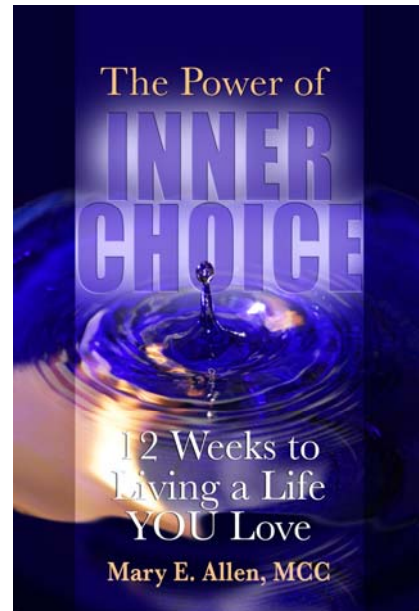


Taken from *The Power of Inner Choice: 12 Weeks to Living a Life YOU Love*
by Mary E. Allen, MCC
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The Power of Inner Choice

Introduction

Imagine your life flowing like a sailboat breezing magically through the water. Your craft is perfectly aligned with the forces of nature. You have adjusted your sails for optimum use of the wind, and your hand on the rudder allows for fine attunements. You feel a sense of direction and purpose. In every cell of your being, you are enjoying the ride. There is something innately fulfilling about being in harmony with your boat, the wind, and the sea.



Our lives are a lot like sailing. There are fundamental forces we cannot change or influence. However, we can learn to align with these forces to guide us effortlessly through life with ease and grace. Optimal flow not only allows us to arrive at the next port of call more quickly, it also creates a sense of fulfillment that permeates every moment of the journey.

Just as there are other boats on the water that we must navigate around, there are obstacles in life that we must accommodate and negotiate. When we deny obstacles or resist the forces of nature, the result is pain, frustration, and suffering. In a physical journey, this resistance generally slows progress and takes away from the joy of the journey. Resistance in life, however, shows up in a subtler manner. Our resistance manifests in the form of arguing, complaining, apathy or rebellious behavior. Thoughts of judgment, confusion, worry, or regret are other strains of resistance. Feelings of frustration, fear, disappointment, stress, or depression are forms of resistance to life. And, like a boat attempting to sail into the wind, at best, you'll be stopped; more likely, you'll be pushed backwards. No matter how hard an individual tries to oppose the wind in this manner, the navigator will remain unsuccessful. When we stop resisting the wind or whatever we are resisting in life, we will naturally be guided back on course.

Many sailboats these days have computers that automatically make tiny adjustments to maximize their flow through the water. So far, there isn't a computer system that provides this service for human beings. To live a life that flows with the natural forces around us requires being in tune with something else inside of us. It is a feeling generated in our bodies. While it's hard to describe, it is distinctly felt. It's not about finding it once and being 'done': It is a steady process of alignment and re-alignment. If we work at it, we can become masters of our own internal navigation system. We gain power when we choose to align with this force inside of ourselves.

This book is a resource that will enable you to fine-tune your own internal navigation system, to optimize the momentum, results, balance, fulfillment, and flow of your life. As you do so, you will naturally create a life **you** love. In each of the twelve lessons, you will be challenged to raise your awareness of the multitude of choices you make in your life. Your life is an unending stream of what I call "choice points." It is what you do in these moments of choice that creates the quality of your life.

Choice Points

Choice points are moments in time where we consciously or unconsciously make a choice that either accelerates or decelerates our lives. Some choices are monumental and radically shift our lives for better or for worse. Decisions to leave a company, start a business, commit to a health regime, marry, divorce, have children, or move across country are a few of the big choice points we may make in life. Other choices may seem insignificant in the moment, but they may alter our lives forever. Examples of these types of choices may include attending a seminar, befriending a stranger, having an intimate conversation, forgiving someone, making a decision to quit smoking, honoring your integrity, speaking the truth, or reading a life-altering book. Still other choices seem almost inconsequential, such as what to eat for breakfast, what to wear, what to watch on television, or what to do during your free time. It's the net accumulation of all your choices, both conscious and unconscious, that have shaped your life into what it is today.

As human beings, we have been designed to navigate through life efficiently, without requiring a conscious choice every second of the day. This is useful, as it frees our mind for other uses. We can walk across the room while thinking about the children's homework or what to make for dinner. While putting in a load of laundry, we can think about a problem at the office or about the argument we had with a friend or our spouse. While driving across town, we can contemplate our goals in life or listen to the radio.

Varying degrees of consciousness and awareness are involved with every choice and experience throughout the day. Habits and behaviors are formed to conserve energy. While the vast majority of these patterns serve us in many ways, it has also created a culture that is largely unconscious. The less conscious we are, the less power we have to co-create results in our lives. It also impedes our ability to grow and evolve, and diminishes our sense of inner fulfillment. To the extent we are living life unconsciously on auto-pilot, choices are born out of hidden beliefs and outside influences. In essence, we're not guiding the sailboat. When we choose unconsciously, we're more likely to choose out of habit, fear, or to please another.

Choices that align with our personal values, sense of integrity, or that are deliberately made with intention are conscious choices. When we choose consciously, we are more likely to find the "sweetspot" that sailors experience on the water. We feel a sense of purpose and direction. Again, there are varying degrees of consciousness involved with every choice we make.

The Power of Inner Choice explores twelve fundamental choices, and offers guidance for elevating your mastery of choice. As you investigate the contrasting impact of choices presented throughout the book, it should become apparent which one contributes to more pain and frustration, and which one supports maximum flow and joy. Your thoughts and feelings are like navigation instruments on a sailboat. By maintaining awareness and intimate familiarity with these gauges, you can develop mastery of choice. Reading this book and engaging in the exercises is meant to help you get started.

Consequences of Choice

As our awareness and consciousness expand, we notice that we either restrict the essence of who we are, or we become more authentically self-expressed. We either dwell on thoughts of regret about the past or fears of the future, or live in the present moment. We either allow ourselves to continue feeling bad in the moment, or we choose to feel good. We either succumb to the seductive influence of the ego or we heed our inner wisdom. We remain lost in a state of confusion or we gain clarity about what we would like to create. We either attempt to control the impossible or we surrender to inspired action. Some of us remain frustrated and immobile while others create momentum. We choose scarcity or abundance. We either resist or accept reality. We are caught in the illusion of thoughts that bring us stress or we choose thoughts of peace. We either remain helpless victims of life's circumstances or we live from a place of power. We either choose to please someone else in an attempt to win their love and approval, or we progress toward a life that honors our values and brings us inner fulfillment. We can wish the world and people around us were different and remain frustrated, or accept them as they are.

Each one of these courses of action is a choice, whether we make the choices unconsciously or consciously. Each choice can contribute resistance and cause stress, pain, frustration and suffering, or it can create joy, momentum, progress, growth, and flow. There are no benign choices. Most of us do not live lives that are perfectly optimized. But, that is not a reason to condemn ourselves. Just as a sailboat does not always flow across the water in perfect balance and harmony, neither do we. When the tides change or an obstacle appears, the opportunity to change course becomes clear. We can either fight the current or allow ourselves to gracefully adjust. It's in these moments that we meet our greatest choice points. This is part of the joy and challenge of life. Without challenge, we remain bored or apathetic. Fortunately, life is full of challenges. We can choose frustration, or we can develop our skills in navigation.

Getting in Touch with the “Chooser”

Who is doing the choosing? This is a wonderful question to contemplate each time you make a choice. Ask yourself this question over and over again, and you may begin to connect with and strengthen your internal guiding system, the place of “inner choice.”

Sometimes a choice will be clear. Other choices may be dictated or influenced by others.

When you decide to say “yes” to something, who is doing the choosing? When you choose chocolate over vanilla, who is choosing? When you decide to get up or go to bed at night, who is doing the choosing? What is the force inside human beings that guides and directs life choices?

Do you resist the wisdom of your guiding system, or do your choices happen seamlessly? Can you distinguish one clear voice, or are there numerous voices inside and outside of you that cause you to remain stuck or confused at times? In these moments of choice, do you choose out of integrity or fear? Do you choose to compromise your own values to please another? Do you choose the path of love or the path of least resistance? Do you choose out of defensiveness or protection? Do you choose from inspired guidance? And what is the relationship to your self in these moments of choice? Do you trust and honor your choice, or question and doubt yourself? As you develop a greater awareness of your influences, the power of inner choice reveals itself more and more clearly. Ultimately, your thoughts, feelings, and resulting action work harmoniously. When this happens, you can simply enjoy the journey as you create, accomplish, and experience life, sharing your gifts with the world.

What Is Inner Choice?

Inner choice is your purest internal guiding system. It knows when you are on or off course. It knows when to say yes or no, when to speak and when to remain silent. It senses your connection to or disconnection from others. It has a sense of right and wrong. When you are responding to this power of inner choice, your life can flow. You are on purpose, and loving your life. You are in complete alignment with both the external world and your inner world. There is no resistance to life.

There are numerous times you have personally experienced or witnessed perfect access to inner choice. When the connection is strongest, there is not a slow, deliberate, conscious choice in every moment, although this is often how the connection is strengthened initially. Body, mind, and spirit are working together in perfect

harmony, creating excellence in performance, creativity, beauty, pleasure, and connection with others.

Think about a world-class gymnast flowing through a routine with perfection. A musical performer radiating the sound of her voice in harmony with the words, instruments, the audience, and her soul. A mother instinctively responding to the needs of her baby with love and warmth, knowing exactly what is needed without instruction. An artist elegantly combining colors, textures, and images in a manner that touches the hearts of those who experience the work. A skier gliding down a mountain with grace and precision. Husband and wife making love together as one, maximizing their connection and pleasure. A poet allowing a set of words to flow onto the paper, bringing tears of joy to his readers. A CEO, presented with a host of challenging decisions to make, is intuitively guided to a clarity that propels the success of the business. Valentino, the infamous clothing designer, described what happens when he creates a new clothing line, "It just comes to me."

Each of these examples carries a common set of characteristics. The persons experiencing or witnessing the moment is virtually one hundred percent present to the moment. They probably felt a sense of peace or calm along with pleasant emotions such as joy, love, excitement, openness, and a sense of fulfillment. Their bodies and minds were perfectly aligned with their external worlds. They were expressing their most creative selves. The power of inner choice was working through them harmoniously.

Sometimes, the sense of inner choice works in a less dramatic manner. Although outwardly less dramatic than the visual results of critical choices made in high-performance sports, works of art, or moments of connection, the power of inner choice plays a significant role in clearly guiding even simple decisions, in addition to directing you into a new phase of your life. Inner choice is at work when you "know" that it's time to make a career change or move to a new city. It tells you when to call a loved one, and when to let go. It captures your attention during a peak experience, allowing you to savor the moment. Sometimes it shows up as procrastination (resistance to taking action); at other times it inspires you to action.

Although each of us has access to this internal guiding system, the connection to this resource may be weak or strong. If your life is flowing well, your connection is strong. If your life is filled with stress, frustration, and suffering, your connection is weaker. The good news is that you do have an opportunity to strengthen the connection. Your internal guiding system may work well in some areas of your life, but may be less effective in other areas. The more you fine-tune the connection, the more your life will flow.

How Does Transformation Happen?

When I climb aboard a sailboat, I am amazed at how my friend knows exactly what to do to orchestrate this seemingly awkward configuration of fiberglass, wood, poles, lines, and sails that propels us across the water. How does he know what rope to use and when? How does he know how hard to pull or when to let go? How can he use the wind he can't see to move us through the water? How does he make those almost constant tiny adjustments with the rudder? And how is it that no matter which direction the wind is going or how rough or calm the waters, we're always able to get from point A to point B and safely back into the harbor?

There are so many things to keep track of simultaneously. If I were to attempt to get the boat out of the harbor at Santa Cruz and into the ocean, I'm certain it would be either hilarious to any casual observer—or disastrous. If I had to take over the craft in the ocean on a calm day, I would probably just drift in whatever direction the wind was going, or listen to the guidance of someone else. If I had to manage the boat in the middle of a storm, I wouldn't know what to do. Perhaps I would try to fight the wind, or attempt to protect myself, or maybe I'd just give up. Without proper training, getting from A to B would be improbable. Even with expert instruction, until I could gain competency, sailing would remain frustrating. The sense of oneness master sailors thrive on would remain an elusive concept to me.

I imagine this is how a lot of people live their lives. They are attempting to operate their craft without ever really mastering the basic rules of alignment. We may live our lives in the safety of a harbor, never venturing into uncharted waters and attempting to sail

to an exciting new destination. We may never get in tune with that exhilarating feeling of being one with nature, our craft, and ourselves.

The good news is anyone can learn to sail one's life. *The Power of Inner Choice* provides a concentrated guide to getting started.

Imagine you wanted to become a master sailor. As most people who develop this passion, you would find an instructor and methodically learn the basic components of sailing. You'd learn the language of sailing and you'd learn about the equipment. Ultimately, you would need experience to get a "feel" for it. Knowing the basics is not the same as navigating on the water under a variety of winds, weather, and water conditions. If you took a lesson once a year for twelve years, you'd likely improve a little over time. But with so much time between lessons, you would have to relearn many of the basics each time. If you went sailing once a month or once a week, your learning curve would accelerate. If you took a three-month sailing trip with another master sailor and immersed yourself in the art of sailing, your progress would exponentially advance. On the other hand, a variety of teachers, each with a slightly different area of expertise, might ultimately make you an incredible sailor, but until you were able to integrate the wisdom, a variety of different teachers might serve to confuse and slow your progress.

Unlike sailing, living life doesn't require lessons. However, there are numerous resources available that can substantially improve the quality of your life, offering a wide array of distinctions, philosophies, suggestions, and ideas. As a life coach, one of the biggest challenges I have both witnessed and experienced personally is the challenge of integrating all the available wisdom about living fulfilling and purposeful lives.

Since stores are full of books on self-improvement, spirituality, personal growth, and self-development, it's likely that you've read one or more of these books. From practical "how to" strategies to more esoteric and philosophical ideas, there is an abundance of wisdom readily available to everyone. Thirty percent of the books on the top 100 Best-Selling lists are related to some type of self-improvement.

How this Book Differs

This is not simply a “how to” book, it’s more like an interactive workbook. You’ll receive a wealth of practical strategies, how-to’s, suggestions, exercises, tips, and ideas. Perhaps more importantly, this book is about *affecting your being*. This means you’ll be challenged to cultivate awareness of your inner thoughts, feelings, desires, values, and behaviors more consciously than you ever have before. Awareness combined with becoming present with your conscious choices allows you to evolve and grow from the inside out. It’s more than simply taking new actions.

The real power of this book is unleashed through the exercises and expanding your awareness in your life. I encourage you to stop and do the exercises *as they come*, because each exercise builds upon the previous one. Some of the exercises challenge you to become more present in the moment, or to listen more closely to your internal guiding system. The more actively you engage in an exercise, the more you will strengthen your connection to inner choice. Avoid going through the motions or *only* taking in the book intellectually. Since your participation and mindset is key to maximizing the value of this book, a more detailed set of guidelines is offered in chapter two.

Feel free to refer to this book again and again to gain new distinctions, or any time you want to reinforce the connection with your internal navigation system. It may take years to master everything in this book and a lifetime to master your internal guiding system. However, once you get a *feel* for this connection, you’ll always know it is available. Every lesson has the power to elicit the state that I’m describing. The more you experience that sense of flow, the more easily you’ll access it. Just as the sailor savors those perfect moments of oneness on the sea, so you will relish the seamless flow of your own life as your ability to live in harmony with your power of inner choice becomes an everyday way of being.

Who Can Benefit from this Book?

This book is a resource for anyone who would like to develop or to optimize the internal guiding system we are referring to as “inner choice.” Perhaps you are someone who would like to create more results, more balance, or more fulfillment in your life. You want a life that flows. You may have experienced enormous success in achieving goals through determination, willpower, and hard work, yet find

yourself exhausted with this approach. You know there must be an easier way. Maybe you just realized that you have been living your life quite unconsciously and disconnected from this powerful guiding system. Maybe your life doesn't seem to be working. It doesn't matter whether you have recently awakened to the possibility of taking more conscious control over your life, or if you are just interested in adjusting how you engage your guiding instruments in certain areas of your life.

Maybe you've paid a lot of attention to your health, developing your business, or being a wonderful parent, yet certain relationships aren't flowing optimally. Maybe you are in tune with your finances, but you're not experiencing as much fun or joy as you'd like. Maybe your house is in order, but you have let your health suffer. Maybe you know how to experience love and joy, but haven't aligned with your purpose or maximized your business potential. And, maybe you've recently felt a tug to do something else with your life, but the "What's next?" hasn't become clear yet. This book can help you enhance such areas that aren't flowing as smoothly as you would like.

Perhaps you have been developing your connection to your internal guiding system for years or decades, and know the value in polishing and refining it. You want to grow, evolve, and strengthen your navigation system to allow your life to flow even more effortlessly, effectively, and joyously.

As depicted in the popular movie "The Matrix," Neo (played by Keanu Reeves) had the option of taking one of two pills that would guide his destiny. The blue pill would allow him to return to his everyday world and remain comfortably inside of the matrix of life without remembering another option was available for him. Alternatively, the red pill would allow him to become aware of the truth. He was forewarned that this option would be the more uncomfortable path of the two.

Whether it was today, last week, or ten years ago, somewhere inside of your being, you made a choice to take charge of your life in some new way, just like Neo did. And so your journey began. Or maybe you're thinking about taking the "red pill" right now. Just as the art of sailing is not mastered overnight, learning how to interpret,

understand, and influence your thoughts, feelings, and actions comes with time. Life is a process that unfolds continuously. Optimizing life is not a destination that is ever reached once and for all.

This book can also provide information for coaches, therapists, healthcare practitioners, managers, and parents who enjoy helping others improve their productivity or satisfaction in their lives.

Hundreds of individuals have already participated in the Power of Inner Choice ecourse and teleseries programs. Whether you have been studying personal and spiritual growth principles for years, are just beginning to expand your awareness of such concepts, or are somewhere in between; you can strengthen your connection to this place of inner choice and experience more flow by studying this book and working the exercises. As you connect with the power of inner choice, you may be delighted to find yourself naturally aligning with your life's purpose and discovering a deeper sense of joy, inner fulfillment and peace in your life.

***By becoming a conscious choice-maker,
you begin to generate actions that are evolutionary for you.***

– Deepak Chopra

The Power of Inner Choice – Introduction
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