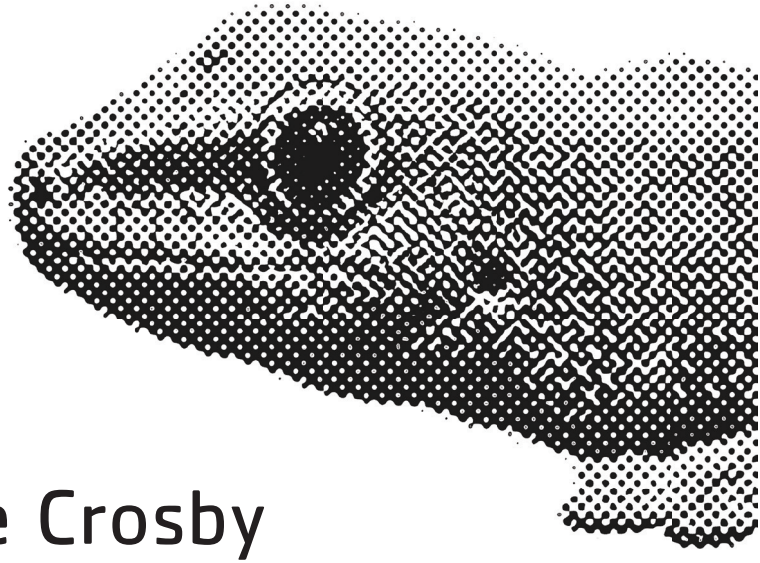
Fight, Flight, Freeze

Emotional Intelligence Behavioral Science Systems Theory & Leadership



Gilmore Crosby

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Book Layout and Design: Chris Crosby
Cover Design: Norman Hathaway

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

The best way to introduce this book is to acknowledge my father, Robert Parson Crosby, who created the framework and the spirit reflected in this text. Dad began his adult life as a Methodist minister, but his true calling was adult learning, and he has touched thousands of lives and empowered countless organizations through his unique brand of personal and organization development. Whether working with the severely mentally ill, or with corporate CEO's, Dad's approach consistently conveys respect for each individual's ability to find his or her own truth and forge his or her own path. Our task is to provide useful information and experiences and then watch in wonder as people wake up to their own possibilities. At the time of this second edition, I have followed his footsteps for over thirty years. The activities and information in this book are rooted in his wisdom, and chapter eleven is a case study of some of his best work.

I also owe a great debt to John Wallen, a colleague of my father, whose theories and writings have had a huge impact on me. Some of his material is included in this book. Likewise, I owe much to the fields of family systems therapy and applied behavioral science, which have great untapped potential for helping people understand themselves and the systems they are in.

I am also grateful for the contributions of my colleagues Mark Horswood, Chris Crosby, and Dave Crosby (Chris and Dave are also my brothers) to the content and editing of this book. Chris pushed hard for this second edition. I admittedly resisted. I was quite happy with the original, and as I suspected, what initially appeared to be a simple revision proved to be a major undertaking. In the end, however, it became a labor of love, with significant rewrites of chapters two and three, and improvements throughout. I'm forever indebted to Chris for both encouraging me to do this, and for the long hours and hard work he put in to

this revision.

The second edition was also inspired by the need to update the book's application of neuroscience to self-improvement. To that end I am also in debt for the technical advice provided by my cousin, Greg Crosby, a founding faculty member (2005) of the Interpersonal Neurobiology Certificate Program at Portland State University.

As you may know, the original title was "Fight, Flight, Freeze: Taming Your Reptilian Brain and Other Practical Approaches to Self-Improvement." The current subtitle is intended to reach readers who are looking to apply the power of emotional intelligence to improved work performance, a central mission of this text. A vast body of research shows that emotional intelligence is vital to leading and following effectively, and the awareness and skills embedded in this book have been proven time and again to create high performance in teams and organizations.

Thanks also to my long-time friend, Norman Hathaway, who took time off from his more esteemed customers (Paul McCartney, among others) to create the cover art and translate our understanding of the brain into the graphics in chapter two, and to my dear friend Robin Dillaway, who went above and beyond in his detailed search for typos and confusing passages in the original edition.

I wouldn't know what I know, if not for my two sons, who have brought me great joy and taught me much about my own emotional maturity. I wouldn't be who I am if not for Terry Bradshaw, Willie Stargell, and all the Pittsburgh sports greats of the 1970s, who boosted my self-esteem and helped me bond with my family during my formative years. Finally, my deepest thanks goes to my darling wife, Lisa. Your Jamaican perspective helps me keep learning, and your humble love motivates me to give my best each and every day.

Introduction

The journey you are embarking on with this workbook is the continuation of a journey my father began in the nineteen-twenties, and which I willingly continue today. It is the journey of understanding yourself and understanding your relationship to those around you. Why do you create what you want at times, yet at other moments generate undesired reactions in yourself and others? To what extent are your reactions and behaviors linked to the reactions of others, and what can you do to be the way you want to be and produce the outcomes you desire, more of the time?

Actually, you began your own journey of self-development long ago and will continue long after you read this book. You already have theories about yourself and about others. This guide will give you a chance to test and hone your own theories and to learn from the wisdom of others.

The good news is that it is possible to gain a practical understanding of yourself and apply that knowledge to enrich your personal relationships and increase the productivity of your relationships at work. The following workbook draws on the rich body of knowledge known as applied behavioral science, primarily generated during the past hundred years, but reaching back through all of recorded time. It is also based on decades of experience applying these theories with countless participants through workshops, organizations, families, and individual coaching. Finally, this second edition was necessitated by continued refinements in the neuroscience of the brain, and the increasing clarity my colleagues and I have about how to apply that to emotional intelligence and behavioral change. The result is a step-by-step guide to understanding yourself and creating the quality of relationships you want.

At the core of this approach is a Rogerian faith (Carl Rogers was a therapist) that you are the most motivated expert on you

and are the best source for your own solutions. This workbook will help you build a more scientific understanding of yourself, which you can then apply to determining your own path. This is not a cookie-cutter approach, because being human is not a cookie-cutter situation. How boring if it were! Instead, each of us must choose every day and every moment what to do next. My goal is to help you make those choices with as much knowledge as you can.

I'm honored and privileged to partner with you in your journey of discovery. Let us begin!

Disclaimer:

This book is about creating more of what you want in your relationships. Although most people have far more influence over what is happening than they realize and can assert that influence through the steps that follow, there are exceptions to the rule. A Polish Jew could not change the Nazis through self-awareness or interpersonal skills. A battered woman is not going to change her frog into Prince Charming. In extreme situations, the only way to create change is to get out. However, in most relationships, even really difficult ones, even relationships where you are convinced that the other person is to blame, the behavioral skills in this book will help you create more of what you want.

Chapter 1

Beginning the Journey

What has to happen to improve your relationships at home and at work?

What do you think has to happen? Read the quiz on the next page, and then rate your relationships at home, work, or both.

Is it hard to decide where to focus? Many people tell me they are very different at home and at work. Of course, there is truth to this, but the key to learning about yourself and creating what you want lies in being able to learn from any of your experiences. To gain the most from this book, focus on whichever situation you want, either at home or at work, and look for the common patterns in your reactions and behavior. The trick is to be able to learn in the midst of any important relationship. Pick one, and rate it. You can always focus on additional relationships later, as you proceed through this book.

To do the rating, pick a number from 1 to 10, with 1 representing a low score, or the worst possible condition, and 10 representing the best possible condition. You could pick any number on the scale (a 3 would be not good but not terrible, a 6 would be slightly better than average, etc.):

Figure 1: Relationship Quiz

Low									High
Q#1:									
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
I am often troubled about this relationship.									This relationship is going great!
Q#2:									
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
I rarely get what I want in this relationship.									I get what I want from this person, and I believe they would say the same about getting what they want from me.
Q#3:									
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
We are often in conflict with each other, and it's messy.									While retaining the ability to share differing ideas, we seem aligned on most issues and headed in the same direction.
Q#4:									
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
We do not talk directly to each other when we differ. We vent out frustrations about each other to others or just hold them in.									If we disagree or feel irritated, we speak directly with each other, hang in, resolve the issue, and improve the relationship.

Now, reflect on the rating that seems most important to you. Describe what is happening in the relationship that leads you to that rating. What would it take for you to give that question a higher rating? Write about what it would take (some people like to write, some do not. While many of the writing assignments in this guide are optional for learning, in this case writing greatly increases the likelihood that you gain what is intended from this exercise, so please write before proceeding further):

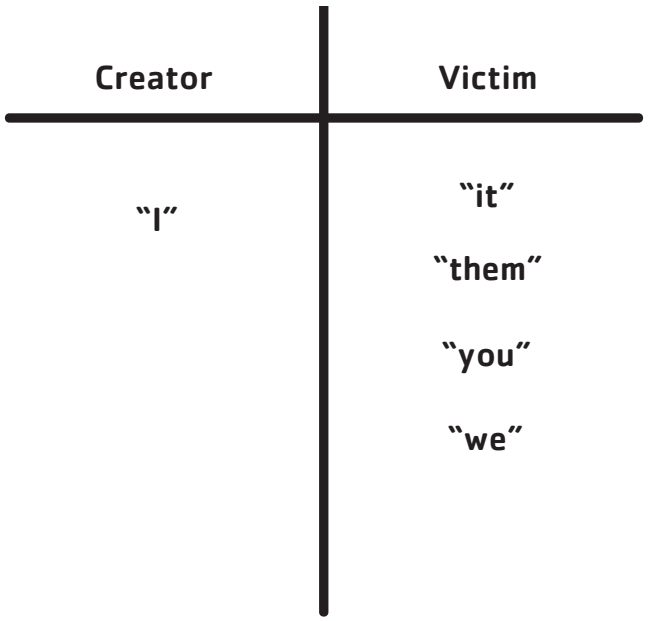
Now look at your writing. The language you use reflects your tendencies when it comes to thinking about challenging relationships. Most people are better at critiquing the behavior of others than they are at critiquing themselves. In fact, they are so good at criticizing others that they often have no clue about their own role in whatever is going wrong, and actually believe that the only way for things to improve is if the other person somehow changes. What's worse, the behavior of focusing on the other is unlikely to be welcomed, thus further fueling tension in the relationship. The other is likely to respond in kind, focusing their energy on

what's wrong with you. By focusing primarily on how the other could be different, one is essentially saying "this relationship will only be better if you are better." The key to change is placed outside the self. This focus on the other, which creates a "victim" mentality, pervades modern culture. Allow me to explain.

But first ponder this…*a critical skill in adult learning is the capacity for reasonably objective self-critique.* This book will offer various means for doing so, as well as tips for getting feedback from others. If you are not willing to study yourself, then this book is not for you.

Using the following chart, look at what you wrote about "what it would take to give a higher rating" (or think about what you thought, if you didn't do the writing), and critique your language. Were you thinking about what you could do differently, or about what others could (or should) do? Were you using "I" language, or other focused language? Were you thinking as a victim or as a creator?

Figure 2: Victim/Creator Model



Before I say more about the difference between a "victim" and a "creator," take a moment to notice your emotions as you are reacting to this self-assessment. Emotion plays a powerful role in influencing your thoughts, and it's vital to your development that you recognize your emotional states as clearly as you can. Name your current emotion, if you can. Is your emotional state helping or is it hampering your ability to learn?

If you are explaining to yourself why you used "victim" language, and why it's justified to do so, then you are probably experiencing the emotional state of defensiveness. If this is true and you can see it and admit it, congratulations! You have the capacity to learn about defensiveness, a normal human reaction, and influence the amount of time and energy you allow that emotion to sway your thoughts and behaviors. If you are feeling defensive and don't know it (a paradox, but quite possible), then it's much more likely to be a repetitive experience that interferes with relationships and learning. The clearest indications of this emotional state are behavioral - for example, the behavior of explaining yourself to yourself (in your head, or possibly even out loud) and/or to others. Whenever you begin explaining yourself, it's a safe bet that you're acting on the emotion of defensiveness.

Whatever your current emotion, by paying attention to your emotional reaction to the above exercise, we have begun scratching the surface of the critical role that emotional awareness plays in self-awareness, self-development, and relationships. To learn about yourself, it will be vital to explore your beliefs about emotions. You probably think that some, such as love, are good, and that some, such as defensiveness, are bad. Such beliefs can prevent us from seeing clearly what emotions we, and others, are experiencing. From the perspective of this guidebook, emotion is not inherently good or bad; emotion is simply a constant part of being human. The question is what we do with emotion. If we are unaware of our emotions, we have less control over their impact on our thoughts and behaviors. When we are aware, regardless

of what type of emotion is present, we have more influence over what we think and do.

We will continue to explore emotion in just a bit. For now, return to the language you used when you pondered what it would take to give that question a higher rating. If you used "I" language, you were almost certainly focused on what you could do differently. This is the essence of the difference between being in victim or creator mode. As a creator, you are taking responsibility for your influence on relationships at home and at work. Your task is to understand your own part in what is going well, and what is not going well, and to make adjustments by trying on new behaviors and perspectives. This workbook will open your eyes to many possible choices.

Be careful not to fall into the trap of fooling yourself when looking at the language you used. In creator mode, "I" language indicates speaking for yourself, and taking responsibility for what needs to happen. But one can use the word "I" and remain in victim mode, as in the following examples: "I think my husband should listen more." "I think if management were more trustworthy, things would be better around here." These might be reasonable things to want, but you have only shifted out of victim mode if you are looking at your own role in what is happening, and thinking about what you are going to do about it.

Your clarity about the line between victim and creator can also be blurred by the word "we." There are, of course, times when it is accurate and in good taste to use the word we, as in "we're all in this together," and when giving credit to a group when group credit is due ("We got it done"). At other times, people use "we" in more slippery ways. "We" is used as protection, or to lend weight to an argument, as in "Boss, we all think…" or to claim there's agreement when there really is not ("We decided…").

During the exercise, if you said something like, "things will be better when we all start doing our part," you were still primarily in victim mode. Waiting for "everyone" to change takes the

responsibility off of you, even though you are part of the "we." Figuring out what you're going to do to start the change, puts you back in creator mode.

To be a true "we," a group has to be made up of individuals who think and speak for themselves, and respect that in each other. To be a true "we," the group has to be made up of individuals who operate most of the time in creator mode. Otherwise "we" is often wishful thinking, based on fear. People pretend to agree even when they don't. There is a show of unity, but real differences are shied away from, and the unity is fragile. By developing yourself and being a creator more of the time, you will also be a healthier influence on the groups you belong to, both at work and in your personal life, including your family.

We all spend some time in victim mode. When there, it is easy to blame others and circumstances for reactions and conditions you don't like. As mentioned above, it is also easy to fool yourself into thinking you are taking responsibility, even when you are not. Perhaps you are "being proactive" by looking for the "right" mate or job (efforts which deserve respect), but such solutions still imply that the answer to your problems lies outside of yourself. If only you could get lucky and find the right circumstances. If only your boss/spouse/co-workers/income/president was this way or that; then you would be happy.

Victor Frankl, the author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, found the "right circumstances" as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. He was able to find hope and pleasure in relationships, however fleeting, and in the beauty of a sunset, while other prisoners withered away. According to Frankl, "Everything can be taken from a man but...the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." If he could be in creator mode, under the most horrible of circumstances, then you and I have no excuse.

Whatever your circumstances, you create your experience. You are limiting yourself in some way (we all do). You are

capable of more than you currently imagine. You are already a creator, regardless of how you answered the "I" language quiz. You created the ability to walk and to talk, for example, without skipping a beat. Admittedly, you were unencumbered at the time by fear of failure, but fear can be overcome. With this workbook, you can create new ways to think, feel, relate, get results, and learn about yourself on an ongoing basis.

Although potentially painful at times, critiquing yourself is much more empowering than being focused on critiquing everyone else. The critical skill in self-development is whether you are willing to look at yourself rather than look outside yourself when dealing with difficulty. If you used "victim" language in the exercise above, you were thinking at that moment as if you are powerless to alter what is happening, unless other people change. In other words, your vision was limited to the change that could occur in them, something you have very little control over. The people around you will only change if they chose to start with themselves. Your best bet to create more of what you want, regardless of their choices, is to do the same. Don't wait for them to be different. Start with yourself.

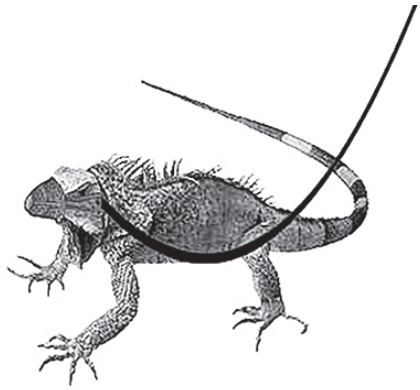
If you didn't use "I" language during this exercise, that doesn't mean that you always focus on what others need to do differently, instead of starting with yourself, but it at least means that it's enough of a habit that you slipped into it during this activity. If so, don't beat yourself up. Even the most emotionally mature humans slip into victim thinking at times. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to become more aware of the difference between being in victim or creator mode, and to choose creator mode as often as possible.

Victim thinking, if you slipped into it, is the first barrier to creating what you want. Rewrite what it would take for you to give that question a higher rating, using "I" language. Notice the difference that comes from shifting your focus.

If you used "I" language in the exercise, congratulations, you already have the habit, at times of starting with yourself (as, no doubt, do those who used victim language). Keep it up. Increase the habit! And read on. The journey has only begun.

Chapter 2

Emotional Intelligence: Taming the Reptilian Brain



One of the dilemmas of being human, with consequences at work and in our personal lives, is the fabulous instinctual behavior that protects us from physical dangers - the instincts of fight, flight, and freeze. These reactions are rooted in the reptilian portion of the brain, protecting us from danger, but accidentally working against us in social relationships. Whatever your beliefs about the beginnings of human existence, you probably agree that humans have reactions to danger that do not require conscious thought. If we detect danger in the environment - a snake, a violent person, a vehicle bearing down on us - we act without thought (and, hopefully, take the right action). Unfortunately, the same split-second reactions are frequently present in social relations, where they are not nearly as useful.

For example, when an authority figure enters the room, the parts of your brain (both sensory and perceptual) that scan the environment may send the danger signal to the reptilian brain, even if you get along relatively well with that person. For many, it is hard to relate to their bosses without slipping into fight, flight, or freeze behaviors. This does not mean you punch the boss in

the nose and/or run out of the room. We are generally more civilized than that. Instead, the likely behavior of a person in fight mode is to "logically" disagree with whatever their boss, company, or mate has to say. Flight, the most common of the three reactions, takes the form of avoidance. People flee inward, keeping their mouths shut, not saying what they really think and trying to hide how they really feel. Freeze behavior is a deer in the headlights moment, when a normally intelligent and engaging person goes brain dead, even if they've rehearsed what to say many times in advance.

The same is true during times of change. Picture your reptilian brain as a lizard sunning itself on a rock, next to a pond. As soon as there is a change in the environment - a splash in the water, a rustling in the weeds - the reptile is on alert and the reactions of fight, flight or freeze kick in. Even though we aren't reptiles, our anatomy is wired for a similar response. A new boss, a new company initiative, something as small as someone in your regular seat at a meeting, and before you know it the reptilian brain kicks in. If the leader of a change responds to the initial reaction with their own reptilian behavior, they will add fuel to the reactive flames.

Once activated into fight, flight, or freeze mode, it is easy to have misunderstandings. If you think you're being criticized or attacked (and I use the term "think" lightly here - you have scanned the environment and made a split second assessment), then it is likely, regardless of the other person's intentions, that you will view their words and actions in an unfavorable light. This, in psychological terms, is known as "confirmation bias," which is the brain's tendency to interpret information in a manner that confirms what it already believes. If we have labeled somebody with a negative judgment, such as "untrustworthy," we tend to note the evidence that supports our belief and overlook any evidence to the contrary. If someone you trust does you a favor, you are grateful. If someone you mistrust does the same

thing, you wonder "What's the catch?" When the reptilian brain is activated, we tend to anticipate danger by assuming the worst.

Our habits in terms of reptilian reactions are rooted in a mix of biology and experience. As infants and during our subsequent development as children, we form our beliefs and habitual reactions to authority figures, and carry them into our adult lives. Different stimuli evoke different reactions in each of us, although it's easy (and comforting) to assume that others think and feel the way we do. Such wishful thinking is also rooted in instinctive behavior. Humans like to be the same, to belong. Humans also like to be different. No wonder humans can be so confusing! Unfortunately, being "different" is often a reactive fight behavior, in which you only have a sense of identity if you have something to rebel against. Ironically, the same can be true for "being the same." Group think is a reactive flight behavior wherein people pretend to agree even though they don't, because they want to belong, and/or they don't want to make waves.

Humans have been trying to understand and master emotional reactivity since the dawn of time. Tibetan Buddhists, for example, have been using consistent methods to conduct their own study of emotion for more than a thousand years. In one of his many books on emotional intelligence, *Destructive Emotions*, Daniel Goleman initiated collaboration between Buddhist scholars, including the Dalai Lama, and scientists from fields such as cognitive neuroscience and psychology, to understand and learn from the Tibetan perspective on emotion. What do the Buddhists consider a "destructive emotion?" Any emotional state that distorts "our perception of reality." Even emotional opposites, such as strong "attachment" (the honeymoon period, for example) and "aversion," are similar in creating a likely gap "between the way things appear and the way things are." In other words, the defining quality is not whether one feels good or bad, happy or mad, but rather whether one's emotional state is obscuring one's clarity about reality. From this perspective, love

and other "positive" emotions can distort reality as much as hate can. The latter encourages seeing nothing but our differences, the former obscures our differences until we start to come down from the high of our infatuation. The same is true of more subtle emotions. One's loyalty to a person or a group (a leader or a production department, for example), while an admirable quality, makes it harder to see them, or anyone who seems to threaten them, clearly (as they really are).

The ability to see clearly is further complicated in organizational systems. Hierarchy, which has endured throughout history because it is a proven structure for getting things done, breeds fight, flight, or freeze responses. Emotion obscures seeing others or oneself accurately, and as a result, the reptilian brain has at least as much influence in most organizations as the thinking centers of the brain (the neo and prefrontal cortexes).

The challenge is to bring one's cognitive powers into play to manage one's reactivity. As the renowned philosopher Eckhart Tolle puts it, "Be present as the watcher of your mind—of your thoughts and emotions as well as your reactions in various situations. Be at least as interested in your reactions as in the situation or person that you are reacting to. Notice also how often your attention is in the past or future. Don't judge or analyze what you observe. Watch the thought, feel the emotion, observe the reaction. Don't make a personal problem out of them. You will feel something more powerful than any of those things that you observe; the still observing presence behind the content of your mind..."

There are many ways to attempt this, including Buddhist meditation. Goleman's book applies science to assessing the impact of Buddhist techniques, including brain scans of meditating monks. While acknowledging that there are other paths, this guidebook is based primarily on western science. Wallen's Interpersonal Gap model (the focus of the next chapter) is a good example. Wallen's model suggests that how we interpret

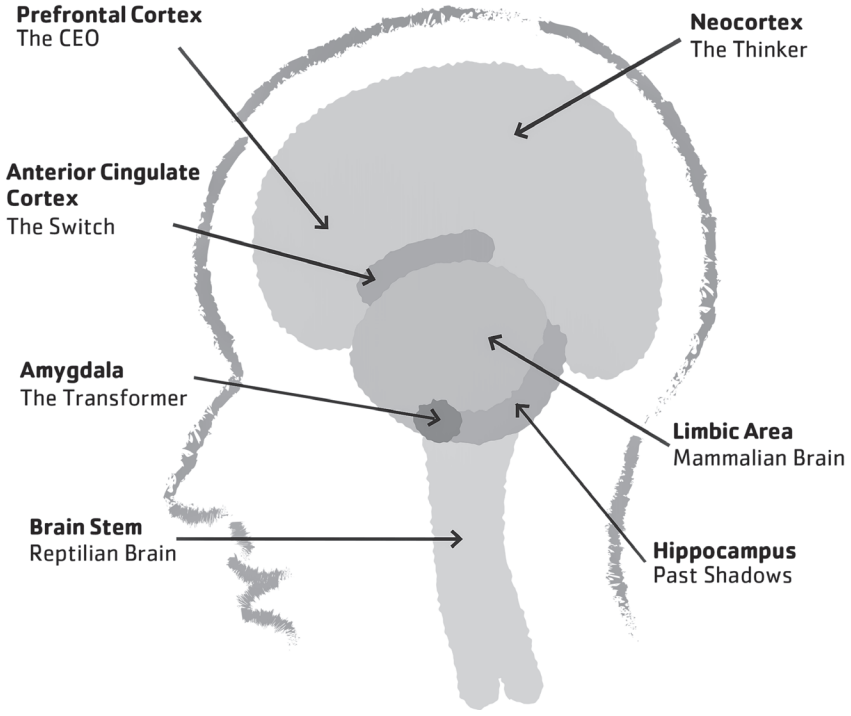
other people's behavior has a huge influence on how we react to them. Instead of blaming or attempting to change the other, the focus shifts to understanding and questioning one's own interpretations, and through that process, cognition gradually plays a more positive role in work and personal relationships. Wallen also outlines various behaviors, such as paraphrasing, which increase the likelihood of understanding the message others meant to convey, versus the mangled version we received if we were in a reactive state. You will be practicing these behaviors as you continue to work with this text.

Such behaviors serve a dual purpose. First off, they serve their stated goal. Paraphrase, for example, decreases misunderstanding, which is an important outcome unto itself. The secondary effect is perhaps even more important. By providing a non-reactive and thoughtful focus, they help the brain switch from reactive mode, which is inherently close-minded, to a calmer and more open-minded state. In therapeutic terms this is called "grounding." Any method you have for calming yourself in an emotionally intense moment, is a grounding skill (counting backwards from ten, taking slow deep breathes, etc.). The ability to calm yourself in the midst of a difficult interaction is arguably the most important self-management ability. Feeling description, another Wallen communication skill (which you will be practicing in chapter four), has perhaps the most direct grounding effect. By naming your current emotion (out loud or in your head), you are shifting activity from the emotional center of the brain to the thinking center.

We know this thanks to advances in neuroscience during the past few decades. We can actually see brain activity shift from one area of the brain to another as a person's focus shifts. Imagine your head is in a brain scanner. If the emotion you are experiencing is particularly intense, your limbic or emotional center will light up the screen like a Christmas tree. The moment you "name it" the lights will go on in the prefrontal cortex, and

begin to dim in the limbic. In other words to be truly rational, one must respect and think about the irrational (emotion). Otherwise emotion, especially intense reactive emotion, will be in charge of your thinking, and your behavior. The following graph illustrates brain structures critical to reactive and non-reactive behavior:

Figure 3: Neuroscience and Self-Improvement



Explanation of Figure 3

Prefrontal cortex: "The CEO" - Observes the self, links the neocortex, limbic, and brain stem. Holds the capacity for anticipating, analyzing, reflecting, deciding, morality, and direction (vision). Fuels reactivity or guides non-reactivity. Uses body (breath) or interpersonal skills to calm the limbic. Central to learning - core EQ skill is "name it to tame it" (the 'it' is emotions/patterns).

Anterior cingulate cortex: "The Switch" - Limbic and neocortex interface. In tense social moments it switches between open learner or rigid/inflexible.

Limbic area: "The Mammalian Brain" - Emotional center, that includes bonding, attachment, and motivation.

Amygdala: "The Transformer" - Steps up emotions, and detects fear. Alert amid change/transitions.

Hippocampus: "Past Shadows" - Stores emotional memories (happiness, trauma, anger, or loss).

Neocortex: "The Thinker" - Thinking center.

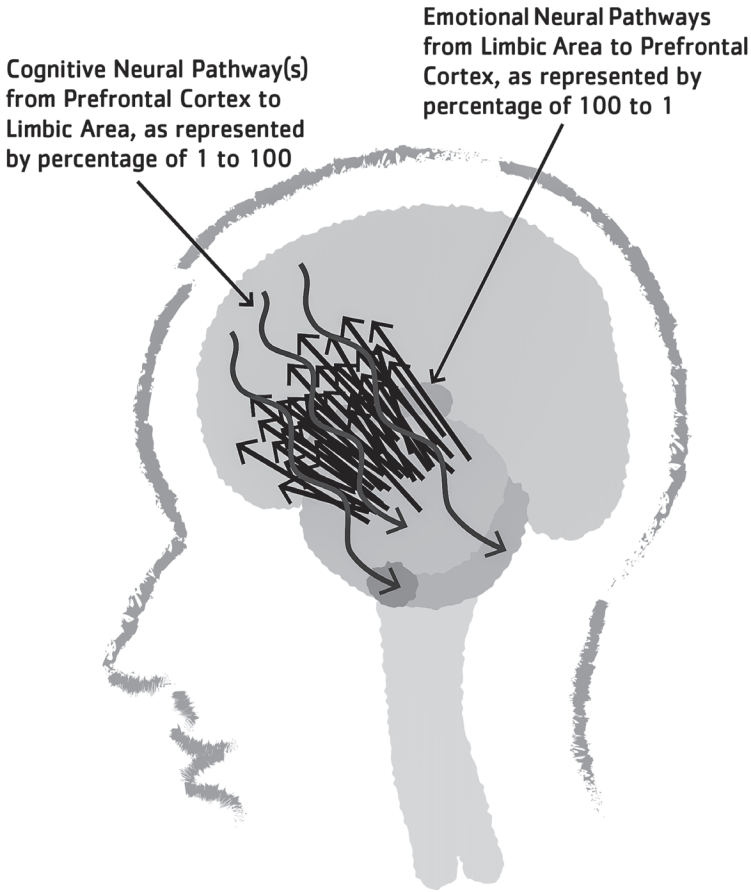
Brain stem: "Reptilian Brain" - Regulates body functions, fight/flight/freeze response, and is basically a reptile's only brain.

Given what we know about neurobiology, the question becomes, do you want your neocortex (especially the prefrontal cortex) calmly in charge during difficult interactions, or your reptilian brain? The answer, I hope, is obvious...although in a reactive moment it can be tempting to indulge in reactivity. This is because it is both a physiological and deeply emotional process.

Back to our example of the authority figure (or someone you find difficult). They unexpectedly enter the room. Before you can think, the process basically goes like this: you hear and see them (sensory data), and send the alarm to the amygdala which, acting like a transformer in an electrical system, steps up the alert. This person reminds your hippocampus of some past emotionally intense experience (which can date back to pre-cognitive time - infancy and early childhood), further increasing the perception of danger. The heart beats faster, the breathing rate and blood pressure increase, adrenaline and other stimulates flood the system. The reactive brain is ready for action (fight, flight or freeze), and the limbic region, if you happen to be in a brain scanner, is lighting up. The reactive versus non-reactive

moment of choice has arrived, with your built in survival system heavily wired in favor of reactive (there are approximately one hundred neural pathways heading from your reactive brain to the neocortex for every one neural pathway heading the opposite direction, as illustrated in the following graphic)!

Figure 4: Neural Pathways



Explanation of Figure 4

Nueral pathways go in one direction. According to neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, there are 100 emotional neural pathways from the limbic area to the prefrontal cortex, and they are strong like superhighways, to every 1 cognitive neural pathway from the

> prefrontal cortex to the limbic area, and they are weak like a winding road. Once you switch to open learner and away from being rigid/inflexible, then you can train the prefrontal cortex through behavioral skills that add, build, and develop cognitive neural pathways in order to gain better access to all parts of your brain and, ultimately, even more control of your behavior

Again, back to our example of a person you are reactive to entering the room. Fortunately, because you have been working on how to better manage yourself in such moments, you notice something about your reaction (your body is tense, you are anxious, etc.), and you take a deep slow breath. Norepinephrine is released, and you begin to calm. Your anterior cingulate cortex begins to switch your pre-frontal lobe into a more open-minded state. Your entire neurological system de-escalates, and you are much more able to relate to this person without past emotionality (which often has nothing to do with the present relationship!) clouding the interaction.

In such moments, you are literally strengthening weak neural pathways (such as to emotions that you have lost touch with) and forming new ones, making it more likely you will be able to better manage your reactive brain in the future. Scientists call this "neural plasticity." Your brain is changing throughout life, and the skills in this book are a fast track for positive brain development.

There are many skills and theories that can aid in the process of minimizing and recovering from the reactive/reptilian brain. The Awareness Wheel, by Miller, Wackman, Nunnaly, and Saline, slices awareness into sensory data, emotions, thoughts, wants, and actions. Lack of awareness of any of these, and of how they impact one another, is a blind spot and increases reactivity. If, for example, I'm unaware that I interpreted (my thoughts) your words (my sensory data) as an attack (fear!), and responded (action) based on flawed information, I may blame you for the conflict that is ensuing, and my subsequent reactive want (that

you realize I'm right) may be further fuel for the flames.

We will cover other models, such as VOMP (by my father, Robert P. Crosby) and PINCH (Sherwood, Glidewell & Scherer) that can help you use the thinking center of your brain to understand and better manage reactive moments. Family systems theory (Bowen, Friedman, Satir, and others) helps us understand how we are linked together in reactivity and the importance of differentiating between the past and the present, and the emotional state of self and others.

A goal of this guidebook is to help the thinking center of your brain be calmly in charge more of the time, and to decrease the amount of time you spend in reactive/reptilian brain mode. A simple technique is to notice when you are feeling tense, and to take a deep breath. Reptilian mode is tense. It's hard to maintain if you relax. And if you relax, you will contribute to the relaxation of the people around you. Tension feeds tension. Relaxation feeds relaxation. Rather than blame others for being tense (victim behavior), calm yourself (be a creator!). Breathe deeply. I have been told by many that they are amazed how much simple awareness (noticing they are tense) and behavior (taking a deep breath) has increased the quality of their relationships.

Rest assured that it is possible to learn from your experiences, decrease your reactivity, and increase your objectivity when you are in the midst of, or at least soon after, reactive moments. This guidebook will help you learn, through skillful reflection, to alter future reactions and outcomes.

Activity:

Think of your most recent reactive moment. Which mode were you in, fight, flight, or freeze? Is this typical or situational? For example, many people when stressed tend towards flight or freeze in the presence of their boss, yet habitually fight if there is tension with their spouse. Keep in mind that some reactions

are very subtle. If you find you almost never speak in a certain setting, you are almost certainly into flight or freeze mode (or a combination thereof).

Make a note of these situations, and prior to and during the next such moment, take steps to calm yourself - deep relaxed breathing is a good start - and clarify in your mind what you want to happen. Get to your real goals - not momentary gratifications (such as, "I want to tell her to go jump in the lake"), but deeper goals, such as "I want us to succeed." Clarifying what you really want in any given relationship, at home or at work, is a great way to put the thinking center of your brain in charge of the primitive brain, and to start you down the right path.

Reactive moments:

Key Relationships – What I Want:

Nice work!

When you are ready, move on to the next chapter, and begin to explore the thinking process you use to understand situations and people.

Chapter 3

Behavioral Science: The Interpersonal Gap

Think about two or three people that you have difficulty dealing with. We are all products of the cultures that we live in, and a norm of our modern culture is to label a person's personality. What labels (for example: uptight, irresponsible, domineering, slacker, rude, disrespectful, etc.) do you use when you think of these people? Make a mental note of the words that you choose.

Everywhere I go I encounter the same phenomenon...people in all walks of organizational life offering theories about other people's intentions and motives, and operating as if their theories were valid and objective. "Bill can't be trusted." "So and so (or such and such group) isn't committed to this activity." "That plant (department, person, etc.) is resistant to change."

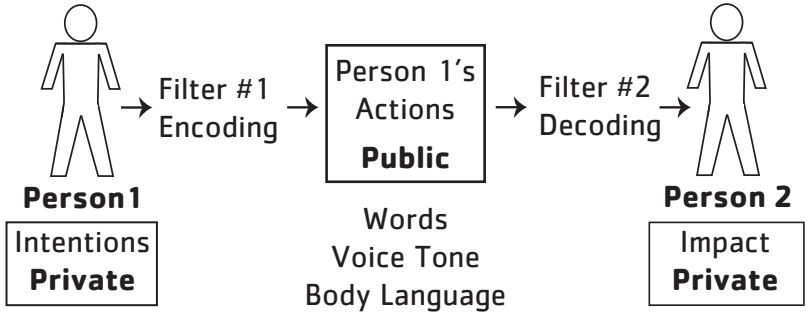
These beliefs, though commonly held, rarely stand up to a rigorous examination. Furthermore, such beliefs greatly complicate conflict and are often a significant contributor to whatever problem the observer is criticizing. In other words, when we generate or give credence to negative interpretations about the motives or personality of others, we have almost certainly become part of the problem (and possibly the source). This almost-universal blind spot fuels all kinds of waste, conflict, and lost productivity.

Recognition that we are interpreting and that our interpretations create our reactions to others is the essential skill needed to break out of this culturally accepted phenomenon. Kurt Lewin, one of the founders of Organization Development, once said "There's nothing so practical as a good theory." The Interpersonal Gap (John Wallen, 1964), is one of the most practical theories of behavioral science, and offers a path out of the phenomenon described above.

According to Wallen, "The most basic and recurring problems in social life stem from what you intend and the actual effect of your actions on others." I would add (and I'm confident Wallen would agree), that "basic and recurring problems" stem equally from the reverse: your own interpretations, sometimes accurate, sometimes not, of the intentions of others. While both their interpretation of you and your interpretation of them are worth paying attention to, it is the latter source of trouble over which you have the most potential control.

In short, Wallen's theory is that each of us has intentions in every interaction (we intend a certain impact), we translate (or encode) our intentions into words and actions, the people we are interacting with translate (decode) our words and actions, and the decoding determines the initial emotional impact on them, as illustrated in the following graph:

Figure 5: The Interpersonal Gap



A difference between intent and impact equals a "gap"

Filter #1: Sender's beliefs & habits regarding how to translate intentions into words and actions.

Filter #2: Receiver's interpretation/judgment (beliefs/theories/stories) about what sender's behavior really means

This process occurs constantly, and in nanoseconds. It is the micro moment in a macro tapestry of interactions and beliefs. I react to you, and in that moment you are already reacting to my

reactions. To further complicate things, our filters are complex and ever changing. Our history together, our separate life experiences, our culture, the nature of our relationship (i.e., roles such as boss and subordinate, parent and child, salesperson and customer, etc.) all impact our immediate filters about each other. There is ample potential for misunderstanding at any step in the process (beginning with the formidable task of understanding yourself - that is, with having clarity about what impact you really want in any given interaction). Such misunderstandings are what Wallen refers to as a "gap." As he puts it, "Interpersonal gap refers to the degree of congruence between one person's intentions and the effect produced in the other. If the effect is what is intended, the gap has been bridged. If the effect is the opposite of what was intended, the gap has become greater."

Wallen goes on to say, "We see our own actions in the light of our own intentions, but we see the other's actions not in the light of the other person's intentions but in the effect on us." In other words, we usually know what we intended, especially when we believe we've been misunderstood (when we believe others have interpreted our words and actions differently than we intended). It is easy to notice Wallen's gap in those moments. That awareness is the first vital step in potentially clearing up misunderstandings.

It's more problematic when the shoe is on the other foot, when you interpret another's words and actions in a manner that has an undesired effect on you. Understanding the power your interpretations have on your own reactions is the starting point for increasing your objectivity and becoming less of a victim to your own interpretations. For example, a person who gives you "close supervision" (an interpretation in itself) may also be decoded/interpreted as a) "not trusting your work," or b) "being committed to you" (or c, or d, etc.). A worker who speaks with anger may also be decoded/interpreted as a) "a troublemaker" or b) "passionate about their job." The same behaviors, decoded differently, evoke different reactions (emotions, beliefs, etc.).

Simple - but hard to remember when the (emotional) heat is on, especially since your circle of associates will likely agree with your negative interpretations, lending what seems like validity to your judgments about the other person or group. And the subtle tension fueled by such negative beliefs makes it likely that future interactions will further reinforce the current outcomes.

Does this mean that you should never have negative judgments of others? Absolutely not. Besides the fact that such a suspension of interpretation would be virtually unachievable, it would be undesirable as well. Honest and timely critical feedback is a vital factor in a high performance workplace. What it does mean is that it is useful for you to be as skillful as possible in describing the behavior that led to your interpretations of others (especially if you are an authority figure giving them performance feedback!), and that you should leave ample room for questioning your own interpretations.

In other words, don't get so attached to your interpretations that you defend them and close your mind to other possibilities. Keep your anterior cingulate cortex switched to "open learner." If you are being objective you will understand that your initial interpretation of someone's words and actions may be very different than what they meant. Close gaps by being specific about what you think they said or did (keeping in mind that they may not describe their words and deeds the same way), and about the emotional impact your interpretation of their words and actions is having on you. The good news is, you have the ability to reconsider your own interpretations, and that is a critical step for breaking any patterns of misunderstanding that are needlessly complicating your relationships at home and at work.

Wallen states: "I know myself by my intentions; I know others by _____."

How would you finish the sentence? Think of your response, and then continue reading.

If you said, "I know others by their behavior," your answer reflects the dominant cultural perspective of our times. In other words, most people would give that answer. It is part of the subtle victim mentality we spoke about earlier. The solution is seen as being located outside of the self. "I know them by their behavior; for things to be different, their behavior has to be different." It follows that your efforts will be on analyzing them and trying to change them (or getting rid of them). And since the people around you are operating in the same cultural mode (answering the question the same way), that seems to validate your perspective. "Don't talk crazy. Everyone knows the world is flat!" But is it?

Wallen's completion of that sentence is a radical shift. "I know myself by my intentions. I know others by my interpretations." I know you by the stories I *make up* about what I believe your words and actions *really* mean. This leads to an empowering possibility. If I change my stories, I change my reaction. In other words, I create my own reactions. A subtle shift, but radically different than popular belief. "You made me angry!" Nope. "I interpreted your words and actions as an attack, as an attempt to thwart what I want, and my thoughts aroused anger within me." And if one is really objective they might add, "And frankly, there's a good chance I misunderstood what you meant to convey."

"I know you by my interpretations" is both a sobering and calming perspective. Rather than believing, defending, and reacting to your own interpretations, if you maintain awareness of the possibility of misunderstanding (an awareness that will have a grounding effect), you open the door to more rational relationships – you will calm the limbic and put the prefrontal cortex back in charge.

Activity:

Write down the interpretive words you used at the beginning of this chapter.

Be a detective of your own interpretations. What were the words or actions that led to your choice of those words?

Think of the person you hold in the highest regard in all the world. If they did or said the same things that you have listed above, would you interpret them in a different light? Strictly for the purpose of increasing your awareness of how you give meaning to other people's actions, interpret the words and actions you have listed in a manner that would make you feel appreciative of the other person. (Please note: I am not trying to trick you into appreciating this other's words and actions. I am simply trying to give you insight into to how your own process of interpretation works).

Now let's look at the Interpersonal Gap from yet another angle. To understand your own reactions and to convey useful feedback to another, it's important to be as clear as you can about what "action" you are interpreting. When you are conversing with someone, what sort of behavior are you taking in?

For our purposes, there are three primary sources of behavioral information: words, body language, and tone of voice. Words are what the person is saying and what you are hearing them say (which may be two different things!). Body language is constant, and includes the powerful information conveyed by facial expression. Are they smiling? Frowning? Looking at you? Leaning towards you? Leaning back? Tensing their muscles? Slumped in their posture? Folding their arms? All body language provides information about the sender of the message, and is open to interpretation by the receiver. Last but not necessarily least, does the tone of voice match the words being conveyed? Think of the various tones that could be used with the words "Thanks a lot." As you can probably surmise, very different messages can be conveyed, depending on the tone.

A famous study by Dr. Albert Mehrabian assessed where the receiver tuned in for understanding, when the messages from these three aspects of behavior (body, tone, words) were inconsistent. Mehrabian's research breaks them down into percentages. What percentage do you think you get the message from, when there are mixed messages from the sender? Take your best guess, and then turn the page:

Body Language: _____%

Words: _____%

Tone: _____%

In Dr. Mehrabian's research, these were the percentages:

Body Language: 55%

Tone: 38%

Words: 7%

If you answered differently, that doesn't invalidate your answer. You may be getting more of your information from one or two of these sources than did the people in the study, or you may be closer to the study's numbers than you realize. Either way, your ability to be specific about what you are reacting to will increase your own clarity about your reactions and improve the clarity of the feedback you give to others. For example, when you believe you are receiving a mixed message, you could think or say something like this: "when you said you were happy, you were frowning, so I didn't believe it." Compare that to somebody being effected by the same behavior, and thinking or saying, "liar." Feedback which primarily conveys specific behavior is generally less inflammatory than feedback which primarily or solely conveys judgments (interpretations). It's also more likely that the receiver and the sender can learn from and act on behaviorally specific feedback. The ability to give behaviorally specific feedback, free of interpretations, is essential if you are in a position of supervision, and important at home if you want less fighting and more understanding. Frankly, if you can't be behaviorally specific, you are better off not saying anything at all. How you put things and what you focus on does matter. Activities to sharpen your skills are soon to follow.

You can also pay attention to the alignment of these three variables in your own communication. How aware are you of your own facial expressions? Do you smile when you are anxious or delivering a serious message? Many people smile because they are afraid of how the message will be received. Others cover

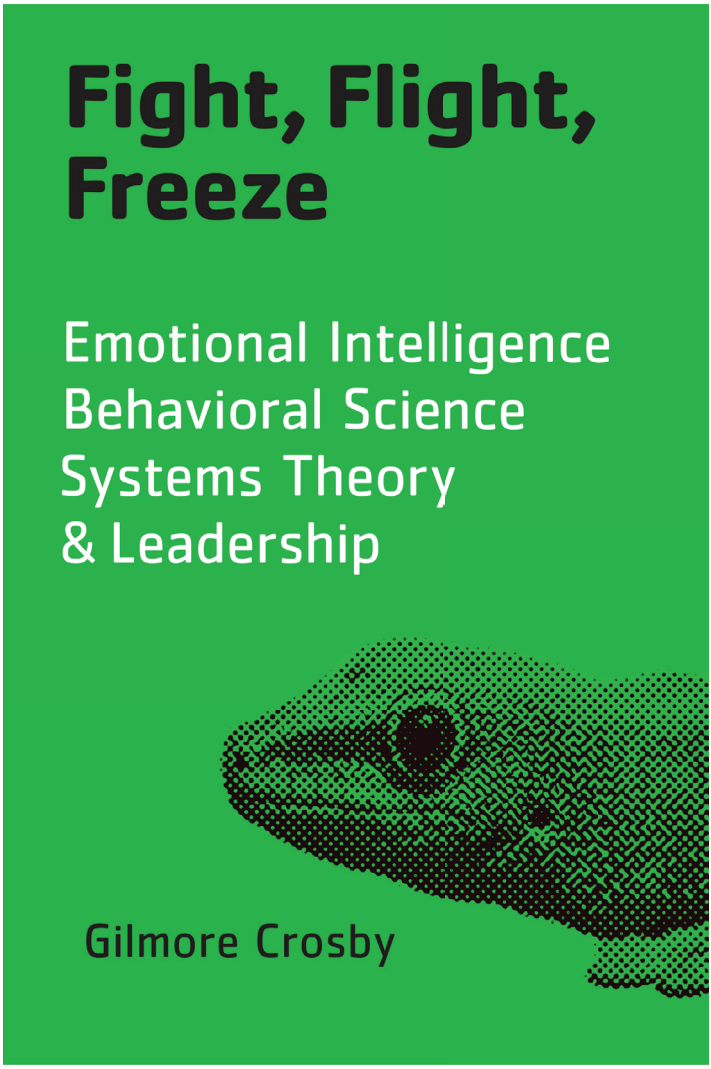
their inner state by never varying their expression. Unfortunately, either behavior is likely to be confusing to the person on the receiving end. And neither behavior protects you from conveying *something*, and sometimes conveying messages very different than what you intend. Ironically, people who have a more or less consistently blank facial expression, especially if they are in positions of authority, are often miss-interpreted more, because people have less to go on and are filling in the blanks with their own imaginations (and with authority figures, they often imagine the worst).

If you want people to get a clear message, try smiling when you like what's happening, and looking serious when you feel serious. Family Therapist Virginia Satir calls this match between your inner experience and your outer expression "congruency." You started life that way. When you were happy you looked happy, when you were sad you looked sad, and so on. If you have ever been around an infant, you know this to be true. From that point on, we all learned habits of what to show and what not to show. Through persistent intentional effort, you can unlearn those habits which are no longer serving you well, and relearn how to be congruent when you want to be.

The same is true of tone, and of words. As the Toltec Mayans have known for thousands of years, your words are powerful. Endeavor to say what you mean, and mean what you say. Be kind with your words, to yourself (in your head) and about others. Keep your word.

Wallen identified four ways to close interpersonal gaps. Read on and experiment. Remember, not every experiment will go the way you want it to. Learning new behaviors can be awkward, and the people you are with may not know what to make of your efforts. But just because you fall down doesn't mean learning to walk is a mistake. If the voice in your head starts being negative the first time you try new behavior and the interaction doesn't go the way you want, challenge that filter! Thank goodness that

filter wasn't in place when you were learning to walk and talk! You can stumble and still move forward! It doesn't mean you, or the method, are a failure! Be clear about what you want, and go after it! The more you try on the behaviors in this book, the more you'll forge your own path, your own style, and create more of what you want in your life!



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or 302-983-1429