

# **How Much of Yourself Do You Own?**

A process for building  
your emotional resources

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How Much of Yourself Do You Own? A process for building your emotional resources

144 pp.

Bibliography: pp. 121–125

ISBN: 978-1-938248-71-9

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Published by aha! Process, Inc.

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Printed in the United States of America

Book design by Paula Nicolella

Copy editing by Dan Shenk

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**T**he purpose of this book is to have a better way to look after ourselves and reclaim parts of ourselves that we have lost or set aside. All of us lose pieces of ourselves along the way; it is part of the process of living. It's just that we often don't know how to get them back. This book outlines a process you can use to do that.

The chapters contain a combination of techniques and strategies used in proven, research-based theories of change and counseling that we have used successfully for more than 20 years—both in our professional practice working with thousands of students, clients, and professionals, as well as during our own processes of personal change.

The model of change that we are presenting to you will give you the opportunity to learn about yourself and move from one area to another, step by step, at your own pace.

The program included here will give you tools to identify your true emotions and needs, deal with your emotional losses, and find the resources—emotional, cognitive, socio-social, and spiritual—to heal, use your energy wisely, make healthy choices, experience significant learning, and develop action plans for long-lasting change.

Many of the exercises we are sharing with you are the ones that we [authors Ruby Payne and Emilia O'Neill-Baker] used ourselves during our therapy processes. We learned some others, picking them up along the way, from our formal and informal teachers during our professional training. Most of these exercises have been adapted or re-created the past 30 years to fit specific needs of students and clients we have trained and counseled. We are deeply grateful and indebted to all the people who have shared their expertise and experience with us—and who have made it possible in turn for us to offer these exercises to you.

## ADMONITIONS

This process, which is not necessarily for everyone, was a gift to us. It allowed us to reclaim our energy and zest for life. While this book is a quick read, to benefit from the process requires work. An analogy would be this: You can read this book as you would watch a travel show about a trip to another

country. However, if you are actually going to go to that country, it requires a great deal of work. You have to pack, find someone to take care of the dog, stop the mail, go through airport security, etc. So it is with this book. You can simply read it for interest or ideas, but if you want personal application and significant personal benefits, you will need to do some work.

***NOTE: This book is not for individuals who have had serious abuse, trauma, biochemical issues, etc., which have not been processed with professional help.*** Some emotional issues require ongoing support from a professional therapist or psychiatrist. To overlay the process described in this book onto intense emotional issues almost certainly would not be advisable. It is also a great tool to use as you go through your therapeutic process.

It has been said that ***the only way out of pain is THROUGH pain. Emotional work involves pain and discomfort,*** just as physical exercise does. When we are experiencing change and a reintegration process, things may feel worse before they feel better.

It is strongly recommended that you find a trusted individual to debrief these activities with—and that if/when the emotional response becomes intense, you talk to a counselor or the group facilitator (if you are working in a group), and she or he will provide you with community resources (counselors, psychologists, et al.) who can help you deal with emergent issues. Please give yourself the opportunity to heal with the support of a professional and a group.

***Who is this book for? It is for people who, like us, have lost their way at some point and want to get “themselves” back. We want emotional wholeness, emotional wealth, and emotional stability. We want to live with joy. It is only one road map, but if you don’t have one, perhaps this process can be received as gift. We emphasize, however, that while this is***

**what has worked for us, each individual has a unique path.**

You can work with this book ***on your own and at your own pace.*** We would suggest you follow the order of the chapters, since the book has a ***constructive approach,*** where you increase your awareness, build more resources, and become stronger as you move from one exercise to the next.

This book can also constitute a great program to be used and experienced in the safety of ***a group—peer-support, self-help, therapy group, etc.*** We invite you to participate and share to the level of your comfort. If you do not feel ready to share certain events or information, just indicate this to the facilitator. The more you give yourself permission to learn about yourself and others, the better you will feel, and the more you will grow and heal.

**Finally, as preamble, we would note the following: By being aware of ourselves and our environment—and working through our emotional concerns—we can grow out of pain in a healthy and enriching way.**

How did this book come to be?

*Ruby*

I was married for 31 years, divorced (he had an addiction), and then 5½ years later, my former husband died unexpectedly. I had started my company eight years before the divorce, had traveled and worked 80 to 100 hours a week as many entrepreneurs do. The company had double-digit growth every year for several years. So just keeping up was monumental.

As part of the divorce settlement, I had to buy back my half of the company that I had started. I was tired of traveling. I was weary of 80- to 100-hour weeks. All the effort I had put into the marriage and the business seemed to

have crumbled in front of my eyes. And then the recession hit, our revenues dropped, and I could not see the end of the tunnel. I experienced a loss of purpose and meaning, working twice as hard for half the money to pay back the settlement. I became very discouraged.

A colleague suggested a consultant/life coach. When I went into see him the first time, I basically told him this: “My story isn’t working for me anymore. And I don’t know how to fix it.”

One day I said to him, “What does it look like in the end? How will I know that I am emotionally together? What are the markers? I have read everything, and *I cannot find a road map*. What is this process in its entirety? I need to see the whole picture.” A process was outlined; this book describes it.

May the following process be a gift to you as it was to us. Will it solve all your issues? No, but it is a way—and just one way—to begin getting back the pieces of yourself that you want and need to reintegrate.

### *Emilia*

I was a victim of sexual abuse as a child. I also grew up with a mentally ill grandfather (bipolar condition) who thought violence was the way to solve any conflict. Although I always thought I would never marry someone like him, I ended up married for 10 years to a man who suffered from a borderline personality disorder. He refused to get professional help, and I kept trying to rescue him.

For many years I felt ashamed and afraid. I finally chose to change *myself*—not him. I worked with a therapist who helped me become aware of my unhealthy behavioral patterns, my strengths, and all the different choices I could make to change my life. Even though it was painful at times, as I learned about my true Self, my needs and my possibilities, I gradually felt stronger and happier. I left my abusive husband.

I lost my house, my car, and many of my friends. But I found myself, and I felt so light and content!

I started over. I went back to school, established my own company, and recovered long-lost friends and relationships. I am now married to a wonderful man and am enjoying my life—with all its ups and downs.

Suffering is inevitable, but we always have the possibility of choosing our attitude while dealing with it.

### Organization of the book

Throughout each chapter, there are hands-on exercises you can work on at your own pace to deal with the issues being discussed. Exercises have instructions for individual work, as well as for group process. If you are working on your own, perhaps you may want to share your findings with someone you trust—and you can even invite her or him to work on things together with you!

At the end of each chapter, there’s a calendar. The calendar identifies approximately how much time the reflection work of that chapter takes—*if you choose to do the work*. The calendar identifies what the work of the chapter is.

## The Dilemma or Problem: All About Safety and Belonging

Emotional issues are often prompted by a dilemma, a problem, a situation that pulls us in different directions. We find ourselves not being able to identify our needs clearly, and we don’t know how to handle things or what to do. Should I get married? Should I divorce? What should I do about my boss? There isn’t enough money for this situation, so what do I do? Or I have cancer. Or my husband has lost his eyesight. Or my son has dropped out of school.

Dilemmas also can be caused by positive conflicting matters. Should I stay in this job or take the new one? Should I go to morning or evening classes? Both kinds produce stress, and stress affects our energy levels. We will see the differences between positive and negative stress, and we will review some strategies for using our energy wisely.

Often dilemmas don't come one at a time. You've heard the expression: "When it rains, it pours." Sometimes that's true. If we don't take care of things, one at a time, they start to accumulate as unresolved dilemmas and negative stress, which generate anxiety, fear, and a feeling of being overwhelmed most of the time. The energy for daily survival saps our decision-making abilities so we let other important, emotional issues "ride" for another day.

Eventually, the issues become overpowering, and we feel lost. So we seek satiation or a distraction or an escape. Eventually, the satiation

or distraction or escape creates issues for us as well: too much eating or shopping or alcohol, etc. At that point there is barely enough energy for daily survival.

How do we unravel the reality, understand it, and (more importantly) use it to help us grow?

**Just about all dilemmas or problems have at their foundation the need for safety or belonging or both.**

We recommend that you:

***Choose one issue at a time.*** Start with getting one piece of yourself back. Other pieces will follow. You may start with one that feels less scary and, as you feel stronger, move on to more complicated ones. This process will take time, patience, and practice. Be kind to yourself.

We wish you well on your journey!



## Why Do We Feel Good or Bad? The Importance of Awareness and Energy

Some individuals have more physical energy than others—that is, “bigger engines.” The amount of emotional energy we have is determined by our personality type, our personal history, and our learning experiences. We allocate energy to different areas of our life. Time allocation and energy allocation are not the same, but they are interrelated. Energy allocation is where we put our effort and our zest. It is what we give the most thought. Time allocation is the minutes and hours that we give to activities, tasks, or people.

Contingent energy is the “extra” energy we have—the energy that is ours to do with as we wish and what brings us joy. It’s possible to give something a great deal of time (work, for example) but not much energy because we have given the energy to something else, even though we are at work. We pull energy from the contingent energy first, and then it continues to pull down the energy level until basic self-care is in jeopardy. Our time allocation may be very different from our energy allocation.

### Zinker's 'Cycle of Awareness-Excitement-Contact'

In 1977 Joseph Zinker, a Gestalt practitioner, developed a “Cycle of Awareness-Excitement-Contact”—or simply “Cycle of Awareness”—to help individuals become aware of how their energy moves, where they choose to place it, and how they can make best use of it. This is a powerful tool. It helps us learn how we invest or waste our energy based on our needs, our emotions, our thoughts, and our experiences. In this cycle, Zinker integrates:

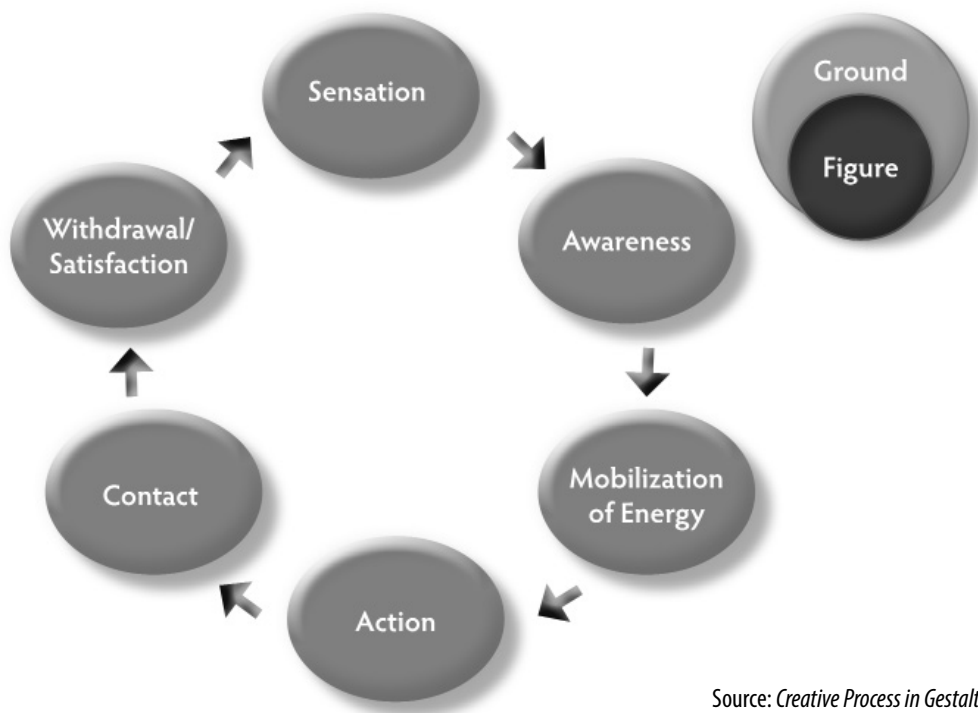
- a) Sensations/Figures
- b) Awareness
- c) Mobilization of Energy
- d) Action
- e) Contact
- f) Withdrawal/Satisfaction<sup>1</sup>

Here is how it works: Our body/brain constantly picks up messages and stimuli from the environment (internal and external). Depending on the importance of the messages and stimuli, we choose to place (or not place) our attention or energy on them. This is called a process of *figure/ground* formation. The need is a *figure* that calls for our attention, and everything else around it constitutes the *ground*.

After a few minutes, I realize I don't feel cold anymore; I feel warm and comfortable: *contact*. My need to feel warm has been satisfied, and now I can pay attention to something else—or go back to what I was doing before: *withdrawal/satisfaction*.

Now I can return to what I had been doing. The previous activity comes to the fore again: *figure*. The cold goes to the ground; I don't need

### Cycle of Awareness



Source: *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy* by J. Zinker.

For example, if it is cold, my body starts losing temperature, and I feel a chill. This is called a *figure*, that is, something I choose to pay attention to. This *figure*—the chill—tells me that I need to do something to feel warm: *awareness*. I think about putting on a sweater, I decide which one I will wear, and I remember where it is: *mobilization of energy*. I then decide to stop doing what I'm doing at the moment (all other activities become the ground), get up, go to the closet, get the sweater out, and put it on: *action*.

to pay attention to it, since I now feel warm and comfortable. New figures form constantly, and as we become aware of them, we utilize our energy to satisfy the needs that require our attention.

Every day—and throughout our lives—our energy moves from our bodies to our head, to our hearts, to our spirits. It goes from one place to the other depending on circumstances and our needs. This cycle can take place in a minute, an hour, a year, or a lifetime.

**Exercise:** How am I using my energy?

**Approximate time:** 1 hour

**Structure**

Individual work: 20 minutes

Group process: Share in groups of three, 30 minutes (10 minutes each); engage in large group, 10 minutes

## INDIVIDUAL WORK

Find a place in the room where you feel comfortable. Do this exercise by yourself. You will share your experience with the group afterward (but you will say only as much as you feel comfortable disclosing). Try to be as honest as possible!

Don't overthink it! After you read the instructions for each section, just write what comes to mind. If you have difficulty understanding some part of the exercise, ask the facilitator.

When you work with your partners, make sure each of you has the opportunity to participate and benefit from the exercise!

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Think about a problem or dilemma that is making you feel stressed and write a description of it, with as many details as possible.

The problem/dilemma I have is:

---

Describe the emotions and feelings related with this problem. Take your time to identify the emotions/feelings and to describe them as accurately as you can.

When I think about this problem, I feel \_\_\_\_\_

Examples: anxious, sad, stressed, angry, overwhelmed, etc.

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**Exercise:** How am I using my energy? (continued)

Describe the thoughts that you have regarding this problem, and try to classify them as positive or negative.

Negative thoughts	Positive thoughts
Example: I can't work it out, this is stupid, nobody will care/help me, etc.	Example: I have some choices, my friends/relatives/boss will help me, I have an idea of what I can do, etc.

Think about your attitude at this point. Are you feeling defeated, angry, frustrated? Or are you feeling hopeful and optimistic?

Describe your attitude

**Exercise:** How am I using my energy? (continued)

Spend some time reading what you just wrote.

**Analyze:**

Where are you placing most of your energy? Is it on positive feelings, thoughts, and attitudes, or is it placed more on the negative side?

If you find you are placing most of your energy on negative feelings, thoughts, and attitudes ... what can you do to change that?

---

Based on all the things you have learned about the situation and about yourself, can you think about some possible solutions to your problem or dilemma?

Possible solutions:

1.

2.

3.

Which solution is best? (in terms of energy, resources, healthy choices)