

CHAPTER 1

Asking: The “Inner Game”

You Were Born to Ask

You were born to ask. It's your natural way of being. Think about it: have you ever noticed that children ask for anything and everything with no shame? They ask as if they expect to get it and if they don't, they ask again and then ask someone else. They're annoyingly persistent sometimes. And they have a million and one creative ways of getting you to finally say, “Yes.”

Here's the problem. As they get older, we erase this natural skill from their make-up by saying things such as, “Stop asking, it's annoying,” “Don't be cheeky,” “Don't be greedy,” “It's rude to ask for that,” “You don't hear other people asking all the time, do you?” or just a definitive “No!” in answer to each outlandish request.

I've even seen embarrassed British parents pull their child's eagerly outstretched arm down when the group of little ones was asked, “Who'd like a chocolate biscuit?” at a fête.

We mean to teach them patience, social norms, moderation, not to be needy or greedy and appreciate the value of things, but what we really do is to plant the messages, “It's not good to ask all the time” and “Asking for stuff from strangers is socially unacceptable.”

Here, in the 21st century, both premises are wrong. So, you have some choices here. You can:



STRAIGHT TO YES!

1. Go and rant about it to your parents – it's all their fault anyway.
2. Find a Gestalt therapist, imagine your parents are sitting on the two empty chairs next to you and rant about it to them – it's all their fault anyway.
3. Realize that it was a well-intentioned but anachronistic hand-me-down, start encouraging the opposite behaviour in your kids and start re-learning how to ask. It's all there, deep down . . .

If you chose option 3, congratulations, you're ready for the next section!

Naturally "X" People

Until recently, one of the greatest debates alive was "nature vs. nurture." It was a term coined by an English polymath from the Victorian era, Francis Galton, the cousin of Charles Darwin.

In our context, advocates of the "nature" standpoint would argue for heredity: that some people are just born influential, confident, charismatic, bold, fearless, playful – it's in their DNA. They'd quote various experiments with separated identical twins around the world, who are reunited only to find that they have had the same career, wear the same clothes, and married almost identical spouses. Fascinating and scary - if you Google "Eugenics" you'll discover the dark side of this standpoint.

Advocates of the "nurture" standpoint would argue for environment: that people are a product of the social, physical, geographical and political conditions in which they grow up. A young girl growing up in 16th century China would have a very different personality, brain function and life to a young girl growing up in 21st century San Francisco, for example.

The arguments on each side are solid, compelling and convincing. But leading geneticists and psychologists such as Steve Jones, head of the Department of Genetics, Evolution and Environment at



University College London, and Jerome Kagan, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, both declare the argument as misguided in a modern-day context.

For example, the possession of the gene variant that disrupts serotonin activity in the brain can result in social anxiety in a woman raised in a stable middle-class family. But it can contribute to criminal behaviour in a man brought up in poverty by abusive parents.

While we do know that physically attractive people are *attributed* positive traits by others, isolating nature from nurture is like trying to separate salt from the stew after you've added it – it's futile and rather impossible. We are all a product of both. And without wanting to freak you out too much, did you know that having powerful new emotional experiences actually activates new DNA within your system? So it's not just about the fact that it's in our DNA, but rather what elements of our DNA are awoken by our experiences!¹

So, what do you think now about people who you used to think were naturally confident, charming, influential and so on? If you still think you don't naturally possess one or all of those desired traits, how do you know that it's not just because of the environmental factors so far in your life?

Because it is; and once you practise and get some positive feedback, your confidence will flourish. By investing your time in practising the contents of this book, you're boosting the environmental factors needed to adopt those traits as your own.

So, some choices at this stage. After choosing, you might like to take a break from reading: "heavy" information takes a lot of glucose from the brain, which you'll need to replace to optimize your learning.

1. Carry on thinking that people were born confident, intelligent, able and successful because of their DNA and wonder what would have happened if your mother had mixed her genes with a male super model, world champion martial artist with an MBA from Harvard and a penchant for climbing K2 for fun.



STRAIGHT TO YES!

2. Carry on thinking that you didn't have "the right" conditions growing up and wonder what would have happened if you'd had a rich, stable family, access to influential people, a ready-made network of successful folk with open doors, the right name, colour, race, religion, school, university or neighbourhood.
3. Take to heart that anyone can learn a new skill to a high level and develop new traits given the right motivation, instruction, support, attitude and time.

If you plumped for option 3, you're in for some pretty major rewards from this book.

The Inhibitors

This book isn't a therapy book. Nor is it a life-coaching book. I'm making no promise to transform your confidence, body, career, wealth or love life! (If that's your goal, I recommend books or audio programmes by the wonderful Michael Neill or Paul McKenna.) It's not so much a book about the "inner game" of asking, as it is a practical handbook of strategies, knowledge and approaches. That said, I want to spend a few moments with you bringing your awareness to some of the inner hurdles that people sometimes have to rise above, at key points in their journey. Forewarned is forearmed, as they say, and I genuinely believe that we're all very similar in our barriers to success.

Over the last five years I've been blessed and focused enough to have trained or coached thousands of people from different cultures, backgrounds, industries and abilities. Some have been CEOs with thousands of people reporting to them and a board on their back; others have been entrepreneurs flying solo. Regardless of the face or the place, I've noticed that the same five inhibitors tend to pop up again and again. If you're prepared for these insidious inhibitors, my guess is you'll gain far more control and flexibility in response should you encounter them.



Issue #1: deserving

Question: When you say to yourself, “I deserve everything that life has to offer in abundance: vibrant health, incredible friends, supportive family, stupendous wealth, heavenly love, exciting travel, a fulfilling romantic life, daring adventure, ecstatic happiness, the power to change the planet and worldwide recognition for my gifts!” do you feel a resounding and convincing “YES!” coursing through your veins? Or do you feel a bit of a fake? If you came over a bit fakey, you very likely have a belief that you’ve been limiting yourself with – and it may well be around deserving or worthiness. “I’m not enough” is one of the greatest fears we all share in our dark moments.

I believe that the concept of deserving is . . . well, quite frankly, a bit weird. The wonderful writer and life coach, Mandy Evans, usually responds with the following three questions to an “I don’t deserve it.” As follows:

1. How do you know?
2. How could you find out?
3. Who’s in charge of handing out deserving anyway?

I can’t say it any better than her, so I suggest you watch her on YouTube. If you search “Deserving is a Bogus Issue with Mandy Evans” on YouTube,² you’ll see that she’s rather wonderful.

Issue #2: fear of rejection

Rejection and the fear of failure seldom make an explicit appearance in people’s conversations, but they’re often lurking there, implicitly. Like “deserving,” rejection is also fairly hardcore. It stems from our need to be part of a tribe, pack or society because group size vastly increases our chances of finding food, protection, shelter, learning and mates.

As crazy as it sounds, being rejected makes us feel less secure within the group, which threatens our chances of survival. That could lead



STRAIGHT TO YES!

to starvation, having to fight off a saber-toothed tiger single-handedly, or dying a childless virgin. Is that a bit over the top? Of course it is. It's just someone saying, "No" to you! Get over it!

Great askers are also "No collectors." Why? Because they ask more often than anyone else and they ask bigger than anyone else. And somewhere in the flood of "no's" they receive, they hear the "yeses" popping out. In fact, if you're not getting plenty of "no's," you're doing something wrong: either not asking often enough or not asking big enough.

It's critical that you start to build your rejection muscle now. It gets easier to hear the "No" responses the more often you get them. Go for no. It also has an interesting positive side effect, explored in Chapter 4.

One interesting aside on the topic of rejection is that it goes both ways. Recent research shows that the act of rejection hurts the rejecter as well as the rejected: the act of rejecting reduces the desire to reconnect with anyone for a period of time after.³ So, you can feel compassion for those who tell you "No." First, they're missing out on your great offer and second, saying "No" has a socio-emotional cost attached for them.

Issue #3: fear of success

Less common, though common enough to check out, is the fear of success, which I've witnessed on a few different levels. This was my own personal barrier. The first is a social level. When someone starts having a new level of success (in whatever way they personally define success) it can create unsettling ripples in their family and social groups. For example, some friends are intimidated by your newfound success – it changes the interpersonal dynamics of your relationship with them.

This can result in them asking themselves questions such as, "Do I feel comfortable around her now?," "Does he think less of me now he's so successful?" or even, "Who does he think he is? Is he too good



for this (my) lifestyle now?" The spectre of rejection rises up in them and rather than be rejected, they voluntarily withdraw. On some level, we know that and sometimes it stops us from going for that new job, starting the business, finding a new and different-acting friend or peer group to hang out with. Faced with losing what we already have in order to gain something we don't yet have, we often go for not losing, a strategy you'll see in later chapters. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush . . ." as they say.

The second level is about your "blueprint" of life. Each of us designs, and lets others design for us, a plan for what life can be like: what we can experience, achieve and contribute. Most of us never think about proactively redesigning it. Unfortunately, most blueprints are a mish-mash of parental and peer group expectations and times where we've tried, failed and given up.

As soon as we start stepping off the blueprint, the extruder alarms start going off and that's enough for most people to return to the plan, as is. Because what would it mean if you stepped up your game and started living a more fulfilling life? Could you take the pressure of maintaining it? What would happen if it all disappeared? Would you feel truly deserving of the accolades, recognition and honour? What if you achieved enlightenment and still weren't happy?

Rather than dealing with these challenging questions, we self-sabotage and step back onto the blueprint, where we're safe. For a fleeting moment. Because, as leadership guru Seth Godin states, in today's world, not taking risks is itself the biggest risk of all.

I believe that you are the architect of your own experience and if you haven't got a plan, you're following someone else's. A good coach can help you with this part. If you haven't got one or can't afford one right now, I offer a free interactive coaching app for Windows or Mac at www.soinflow.com as a gift to you. You can go to "Free," then "Inspire" to download it. No adverts, no cost. It will walk you through a process to clarify your mission, vision and values as well as some next steps.



STRAIGHT TO YES!

Issue #4: fear of discomfort

Often, when doing or preparing for field tasks, such as “Freedom shopping” (you’ll find that in Chapter 4), my clients start getting cold feet; “It doesn’t feel comfortable,” is a common thing I hear. And that’s both accurate and fine. As Henry Ford was heard to say, “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you always got!” So, if you want something different, you have to do something differently.

Feeling discomfort means you’re stepping outside your comfort zone. It doesn’t always feel great, but it’s good for you. And the only place where personal growth happens, by definition, is outside your comfort zone. Remember your growing pains as a child? What would have happened if your parents had given you drugs to stop the growth to stop the pain? You’d be “rather wee” as they say in Scotland!

So, that icky feeling just means you’re getting ready to grow! Remember that and embrace it when it happens.

Issue #5: wrong peer group

There’s an interesting and fairly accurate law that states, “Add the wages of the seven peers you most closely associate with. Divide by seven, to get an average. This figure is likely very close to your own earnings.” Think about the anecdotes actors share, where it sounds like they’re unable to hold onto names, dropping one every second; mentioning rock stars, actors and directors who they were at a party with. Who does Richard Branson invite to Necker Island, other than family and an employee or two? Kate Winslet, Janet Jackson, Harrison Ford, Mariah Carey, Eddie Murphy and Oprah Winfrey! How many unemployed people hang around with neurosurgeons and business owners? Now try replacing “wages” with earnings, happiness, health, weight, number of children, strength of marriage, qualifications and see what happens. It’s an interesting exercise and usually pretty accurate.

The point is that millionaires tend to hang around with millionaires; jobless with jobless; artists with artists; habitually confident with

ASKING: THE “INNER GAME”



habitually confident; shy and retiring with . . . well, with no one, of course! If you're looking to change your results, it's important to be associating closely and frequently with other people who are already achieving, or on the way to achieving, those results.

“Your results in life are directly proportionate to the expectations of your peer group.”

Tony Robbins, American success guru

Read this quote a couple of times more and let it sink in. In today's world, your network and your network intelligence is where your real power lies.

So, choice time is here. You can:

1. Continue reading and treat the strategies in this book as “interesting information” but avoid trying them out in case your inhibitors kick in.
2. Continue reading and “flirt” with the ideas in this book, with no real commitment to making them work, in case your inhibitors kick in.
3. Continue reading and put the strategies into action, one at a time, knowing that some will work better than others for you, that perfect practice is the key and understanding that any discomfort that arises is purely a test to see how much you really want the prize you seek.

If you chose option 3, you're in the minority. But history repeatedly demonstrates that the rewards of the “slumbering many” go to “the daring few.”

See you in the next section!



STRAIGHT TO YES!

In June 2012, I lost a very dear friend. At the tender age of 42, Steve Brown's heart stopped. No warning, no illness, just stopped. In the days following this tragic event I discovered he had been struggling to come to terms with the death of his father some three months previously. I'm still asking myself, "Why didn't he ask me for help?" Maybe he didn't think I could. Maybe he didn't want to burden me. I'll never know. What I know is that I would have helped in any way I possibly could.

Steve was no different to you or me. How many things that are rightfully ours, or would be freely and graciously given, do we not ask for? And why? Because we imagine we'll upset people, they may think us rude, they may disagree with us, we may upset them.

What are YOU denying yourself, or those you care about? All because of what you're imagining.

What's certain is that people aren't telepathic, and if you don't ask, you'll NEVER get. If something is rightfully yours, all you need to do is ask . . . and if you don't get it, ask again, and again, and again, and again . . . It works for our children so why wouldn't it work for us?

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