

GARY & RADHA BELLO

THE
FRUSTRATION
CYCLE

The Cause of Your Agitation
Is *Not* What You Think!

The information contained in this book is based upon the research and personal and professional experiences of the authors. It is not intended as a substitute for consulting with a healthcare practitioner. The teachings in this book are recommended as an adjunct to any therapeutic treatments the reader is currently undergoing or in which he or she is currently participating. Should the reader have any questions concerning the appropriateness of any of the exercises or methods described in this book, the authors strongly suggest consulting a professional healthcare advisor.

The client examples used in this book are composite stories. Actual names and identifying characteristics have not been used, and any resemblance to a specific individual is coincidental.



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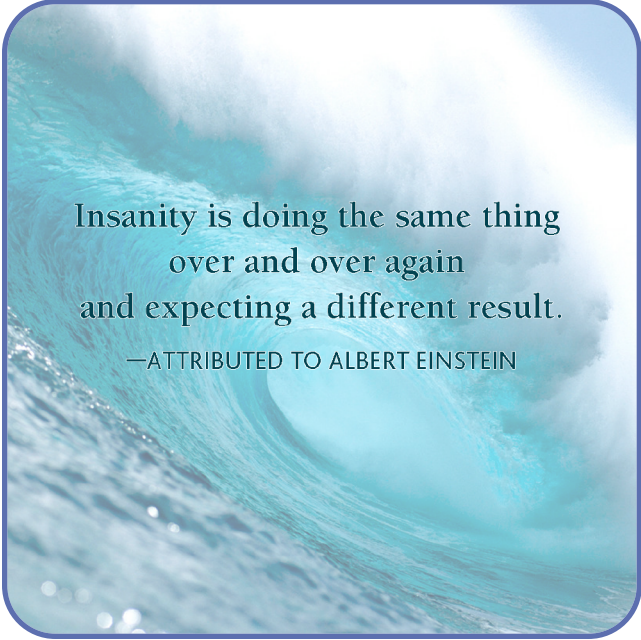
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Insanity is doing the same thing
over and over again
and expecting a different result.

—ATTRIBUTED TO ALBERT EINSTEIN

CHAPTER 1

THE SITUATION & THE STORY



What upsets or frustrates you? When you become agitated, do you know *which* of your buttons are getting pushed? Do you know *when* they get pushed? Do you know *how* they get pushed? Are you even aware that your buttons are being pushed? You might not be. You might be blaming your frustration on something outside yourself. Have you noticed that sometimes you get upset about something that at other times doesn't bother you? This is similar to two people reacting differently to the same situation. For instance, have you listened to someone's story of an upsetting event and thought, *I wonder why she got so upset by that?* (You may even look back on your own reaction to some recent event and wonder why you overreacted.)

To begin to unravel what's going on, we are going to look at two important factors: the situation and the story. Understanding these factors and their roles will help you begin to identify the cause of your agitation or discomfort. This is the first step in dealing directly with your frustration.

THE SITUATION

Situations are the events that are happening around us. They make up our everyday experiences; some may be opportunities for growth, while others may not have any obvious effect on us. In other words, we'll just feel neutral about the circumstances surrounding an event. In other cases, we'll feel a certain amount of satisfaction, and yet in other instances, we'll feel some level of agitation that can easily mutate into frustration. It isn't the situation—the outside influence—that is really the source of our agitated feelings.

It is easy to mistake our story (our running narrative *about* an event) for the situation, and when this happens, quite a bit of confusion develops, which can perpetuate the agitation. So to avoid this, let's learn how to discern the difference between outward situations and our story. A situation can contain any number of variables, but it is *always* based on fact. Here are some examples of situations:

- ◆ Sixty-year-old George is the president of the board of directors for a tremendously successful business on the stock exchange, who has difficulty setting boundaries with people in his personal life.
- ◆ Thirty-year-old Jason, a student, teacher, and writer, is dating a woman who he loves but who does not love him in return, although she does not want to end the relationship.
- ◆ Twenty-five-year-old Carolina, an accountant, recently divorced her husband, who behaved in a verbally abusive manner throughout much of their marriage.
- ◆ Fifty-year-old Michael, a head research scientist who established and runs a research facility, lost his fourth qualified employee in the same number of years and needs to find a replacement.
- ◆ Thirty-eight-year-old Cynthia, a successful entrepreneur, has been divorced twice and wants to get married and have children.

- ◆ Forty-two-year-old Mark is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army whose assignment is to assist families of soldiers killed in action. He is twice divorced and lives part-time with his two daughters.
- ◆ Fifty-three-year-old William has high blood pressure for which he must take medication.
- ◆ Fifty-six-year-old Stephanie, a successful bodyworker, has a pile of unopened mail, unpaid bills, and unanswered e-mails to attend to.
- ◆ Forty-year-old Keith, a self-employed executive headhunter, spends hours online surfing the Web and making occasional purchases.
- ◆ Thirty-one-year-old Veronica, a yoga instructor, is at odds with her business partner over how to run the business.
- ◆ Forty-seven-year-old Bethany, a manager of a health-food store, experiences discomfort around the owner of the store, who the employees agree behaves aggressively.

Notice that none of these situations contain subjective information. Without subjectivity, these situations cannot be labeled as good or bad, negative or positive. In other words, when we are looking at just the situation, a cigar will *always* be just a cigar. It is only when we bring ourselves and all of our accumulated experiences that shape our perception into the equation that we begin to size up the circumstances surrounding an event and make conclusions about it.

Let's take a look at Keith's situation: he spends hours online. Is that a problem? Well, spending time online is not a problem in and of itself. For example, a research assistant might spend hours online in order to accomplish his or her research goals, or a student might spend hours online in group study, and so on. Keith, however, was not accomplishing anything worthwhile in his own estimation. In other words, Keith might say, "I'm wasting all my time on the Internet." And, for Keith, that statement brings up all sorts of feelings and other statements, such as "I'm such a slacker for not getting my work

done,” in a domino-like effect. Do you see how the situation *seemed* to change when Keith’s perspective was introduced? In actuality, the situation didn’t change at all. Subjective information was introduced along with another situation: Keith wasn’t getting his work done. It was a simple fact. Calling himself a slacker, however, was an opinion he had of himself and not part of the situation. So, in other words, the situation wasn’t responsible for Keith’s poor opinion of himself, but rather Keith was.

Make a list of some of the recent situations that you found agitating and resulted in upsetting you. Be as descriptive as possible, but see if you can stick to just the facts. As you do this exercise, you may notice that you begin to feel some agitation. This might confirm your belief that the situation is the source of your agitation. But this is never the case. However, a situation can *trigger* your agitation. So where is your agitation coming from? Where does it originate? We’ll need to delve deeper and continue to consider that the thoughts (your stories) and the emotions attached to them are resulting in your agitation. Now that you know this, when you feel yourself becoming agitated, ask yourself, *What is it that’s upsetting me? Is it my story about the situation? If so, what is the source of that story? Where is that story coming from?*

YOUR STORIES

A story is a factual or fictional narrative that our mind plays as a situation unfolds. Stories are the thoughts that rise to the surface of our minds in reaction to the feelings we have about the things that are happening around us. In earlier examples, we identified various situations to illustrate that it isn’t the situation that’s responsible for our agitation. Rather, what’s happening around us activates something within us, and we, in turn, feel something and begin to label what we’re feeling and dramatize what we’re experiencing. In all cases, the emotional content attached to the story projects itself onto the situa-

tion. Let's take a look at the actual stories that accompanied the situations described earlier. Notice how the situations are woven into the stories:

- ◆ George says, "I am such a giving and loving person. When it comes to my personal life, why do people keep taking advantage of me? In my business, I would never have succeeded if I let people take advantage of me."
- ◆ Jason says, "Although my girlfriend doesn't think she loves me, I know that I am a special person and I have the capacity to win her over."
- ◆ Carolina says, "We had to get a divorce, but I tried so hard to make my marriage work. I can't do anything right. I should have been able to change the relationship. I should have picked the right person to begin with."
- ◆ Michael says, "Qualified employees keep quitting on me! Our society is going down the tubes. We are not teaching people how to commit! Why do I keep hiring people who will not make a long-term commitment to the project?"
- ◆ Cynthia says, "Why do I keep falling in love with the wrong guy? Why do they keep turning into such creeps? Where is the guy who is a perfect fit for me?"
- ◆ Mark says, "So many emotions come up on the job, and I don't have anyone in my life that I can talk to about them. I wish I had a partner, someone who loves me, someone who looks after me like I look after others."
- ◆ William says, "I'm going to be on high blood pressure meds my whole life, so why should I even try to make any changes? It doesn't make sense. I'll keep doing what I've always done and get by."

- ◆ Stephanie says, “The bills aren’t getting paid, and the paperwork is overwhelming. I can’t stand to look at the piles. I just don’t know how to do this. I have no idea what it takes to run a business. I feel so overwhelmed by it all.”
- ◆ Keith says, “My work is very taxing, and I really have to relax, so I surf the Internet and sometimes I don’t have enough time left in the day to get my work done. I guess I’m just a slacker.”
- ◆ Veronica says, “This relationship is too difficult. We’re running a yoga center and my partner is always travelling. She is never here and expects me to do all the work, and then she judges me for not doing it right.”
- ◆ Bethany says, “If I stay out of sight when my boss is around, I won’t have to deal with him.”

All of the above stories contain subjective information that arises from the person’s *feelings* about the various situations. Because we explained exactly what each client’s situation is, you can probably easily separate the situation from the client’s story about the event. Jason thinks his girlfriend will fall in love with him if he is romantic enough. This story is a prediction, not a fact. The fact is that he is in a relationship with someone who doesn’t love him. Ending it frightens him, and so he clings to his story. (The emotional content of Jason’s story, as you probably guessed, is loneliness.) Now, consider Stephanie’s story: “I have *no idea* how to run a business . . .” Well, it’s highly likely that she does have at least some inkling of how to run a business considering she has one. She is obviously exaggerating and being self-critical. Again, this is not a fact.

We often blame the situation for being the cause of our agitation, and since there is a direct link between the two, we need a calm and clear mind to be able to delve deeper into the event to notice that we are out of balance. It takes a considerable amount of practice to gain

the ability to step back as if jumping up to a higher level so that we are able to “look down at” or observe ourselves with detachment while still in the situation. Until we are able to observe our behavior from a balanced state of awareness, we will continue to feel victimized by the many situations in life that don’t meet our expectations.

It is important to acknowledge and be completely aware that there can be a profound distortion and difference between our story and the actual situation. Here’s a good example: You walk into a room. You have no idea what was going on in the room before you got there. You look around at the people and they are all frowning. You immediately begin making up a story: *I shouldn’t have come in. They don’t want me here.* You’ve interpreted the frowns on their faces to mean that you are unwanted, but their frowns might have absolutely nothing to do with you.

This is a simplified way of looking at the many different situations that occur in life and how we distort their meaning. Making up a story reduces your awareness and creates imbalance.

As with everything else on this journey, separating the story from the situation begins with becoming more aware of what’s going on inside of us as well as outside of us. The situations that occur in life are what life is all about. Things happen, we have emotional responses, and we experience the ups and downs of life. This is wonderful. What’s also wonderful is that as human beings we are self-reflective. We can actually step back and analyze, “Oh, look at that. I’m getting upset/agitated. Isn’t that interesting?” A simple comment, one that had absolutely no malicious intent, can stir up things inside us, things that are so uncomfortable that we feel we must push them away or cover them up with all sorts of stories.

There’s something deeper at work here. There are buttons being pushed that operate on such a deep level that we often don’t know what’s just hit us. In cases like this, we need to consider the subconscious mechanisms at work in our reactions; in other words, we need to discover our hidden issues.

CHAPTER 2

AWARENESS



When we are unaware, we go through life blaming people, things, and circumstances for our pain and misfortune and giving those same things credit for our joy and accomplishments. We are oblivious to what's going on inside of us and lack the freedom to step back, observe the process, and adjust. When we are unaware, we experience gaps in our consciousness, and we fill those gaps with thoughts that try to make sense of things. We determine that we are at the mercy of the waves that push us around, and we hope for calmer waters ahead. We become frustrated when the waves seem to keep throwing us off balance.

However, when we become aware, we can see that the waves are merely obstacles in our path. We can ride them, dive below them, wait them out, jump them, or surf them. We can even calm those waves when we have the right tools at our disposal. Then, not even a powerful tsunami can throw us off course for very long.

At its most subtle level, awareness is consciousness. It is the spark that gives us the ability to perceive and experience the world in which we reside. At its purest, that perception is unencumbered by thought and preconceived notions, and the world is therefore experienced exactly as it is: perfect in its design and intention. At the heart of the matter we are aware beings, and each of us has a certain amount

of self-reflection; it can be vast, or small, or anywhere in between. Whatever the case may be, when we take steps to expand our awareness, we are giving ourselves the opportunity to experience a greater range of emotions, and this allows us to learn fully from, and grow with, the world of experiences and relationships around us.

To increase your awareness, observe yourself thinking. Take note of your thoughts and the emotional content of those thoughts. Hear the messages you are telling yourself. If you develop the habit of observing yourself think, you will be in a better position to recognize the skewed messages resulting from your subconscious programming.

The mind is a vehicle with a very specific function. It enables us to sense the world. It gives us an identity and allows us to experience ourselves in relationship to the things and events around us. Because we have a mind, we are able to perceive the material world, remember what we have experienced, and make conclusions based on what we believe is true. The mind is a rather useful vehicle; however, just as a car needs a driver to steer it, our mind also needs an operator. In other words, it needs *us* to operate *it*, not the other way around. Awareness is supposed to drive the mind.

When we are aware that we have the capacity to observe our mind, we can notice our thoughts and emotions more objectively. Being the observer of the mind gives us the advantage of remaining objective in difficult situations, which results in decisions that are not influenced by anything but clarity, intuition, and unbiased knowing.

HABITS, TENDENCIES, AND PATTERNS

When we become aware that we have consistent reactions to certain situations or that we are engaging in some repetitive behavior, we are in the position to ask, *Why am I reacting? What's going on? Why am I doing this?* We don't want to disregard that reaction and/or distract from it since we're bound to face the same or similar situations again

(that's the frustrating thing about life: we keep facing the same upsetting situations without seeing any changes take place). Nor do we want to blindly continue to engage in useless behavior without being aware of why we are doing it.

If you feel yourself reacting to a situation in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, take a step back. Why continue down the same old path? This is your opportunity to try an alternate route. Pausing allows you to calm your mind, refocus your attention, and come back into balance. By taking a moment (or longer) and considering what's at play and using your discrimination, you are actively increasing your awareness of both yourself and the circumstances. You can now begin distinguishing between the situation and your story about it.

The Grooves in the Mind

Each time we have an experience, our brain records it, creating a physical pathway from neuron to neuron. The next time we have a similar experience, the mind will take us along that same pathway. The more often we have that experience, the more trodden that pathway becomes. When we engage in something time and time again, the mind starts to become accustomed to taking that particular, well-worn path. Then, any deviation from that pathway starts to feel uncomfortable or unnatural. Suddenly we are faced with deep grooves in the mind and our thoughts and reactions become ingrained and automatic, seemingly almost out of our control, as if we are operating in a trance or sleepwalking. We become stuck in concepts or preconceived notions. This is how habits and patterns form. If these experiences are negative or unfulfilling, the pathways formed serve us no purpose. They decrease our awareness because we are not looking outside our patterned reaction for a more suitable response.

CHAPTER 3

THE ISSUE



As empathetic beings, we're designed to feel. Many of the emotions we experience are connected to specific thoughts. All of our stories carry with them emotional reactions or responses. If you're in complete harmony with your experience, you will have an emotional *response* to the situation, and whatever that response is, it will be perfect, whether that response is anger to an injustice or joy over something wonderful. You will respond appropriately.

However, if you are in *reaction*, the past has been activated and you are literally re-acting what happened previously. If the thinking mode is on, you are one step removed from experiencing the situation directly because you are experiencing it through the filter of memory, and that emotional experience will be corrupted in some way. You will be unable to deal with that new situation without pre-conceived notions that distort your perspective.

What is it that colors our stories about the events that take place around us? For simplicity sake, let's call it a virus. The virus becomes activated when certain buttons are pushed. These viruses prevent us from navigating life successfully because they interfere with our perception of situations. They cloud our judgment. When the virus is active, we are in "issue activation."

So, what exactly are these viruses? They are the *erroneous core*

beliefs, the issues that reside just below the surface of our conscious mind, in what is called the subconscious. We've listed them below so that you can familiarize yourself with them. At first, you might be surprised that there are only a handful of them, but when you examine them closely, you'll recognize their universality. And with some serious, honest, and heartfelt self-reflection, you will discover that you do relate to one or more of them on a very visceral level. Don't try to convince yourself that you *shouldn't* feel these things by telling yourself more stories. These aren't logical beliefs, so don't try to intellectualize them. That's why we call them viruses.

- ◆ I am not safe.
- ◆ I am alone.
- ◆ I am not good enough.
- ◆ I am unfulfilled.
- ◆ I am not heard.
- ◆ I am unable to trust.
- ◆ I am unacceptable.
- ◆ I don't have enough time.

There are endless variations of these erroneous core beliefs and multiple combinations. Though not everyone will readily admit it to others or to themselves, we all have some level of insecurity.

Let's take a look at the clients we discussed earlier through the presentation of their situations and their accompanying stories. You have probably figured out by now that each of their stories had an issue activation associated with it. Most of the time, these people function quite well in the world. Now, let's take a look at each of these client's erroneous core beliefs, which they discovered through self-reflection and the methods in this program. Remember, none of the erroneous core beliefs are based on reality, but rather on faulty programming. Also keep in mind that different people will often have different reactions even if they share the same issue. It's also important to note that most people have a combination of erroneous core beliefs that can become activated singularly or in different combinations according to the situation. Let's take a look at some specific examples.

George's issue is *I am alone*. When activated, this issue prevents him from setting boundaries in his personal life and being truthful about his needs. He has developed a supersensitivity for knowing what people need and goes out of his way to provide it for them. *There's no one here for me* is a common theme among people with the issue *I am alone*. Oftentimes, these people are not tuned in to their own needs, but are extremely sensitive to the needs of others. You'll find a great number of people with this issue in the helping professions, but that's certainly not a prerequisite for having this issue.

For Jason, *I am alone* causes him to try to change, transform, or manipulate a situation in an effort to attract others to be there for him, as he does by romanticizing his relationship with his girlfriend. We've all heard the saying "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world," and that's a romantic way to look at it. Someone with the issue *I am alone* will often go to great lengths to keep people close by and may alienate people with their neediness.

Carolina's issue is *I am not good enough*. This causes her to frame her divorce as a personal failure because she feels flawed and blames herself for her inadequacies as a wife. People who feel they are lacking something are often very hard on themselves even when they've done everything "right." They have difficulty accepting a job well done and will search out a flaw to confirm their erroneous belief about themselves.

Michael's issue is *I can't trust anyone*. This causes him to treat people with suspicion, and in his particular case, he confronts them, making them feel uncomfortable under his unwarranted scrutiny. Michael's attitude that it's "my way or the highway" blocked the creative expression of the research scientists he employed. That's why they kept quitting. People with the issue *I can't trust anyone* are often on high alert. They have difficulty letting people in, and if they do end up letting someone in and getting hurt, it is proof to them that *no one* can be trusted. When this issue is activated, they will usually be confrontational and controlling as a way to distract themselves from feeling.

Cynthia's issues are *I am not good enough* and *there's not enough time*. This causes her to seek validation from men and jump into relationships too quickly. If she finds a man to love her and marry her, she believes this will prove her worth. First, though, a potential mate must pass her scrutiny. However, if he is interested in *her*, he will have to prove to her that he is perfect.

Seeking validation from others to quell the issue of *I'm not good enough* is a common thread for a lot of people. This is especially true in our society where people tie their self-worth to their accomplishments. This type of self-worth is fleeting, however, since people with this issue are always striving to accomplish something even greater. *It's never enough!* In Cynthia's case, *there's not enough time* makes her feel as if she must rush headlong into relationships despite the fact that her other issue may be interfering with her judgment regarding the best course of action. This is not uncommon among people with this issue.

For Mark, the *I am alone* issue causes him to feel he must do everything himself and no one can do anything as well as he does. Due to these high expectations, he is constantly judging others and becoming upset when they do not do things according to his needs. In relationships with women, this leads to an inability to expose his vulnerabilities, and therefore, he cannot maintain an intimate relationship.

People with this issue who feel they must do everything themselves often push people away because they don't know how to accept assistance. If they do accept assistance, they often have high expectations of what that assistance should entail because they know exactly how they would handle it. This obviously causes disappointment, because people can rarely live up to other people's expectations of them. This usually causes others to feel as if there is something wrong with them.

William's issue is *I'm not safe* and *I can't trust anyone*. It's a double whammy that causes him to be Mr. Tough Guy. *If I can't trust the out-*

side world, then I better be ready to fight. With a temperament like this, the most easily displayed emotion is anger, which compels him to push down all other emotional experiences. In this case, William doesn't feel safe sharing his feelings with people because he can't trust them. People with this combination tend to push others away, and the only way for someone to be in a relationship with a person like this is to be subservient, in which case he or she is treated with much generosity. They stuff their emotions so deeply beneath the surface that it is difficult for them to feel anything. Anger is an easy cover-up for this condition.

Stephanie's issue is *I am unacceptable*. This comes out in her as the statement *I am a terrible person*. This causes her to be highly self-critical, even more so than someone with the issue *I'm not good enough*. She engages in behaviors that reinforce her low opinion of herself and downplay her accomplishments. By not paying her bills and returning calls in a timely fashion, she succeeds in creating situations that confirm or reinforce her erroneous core belief.

Keith's issue is also *I'm unacceptable*. He believes he doesn't have the skills to do his job and engages in distracting behavior that reinforces his self-proclaimed unacceptability. When activated, people with this issue have great difficulty believing anything good about themselves. They have a tendency to fall into bouts of self-pity because their life is so terrible, and they can't get motivated to do anything because they will be horrible at it anyway.

Veronica's issue is *I am not heard*. In her case, it is she who is not listening to herself. She projects this onto others and becomes defensive. By doing this, she distracts from her own inner voice and feels like she's a victim. She defends her position, especially when she receives supportive, critical feedback, and doesn't even consider the veracity of what someone else is saying. People with this issue activated may defend their position very loudly or may have difficulty finding his or her voice. Their defensiveness usually creates a reaction in the other person, resulting in an unfulfilling, unrewarding interaction.

Bethany's issue is *I'm not safe*. When activated, this issue causes her to see the world and people around her as threats. She perceives danger in places it does not exist and protects herself by withdrawing, as she does when her boss visits the store. There are certainly dangers in the world, but when someone has the issue *I'm not safe*, it is difficult for them to make a distinction between an actual threat and a perceived threat. This has the potential to negatively impact one's ability to take professional and personal risks.

People come in a variety of shapes and sizes with all different types of personalities, and even though the underlying issue may be the same from one person to the next, everyone will react to issue activation in a variety of ways. Also, certain situations can activate a different combination of issues. Some generalities can be made, but it is impossible to fit each person into a predetermined set of behaviors. It's important to allow room for variations and surprises in this world.

ISSUE ACTIVATION

When an issue is activated, you may or may not be aware that you are in *reaction* to a situation. You may think you are responding appropriately. This is because when you are in the thick of things, it's difficult to separate yourself from the explosive feelings you are experiencing.

When the virus is active, it will usually generate predictable and recurring emotional reactions to events. These physical and emotional explosions prevent the mind from remaining neutral to the outside events that stimulated this inner reaction. Once issue activation occurs, the mind creates a series of thoughts, or stories, that at best prevent us from being an impartial witness to events and at worst propel us into drawing conclusions and displaying behaviors that are both out of proportion and inappropriate to the situation.

Most negative or unwanted behaviors originate from issue activations. They prevent us from being fully present to the moment. Once activated, these issues confuse and distort the present moment, forcing us to struggle with the past. This compulsive reliving of the past is then projected onto the present situation, creating the illusion that the story in our mind about the present situation is accurate. This can become so uncomfortable that we'll do anything we can to make it go away. And often we are successful—that is, until the situation presents itself again.

CHAPTER 4

DISTRACTION & SUPPRESSION



When we keep experiencing the same uncomfortable emotions, when we are feeling stuck in some area of our life, when one or more of our relationships is unsatisfactory, or when we feel that there's something more waiting right around the corner but we just don't have any forward momentum, we are most definitely caught in the Frustration Cycle. This is a clear message that something needs to change or we will keep experiencing the same patterns over and over again.

What are the recurring patterns in your life that aren't working for you? Do you find yourself withdrawing from people or experiences and then find yourself complaining that no one includes you? Do you find yourself sitting in front of the television eating mindlessly and then complain that you are gaining weight? Do you fail to express your opinion and then complain that no one listens to you? Are you dating people who are consistently emotionally unavailable or incompatible with you? Do you find that you distract yourself by going for a walk in nature when you get upset rather than staying present and confronting the issue? Do your friends and acquaintances take advantage of your good nature? Do you fight with your siblings whenever you are

The Frustration Cycle



together? Do you find a glass of wine or two to be a soothing necessity at the end of a difficult day? Do you wake up in the middle of the night ruminating about an agitating situation and often find that you're unable to get back to sleep? Do you shrink every time you speak to one of your parents? Are you in a dead-end job that you hate but tolerate? Do you keep getting passed over for promotions? Do you find yourself saying things you didn't mean when something is not going your way? Do you allow people to speak to you in a less than kind way? Is your temper inappropriate in certain situations? Do you have difficulty expressing yourself in groups? Are you afraid to try new things and constantly limit yourself to certain experiences because of fear?

If your answer is yes to any of these or similar questions, you are stuck in an unproductive pattern—or even more than one. If you do not directly address your agitation, you will keep spinning your wheels and feeling like a victim. So what is keeping you from directly addressing the agitation you are feeling and getting to the heart of your issue?

DISTRACTION

A distraction is something that diverts our attention away from something else. It is an obstacle to concentration. There are various forms of distraction. Not all of them will be what you might consider a distraction, such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or overeating. We all know that such distractions can be detrimental to our physical health, but distractions can also be healthy activities, such as going for a brisk walk, meditating, or reading a quality piece of literature. However, distractions don't always fall neatly into the positive/negative categories. The things we do every day or very often, such as working, healthy eating, texting, talking on the phone, having sex, shopping, meditating, religious observances, socializing, and so on, can also become distractions when we are doing them to avoid feeling the agitation we are experiencing in reaction to something. Distractions can even be the very stories we tell ourselves.

When we engage in a distraction to avoid feeling the emotions associated with our agitation, we are putting another layer between ourselves and our feelings. Regardless of *how* we are doing it, when we are stuck in the Frustration Cycle, we are *not* processing our agitation.

SUPPRESSION

Once you've engaged in your distraction long enough, and it has succeeded in squashing or numbing your feelings, you have reached the eleven o'clock position in the Frustration Cycle. All seems well for now, but when the clock strikes midnight (the situation or some variation of the situation occurs again), you are bound to repeat the same old actions and feel the same old upset and frustration. You haven't made any progress. Suppression only provides temporary relief. A new situation will always arise, which in turn will lead to the same patterns of agitation.

THE FRUSTRATION CYCLE AT A GLANCE

How does the Frustration Cycle begin? A situation occurs. Situations occur all the time, of course, but not all of them result in feelings of frustration. No, this situation occurs and you immediately experience some kind of emotional explosion. An issue has been activated. You feel agitation. There is a powerful, uncomfortable feeling at play. Almost immediately you begin thinking and analyzing—in other words, creating stories to validate your feelings or to talk yourself out of them. Where does the material for your story come from? From the issue activation and the situation. So most likely, your story is going to have some parts of the situation (the facts), but it's also going to be powered, fueled, and energized by an erroneous core belief.

Let's take a look at an example. The phone rings and you look at the caller ID (the situation). When you see who it is, you tense up and feel upset (an issue is activated). *I don't want to answer the phone; she is just going to push my buttons and upset me*, you tell yourself (the story). Using that example, what's next in this cycle? Distraction. You decide not to answer the phone. You press the little button on your cell phone and it goes to voice mail. A few moments later, in order to thoroughly suppress your agitation, you have a glass of wine or listen to some relaxing music. Obviously, one of these distractions is a healthier choice than the other, but that's not the concern here. The key here is to link the distraction to the issue activation. That's what's important in this cycle. It's important because the distraction, healthy or unhealthy, is the problem. The distraction allows you to suppress the issue, and once the issue is suppressed, it will not surface again until the next situation—or when you look down at your phone and see that the person you didn't want to talk to left you a voice mail. Uh-oh! You tense up and feel upset. You decide to have another glass of wine or go for a walk and ignore the message for now. . . .

CHAPTER 5

WHAT'S NEXT? EXITING THE FRUSTRATION CYCLE



*We always look forward to the next time we're agitated.
It's an indication that there's a valuable lesson to be learned
and we have another exciting opportunity for growth.*

—GARY AND RADHA

Now that you are familiar with the Frustration Cycle, as soon as you start to feel agitated in reaction to a situation, you're going to realize that something is happening on a very deep level. You will instinctively know that you are no longer perceiving the situation clearly and that the story you're creating in your mind is corrupted by your issue—the erroneous core belief—the virus in your operating system. That virus is now determining what happens next. With all the training you've been through in the previous four chapters, you know that you are responsible for your reactions: you do not have to play the victim and get caught up in the Frustration Cycle again and again. No, you can put the Frustration Cycle to work for you as many of our clients have learned to do. Along with the knowledge of your habitual patterns, you'll also be able to clearly identify when you have resorted to your old standby stories and distractions.

PUTTING THE FRUSTRATION CYCLE TO WORK FOR YOU

We have all been caught in the loop of the Frustration Cycle countless times throughout our lives. Operating with inadequate awareness keeps us spinning around this cycle again and again. However, with enough practice, we recognize when we are on this merry-go-round and realize we are ready to learn how to hop off. It is the goal of this booklet to give you tools to notice and become more aware of differentiating between what is the real cause of the many agitating moments we all experience in the course of our day and, eventually, with more awareness, not get trapped in our old grooves of distraction and suppression.

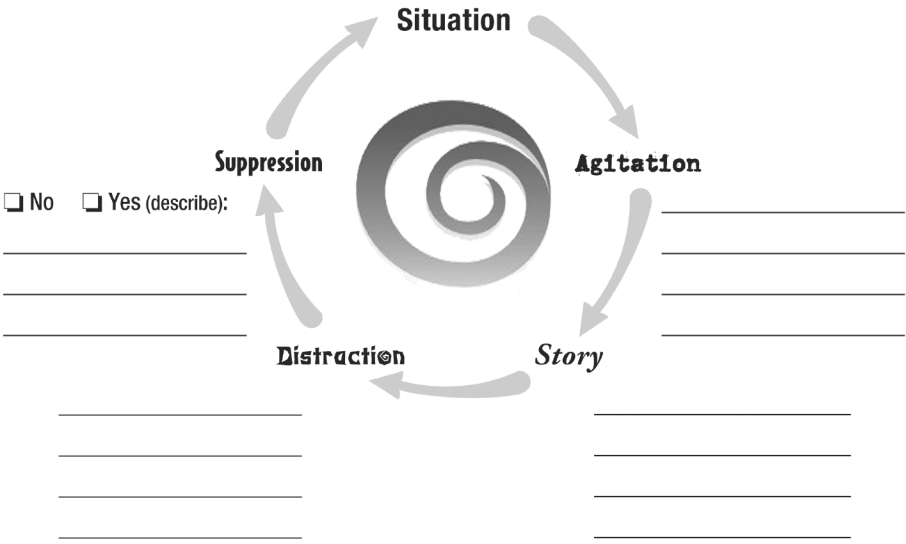
I use the diagram on the following page with my coaching clients as a means of offering them a conscious process each time they get issue-activated. By writing down each of the steps in the Frustration Cycle a person begins to pay more attention to the unconscious patterns that have prevented them from reaching their goals.

The next time you get upset, take the time to fill out the Frustration Cycle Playsheet and, with enough practice, you will become more aware of what is really causing your agitation. Eventually, after a fair amount of practice, you too will look forward to the next time you have an issue activation.

The purpose of this booklet is to offer you a simple method you can use to become more aware of when situations trigger—rather than cause—the agitating moments in your life. Once you realize that you are caught in the Frustration Cycle, you are ready to exit the cycle by deactivating the self-limiting belief. When you recognize the specific emotion or emotions that fuel your reactions, it becomes possible to avoid the downward slide into unproductive and unhealthy habits that keep you from making significant and positive changes in your life.

FRUSTRATION CYCLE PLAYSHEET

On the lines below, fill in the appropriate information relating to the stages of the Frustration Cycle. Indicate the nature of the trigger (the Situation) and the feelings it evokes within you (what causes your Agitation). Describe the excuses you give yourself for feeling this way (your Story), and what steps you take to escape from those feelings (the Distraction). By not permitting the issue to be faced and resolved (Suppression), you allow the cycle to continue. This ultimately will lead to a recurrence of this reaction when the Situation repeats itself.



Additional Notes:

If we have piqued your curiosity about how to exit the Frustration Cycle, then we invite you to read our first book, *Enlightening Moments, Living Beyond the Frustration Cycle*, which offers a simple and profound method for recognizing and deactivating the agitating moments in your life. GRACE is the acronym we created for this innovative, simple, and effective five-step process that allows your aware, wise, and intuitive Self to steer you out of all those frustrating moments.

*If you are interested in knowing more about us,
please check out our website:*
www.garyandradhabello.com

ENLIGHTENING MOMENTS

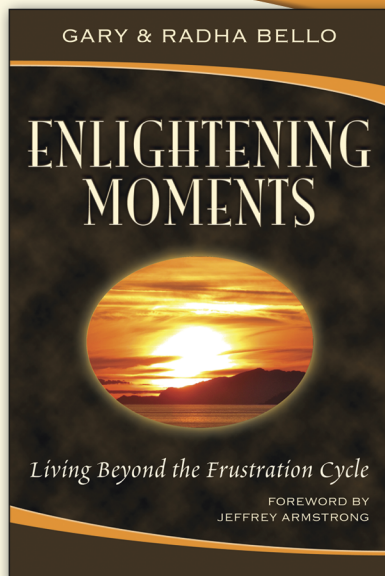
GARY & RADHA BELLO

Caught in the FRUSTRATION CYCLE?

Are you too hard on yourself? Are you fed up with the people in your life who just don't get it? Do you feel like you never have enough time? Are you stuck in a pattern you cannot break no matter how hard you try? If so, you are caught in the Frustration Cycle, and you are getting nowhere fast. If you long for a satisfying relationship, if you feel that something is interfering with your professional success, or if you don't understand why you let a certain situation bother you so much, this book is for you.

Enlightening Moments: Living Beyond the Frustration Cycle has the power to transform every area of your life. Instead of trying to change what's going on around you, this book introduces a radical perspective that inspires refreshing responses to the way things are. Being able to recognize your patterns and take full responsibility for your reactions leads you down a clear path to the root cause of the issue—to the source of surprising insight and profound understanding.

This paradigm is revolutionary because it works. Gary and Radha Bello don't just talk about what's possible . . . they walk you through the step-by-step process required to unwind the habits that bind. With simple practices, playful curiosity, and an openness to grace, you will see what used to bother you the most transform into the revelation you've been waiting for.



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Gary and Radha Bello are the founders of Pacific Horizon Consulting, serving clients from all walks of life. They have combined Eastern wisdom with Western psychology to create simple tools for personal and professional transformation.

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