



The following excerpt is taken from the book **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SMART PEOPLE: The Conscious Pursuit of Personal Growth** by Steve Pavlina. It is published by Hay House (October 2008) and is available at all bookstores or online at: [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

## Introduction

*“When I’m working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think only how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.”*

— **R. Buckminster Fuller**

Do you remember the exact moment you first became interested in personal development? I certainly do. It happened in January 1991 while I was sitting in a jail cell. I’d just been arrested for felony grand theft. This wasn’t my first run-in with the law, so I knew I was in trouble. I was 19 years old.

I began stealing shortly after moving to Berkeley, California, during my first semester at UC Berkeley. I didn’t steal for money or to build a reputation—I stole for the thrill. I was addicted to the surge of adrenaline. The compulsion to steal was so strong that shoplifting was part of my routine, nothing more than my daily espresso. Usually I didn’t care what I stole; it was the act of stealing that seduced me. On a typical outing, I’d lift a dozen candy bars and then drop them off in a public place, figuring that other people would eat them. I didn’t eat the candy because I didn’t think it was healthy.

As I sat in jail for several days that January with nothing to do but wallow in my own stupidity, the reality of my situation came crashing down upon me. In high school I’d been a straight-A honors student, president of the math club, and captain of the Academic Decathlon team. My future as a computer-science major looked unbelievably bright, but somehow I’d torn it to shreds. Now I was expecting to spend the next year or two behind bars.

Upon returning to my studio apartment after three days in jail, I received a letter from UC Berkeley informing me in no uncertain terms that I’d been expelled. Apparently schools do that sort of thing when you don’t bother showing up to classes and your grade point average starts with a decimal point. In that moment, I realized I had two basic options for how to deal with my situation: grow up or give up.

During the next few months while waiting for my court date, I was in a total funk. Most days I slept until well past noon. I buried myself in video games, sometimes for 18 hours at a time. (We’re talking single-player Nintendo games here, not massive multiplayer online games.) It’s hard to feel motivated when you’re expecting to go to jail for a while.

Eventually I secured a lawyer and met with him at his office to discuss my situation. Before I could open my mouth, he blurted out, “Steve, I’ve reviewed your case, and since this is your first offense, I’m pretty sure we can get it reduced to petty theft. If we plead no contest, you’ll get off with a lesser conviction and end up with some community service. I’m on great terms with the district attorney, so I’m sure he’ll go for it. I strongly advise against going to trial, as the evidence against you is overwhelming, seeing as you were caught red-handed.”

Immediately my thoughts began to race. *First offense? Is he deluded? Why does he think this is my first offense? Doesn’t he know about my priors? If he thinks this is a first offense, will the rest of the court*

*think so, too? Should I correct him on this serious oversight?*

While trying to decide how to respond, I heard a voice in the back of my mind: *Keep your damned mouth shut!* I realized that speaking up now might backfire on me later, but there was a slim chance it could “frontfire,” too. I figured that the worst case was that I’d have an angry lawyer somewhere down the road, but the best case was too good to pass up. Grand theft is a felony; petty theft is only a misdemeanor. I decided I had to risk it. Taking risks was an all-too-familiar pastime.

Several weeks later we went to court, and I was a nervous wreck. My plan was to keep my mouth shut as much as possible and only say the absolute minimum. Outside the courtroom, I reviewed the posted documents about my case. None of my priors were listed. Was it human or computer error? Either way, it was one huge mistake in my favor.

Sure enough, when my lawyer and I entered the courtroom, the court remained under the assumption that this was a first offense and diligently processed it as such. I pled no contest to the reduced charge of petty theft and received 60 hours of community service. My head was spinning as I raced out of the courtroom. The next two years of my life were mine again.

I did those 60 hours like I was at a dream job, knowing full well my sentence could have been 17,520 hours. It’s hard to imagine a more joyful time in my life than those days spent picking up trash at the Emeryville Marina. You have no idea how good freedom feels until you expect to lose it. I felt immensely grateful for this second chance, a chance I felt I didn’t deserve.

I wish I could say my recovery after these events was fast and easy, but it wasn’t. Despite this amazing gift, turning my life around was still incredibly difficult. I said good-bye to my Berkeley friends and moved back to my hometown of Los Angeles. I landed a minimum-wage job in retail sales. Even with a criminal record, I probably could have found a more lucrative position, but I just didn’t want one. I only wanted to play it safe, stay below the radar, and eke out a “vanilla” life devoid of stress and excitement. Courage had become my enemy.

During this year of quiet, uneventful living, I worked on myself. I gradually developed a new code of ethics to guide me, integrating values such as honor, honesty, integrity, humility, and fairness. This conscious reconstruction process would continue for at least a few more years. As the months went by, I began to feel good about myself again, and I decided it was time to go back to school. I figured that if I could earn my degree in computer science, it would somehow erase my past mistakes.

In the fall of 1992, I enrolled at California State University–Northridge (CSUN), starting over as a freshman. CSUN’s computer-science program wasn’t impacted, meaning that it had plenty of room for new students. I was guaranteed admittance just by filling out an application, so they didn’t care that I’d flunked out of UC Berkeley. Now 21 years old, I was no longer the same person I’d been at 18. Something was different. I’d developed a passion for personal growth, and I felt an intense desire to do my absolute best this time.

In my mind, I was already three years behind, and I couldn’t stomach the thought of taking four more years to graduate. I knew I was responsible for this situation, and I intensely desired to speed things along. So I set the ambitious goal of earning my degree in only three semesters by taking triple the normal course load. Those who knew me thought I’d gone insane, but they couldn’t see into my heart. I was 100 percent committed, and I knew that nothing could stop me from achieving this goal. It was the only way I could honor my tremendous gift of freedom.

To prepare myself for the heavy workload, I studied time-management techniques and immediately applied what I learned. I listened to motivational tapes every day to keep my attitude positive. I exercised daily to manage stress, and I found creative ways to increase my productivity. I experienced a tremendous flow of energy and drive because I knew I was finally doing my best. I worked hard and aced my classes. I even added a double major in mathematics along the way. At my graduation, I was given a special award for being the top computer-science student of the year.

In my final semester, I also worked as a contract programmer, developing several computer games for a local games studio, and I served as vice chair of the school’s computer club. It took a lot of hard work and conscious effort, but I successfully achieved my goal of graduating from college in three semesters. Somehow this achievement helped me release the pain and guilt of my past while retaining the valuable

lessons I'd learned.

During the months after my graduation, I launched my own computer-game development business and began dating my future wife, but personal growth remained my top priority. Little did I know at the time, my lifelong pursuit of conscious growth was only beginning. Over the next several years, I read hundreds of books and listened to dozens of audio programs on a diverse selection of personal development topics, including psychology, motivation, success, productivity, career development, problem solving, health, wealth, conscious living, spirituality, meditation, and more.

Admittedly, most of the self-help information I absorbed wasn't very helpful. The authors were enthusiastic, but their ideas were often unoriginal, inconsistent, incongruent, incomplete, impractical, or simply incorrect. I suspected that many of them exaggerated their results. If you're an avid reader of such works, I'm sure you've encountered similar problems, such as buying a diet book and discovering that it's nothing more than a disguised sales pitch for expensive supplements. Nevertheless, I did encounter some nuggets of wisdom that gave me new insights and helped me improve my life. However, my greatest breakthroughs usually came from personal experimentation, not from devouring information products.

I ran my computer-games business for many years (sometimes successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully) while maintaining a passionate interest in personal development on the side. But as time went by, I lost interest in game publishing, and running my business became less fulfilling. I decided it was time to expand my personal development hobby into my primary career.

### ***Creating StevePavlina.com***

In 2004, my wife and kids and I moved from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, and in October of that year I officially retired from computer-game publishing to launch a new online personal development business, StevePavlina.com. I started a blog, wrote articles, and recorded audio programs to share what I'd learned from more than a decade of personal-growth efforts. Within three years I'd created enough material to fill about 20 books, and I still felt as though I was just getting started. I shared all of this content for free. The Website generated income from advertising, affiliate programs, promotional offers, and donations.

Although I had virtually no credibility in the personal development field when I began, StevePavlina.com exploded with traffic, quickly becoming the most popular personal development Website in the world with readers in more than 150 countries. This happened by word of mouth, since people who benefited from the free content often referred their friends, family members, and co-workers to the site. I never spent a dime on marketing or promotion. Soon the site was bringing in tens of thousands of dollars a month, even though I had no products, no employees, and no customers. This drew even more visitors, since people wanted to know how I could be earning so much money by giving everything away for free. All of this free content is still available on the site today, with more being added every month.

Running StevePavlina.com massively advanced my personal-growth knowledge because I had the opportunity to communicate with so many people about their unique challenges. After thousands of interactions with my readers, I began to detect recurring patterns and themes. I also noticed that when I wrote an article on a specific subject, often someone would take a general concept from the piece and find a way to apply it to a totally different area. For example, if I wrote about sleep, someone would figure out how the same general advice could be applied to their business. I began to suspect that there was a hidden order beneath our seemingly chaotic growth experiences.

### ***What Is Personal Development for Smart People?***

*Personal development for smart people* is a phrase I use to describe my approach to personal growth. Instead of going after the low-hanging fruit and solving the easy problems, such as how to make healthier food choices or earn more money, I wanted to answer a really tough question: what does it mean for us to

grow as conscious human beings, and how do we intelligently guide that process?

There were two threads in my life that led me to tackle this question. The first thread was my long-term fascination with the concept of intelligence. The second thread was my direct study of the field of personal development.

While earning my computer-science degree, I specialized in artificial intelligence (AI). I learned how difficult it is to create intelligent computer programs, largely because we don't really understand intelligence. I incorporated basic AI techniques in some of my early computer games, but those programs only mimicked intelligent behavior and couldn't be considered truly intelligent. I soon asked myself: *How do I actually know that I'm intelligent?* I couldn't find an answer that satisfied me. Eventually my pursuit of personal development led me to adopt a new definition of intelligence that satisfied both my logic and intuition. You'll learn that definition in Chapter 7.

While studying personal development for many years, I learned that this field is very broad and fragmented. Any area of your life can reasonably slide under the umbrella of self-improvement, including your health, career, finances, relationships, and spiritual beliefs. Each subset of this field has its own purported experts, all of them sharing different ideas, rules, and advice. Relationship experts tell you how to maintain successful relationships, wealth experts teach you how to manage your money, and health experts help you improve your body.

Unfortunately, these experts often disagree with each other. Some people recommend a high-protein diet; others recommend high carb. Some say you can achieve success through hard work and self-discipline; others advise letting go and allowing God or the universe to handle the details. Some experts encourage you to change; others say you should accept yourself as you are. If you try to incorporate all these different ideas into your life, you'll end up with a fragmented, incongruent mess.

I soon realized that an intelligent approach to personal development would have to resolve these incongruencies somehow. Such an approach would have to make logical and intuitive sense, satisfying both head and heart. It would have to appear logically correct in order to satisfy the left brain, and it would have to feel intuitively correct in order to engage the right brain.

### **Qualities of the Core Principles**

The laws of physics are universal. Although their specific applications can vary tremendously, these governing laws don't change based on our location, our culture, or our moods; the core principles are the same whether we're dealing with rockets or submarines. Why should the field of personal development be any different? Couldn't universal laws of consciousness exist as well?

I decided to tackle this problem head-on, doing something I've never seen done before. I set out to find the common pattern behind all successful growth efforts, to identify a complete set of core principles that would be universally applicable. To define what this set of principles would have to look like, I outlined several criteria, all of which would have to be satisfied by the final solution. These criteria include universality, completeness, irreducibility, congruency, and practicality:

First, these principles must be universal. They must be applicable by anyone, anywhere, in any situation. They must work equally well for all areas of life: health, relationships, career, spiritual growth, and so on. They must be timeless, meaning that they can still be expected to work 1,000 years from now, and they would have worked 1,000 years ago. They must be culturally independent: they need to work for all those living on Earth, as well as for people aboard a space station in orbit. They must work both individually and collectively, so they're effective for any group of any size.

Second, these principles must be collectively complete, so all the critical elements are present and none are missing. It should be possible to trace all other effective universal laws of personal growth back to these basic building blocks. Ideally, these principles should lend themselves to a structure that is both simple and elegant.

Third, the primary principles must be irreducible, similar to prime numbers in mathematics. They must serve as the fundamental atomic building blocks of conscious human growth. Therefore, it must be

possible to combine two or more primary principles together to form secondary principles, and the resulting combinations must also be inherently sound and universally applicable.

Fourth, these principles must be internally congruent. They can't be in conflict with each other. They must be logically and intuitively consistent.

Finally, these principles must be practical. They must be able to generate intelligent real-world results. You should be able to use these ideas to diagnose personal development challenges and devise workable solutions. Knowledge of them should accelerate your personal growth, not obfuscate it.

Consider the statement "Love your neighbor as yourself." This concept can and does assist many people on their path of personal growth, but unfortunately it violates most of our criteria, so we can't include it as part of our framework. First, the concept isn't universal. It applies well to some areas of life such as relationships and even business, but it doesn't make as much sense if we try to apply it to improve our physical health. Second, it isn't irreducible. This statement actually derives from the more general principle of oneness, and oneness itself can be derived from the principles of truth and love (see Chapter 4). Taken in isolation, this statement is incomplete, so it only provides partial guidance. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is sound advice that may help you improve your interpersonal relationships, but it probably won't help you pay your bills. There are many similar concepts that have positive applications but that we can't include as part of our underlying framework because they don't satisfy all of our criteria.

Finding the hidden order behind all conscious human development is extremely difficult because the solution has to be fairly general and abstract, but it must also have abundant practical applications. Because we're dealing with the realm of pure conscious thought, the solution won't be as crisp as a mathematical formula, but it should bring us as close to that ideal as we can reasonably get.

I researched various philosophical, psychological, and spiritual frameworks that had previously attempted to address this challenge. Some had clearly identified one or more of the core concepts, but none provided satisfactory explanations of the big picture. I racked my brain again and again, asking repeatedly: *What is the underlying pattern?* There were clues everywhere, but the complete structure remained a mystery. The task seemed nearly impossible, and I had no guarantee there even was an answer. I ended up rejecting an almost endless progression of partial solutions. It was frustrating to find a solution that looked good at first glance, only to discover that it was full of holes.

### ***Introducing the Seven Principles***

It took me almost two and a half years, but I eventually found the solution I was looking for. It consists of just three core principles: *truth*, *love*, and *power*. Four secondary principles are directly derived from the first three: *oneness*, *authority*, *courage*, and *intelligence*. Oneness is truth plus love. Authority is truth plus power. Courage is love plus power. And intelligence is the total combination of truth, love, and power. Consequently, we can say that the intelligent, "smart people" approach to personal development is the direction that moves you into greater alignment with truth, love, and power. As you'll learn in Chapter 7, this also provides us with a very elegant definition of intelligence: *Intelligence is alignment with the principles of truth, love, and power.*

Don't worry if you don't understand these principles yet. We'll spend a full chapter exploring each one, and several additional chapters will address their practical applications. Once you learn these seven principles and recognize how they operate in all areas of your life, you'll never look at personal development the same way again.

Some of these principles will appear to be common sense at first glance. The principle of truth is intuitively understood by any scientist. The principle of love is common to all major religions. And the principle of power shows up repeatedly in business and government. Unfortunately, our society tends to compartmentalize these principles. We're taught to favor truth during our early education, while our power is simultaneously weakened by external authority figures. We're encouraged to align with love in our relationships and spiritual practices while truth and power are de-emphasized. And we're conditioned to seek power as we build our careers and improve our finances, while truth and love take a backseat in

these areas. This is an enormous mistake. These principles are universal; they cannot be successfully compartmentalized without sacrificing something far more important—our true nature as conscious beings.

The goal of this book is to teach you how to bring all areas of your life into alignment with these universal principles. This requires injecting truth into your relationships, aligning your career with love, and bringing power to your spiritual practice. This is what it means to live as a conscious, intelligent human being. The more your life aligns with these principles, the smarter you become.

This book offers you a new way of thinking about personal growth from high-level concepts to practical actions. You won't need different rules for maintaining your health, building your career, and caring for your relationships. The core principles of growth don't change from one area of life to the next, nor do they vary from person to person. Once you understand how they work, you'll be able to use them to improve your results in any endeavor.

### ***How to Read This Book***

This book is organized in two parts. Part I explores the seven fundamental principles of personal development, starting with the three primary principles of truth, love, and power. By internalizing these basics, you'll build a solid foundation for improving your growth efforts in all areas of your life. Your goal for reading this part of the book is simply to gain an understanding of these seven principles. There are some suggested application exercises to deepen your understanding, but you don't need to do them on your first pass. Those exercises are mainly intended to illustrate how the ideas can be applied through action. Because some of these principles build on those before them, it's best to read these first seven chapters in order.

Part II is the down and dirty application section. This half of the book explains how to apply the seven principles to generate positive, practical results in your life. Every chapter tackles a different area of life, including your career, health, relationships, and more. You can read these chapters in any order, so feel free to jump straight to the section that interests you most. However, it's best if you read all the chapters in Part I before progressing to Part II.

This is a very content-rich book, packed with fresh ideas. Take as much time as you need to read it, and don't feel you have to race to the end. This book is meant to serve you in your pursuit of personal growth, and how that plays out is up to you.

If you want extra help or if you'd just like to explore personal development with like-minded folks, be sure to take advantage of the Personal Development for Smart People discussion forums at [www.StevePavlina.com/forums](http://www.StevePavlina.com/forums). There you'll find a welcoming and supportive community of thousands of growth-oriented individuals from around the world. The forums are completely free, too, so there's no catch to participate.

Incidentally, some Web pages will be mentioned in this book to refer to you additional free content at StevePavlina.com. Rest assured that this book is complete as is. These Web pages are offered as supplemental resources, such as the discussion forums mentioned above. If for some reason you don't have Web access at home or at work, take note that most public libraries provide it for free.

My promise to you as you read this book is threefold. First, in accordance with the principle of truth, I'll be completely honest and straight with you. I have no interest in filling your head with false notions and leading you astray. Second, in accordance with the principle of love, I'll do my best to connect with you, human being to human being. I'm here to serve as your friend and guide, not your guru. And finally, in accordance with the principle of power, I intend to help you embrace *your* true power and face your fears. Sometimes that means I'll be encouraging and supportive; other times it means I must challenge you. Applying what you learn from this book won't be easy for you. It hasn't been easy for me, either. Real conscious growth is seldom undemanding, but it's always worthwhile.

Let us now begin our journey into conscious personal growth.

# PART I

## Fundamental Principles

## Chapter 1

### Truth

*“Life has no other discipline to impose, if we would but realize it, than to accept life unquestioningly. Everything we shut our eyes to, everything we run away from, everything we deny, denigrate or despise, serves to defeat us in the end. What seems nasty, painful, evil, can become a source of beauty, joy and strength, if faced with an open mind. Every moment is a golden one for him who has the vision to recognize it as such.”*

— **Henry Miller**

Truth is the first principle of personal development. We primarily grow as human beings by discovering new truths about ourselves and our reality. You’ll certainly learn some important lessons no matter how you live, but you can accelerate your growth tremendously by consciously seeking truth and deliberately turning away from falsehood and denial.

Genuine personal growth is honest. You can’t take shortcuts through the land of make-believe. Your first commitment must be to discover and accept new truths, no matter how difficult or unpleasant the consequences may be. You can’t solve problems if you don’t admit they exist. How can you achieve a fulfilling career if you won’t admit that your current job is wrong for you? How can you improve your relationship situation if you refuse to accept that you’ve been feeling empty and alone? How can you better your health if you won’t accept that your current habits don’t serve you?

Reality is the ultimate arbiter of truth. If your thoughts, beliefs, and actions aren’t aligned with truth, your results will suffer. Positioning yourself in this way isn’t enough to guarantee success, but siding with falsehood is enough to guarantee failure. When you align yourself with truth, your troubles won’t fix themselves overnight, but you’ll be taking an important step in the right direction.

When you deny your problems, you turn away from truth. The lies you tell yourself spawn more lies, infecting your mind with falsehoods that weave themselves into your identity. You become disconnected from your true self, living as a mere shadow of the brilliant being you were meant to be. You aren’t here to endure such an existence. You’re here to learn how to create a life of your own choosing. It’s not for me to say what that life should look like, but I’ll do my best to help you figure it out.

For the remainder of this chapter, I’ll take you on a guided tour of truth. This will help you understand how to identify and accept what’s true for you. These ideas can be fairly abstract, so your goal here is simply to familiarize yourself with the high-level concepts. In Part II of this book, you’ll learn to apply these concepts to all areas of your life, so you’ll see exactly how they can be used to improve your results.

Let’s begin with an exploration of the key components of truth: *perception, prediction, accuracy, acceptance, and self-awareness.*

#### ***Perception***

Perception is the most basic aspect of truth. If you want to improve some part of your life, you have to look at it first. For example, if you want to know how your relationship is doing, a good place to start is to ask yourself: *How do I feel about this relationship? What parts are*

*working well? What parts need improvement?* Ask your partner the same questions and compare your answers. Figuring out where you stand will help you decide what changes you'd like to make.

Perception is a key component of personal growth because we react to what we perceive to be true. Facing the truth of your situation causes you to trigger new desires. When you step on the scale and see that you weigh more than you'd like, you think, *I want to lose weight*. When you get clear about what you don't want, you gain clarity about what you do want. These new desires can help drive you in a positive new direction, but nothing will change until you first admit that you'd like it to.

The first step on your path of personal growth must be to recognize that your life as it stands right now isn't how you want it to be. It's perfectly okay to be in this position. It's okay to want something and have no idea how to get it, but it's not okay to lie to yourself and pretend everything is perfect when you know it isn't. The closest you'll get to perfection will be to enjoy the experience of lifelong growth, including all its temporary flaws.

It's easy for me to say that you should face the truth about your life, but in practice this can be very difficult to do. It's hard to admit that you've become dissatisfied with your relationship. It's hard to accept that you made the wrong career choice. It's hard to look at yourself in the mirror and realize that you don't like the person you've become. But despite how difficult this is, it's still necessary. You can't get from point A to point B if you stubbornly refuse to acknowledge that you're *at* point A. Denying A, fighting A, or otherwise resisting A only keeps you stuck at A.

What do you perceive about your life that you'd like to change? Are there any addictions or destructive habits you'd like to break? Would you find more fulfillment in a new career? Would you rather be living somewhere else? Open your eyes. Look around you and notice what you like and dislike about your life. Don't worry about setting specific goals just yet; just become aware of what you perceive and how you react to those perceptions.

## ***Prediction***

Prediction is the mechanism by which you learn from experience, thereby enabling you to discover what is true. As you observe any new situation or event, one of two things can happen: either the experience will meet your expectations, or it won't. When an experience meets your expectations, your mental model of reality remains intact. But when an experience violates your expectations, your mind must update its model of reality to fit the new information. This is how you learn from experience and discover new truths.

Your predictive powers are extremely flexible. When you learn something new, your mind tries to generalize from the experience. It favors storage of general patterns instead of specific details. Your ability to recall the finer points will be fuzzy, but you'll normally have a strong recollection of high-level patterns. For example, you can understand written language, but you don't recall when and where you learned each word. You know what certain foods taste like, but you don't remember every meal.

Your mind automatically makes predictions about the future, even when you aren't aware of it. When you see the edge of an object on a shelf, your mind can predict that it will be a book if you pick it up. You expect the book to have a certain weight, texture, and appearance. As long as your expectations are met, the mental pattern remains intact.

Based on your previous reading experience, you already have a certain understanding about what you'll find in this book. If it satisfies all your expectations, you won't learn anything new and reading this will have been a waste of your time. In order to help you grow, this book must violate your expectations and give you some unexpected "Aha!" moments.

Your mind continually generalizes from your specific experiences, stores those general patterns, and then applies them to predict the outcome of new events. This happens automatically,

usually without your conscious knowledge. However, once you become aware that this is how your mind works, you can deliberately take your intelligence to a whole new level.

There are two powerful ways you can apply your mind's predictive powers to accelerate your personal growth. First, by embracing new experiences that are unlike anything you've previously encountered, you'll literally become more intelligent. New situations shift your mind into learning mode, which enables you to discover new patterns. The more patterns your mind learns, the better it gets at prediction, and the smarter you become.

Read a book on a topic that's completely alien to you. Talk to people you'd normally avoid. Visit an unfamiliar city. Stretch beyond the patterns your mind has already learned. In order to grow, you must repeatedly tackle fresh challenges and consider new ideas to give your mind fresh input. If you merely repeat the same experiences, you'll stagnate, and your mental capacity will atrophy.

What you learn in one area can often be applied to others. For example, Leonardo da Vinci, considered a genius by any reasonable standard, achieved competence across a diverse set of fields, including art, music, science, anatomy, engineering, architecture, and many others. While some would argue that such wide-ranging interests were a result of his intelligence, I think it's more likely that they were the cause of it—or at least a major contributing factor. By exposing himself to such a rich variety of input, da Vinci found patterns that others never noticed. This vastly amplified his problem-solving abilities. What's considered commonplace in one field often has creative applications in other disciplines.

Excessive routine is the enemy of intelligence. Exposing yourself to the same types of input over and over again won't help you grow. You'll merely satisfy your mind's expectations instead of pushing it to form new patterns. If you want to become smarter, you must keep stirring things up. Establish basic routines only to provide a stable foundation for branching out into unexplored territory. Push yourself to do things you've never done before. Keep exposing yourself to new experiences, ideas, and input. The more novel things you encounter that violate your expectations, the faster you'll learn and the smarter you'll become.

The second way to apply your mind's predictive powers is to make conscious, deliberate predictions and use those predictions to make better decisions. Think about where you're headed and ask yourself: *How do I honestly expect my life to turn out?* Imagine that a very logical, impartial observer examines your situation in detail and is assigned to predict what your life will look like in 20 years, based on your current behavior patterns. What kind of future will this person predict for you? If you're brave enough, ask several people who know you well to give you an honest assessment of where they see you in two decades. Their answers may surprise you.

When you become aware of your mind's long-term expectations, you bypass the pattern of denial and stare truth straight in the eye. This gives you the opportunity to reinforce your positive predictions and to make changes to prevent negative predictions from occurring.

Your emotions are part of your mind's predictive output. Positive feelings stem from positive predictions, and negative feelings result from negative ones. When you feel good, your mind is anticipating a positive outcome that you desire. When you feel bad, your mind expects an unfavorable outcome. Negative emotions serve as a warning that you must change your behavior now in order to prevent unwanted predictions from coming to pass. Listen to your honest expectations. Don't fight with them or try to deny them, since that will only drive you into self-doubt. Learn to accept your expectations and work with them. When you notice that you're anticipating a negative outcome, look behind those beliefs to find the cause, and keep making changes until your expectations change. When you uncover positive expectations, notice what's working for you and keep doing more of it.

### **Accuracy**

The closer your internal model of reality matches actual reality, the more capable you

become. Greater accuracy means greater fitness for life as human being. With an accurate map, you're more likely to make sound decisions that will take you in the direction of your desires. With an inaccurate map, you're more likely to experience setbacks and frustration.

Total clarity is a rarity. When you pursue a particular career, you'll never know if a different one might have turned out better. When you're in a relationship, you can never be certain that a more compatible partner isn't right around the corner. Whenever you make one decision, you'll never know what would have happened if you made a different choice.

The worst part is that even when you do feel certain, that's still no guarantee you're correct. You've been wrong before, haven't you? History says it's a safe bet that there's something you think you know right now that will later prove to be false.

You can try to gain as much clarity as possible about a given situation, and that's generally a good idea, but you can never eliminate all uncertainty. So you have two basic options: deny the unpredictability of life and create your own false sense of security, or accept the vagaries of life and learn to live with them. In the first case, you're drawing your map of reality the way you want it to be, regardless of what the actual terrain looks like. In the second case, you're striving to make your map as accurate as possible, even though you may dislike how it looks. The second option is better.

When you accept the inherent uncertainty of life, your decisions will increase in accuracy. You'll find it easier to avoid mistakes like gambling away all your money or falling into an abusive relationship, and you'll be in a better position to capitalize on genuine opportunities. You needn't be paralyzed by the unpredictability of life. The key is to intelligently manage risks instead of denying their existence. Learn to thrive on uncertainty, and even enjoy it.

Another problem is that your predictions could be incorrect. Some inaccuracies will self-correct as you gain additional experience and deepen your understanding of reality, but many times those errors can worsen and become self-reinforcing. Here are some examples of how your mind's predictive powers can fail you:

— **Overgeneralization.** You have a few bad dating experiences, so your mind learns the pattern that dating is disappointing. Consequently, you avoid going on any more dates because you see the activity as something to avoid. Unfortunately, this means you'll never again have a *positive* dating experience, which would have allowed your mind to correct this belief. Old patterns persist as long as they remain unchallenged.

— **Prejudice.** You overhear your co-workers complaining that someone who was just hired is apparently a real pain to work with. This causes you to harbor negative expectations about the new hire. During your first assignment with this person, you naturally expect trouble, so you resist working together cooperatively. The other person picks up on your negative treatment and responds in kind, thereby fulfilling your expectations. Making snap judgments without the benefit of direct experience often leads to erroneous conclusions.

— **Self-fulfilling prophecy.** A number of your friends try to start their own online businesses, but they all fail and eventually give up. From their example, your mind learns that starting an online business is difficult and will most likely lead to failure. A year later you decide to launch your own Web-based enterprise. You subconsciously sabotage yourself by making avoidable mistakes, and eventually you give up, just as your friends did.

These problematic patterns all share a common element: their predictions are overly pessimistic. Such patterns can magnify fear, lower self-esteem, and induce negative emotions like worry and stress. In the worst cases, overly pessimistic predictions can cause depression, helplessness, and even suicide. On the other hand, being too optimistic is just as problematic and can lead to overconfidence, unreasonable risk taking, and manic behavior.

The best predictions are the most accurate ones, but where self-reinforcement is concerned, it's better to strengthen high self-esteem, positive emotions, and a reasonable degree of initiative, as opposed to low self-esteem, negative emotions, and undue timidity. These predictions aren't just passive observations—they're active causes unto themselves.

### ***Acceptance***

Once you've identified what's true for you with a reasonable degree of accuracy, your next task is to fully and completely accept the truth. This includes accepting the long-term consequences of your predictions.

Consider your physical body. Is it healthy, fit, and strong? Or is it unhealthy, flabby, and weak? What do you predict will happen if you continue with your current health habits? Do you accept the truth of where you'll likely end up? Are you willing to live with those consequences?

What about your finances? Are you creating such an abundance of value that you'll never know scarcity? Or are you headed for the poorhouse? What do you honestly expect to happen if your current financial patterns continue? Do you accept the complete truth of your situation?

Of course there's tremendous uncertainty in trying to predict where your life is headed, but you can still aim for the most reasonable, rational expectation based on the available evidence. If you were looking at someone else's life that shared the same qualities as yours and you had to place a wager on the outcome, how would you place your bet? Pretend you're Sherlock Holmes looking at the evidence and trying to predict the outcome. What do you honestly expect?

One of the most important skills to develop in the area of personal growth is the ability to admit the whole truth to yourself, even if you don't like what you see and even if you feel powerless to change it. When you face unpleasant truths, you often encounter strong internal resistance. This resistance pushes you to avoid facing the truth, running through endless cycles of distraction, escapism, denial, and procrastination. Only by staring directly into these truths can you summon the strength to deal with them consciously. A simple rule of thumb is this: whatever you fear, you must eventually face.

Whenever you're faced with a part of reality you don't like, and you feel powerless to change it, the first step is to accept the truth of your situation. Say to yourself: *This situation is wrong for me, yet I lack the strength to change it right now.*

Openly admit to yourself that even though you're stuck with complete responsibility for every area of your life, you may not have the ability to fix what isn't working at this point. Simply accept that this is how things are for now, but don't deny the truth of the situation. Never pretend to enjoy a job you hate. Never pretend to be happy in an unfulfilling relationship. Never pretend that your finances are strong when they're really weak. If you want your situation to improve, you must first come clean with yourself and admit the whole truth.

When you fully accept reality, you'll begin making better decisions because they'll be based on truth instead of fiction. If you admit that your body is terribly out of shape, you'll stop pretending that you're in good health. You'll stop subscribing to the delusion that your poor eating habits and lack of exercise are acceptable to you. You'll begin to see that you've got to start making different decisions if you want your situation to change—it isn't going to happen on its own. Once you fully surrender to what is, you can finally begin to create what you want.

### ***Self-Awareness***

As you strive to bring more truth into your life, you must cultivate a high degree of self-awareness. This includes becoming aware of your strengths, weaknesses, talents, knowledge,

biases, attachments, desires, emotions, instincts, habits, and state of mind.

As human beings, we're often filled with conflicting desires. One part of us wants to be healthy, happy, and highly conscious. Another part wants nothing more than to eat, sleep, have sex, and be lazy. Without the presence of consciousness, we fall into reflexive patterns by default, living more like unconscious animals than fully sentient human beings.

Recognize that your level of awareness doesn't remain constant. Sometimes pure logic dominates your thinking; other times you're overwhelmed with emotional concerns. Sometimes you feel incredibly spiritual; other times you're worried about your finances. Sometimes you eat for good health and energy; other times you satisfy yourself with all the processed junk you can devour.

When you make decisions from a certain state of mind and act upon them, you reinforce that same state, thereby increasing the likelihood you'll respond similarly in the future. For example, if you act out of anger, you'll strengthen your mind's anger response. If you act out of kindness, you'll reinforce a kind response. Any given level of awareness has a tendency to perpetuate itself, so you'll likely find yourself cycling through the same ones repeatedly. A significant part of personal development involves working to release your attachment to the lower states as you draw yourself into higher consciousness on a more consistent basis. On a practical level, this means letting go of addictions, negative emotions, and fear-based behaviors and replacing them with consciously chosen, principle-centered actions. And in order to successfully change your behaviors, you must first develop an awareness of your thoughts.

A good way to build your awareness is to make your important decisions from the most reasonable thinking you can muster. The best point to make new choices is when you feel alert, clearheaded, and intelligent. That's the time to consider making big transformations in your life such as a career change, a relationship change, or moving to a new city. Learn to trust those higher states of consciousness. Put the decisions in writing and fully commit yourself to them. When you inevitably sink back down to lower states and lose sight of that higher perspective, continue to act on those decisions even though you may no longer feel as committed to them. Over time, your external circumstances will change in ways that reinforce those higher states. Living consciously gets easier with practice.

One time when I was in a state of very high awareness, I made the decision to switch careers from computer-game development to personal development. That was a stretch for me, especially since my games business was doing well, and I still had several large projects on my plate. However, I felt good about the decision, and I knew it was correct. But of course a few weeks later, I was still bogged down working on the games business with no end in sight. As I slipped into a lower level of awareness, I began to second-guess my determination to switch careers. I had to remind myself that I'd made the choice from a high level of awareness; and it was a sound, intelligent decision. This helped me let go of my resistance and trust the original choice I'd made.

My decisions may not be perfect, but when I use this process, I can at least trust that I made them correctly and from a place of truth.

When you consistently make key decisions from a high level of awareness, they will become more congruent. You'll avoid getting stuck in that state of ambivalence where you keep shifting back and forth between alternatives and can't make up your mind. Recognize that when you make choices from a place of anger, fear, sadness, or guilt, you cannot be aligned with truth because your predictions will be negatively biased by those lower states.

Self-awareness is really truth-awareness. When your awareness is high, you're closer to truth than when it's low. If you aren't aligned with truth, your decisions will produce inferior results. Truth-aligned decisions are more accurate and will tend to yield better results than those made from low awareness. The key is to use your self-awareness to recognize when you're aligned with truth and when you aren't, and strive to make your important decisions only when this core principle is on your side.

## ***Blocks to Truth***

There are several blocks that prevent us from fully aligning with truth. They increase the chance of forming inaccurate mental patterns. Many of these false patterns are self-reinforcing and can be difficult to correct. However, once you become aware of these blocks, you'll be less likely to succumb to them.

### **Media Conditioning**

Media companies generate profits largely from advertising, and for advertising to be effective, you must eventually buy something—whether it be a car, a drug, or a meal. People who hold an accurate model of reality only buy what they actually want or need, so advertisers frequently promote half-truths and outright falsehoods to boost profits. For example, if a brewery can convince you that drinking alcohol will make you feel popular or sexy, they can generate more revenue than if they portray a more accurate depiction of alcohol consumption.

In order to fully trust the information provided by a media source, you must be able to trust that the source will not sacrifice truth to a conflicting value. The problem with corporate-owned media is that when there's a conflict between profit and truth, truth doesn't always win.

The cumulative effect of mass-media exposure is to condition you to adopt a false view of reality—one that upholds pro-advertiser values. The more you expose yourself to mainstream media such as television, the more skewed your mental model of reality becomes. Furthermore, the more time you invest in media consumption, the less time you invest in learning from direct experience. This is a path of long-term laziness, apathy, and decay, not intelligent self-actualization.

You can reduce the effect of this block by learning to find joy in the direct experience of life instead of the pale substitute of mass media. Whenever you're exposed to media conditioning, remain aware that certain people have a vested financial interest in reshaping your beliefs about reality in a way that often conflicts with truth. I'm optimistic, however, that society will eventually outgrow the need for media manipulation as more people realize that power and truth needn't be in conflict. As you'll learn in Chapter 5, power and truth work much better as allies; together they form the principle of authority.

### **Social Conditioning**

Social conditioning is a close cousin to media conditioning. The society in which you live—including your family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances—contributes heavily to your understanding of reality. Through your interactions with others, you're continually influenced by social, cultural, educational, and religious ideas. Unfortunately, such conditioned beliefs often place other values ahead of truth, so you may feel compelled to do the same. In the long run, this disconnection from truth leads to self-doubt, causing you to give away your power out of weakness and confusion. Realigning yourself with truth enables you to reclaim that power.

Sometimes social conditioning serves us well. For example, a common language helps us communicate and connect with each other. Other times, social conditioning installs false beliefs that weaken us, such as an unwarranted fear of public speaking.

It's important to develop an awareness of your socially conditioned beliefs and examine them consciously. When you sense a conflict between your beliefs, your behavior, and your feelings, ask yourself if you really believe what you've been taught. Are your beliefs truthful and accurate? Are they congruent with your perceptions? In order to align yourself with truth, you must eventually release erroneous, inaccurate, and inconsistent beliefs.

I was raised Catholic and attended Catholic school for 12 years. All of my family and most of my friends were Catholic, too, so I had virtually no exposure to other belief systems in my youth. Nevertheless, in my late teens, I began to doubt what I'd been taught because it often conflicted with my direct observations of reality. When I finally admitted that Catholicism no longer resonated with me, I felt free to explore my true spiritual beliefs. I was sometimes ostracized for this decision, but I learned that self-trust is more important than social conformity. My intent isn't to denigrate any particular belief system but simply to suggest that you put your greatest trust in your own judgment, even when others disagree with you. Cultivating self-trust frees you; self-doubt enslaves you.

### **False Beliefs**

False learning occurs when you adopt a belief that's either partially or completely untrue. Such beliefs may be acquired accidentally or installed deliberately by others. The effect is that your future decisions become more error-prone, and your results are sabotaged.

When I started my computer-game development business after college, I was filled with false beliefs about how a real-world business should work, so I made dumb mistakes that wasted my time and money. For example, I mistakenly assumed that a signed contract would always be honored by the other party, failing to consider the inherent risk in any transaction. I closed important deals and soon became dependent on them for income, only to see them later collapse. It took years to rid myself of these false beliefs, but as I uprooted them one by one, my decisions improved, and the failing business finally became profitable.

A large part of conscious growth involves identifying and purging false beliefs. Do your best to remain open to fresh ideas and input, and challenge your assumptions when you suspect you may be clinging to falsehood. Later in this chapter, I'll provide some simple exercises to help you do that.

### **Emotional Interference**

Strong emotions can corrupt your ability to perceive reality accurately. Feelings such as fear, anger, grief, guilt, shame, frustration, being overwhelmed, and loneliness block you from thinking clearly, causing you to mistake falsehood for truth. Similarly, positive emotions can make you overly optimistic, encouraging you to take unreasonable risks and to make overaggressive promises you won't keep.

By cultivating your self-awareness, you can learn to recognize when your judgment is impaired by strong emotions. Your feelings may prevent you from perceiving reality accurately, but a high degree of self-awareness can help you avoid acting on those misperceptions.

Important decisions should be made when you're clearheaded and rational, not when you're overly optimistic or pessimistic. However, your feelings have a powerful intelligence of their own that can assist you in making sound decisions. Think of your emotions as a condensed version of your mind's predictive output, so it's wise to make decisions that produce positive feelings.

### **Addictions**

Addictions such as smoking, drinking, or excessive Web surfing make it harder to accept reality because these behaviors reinforce ignorance and denial. For example, if you smoke cigarettes every day, your pattern of behavior makes it difficult for you to accept evidence that smoking is hazardous to your health. If you fear that quitting will be too great a challenge, you're

likely to avoid seeking the truth about smoking because it will compel you to face your fear and attempt to quit.

Addictions provide rich soil for cultivating further falsehood. Many people are ashamed and embarrassed by their addictions, so they do their best to hide them. Maintaining a false front becomes more important than truth; and secrets, deception, and lies take the place of honest communication.

The first step in overcoming any addiction is to admit the truth: *I am addicted*. Even though overcoming the addiction may be a struggle, if you can admit and accept the truth of your situation, it will help prevent you from succumbing to further falsehood. It's perfectly okay to say to yourself, *I am addicted and want to change, but right now I lack the strength to do so*. Being completely honest with yourself is vastly superior to living in denial. You'll often find that upon taking that first step, the internal and external resources you need to break your addiction will soon come into your life, and the response from others will be compassionate and supportive instead of disdainful and judgmental.

### **Immaturity**

A certain degree of maturity is required to fully accept reality, and this comes from experience. The more fresh experiences you acquire, the faster your thinking will mature. The more you seek shelter and comfort through diversion, escapism, and fantasy, the longer you'll suffer from immature and inaccurate thinking.

Children have the most inaccurate models of reality because they lack experience, so their minds are less adept at making accurate predictions. It's easy to fool an inexperienced child with a trick that an adult would catch. The adult has enough experience to accurately predict the outcome; the child does not.

You can't align yourself with truth and flee from it at the same time. If you wish to live as a fully conscious human being, you must release the immaturity of escapism and embrace the deeper growth experiences that only maturity can bring.

### **Secondary Gain**

Secondary gain is a common problem that occurs when you temporarily benefit (gain) by embracing falsehood. For example, you may tell a lie at work in order to avoid being fired, you may deny your relationship problems in order to preserve the peace, or you may eat unhealthy food for the sake of convenience.

Distancing yourself from the truth is never a wise long-term decision. It stems from a lack of acceptance of your own predictions and a refusal to deal with them openly and honestly. When you look behind secondary gain, you'll invariably find a deeper falsehood you've been fiercely denying. Your refusal to deal with that lie perpetuates an ongoing downward spiral. Apparent short-term benefits replace true advancement, drawing you ever deeper into a life of repression and denial. The more you succumb to the lure of secondary gain, the phonier you become as a human being.

For example, suppose you work in a job that you intuitively feel is wrong for you; you know it's a dead end. When you look ahead, you see nothing but a soulless void. You just can't bring yourself to accept the truth of your situation, so instead you live in denial, pretending that everything will somehow turn out okay. Instead of facing the truth, you search for other ways to fill the emptiness, and eventually you're seduced by the substitute of secondary gain. Instead of your true purpose, you pursue money, recognition, or comfort. Instead of genuine growth, you

settle for climbing the corporate ladder. Instead of abiding friendship and human intimacy, you settle for a sea of casual contacts, none of whom know, accept, and love the real you. Instead of worthwhile challenges, you settle for the illusion of security.

The pursuit of secondary gain leads to persistent dissatisfaction, emptiness, and unhappiness. It's a temporary drug that can never fulfill you. If you find yourself caught up in this addictive cycle, take the time for some deep introspection. Even if you aren't ready to deal with the long-term consequences yet, at least admit the truth to yourself. Don't waste your life defending a string of false accomplishments.

### ***How to Become More Truthful***

It's perfectly normal to find plenty of falsehood and denial in your life, and you may worry that realigning yourself with truth will be an overwhelming task. Don't be discouraged. Every step you take in the direction of truth will make it easier to continue on the path of greater honesty, self-awareness, and acceptance. You don't need to fix every problem overnight.

Here are some simple, practical exercises you can use to help realign yourself with truth.

#### **Self-Assessment**

One of the best ways to bring more truth into your life is to conduct a quick self-assessment. Assign a numerical rating to each area of your life using a simple 1–10 scale. A 1 means this part of your life is terrible and could hardly get worse; a 10 means this area is absolutely perfect and you can scarcely imagine it getting better. Please take a minute to do this now. Here are the areas to rate:

<b>Area of Your Life</b>	<b>Your Rating (1–10)</b>
Habits & daily routine	_____
Career & work	_____
Money & finances	_____
Health & fitness	_____
Mental development & education	_____
Social life & relationships	_____
Home & family	_____
Emotions	_____
Character & integrity	_____
Life purpose & contribution	_____
Spiritual development	_____

Your answers should provide a nice snapshot of how you're doing. Usually you'll find that some areas lag behind the others, sometimes far behind. Interestingly, it's in our weakest spots that we most often succumb to falsehood and denial, since those are the most difficult areas to face. But those areas can't improve until you face and accept the truth.

Now I want you to look at those same numbers from a different perspective. Take every rating that isn't a 9 or 10, cross it off, and replace it with a 1. So now each of them must be a 1, 9, or 10.

You see, if you can't rate a given area of your life a 9 or 10, then obviously you don't have what you really want in that area. This can be especially hard to admit when you think you have a 7. A 7 looks pretty good at first glance, but the true 9s and 10s are way beyond 7s. The 10s are so

far out there that you probably can't even see them from the position of a 7.

A 7 is what you get when you allow too much falsehood and denial to creep into your life. It's a phony rating to begin with, a 1 in disguise. Either you have what you want, or you don't. A 6, 7, or 8 is the answer you give when you know you don't have what you want, but you aren't ready to face up to it yet.

I know this sounds unreasonably harsh, but based on my own experience as well as what I've observed in others, people commonly rate some part of their lives a 7 (or thereabouts) when they've disconnected themselves from the truth. A 7 is a job instead of a purpose-driven career. A 7 is a comfortable living arrangement instead of a deeply fulfilling relationship. A 7 is an income that covers your basic expenses instead of providing true abundance. When you rate any part of your life as a 7, you're really saying: "This isn't what I want, but I'm not sure I can do better, so I'll pretend it's good enough. It could be worse." However, the truth is that if you aren't experiencing what you want, you're already in the worst possible situation.

An honest rating has more to do with your path than your position. For example, I absolutely love my current career. I'd definitely rate it a 10. I've enjoyed a certain level of success in this field, but that isn't why I rate it so highly. If I went back in time to when I first started, I'd still have rated my career as a 9 or 10. Even though I had virtually no external evidence of success back then, I knew I was on the right path. My position didn't matter. The high rating came from knowing I was headed in the right direction.

When you rate some part of your life a 7, it means you're on the wrong path but you don't want to accept it. You don't want to acknowledge that you're approaching a dead end, so you base your rating on your position instead. "Look how far I've come down the wrong path," you say. You assign yourself a 7 based on your location along the route, even though the path itself is really a 1. Your position doesn't matter. Your rating must come from the path. You can be starting from scratch in a new career, a new relationship, or a new spiritual journey and still rate that part of your life a 9 or 10 if you're on the right track.

Now look at each area of your life again, and ask yourself, *What do I truly want? What is my dream, my grand vision? What is the deep desire I've been longing for, the one I hesitate to admit because I don't think I can have it? What path do I most want to experience?* Accept that you want what you want, and stop living in denial of your true desires.

## Journaling

Journaling is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to discover new truths. By getting your thoughts out of your head and putting them down in writing, you'll gain insights you'd otherwise miss.

While some people use journaling merely to record their thoughts and experiences in a "Dear Diary" fashion, the real power of journaling lies in its ability to help you move beyond sequential thinking and examine your thoughts from a holistic, bird's-eye view. Use this tool to solve tricky problems, brainstorm new ideas, bring clarity to fuzzy situations, and evaluate progress toward your goals. Instead of a mere record-keeping tool, your journal can vastly accelerate your personal development if you devote it to that purpose.

Many people use paper journals, others prefer a word processor, and some like special journaling software. I used paper journals for many years, but in 2002 I switched to journaling software and never went back. The advantages are numerous. Typing is faster than writing; your entries are stored in a secure, private database; you can use the built-in search feature to instantly find old entries; you can assign entries to categories for better organization; and you can easily make secure backups. The more robust programs even allow you to insert images, audio recordings, videos, spreadsheets, files, Web links, and more. Once you try journaling software, you'll never want to go back to pen and paper.

If you'd like to see an actual entry from my personal journal, you'll find it included as part of an article on journaling at [www.StevePavlina.com/journaling](http://www.StevePavlina.com/journaling). I wrote that particular journal entry a few months before launching StevePavlina.com, as I was trying to figure out how I'd be able to generate income from a personal development Website. It was funny to look back and see that I nearly dismissed the approach I eventually ended up using.

### Media Fasting

A great way to reduce the impact of media conditioning is to go on a 30-day media fast. For 30 days straight, keep the television turned off and avoid all newspapers, magazines, and online media sources. Unplug yourself completely and see what happens.

I documented my personal results with media fasting in the article "8 Changes I Experienced After Giving Up TV" ([www.StevePavlina.com/notv](http://www.StevePavlina.com/notv)). I found that when I went 30 days without television, I felt free to focus on more important activities, I spent more time connecting with friends, and I went outside more often. It was an eye-opening experience, and I encourage you to give it a try. You'll learn more about 30-day trials in Chapter 8.

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I want to conclude our exploration of truth by sharing one of my all-time favorite poems with you, "The Guy in the Glass." I first heard it when I was a teenager, and it had a powerful effect on me. I hope you treasure it as much as I do. Incidentally, the word *pelf* in the first line of the poem means "wealth."

*When you get what you want in your struggle for pelf,  
And the world makes you King for a day,  
Then go to the mirror and look at yourself,  
And see what that guy has to say.*

*For it isn't your Father, or Mother, or Wife,  
Who judgment upon you must pass.  
The feller whose verdict counts most in your life  
Is the guy staring back from the glass.*

*He's the feller to please, never mind all the rest,  
For he's with you clear up to the end,  
And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test  
If the guy in the glass is your friend.*

*You may be like Jack Horner and "chisel" a plum,  
And think you're a wonderful guy,  
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum  
If you can't look him straight in the eye.*

*You can fool the whole world down the pathway of years,  
And get pats on the back as you pass,  
But your final reward will be heartaches and tears  
If you've cheated the guy in the glass.*

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I recommend that you follow the instructions in the first stanza of the poem literally. Go to a mirror and look at yourself. Is the person staring back from the glass your friend?

If you want to grow as a conscious human being, you must learn to embrace truth and relinquish falsehood. Truth enhances growth; falsehood destroys it. Whenever you feel you've fallen off track in your life, stop and ask yourself: *Am I aligned with truth?* If the answer is no, direct your efforts toward bringing more truth, awareness, and acceptance to your situation.

Now let's turn our attention to the primary mechanism through which we discover truth: the principle of . . .

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