

PRINCIPLE

# 11

»»»» **If you are only what you were  
told you could be, you are  
less than what you can be.**



**W**e all face a sobering truth: Our deepest, most instinctive responses are inevitably products of our upbringing.

Even more sobering is this truth: Our very personalities—our characters—were shaped during early childhood by the messages we received and the behaviors we observed from our parents and the other adult authority figures in our world. Those modeled patterns of behavior and the feelings generated by the messages we received were all recorded and are stored within us, ready for replay at any time. Whether we wish to acknowledge the fact or not, the messages and feelings of our very early years were the starting point of our attitudes, our beliefs about our abilities, and, ultimately, our path in life.

Some people grew up in highly supportive environments where they frequently heard statements such as this: “You can be anything you want to be if you put your mind to it” and “If you work hard, you can accomplish anything.” Others grew up in environments where the messages were far less supportive. These messages may have been more along the lines of: “You’ll never amount to anything,” “You’re a loser,” and “Why try? You’ll only fail again.” There are many sad cases of people whose parents always told them things such as, “I swear, you’re going to end up in prison someday.” Tragically, many of them did.

**Whether we wish to acknowledge the fact or not, the messages and feelings of our very early years were the starting point of our attitudes, our beliefs about our abilities, and, ultimately, our path in life.**

Perhaps you’re wondering: Do the people who were brought up in the most supportive environments *automatically* develop healthy self-esteem and become successful? Are those whose environments were less supportive *destined* to develop poor self-images and become the failures the messages they recorded suggest?

The answer to both questions is “no.”

We have all heard stories about people who grew up under the very worst circumstances—with abusive, unsupportive parents, with teachers who wrote them off at an early age, with friends who made every effort to hold them back from any meaningful accomplishment—and who still found a way to live lives that were successful by anyone's standards, lives full of contribution and achievement. We've also heard plenty of true stories of people who grew up in supportive family environments who managed to live lives of misery and despair.

So, how do we account for the difference?

**Like a bowling pin, which is a product of a manufacturing process that shapes it into its recognizable form, you, too, are a product of a process that has shaped your behavior and actions into a recognizable form.**

We can start by acknowledging that people don't lead a "bowling pin" existence. Bowling pins have no choice but to fall over when hit by a bowling ball. It's the way they were built. It's their destiny to be knocked down, time and time again. Despite what some bowlers may tell you, the pins can't choose to stand their ground and refuse to fall when struck by the ball, and they will never choose a new strategy to move out of the way of a rapidly approaching ball to avoid being knocked over. They will never choose to abandon the unsafe environment of the bowling lane and seek a safer environment. Game after game, they will continue to fulfill their destiny, which is to be knocked down over and over and over again by every ball with which they come into contact.

Let me revise this slightly: people don't lead a bowling pin existence . . . unless they choose to. Like a bowling pin, which is a product of a manufacturing process that shapes it into its recognizable form, you, too, are a product of a process that has shaped your behavior and actions into a recognizable form. That shaping, or programming, was performed by your parents and other authority figures during your

early childhood. They taught you, from their perspective, what was right and wrong, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate. You may have obediently accepted their directives, rebelliously adopted a behavior opposite to what they taught, or exhibited a behavior somewhere between those two ends of the spectrum. **Regardless, you are a product of that upbringing, and what you feel, think, and do in the present is strongly influenced by it.**

**You have the freedom to be, to do, to become, and to be known and remembered for whatever you want.**

*Unlike* a bowling pin, however, which has no choice but to carry out its designed behavior, you have free will. You can make choices about how you act and react to your programming. You can structure your life to strictly adhere to and validate that programming and the scripted behavior it describes, *or* you can choose to direct your energy to alternative behaviors that better serve you in the present. You have the freedom to be, to do, to become, and to be known and remembered for whatever you want.

The choice is yours.

How do you exercise this power of choice? Choosing a new path will likely require you to change your thinking. You can begin by recognizing that there is no right or wrong time to make a good choice, regardless of the choices you may have made in the past. Next, you must learn to stop paying attention to unsupportive childhood messages—principally, the Parent directives and Child emotions—that have exerted a negative controlling influence on your life. Finally, you must acknowledge your true goals and dreams as valid ones, even if they are counter to your programming.

## **Make New Choices and You Will Change Your Life**

*Never forget: If past choices and their associated behaviors have brought you to a place in your life where you are not happy, you have the power to*

*make new choices!* Regardless of how established your existing path may appear, you can choose to change it, right now. Take a new path; take a detour; go off-road if necessary. You are only stuck on your existing path to the degree that you believe you are.

Be advised, though: Even when you do make new choices to take your life in new directions, the old messages will still play. Those messages will make you very uncomfortable at times. You'll have doubts. You'll have fears. You'll be anxious. The good news is that the discomfort will eventually diminish as you grow more comfortable with the process of making your own decisions.

**Charting a new direction means becoming determined by knowing *exactly* what you want to achieve by making the change you have in mind.**

**Choosing a new direction in life is primarily an Adult process.** It's your Adult ego state that is consciously engaged when you make a choice; it's your Adult that is filtering the messages from the Parent and Child, determining whether the behavior directed by those messages will take you closer to or further from the goal, and deciding when a new behavior is more appropriate.

Charting a new direction means becoming determined by knowing *exactly* what you want to achieve by making the change you have in mind. You must *picture* yourself reaching that goal, and return often to the picture of that achievement to reinforce yourself when old patterns reemerge.

You must also have a planned alternative behavior. This is a new, enjoyable behavior that will replace the existing "bowling pin" pattern and enable you to achieve the desired outcome.

To stay on track, it also helps to have a trusted person to act as your coach, cheerleader, and conscience. This should be someone who can help you stay focused and provide encouragement. Many people get help from co-workers, supervisors, or friends. Some people hire

professional business coaches or trainers to work on these issues. Whoever you choose, you should be comfortable reaching out to this person on a regular basis.

## **Martha Changes Her Strategy**

Martha was a sales representative for a well-known computer systems company working within the governmental applications division. She was conscientious and always attended to the business at hand. She had made contact with several mid-level managers in the department of labor and was very active in helping them to brainstorm solutions to a major problem of maintaining and updating their database of a particular segment of the labor force. She was instrumental in helping them design more useful forms of data identification, storage, and retrieval. She anticipated that her company's systems, which she identified, would be utilized when they went to solution. However, the decision maker found suitable alternatives that seemed less costly, and went with them.

This was not an uncommon experience for Martha. She would invest large amounts of time and energy helping prospects to find a solution, only to discover that when push came to shove she would not get the sale.

**Later in life, Martha learned that when she did her best work and was helpful to those in high places, she was amply rewarded and did not have to demand those rewards or negotiate for them in advance.**

Growing up, Martha discovered that when she was mom's little helper around the house, voluntarily cleaning her room and putting her toys away, she received hugs and praise from her mom without having to ask or bargain for them beforehand. She obtained similar praise being the kindergarten teacher's unofficial helper, cleaning up after cut-and-paste projects.

Later in life, Martha learned that when she did her best work and was helpful to those in high places, she was amply rewarded and did not have to demand those rewards or negotiate for them in advance. In her first sales position, working for a pharmaceutical company, she had received high praise for her work as a drug detail provider at the doctor's-office level, where her primary job functions revolved around educating the doctors. She had come to the computer systems company to make more money, only to discover that she often fell short of quota and was barely making anything above her base rate. She knew something was wrong, but she couldn't understand what it was or what she could do about it.

With the help of a Sandler Training coach, Martha was able to see, for the first time, that she had a script, and was playing it out, time and time again, with her prospects.

**He helped her develop a strategy to discover, early on in the selling process, whether the outcome of her *giving* would be in her best interest and inevitably lead to her *receiving* the sale.**

Martha's script read something like this: "I must give in order to receive." That, she realized, was exactly what she had been doing: *giving* her knowledge to her prospects with the expectation of *receiving* their business in return. Unfortunately, she was neither stating her expectation up front, nor was she obtaining her prospects' commitments—up front—to direct the business her way.

Initially, Martha argued with her coach that stating her expectations shouldn't be necessary, because she was, in fact, providing a valuable service. The prospect, she argued, should recognize that and act accordingly. Her coach helped her realize that pleasing her parents and teachers was a different activity than pleasing her prospects—one that has different outcomes. He helped her develop a strategy to discover, early on in the selling process,

whether the outcome of her *giving* would be in her best interest and inevitably lead to her *receiving* the sale. She could then make better choices as to when, where, and with whom to invest her time.

At first, Martha was very uncomfortable asking her prospects directly about their intentions. She feared that her prospects would perceive her as pushy, and a big knot materialized regularly in her stomach, as if to remind her of that.

Martha's prospects, however, were far less shocked by her new strategy than she had imagined. Eventually, with the support of her coach, the discomfort disappeared and Martha became quite skilled at prequalifying her prospects. She became rather selective about the people with whom she shared her knowledge. Her frustration decreased, and her sales soared.

## **Jeff Becomes a Decision Maker**

Jeff sold telecommunications equipment. He had the highest closing percentage of all the salespeople in his division. His technical knowledge was unsurpassed. His ability to uncover a prospect's needs and develop an appropriate solution was exceptional.

He should have been the top producer in the company, but he wasn't.

While Jeff had the highest closing rate in his organization, he also had the longest selling cycle. Jeff could get to the proposal development stage with a prospective client rather quickly. However, it took him an inordinate amount of time to secure an actual buying decision. He allowed the sales process to drag on and on.

**Even though his closing percentage was, on average, 50 percent higher than the other salespeople, his colleagues were closing 33 percent more sales than he was!**

Asking his prospects to make commitments and decisions was difficult for him. What other salespeople in his company were



accomplishing in an average of thirty days—sometimes less—took Jeff two months to accomplish. So, even though his closing percentage was, on average, 50 percent higher than the other salespeople, his colleagues were closing 33 percent more sales than he was!

Jeff recognized that he needed to shorten his selling cycle. He was uncomfortable, however, “pushing people to act,” or asking people to “make hasty decisions.” (Those were his words.)

*Why* did he feel that way?

As a youngster, Jeff had always been in a hurry. He would rush through his chores, his homework—almost any activity. He remembered his mother describing him as having only one speed—*fast-forward*. He also remembered her continually telling him, “Slow down. Don’t be in such a hurry.” “When you’re in a hurry,” she warned, “you’re bound to make mistakes.”

When it came to making decisions, Jeff was given similar “slow down” advice from his father, who taught him that it was best to “sleep on it” before making big decisions. “After all,” his father would say, “you don’t want to make a bad decision.” He never explained *why* a decision made without sleeping on it was bad . . . and Jeff never asked.

**Archaic childhood messages—“slow down” and “sleep on it”—were working against him.**

For young Jeff, the message was clear: Doing things quickly—especially making decisions quickly—was somehow always wrong. It was better to take things slowly and not make mistakes than to risk making bad decisions.

Jeff had been carrying that behavior script around with him since childhood. Making decisions—even decisions others might consider routine, such as which movie to see or which restaurant to go to—seemed to take him forever, and usually caused him distress. He felt compelled to take a bit more time to consider his options before making the decision. It is no wonder that Jeff was reluctant to press

his prospects for decisions. Archaic childhood messages—“slow down” and “sleep on it”—were working against him. They had created a pattern of behavior—a script—that not only influenced Jeff’s actions, but also enabled him to “understand” (that is, sympathize with) anyone who seemed to be exhibiting a similar pattern.

When Jeff went on sales calls, his script required that he take his mom and dad with him. Not literally, of course, but figuratively. They would stand silently in the corner of the room, observing him, and waiting for the perfect moment to offer their “help” whenever they thought it necessary to do so.

**The selling process is driven by a series of decisions. The more quickly those decisions are made, the shorter the selling cycle.**

When Jeff thought about asking his prospects to commit to completing a task by a certain date in order to keep the sale moving forward, he would hear his mother whisper in his ear, “Now, Jeff, don’t be in such a hurry.” As a result, Jeff would not ask for the commitment. Jeff knew that the purpose of making any presentation was to obtain a buying decision, but the minute the prospect exhibited any hesitation or expressed the desire to give the decision some additional thought, Jeff felt his dad tap him on the shoulder and tell him, “Now, son, let him sleep on it.”

The selling process is driven by a series of decisions. The more quickly those decisions are made, the shorter the selling cycle. Jeff was never going to shorten his selling cycle until he became more comfortable getting his prospects to make decisions, and he wasn’t going to become more comfortable even asking them to make decisions until he was more comfortable making his own decisions.

To help Jeff with his decision-making challenge, his Sandler Training coach invited him to a lunch meeting at a very nice, very expensive restaurant. The pretense for the meeting was to discuss a strategy for shortening Jeff’s selling cycle. “Here are the ground rules

for lunch,” the coach, who knew Jeff’s script, said. “When the waitress comes over, I want you to look at the menu. You’ll have thirty seconds to make your selection. I’ll be timing you. If you make a selection in thirty seconds or less, I’ll pay for lunch. If you take longer than thirty seconds, you’ll pay for lunch, and you should know, Jeff, that I’m very, very hungry today. Are you OK with that?” (Notice that the coach’s phrase “Are you OK with that?” *modeled* the critical skill of helping another person to make a decision.)

Jeff was puzzled, and even a bit uncomfortable, but he trusted his coach and agreed.

Before calling the waitress over, Jeff’s coach asked him to describe the worst-case scenario that could result from making a quick selection. Jeff thought for a moment, and then replied, “I suppose I could end up ordering something that’s not as good as something else I could have chosen.”

**Jeff’s coach knew that the *one experience* of making a quick lunch decision wasn’t going to *rewrite* Jeff’s scripted behavior, but it did demonstrate the *possibility* of making a good decision without sleeping on it.**

The coach then asked Jeff to describe the best-case scenario.

“I could order something I really enjoy, have a great lunch . . . and you’d pay for it,” was Jeff’s answer.

“And that’s desirable?” the coach asked.

“Absolutely,” Jeff answered.

“Now, here is the all-important question,” the coach said. “Can you live with the worst-case outcome?”

“I suppose so. It’s only one lunch,” was Jeff’s answer.

The coach called the waitress over, she handed Jeff a menu, and his coach began timing him. Jeff made his selection with twelve seconds to spare.

Jeff confessed that he felt “pressure” making his decision. “Not by the requirement to make a decision,” he admitted, “but more by the time constraint—trying to beat the clock.”

Jeff’s coach knew that the one experience of making a quick lunch decision wasn’t going to rewrite Jeff’s scripted behavior, but it did demonstrate the *possibility* of making a good decision without sleeping on it. Once Jeff knew it was possible to do this, his attitude changed.

**Starting with the very first decision, they identified alternative behaviors that would facilitate obtaining the decisions in a timelier manner.**

Jeff worked with his coach to identify the various decisions required to move the selling process from start to finish, and particularly those decision points where Jeff’s “sleep on it” script caused him to drag his feet in obtaining a decision from a prospect. Starting with the very first decision, they identified alternative behaviors that would facilitate obtaining the decisions in a timelier manner. They then discussed the best-case and worst-case scenarios of the alternative behaviors, much as they had regarding the lunch-order decision. They discovered that, just as with that decision, the best-case scenarios were desirable, and Jeff could live with the worst-case scenarios.

Jeff made a commitment to implement the new behavior. Like Martha, he was uncomfortable implementing his new behavior at first. Interestingly, though, the worst-case scenarios he had imagined never occurred. His prospects didn’t always comply with his wishes; he occasionally received some pushback. Rather than leave the situation open-ended, which he had always done in the past, he was now comfortable asking the prospect to commit to a date by which the decision would be made. Over time, even those situations became rare.

Within ninety days, Jeff cut his selling-cycle time almost in half.

Learning to make good decisions more quickly had a much more profound impact on Jeff, however. In the same period of time, he

bought a new car, proposed to his girlfriend (she accepted), and applied for and obtained a new job—all of which were things he had been “sleeping on” for some time.

## **Jim Searches for Approval**

Jim is a salesman working in the financial services arena. He is a people person. He is very outgoing and exudes confidence. His rapport skills are excellent and most people warm up to him very quickly. He thrives on interacting with others. Unlike the vast majority of people who sell for a living, he’d rather be out making cold calls than sitting at a desk doing paperwork!

Jim’s colleagues respect him and often ask for his help. His clients like him—many have become personal friends. He earns a very comfortable income. Management often points to his drive and enthusiasm for developing new business as an example for others. By most people’s measures, Jim is highly successful; he enjoys his success and the lifestyle it’s made possible for him.

**Jim’s Child script would cause him to feel bad if he didn’t see constant evidence of approval from those with whom he interacted.**

However, it wasn’t always that way. For most of his life, Jim had lived a very different way.

Jim’s Child had a high need for approval. The little six-year-old inside didn’t merely want to be liked, he *needed* to be liked and accepted, and *needed* to see outward expressions of that acceptance. Jim’s Child script would cause him to feel bad if he didn’t see constant evidence of approval from those with whom he interacted. He would feel as though he had done something wrong. And, he would feel compelled to make it right, often going overboard. Jim would give you the shirt off his back—literally—if he thought that was appropriate.

## **His obsessive behavior was a distraction for everyone involved. He could be a real pain in a certain part of the anatomy.**

Here's a typical example. If Jim greeted a colleague with an enthusiastic "Good morning," and didn't receive an equally enthusiastic "Good morning" in return, he would immediately assume that his colleague was upset with him, that he had done something wrong or something to offend the person. He couldn't conceive that the person was simply having an off morning or was absorbed in his work. Jim's Child simply couldn't live with the perceived disapproval. In his mind, approval had to be regained, so Jim would bend over backward to make that happen. He would run out and buy donuts or pastries to share with the person. Several times during the day, he would walk past the person's desk and make a complimentary comment or ask a question designed to test the waters—all to determine whether he had regained the perceived lost approval. His obsessive behavior was a distraction for everyone involved. He could be a real pain in a certain part of the anatomy.

As you have probably guessed, Jim's approval needs didn't stop with his colleagues. If a client or prospect cut short a conversation, for instance, Jim's immediate assumption was that he had said or done something to precipitate the action. He would then waste time and energy trying to figure out what to do to fix the imaginary problem. He would send the person e-mail messages with conciliatory language that was not only unnecessary, but also confusing, since the situation he was trying to smooth over existed only in his mind.

Planting his feet with a prospect or client—holding firm on a price, for instance—was another area in which his acceptance needs hurt him. Holding the line on price, from his Child perspective, was a surefire way to lose the person's approval, so he would give in. Asking a prospect or customer to honor a commitment he was attempting to back away from was just as difficult for Jim. The bottom line for Jim was that it was more important for the prospect or customer to like him than it was for him to obtain the business. What he didn't realize was that the two were not mutually exclusive outcomes.

Jim's constant need for approval spilled over into his personal life as well, where its impact was even more damaging. He would constantly seek from his friends not only reassurances of their acceptance of him, but also reassurances that he was a good person—someone worthy of being liked by others. He would recount an experience, such as the “Good morning” incident described above, and then seek assurance that he didn't do anything wrong. His relentless requests put people off and eventually drove many of his loved ones away, including his wife (now his former wife), who eventually had enough and called it quits.

**Jim was well aware of his need for approval and the negative impact it had on his life. But, he felt helpless to do anything about it.**

Interestingly, Jim was well aware of his need for approval and the negative impact it had on his life. But, he felt helpless to do anything about it. “It's just the way I am,” was his explanation. He simply could not imagine feeling or acting differently.

With constant encouragement and support from his Sandler Training coach, Jim made some progress dealing with the debilitating aspects of his Child script as it related to his selling activities. Based on the progress he was making in the sales arena, Jim began to believe that further change was possible, not only in his professional life, but in other areas of his life as well. In this situation, however, no real progress was going to take place without the help of a professional counselor. This was a suggestion Jim had heard many times from friends and relatives. Working with a professional, however, was something he was very reluctant to do.

The wake-up call that made him take a hard look at his life and where it was headed was a question asked by his closest friend, Jack, who was well aware of the negative consequences of Jim's need-for-approval behavior. Jack asked, “Are you happy with your life?”

Jim's answer was a rather apathetic, “It's all right.”

Jack told him, “If you’re happy living a life that’s ‘all right’ rather than a life that’s *great*, or *fulfilling*, or *spectacular*, or *wonderful*, keep doing what you’re doing. Don’t seek help. But, if you’re open to something other than just ‘all right,’ then you need to see a professional, and I’ll help you any way I can.”

**Jim was able to understand that the behavior that had helped him to cope with stressful and uncertain situations as a child . . . was no longer appropriate for his adult interactions.**

At that moment, Jim finally decided to see a psychologist. After just a few weeks, Jim was able to understand that the behavior that had helped him to cope with stressful and uncertain situations as a child—situations such as losing his mother when he was very young, or interacting with the two step-mothers whose love and acceptance he sought for years without success, or the numerous step-siblings he had to deal with, all before reaching his teenage years—was no longer appropriate for his adult interactions.

Over time, with the help of his therapist and the support of his friends, Jim was able to move beyond the feelings that had prompted his approval-seeking behavior and develop new ways of thinking and acting that enabled him to become the successful, confident person he is today.

## **Bowling Pin Syndrome**

In this chapter, I’ve shared three of the most dramatic stories we (the authors) have encountered to illustrate, in the most compelling ways possible, how three different people overcame what I call the **Bowling Pin Syndrome**. What matters most now, though, is not how these three people learned to move beyond the syndrome of letting outdated beliefs, actions, and behaviors drive their expectations of themselves, but how *you* can move beyond that syndrome.



**Each of us has patterns of behavior that may have worked at some point in our lives but are not appropriate to a given sales situation or our current *life* situation.**

What assumptions are you making about yourself and the world around you? What script is driving your behavior and your interactions—right now, today? What expectations about yourself and your capacities has that script built into your life? What is that script costing you, in dollar terms and in human terms? **What is that script telling you that you could be, and how far away is that expectation from what you *can* be once you find a coach who can help you to build, and follow, a better script?**

## **In** **Summary**

Each of us has patterns of behavior that may have worked at some point in our lives but are not appropriate to a given sales situation or our current *life* situation.

When we were young, we decided to use these behaviors because they were effective or useful in some way.

Starting right now, though, we can recognize that they are getting in our way.

We can decide that they are no longer useful and necessary, and we can get to work on building patterns of behavior that do support us.

## Time for **REFLECTION** <<<

### **The New You**

What would you change about your behavior?

- » Think about a negative or unproductive behavior pattern you'd like to change.
  - » Determine the thinking behind the action. What could be driving the behavior? What early life experiences might have inspired the behavior?
  - » Identify an alternative behavior that will serve you better.
  - » Identify what you have to gain by making a change.
  - » Create a mental image of yourself acting in the new manner, then practice speaking the words that accompany the behavior.
- » Find someone you trust with whom you can rehearse your new behavior, someone who will give you honest feedback about your daily, weekly, and monthly progress in moving away from the old script and creating and following a new script that supports you.