

Foreword

As most of us know, we are only ready to see parts of ourselves and make changes when we have to. This book is about trying to see ourselves and the people around us for who we are. It's about growing into an adult who is fun and responsible; about looking for truth even though it's a slippery fish; about doing what's right because it's right, not because of reward or punishment and about being kind in a realistic way. Perhaps it's best to only read the chapters that interest you at this point in your life and leave the others for when the timing is right. In a song by Tom Waits he says, "If you exorcise my devils, well, my angels may leave me too." It comes to mind often when a particular behavior of someone's or one of my own gets on my nerves. That line reminds me to think about the bad behavior, trace it back to its root personality trait, and then from that root personality trait follow another path to a good behavior. An example is to consider Vincent van Gogh through his brother's writings, how he struggled with him emotionally (madness), and then to consider his fantastic paintings (creativity) - madness and creativity often come from the same place. Keeping this in mind may help us live with our own and others' bad behavior. However, sometimes the bad behavior itself is exactly what is desirable, only in a different situation. The personality trait that makes someone an aggressive and annoying teammate may be the same trait that makes that person the one you want on your team when the *other* team shows up.

Most of this is plain common sense, but as you may have heard, common sense isn't all that common. Yet, none of this is difficult stuff when we apply logic. It's just that logic hides itself under layers of emotions, and the more scrambled and intense the emotions, the more difficult it becomes to tap into logical thinking. But then again clear thinking isn't for everybody...and certainly not in every situation. In addition, as logical as we can be, we still can't account for random factors. In other words, we can make assumptions about how a particular set of circumstances will turn out and how we will behave in it, but no one can say for sure. Nonetheless, I am a fan of taking time for critical thinking, if not during an event, then before and after it. When it comes to interacting with people, it's difficult to know when to give someone the benefit of the doubt, when to ignore or walk away or when to confront that person. It's also difficult to admit to ourselves when we've been in the wrong, try to fix it, try not to do it again and be honest about it with others. These things aren't only difficult because of the layers of emotions involved, but also because of plain laziness. Being around other people means having to deal with these things, being less thoughtless, less indifferent and less intolerant. Perhaps this is why many of us seem to prefer our pets...

The lists in this book are common denominators from many sources such as current research articles, surveys, books, the internet and interviews. Finding common denominators is a way of boiling down information in an information rich world to make it more user-friendly; it is also a way to finding what is considered to be true. If you read 100 diet books and you take the postulates they have in common, you may find what is true about dieting. This is not to say that anomalies are without truth, they may be simply less explored ideas, and it is therefore a few of them are included in this book for your consideration.

Most of the topics in this book are looked at in light of western world culture; it is the chosen scope of this book. However, common denominators can be found worldwide. An example of a cross cultural one is when women from all over the world were asked what they want from a husband. They almost unanimously expressed "to be loved and understood" as their common hope. I suspect if the same survey was done a thousand years ago, the answer would have

WHAT'S YOUR FREAKIN' PROBLEM?

been the same. Some truths do not become clouded by time, religion, politics, science or other such details.