

SAVE YOUR INNER TORTOISE!



**LEARN HOW TO CROSS THE FINISH LINE
JOYFUL AND SATISFIED**

Carol Courcy

Advance praise for
Save Your Inner Tortoise

Emotional learning has been culturally abandoned for a long time, particularly since we made reason the only source of human learning and knowledge.

Today we are collectively realizing the huge cost that that abandonment has had for all of us and the urgent need to recover that essential part of our education. Carol Courcy's book is a marvelous contribution in that direction. It clearly shows her many years of masterful coaching.

Her book is full of insight, reflection, and practices to bring back our emotional learning. She plays constantly with her humorous realism and her exquisite capacity to dream.

I recommend this book to anyone concerned with his or her emotional apprenticeship, and particularly to the coaching community to enhance their ability to bring this ability into their professional activities.

Julio Olalla, MCC

Author of *From Knowledge to Wisdom*

Founder of The Newfield Network

www.newfieldnetwork.com

Master Coach Carol Courcy delivers ways to truly be in control of your life. Her revelations of her personal discoveries coupled with insights from those who have used her approach demonstrate the power of the simple yet potent exercises. With much compassion Courcy takes you gently by the hand, showing you how to create joy and contentment in your life! I LOVE it! This is truly a primer of how to live for all of us, but especially for driven, compulsive achievers.

Joan C. King, PhD, MCC

Author of *A Life on Purpose: Wisdom at Work* and the *Cellular Wisdom* series

www.cellular-wisdom.com

The idea of developing emotional agility is very powerful and truly needed in today's dynamic times. Embracing the tortoise as a symbol of how to approach developing your emotional strength really adds the lightness that a difficult-to-discuss topic like emotions requires. *Save Your Inner Tortoise* shares solid step-by-step tools and includes great activities and exercises that showcase alternative life strategies sure to help tame the self-sacrificing, never-enough, overachiever in you.

Jane R. Flagello, EdD

Author of *The Savvy Manager: 5 Skills
that Drive Optimal Performance*

www.thesavvymanager.biz

Carol Courcy is simply amazing. She was my guide to a new realm of awareness and possibility in her Emotional Agility course. Her two questions “What do you want instead?” and “What emotion would serve you in getting there?” shifted my perspective about emotions forever. Rather than being at the mercy of external events or my unconscious habits and ways of being, I realized that I was in the driver's seat of my emotions—and my experiences. I learned ways to shift my emotions on purpose and develop practices that continue to give me access to more confidence, fulfillment and joy. What I learned continues to inspire and inform my life and work.

Angela Stauder

www.thrivagility.com

CONTENTS

PREFACE	xi
My style and coaching credentials	xv
Might you be a member of the self-sacrificing, never-enough, overachieving club?	xvi
INTRODUCTION	1
Why the tortoise?	2
GOOD TO KNOW BEFORE YOU BEGIN	5
Welcome to my version of Emotions 101	8
Why emotional learning matters	8
Emotions are universal.	10
We confuse being emotional with being overly emotional ...	11
The secret to saving your inner tortoise: Emotional agility	11
What is emotional agility?	12
How does emotional agility work?	12
Another secret to saving our inner tortoise? Practice!	13
Emotional agility in real life.	16
Emotional agility is something we already know	17
Expected outcomes from practicing emotional agility	18

STEP 1: GET TO KNOW YOUR INNER TORTOISE 21

How have you been crossing your finish lines these days? 22

 Emotional inheritances 22

Our metaphorical emotional wardrobe. 27

 Have you been wearing resentment? 37

 Have you been wearing resignation? 40

 Have you been wearing acceptance? 43

 Have you been wearing ambition? 46

 Recognizing our emotional patterns. 49

STEP 2: GIVE YOUR SELF-SACRIFICING, NEVER-
ENOUGH, OVERACHIEVING TORTOISE A BREAK 61

Activating an emotion 62

Interrupt old patterns with new patterns 71

Moods vs. emotions: A subtle yet important difference 78

Emotional Reverberation: We have the choices our
emotion allows! 83

Recognizing the patterns of optimism and pessimism 85

Trying on optimism and pessimism 90

STEP 3: SAVE YOUR INNER TORTOISE ...
CROSS FINISH LINES JOYFUL AND SATISFIED 95

The Universal Emotions of Well-being: Joy,
Satisfaction, and Wholeheartedness 99

 Activate and wear joy. 101

 Activate and wear satisfaction. 111

 Activate and wear wholeheartedness. 130

Frequently asked questions. 149

STEP 4: CREATE AND CROSS NEW FINISH LINES 155

 Resistance is a good sign. 157

 Emotions are contagious 161

 Immersion: Extending emotions into moods 168

AFTERWORD 187

 Where to from here? 187

ACTIVITY AND SIMPLE PRACTICE INDEX. 193

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. 197

NOTES. 199

P R E F A C E

Calling all fellow self-sacrificing “never enough” overachievers! Helmet a bit too dented? Too big a rocket on your back? Need a good rest? Want to retire from this life strategy? Me too. I began my retirement about 15 years ago.

In the mid-1990s, like many fellow self-sacrificing never-enough overachievers, I was driven in life. I pushed and pulled hard to give what I thought others wanted or needed. On the surface I looked successful—if not a bit tired or harried. If honest with myself, I thought I was damaged goods or flawed in some profound way. I didn’t think I was overachieving at all. Despite compliments, promotions, bonuses, kudos, and positive assessments of me and the work I completed, whatever I did wasn’t ever enough. I never quite measured up. I could always find someone else to compare myself to unfavorably. My ever-striving sensibilities had me always coming up short in life. There was always something more I could have done. Should have done. Any attempt at satisfaction or pride was trounced by my internal “itty bitty bitchy committee” hollering about what more I needed to do or should have done. Mind you, on the outside I talked a good professional game. I smiled a lot, thanked people for appreciating my work, and accepted their congratulations graciously. However, on the inside, the “never enough” flourished. Few knew of my personal worries about measuring up.

As a coach and lifelong learner, the approach I now take is one of increasing well-being rather than fixing something that is wrong with me, my clients, or their organizations.

My turning point in 1994 was Martin Seligman's *Learned Optimism* that turned me toward finding ways to increase well-being. He offers:

*I have learned that it is not always easy to know
if you are a pessimist and that far more people
than realize it are living in this shadow.*

*A pessimistic attitude may seem so deeply rooted as to
be permanent. I have found, however, the pessimism is
escapable. Pessimists can in fact learn to be optimists.*

~ Martin Seligman

My “never ever quite enough” did indeed have a pessimistic shadow. I was pessimistic about my talents. That fed my fear of never measuring up and heightened my awful-izing (worrying) about my future. I had to please my customers and boss or else I'd never get work again. Seemed like a never-ending ride on a gerbil wheel.

I had an *aha* moment thanks to Seligman. Simply calling it pessimism and considering I could learn optimism fired up hope that I could indeed leave the shadows of my personal flaws for more lightness of spirit toward myself and more feelings of happiness and fulfillment.

Although insightful, I was left wondering exactly HOW one does that. I was hungry for more. I read other books on emotions by Daniel Goleman, the Dalai Lama, Candace Pert, and Paul Ekman. Great information and insights there too. However, the path to how to live in more desirable emotions wasn't yet obvious to me.

I wanted an owner's manual with instructions.

Another fortunate turn came during my second ontological coach training program. Although already a Certified Coach, I wanted to be a credentialed Master Certified Coach. (Of course I'd do a second course and get a higher credential. I am after all an overachiever—one is not enough.) I posed the “how do I leave my pessimism?” question to my Mentor Coach Jan Goldman, PsyD, whom I considered a masterful teacher and coach. Gratefully she took my question seriously, and through working with her I

opted to pursue what turned out to be two life-changing strategies. In our early meetings, I discovered a pattern of never staying with a thing long enough to become masterful at it. I was a “jumper.” Easily bored after the first sets of challenges were successfully completed, I would switch. (I went from retail to ski instructor, to high school teacher, back to retail—this time in management—to consulting and training, entrepreneur business owner, executive, etc., etc., etc.)

Jan offered that without an ability to deeply feel satisfaction, I would continue to be driven to always do more and be better than expected, resulting in a habit of overextending, worry, and exhausting hours at work. I was driving myself somewhere fast without declaring my purpose or conditions of satisfaction. BIG MISTAKE.

What dramatically changed that life pattern were two of Jan’s coaching “homework” assignments: 1) Learn the emotion of satisfaction and 2) think of a question that I would enjoy researching for at least ten years. (Ten years? Was she kidding? What kind of question could possibly hold my interest for ten years? Didn’t she remember I was a “jumper”?)

I am usually a quick study. However, much to my surprise as a 40-year practitioner of “never ever enough,” I found a simple emotion of satisfaction perplexing to learn. As usual, my second-guessing habit engaged full throttle. *Isn’t satisfaction akin to laziness? Won’t contentment cancel out all my ambitions for promotions, bonuses, better jobs, better bosses, more clients, or better companies? This is the wrong coaching assignment. In fact, isn’t satisfaction un-American, undermining our economic system?* Fortunately for me, my coach did not buy into my justifications.

As it turns out, satisfaction was the best of emotions for me to learn and practice. The same is true for others wanting to exit their excessive self-sacrificing, never-enough, overachieving ways. Remember, tortoises don’t jump—they consider and change course.

Being an “ever striving” person, having no satisfaction as a counterbalance was a surefire route to exhaustion and disillusionment: anger for my staying too long at a company or in a relationship; regrets for not staying long enough in a good situation, and my pattern of unreasonable guilt for

not doing more. Over time I developed a good case of long-standing resentment that I was STILL not happy after all that work.

Fairly early into the assignment I discovered I actually liked satisfaction. My days, although busy, felt less pressured now that I had an “enough” point. I started to leave the office on time, pleased with my day’s efforts. I felt a new sense of freedom. Free to say yes or no to projects. Love for my work reappeared. My fears of laziness never materialized. My ambition had some boundaries. My tendency to overcommit lessened with practice. The promotions, bonuses, and kudos kept coming. I simply worked fewer hours. With more time on my hands, I had space to think about the meaning I wanted for my life. Gratitude began to appear on a regular basis. I got a glimpse of joy and found it tantalizing.

I was on to something here. Those realizations launched me toward my ten-year research question:

Can we really (and I do mean REALLY) spend more time in the emotions we prefer than in the ones we dislike?

I had spent a lot of time in dislike, worry, feeling coerced to be better. Could I undo long-term patterns? Could I support others in doing the same?

Turns out, yes—a resounding and profoundly gratifying yes.

That original proposition started in 1994 and thankfully continues to this day. As I learned satisfaction and dozens of other positive emotional attitudes along the way, my curiosity also expanded to new questions:

- Can we bring back an emotion? *I like how I was last week!*
- Can we lessen an emotion’s hold or effect? *I am sick and tired of feeling this way.*
- How do we extend and strengthen an emotion? *I want more of this in my life.*

And thus my passion for understanding and teaching what I call “emotional agility” was born. To my profound satisfaction and joy, you are reading the result: a book of simple practices that will help you create new emotional habits that encourage your version of satisfaction and joy.

MY STYLE AND COACHING CREDENTIALS

I profoundly respect how busy you are and how oppressive ONE MORE TASK can feel. However, I also have enough irreverence, humor, and stamina to stick with you as you move from what doesn't work to what does. My goal is to help you reduce what is on your plate, to remain responsive while increasing satisfaction and enjoyment. Ultimately, I want you to trust yourself to do the necessary work. Do this work at your own speed. Use what works. Set aside what you are not ready for. Give the learning a good chance to work. Toss what doesn't work for you.

I also recognize that credentials are important for initiating trust in me and the learning path I propose. In addition to my personal expertise gained through my own learning, I have spent more than 5,000 hours coaching managers, supervisors, executives, students, and clients in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Europe, and parts of Asia. Having been a vice president for two organizations over a span of 12 years, I have an appreciation for the conundrums experienced by leaders whose well-being can take a hit in today's high-performance business environment, where overdoing is a norm or badge of honor.

Coaching Credentials

- International Coach Federation Master Certified Coach (MCC) since 2000
- Member Newfield Network and ICF credentialing teams since 2001
- Board Member ACTO (Association for Coach Training Organizations) 5 years
- Newfield Certified Ontological Coach (NCOC™) 1996
- Newfield Certified Coach (NCC™) 1994
- Action Technologies Certified Ontological Coach 1990

Assessment Tool Certifications and Professional Designations

- MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)
- Personal Directions and V-CAS (360° instruments)
- Talent Builder™; Career Focus™; Career Resiliency©
- Workflow Analysis for Business©

MIGHT YOU BE A MEMBER OF THE SELF-SACRIFICING, NEVER-ENOUGH, OVERACHIEVING CLUB?

If you picked out this book, chances are you are familiar with some aspects of life inside the gerbil wheel. Following is a list of typical behaviors of our crowd. CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

- ☐ You care deeply about the work you do, the well-being of your family, co-workers, employees or community—or all of the above—yet often feel exhausted, alone, underappreciated, or overwhelmed.
- ☐ Do you always want more from life? (*I should... I need to... I must...*) (Money, time, being thinner, heavier, healthier, higher up in your organization, more respected, better liked, etc.?) Has this urge for more, better, sooner, or easier gone too far?
- ☐ Do you know what *enough* is or looks like? Can you stop before your body says no more? (What exactly is enough money? Enough work on this project? Enough for today? What date is soon enough?) Can you leave a task, or a day, in peace?
- ☐ When you meet a goal or keep a commitment, do you always see more to do or a better way you could/should have done it? (Recognize overdoing perfectionism?)
- ☐ Does your pleasing others have boundaries? (What is enough pleasing?)
- ☐ Do you only focus on mistakes or failures? Is there no pleasing you? (When you receive positive feedback, do you look for what you did wrong or what was not up to standard first?) Is the highest possible mark or score the ONLY valid score for you?
- ☐ When you compare yourself to others, do you ever measure up?



Carol's Coaching Corner: If you find your heart beating faster or your anxiety rising, TAKE A FEW DEEP BREATHS and keep reading and checking any boxes that apply to you.

- ☐ With your own successes, do you stop to feel and enjoy the satisfaction? A deep sense of joy? Or do you bypass that part? (*Can't rest on my laurels. I'll be left out if I don't keep up.*)
- ☐ Can you receive a compliment or a genuine "thank you" without dismissing it or diminishing yourself? (*Oh, that's okay. It wasn't a big deal. And it was. I don't deserve ...*)
- ☐ Do you crave acknowledgment, gratitude, or praise, yet feel a bit uncomfortable when you get it?
- ☐ Does your organization foster this *never-enough* attitude? (Do you as a leader foster the same? What is enough from employees? Is *enough* a dirty word, or not good business?)
- ☐ Do you say yes when you mean no? Do you say yes and then break your promises to others to keep another commitment? (To children, your spouse, colleagues, etc.)
- ☐ Do you easily forgo promises to yourself? Do you automatically accommodate others and put yourself last? Do you ever get to you?
- ☐ You have *very* good reasons and excuses for overextending. Do you pride yourself in how much work you take on? Does a "better than" or "I know more than" appear? (*Just a little longer. Who else will? No one but me could ... They need me here.*)
- ☐ Might you be overdoing on self-sufficiency? (Remember the tortoise on the cover? Is your helmet dented with "blows from life"? (*I'm OK. I don't need help. I have to do this on my own. It's easier if I do it myself.*)
- ☐ Does your self-sufficiency spread to others? Might you be "saving" people who haven't asked to be saved?
- ☐ Do you resist or avoid asking for help? (*I haven't ever asked, but I am sure there is no one to help. Needing help is a sign of weakness or lack of intelligence. I am the only one who cares or can do this.*)

☐ Add your own...

Carol's Coaching Corner: Did you check too many boxes for your taste? Did your own version of “not enough” fire up again?

CONGRATULATIONS! It shows you are aware of what you do and how you go about doing it.

If you're going to succeed in using this book, awareness of who you are and tend to be these days is a critical step. *Later you will see that these insights are the very tools you'll use to enact change.*

INTRODUCTION

As the book cover suggests, my ideal reader is the self-sacrificing, never-enough overachiever who, in some fashion, is overdoing in life. In this crowded international group, often missing are recurring and extended feelings of satisfaction and joy. More likely to be present are anxiety, fretting, frustration, and other aspects of fear. Also common is accommodating and accepting these stress-generating emotions.

Many in this group can relate to the picture on the front and back covers. We sometimes need a helmet to protect ourselves when we've strapped a rocket to our backs to push through life. Even though we KNOW we are overwhelmed from saying yes too much, and might even be angry at our situation in life, we sometimes put on an even BIGGER rocket to cross our finish lines.

Take a moment. Sit back and take a couple of deep breaths.

What happens these days after you cross your finish lines?

- Is it worth it?
- Did you stop and enjoy the fruits of your efforts? Or is there NO STOPPING?

Keep breathing.

- Instead of experiencing genuine satisfaction and joy, do you find yourself with still MORE to do? *Who has time to rest? Who else but me will get this done right?*
- Have you been ignoring a nagging "should" from your inner wisdom that says something needs to change, and soon?

- Is your helmet full of dents from failing to take care of yourself or other postponements?
- Are you feeling disillusioned, plagued by guilt, or feeling the onset of regret and sadness?
- Might a smaller rocket (or no rocket at all) be a better life strategy?
- Is joy so far away that it seems impossible?

I personally think it a shame that well-intentioned, caring people are too busy and postpone feeling joy. My mission in life is to add some balancing weight of pleasure on the overweighted scales of never enough.

WHY THE TORTOISE?

I laughed when I first saw the picture of the tortoise with the helmet and the rocket strapped to its back. It so fit with how I sometimes lead my own life. I have felt a bit beaten up by life and need some protection, as the helmet suggests. It was the rocket strapped to the back of the tortoise that compelled me to use this image for the covers. Those of us who push and pull our way through life need boosters to get ourselves through our many tasks and responsibilities. (Caffeine, sugar, long workdays, working on weekends and during vacations.) I thought many of my readers would also find it humorous and fitting.

It also reminded me of Aesop's fable about the race between the tortoise and the hare. The story, as you probably recall, is about a hare who ridicules a slow-moving tortoise. Surprisingly, the tortoise challenges the hare to a race. When the race starts, the hare speeds off, leaving the tortoise far behind. Confident of winning, the hare decides to take a nap midway through the race. However, when it awakes, the hare finds the tortoise crawling slowly but steadily across the finish line.

Like the hare, we self-sacrificing, never-enough overachievers assume that at our hectic pace we can cross our ever-increasing number of finish lines. As with the hare, sometimes we find out too late we used the wrong strategy.

Maybe now is a good time to SAVE YOUR INNER TORTOISE. This is an ideal book when more of the same in your life is NOT an option. Ideal in that I know what that is like. I have found effective ways, for myself and hundreds of clients, to undermine undesirable patterns.

My aim is to make your journey across your finish lines simple and effective—right from the beginning. If you bring genuine interest, you can leave the what and how to me.

I have designed and will present *Four Steps for Saving Your Inner Tortoise*.

By means of these four steps, this book introduces insights and instructions for alternative life strategies to help you to cross your finish lines with increased satisfaction. Plus, if you are so inclined, learn how to make regular and extended visits to peace of mind and joy. This book is full of awareness activities and simple practices to help you recover your wise inner tortoise. Along the way you will hear fascinating quotes from favorite authors and teachers, insights from students and clients, as well as my story of my own journey from resentment to contentment.

Step 1: Get to know your inner tortoise.

Experience insightful activities through which you get a clear picture of where you are overdoing while underdoing well-being.

Step 2: Give your self-sacrificing, never-enough, overachieving tortoise a break.

Interrupt your current life patterns to create an essential open space for new learning to take hold.

Step 3: Save your inner tortoise ... and cross finish lines joyful and satisfied.

You don't have to change everything for everything to change. Introducing the *Universal Emotions of Well-being*.

Step 4: Create and cross new finish lines.

Use what you've learned to design and implement your own ideas for extending your well-being for longer periods, or to other relationships and areas of responsibility.

GOOD TO KNOW BEFORE YOU BEGIN

I missed the Emotions 101 classes in school. No surprise. There weren't any. Our emotional smarts came from personal experiences and lessons taught by influential people like our parents, siblings, grandparents, relatives, mentors, and teachers. We are grateful for some of these lessons, and others not so much or not at all. Some experiences triggered our most basic and oldest responses of fight, flight, or freeze. You might notice that these are all related to the emotion of fear. In my own case, my preferred ways of getting through life were pleasing (fear of being disliked) and pretending I knew something when I didn't (fear of not being good enough). I was familiar with play, fun, and laughter, and then also fraught with anxiety and worry. Frankly, it was a bit confusing. I was greatly relieved to find a way out of the confusion.

Author's Story... As with my predisposition to pessimism, mentioned in my earlier story, I was also blind to the resentment that was a driving force in my life. Unbeknownst to me, you could find me whining daily about how bad off or unhappy I was in life. As with pessimism, I felt the emotion, but I did not call it out as an emotion. In a way, the emotion had me.

In October 1994, my life took its second important emotional change in direction. I discovered that beyond my pessimism, I was a resentful person too. Not cool. I considered myself a good girl, and resentment was certainly NOT something I would have admitted to. One day, as

part of my coach training with my mentor coach, my fellow students and I drew workshop topics out of a hat for our presentation the next day. Much to my chagrin, the paper I picked up read “resentment.” I muttered to myself, *Well ... you can't expect me to speak on something I know nothing about! This isn't fair.* So as to not draw attention to my problem, I quietly offered to trade with my co-facilitator, who had drawn “resignation.” As a “pleaser” familiar with doing too much for others and feeling disappointment with the results, I felt resignation was an acceptable emotion for someone always trying to be a good girl. He declined. I muttered, *What? You can't do that!* He responded, “In my experience, Carol, resignation and resentment are related—like a brother and sister. Are you sure you know nothing of resentment from personal experience?” More silent muttering. *Damn him anyway! It's his fault I'll look stupid for my presentation.*

Back in my hotel room, something about what he said rang true. However, I immediately discounted that thought and returned to criticizing him, this stupid coach training course, his question, what a lousy co-presenter he was going to be, etc. *How dare he make me look bad? I might not pass this exam because of him!* I began frantically preparing while frustrated by my plight.

Around 10 p.m., FLASH! Oh, S—T (expletive)! I recognized my resentment toward my presentation partner for “making me” speak on this topic. Then another FLASH! The last eight months with my boss had been full of resentment. As the business owner, he was changing his strategic plan, and if I didn't change with him—which I didn't want to do—I would be out of work. *How dare he take my career and livelihood away from me? He should take care of my future ANYWAY. I deserve better. How could he do this to me? After all, I had worked so hard for him for the last five years. He owed me.*

My realization about my pattern of resentment was formulating clearly now: *Poor me!* and *Why me?* and whining to others had dominated my time for months. Yet another FLASH! Everyone but my boss knew my thoughts and feelings. Around him I made no complaints, no requests—just quiet seething. *Any good boss should have guessed what I was feeling and thinking. Any decent person would have guessed my feelings.* My face flushed and my heart pounded as my pent-up anger, resentment, and bitterness arose. And then ... the final FLASH came around midnight.

YIKES! I really am behaving as a resentful person. In fact, I am a textbook resenter: full of expectations, yet NO complaints or requests for action to someone who could resolve my concerns. No conversation with my boss. I just expected what I *never* asked for! Surprisingly, instead of my normal defensiveness, I felt relief. I could b-r-e-a-t-h-e. At that moment, the pattern was revealed and the opening for change appeared. No wonder nothing was resolved with my boss. The one person who could do something about my situation did not know what I was feeling or thinking. I had forced him into guessing why I was grumpy with him. In my head, I had had the missing conversation many times. In reality, I had not.

The topic “I didn’t know anything about” had come alive for me. My natural pessimism + my pleasing ways = active resentment. My presentation the next day began with “Hello, my name is Carol Courcy. As of 2 a.m. this morning, I am a recovering resenter.” The audience’s laughter and recognition of their own version throughout my talk remains a priceless memory. I was leaving my path of resentment for one of satisfaction and joy.

Carol's Coaching Corner: For some readers, it was obvious I was resentful after a few sentences. It was not obvious to me until I had a name for my pattern, and then all of a sudden I saw the pattern in many relationships and situations. The same will most likely be true with your journey. Emotions blind us in a way. They color and in some cases pollute the air we breathe, what we say and do not say, what we see and do not see. I didn't know the air I was breathing was tainted with resentment and anger. I was just breathing it.

After reading my story, you might notice some places in your own life where disappointment, anger, resentment, or feeling an unfulfilled sense of entitlement are a part of your emotional experiences. Perhaps you also notice that whining, wishing, and hoping do little to change your circumstances, results, or the relationships you want to improve.

I offer that if you want more satisfying and happier outcomes, you'll want to update your emotional habits. Perhaps, as I was "breathing" my pessimism and resentment, you too have been breathing the same emotional attitudes as always while expecting different results for yourself and from other people. You could have a long wait on your hands. Or...

Perhaps it is time to learn more about the indispensable skill of emotional learning.

WELCOME TO MY VERSION OF EMOTIONS 101

WHY EMOTIONAL LEARNING MATTERS

Emotions determine the quality of our lives. They occur in every relationship we care about—in the workplace, in our friendships, in dealings with family members, and in our most intimate relationships. They can save our lives, but they can also cause real damage.¹

Author's Story... The preceding statement from *Emotions Revealed* by Dr. Paul Ekman was a wake-up call. In my case, "saving my life" fit my desire to leave my resenting ways. The *aha* moment at my conference was not enough to change my behavior. Back at work, I found the resentment and anger rising again. I knew I needed to have a conversation with my boss. Turns out, I didn't know how. I had some learning to do.

Some of the necessary learning came from the authors of *A General Theory of Love*:

The superficial purposes of emotionality are plain. Exhilaration, longing, grief, loyalty, fury, love—they are the opalescent pigments that fill our lives with vibrancy and meaning. And emotions do more than color our sensory world: they are at the root of everything we do, the unquenchable origin of every act more complicated than a reflex.²

Author's Story... "... at the root of everything we do!" That one phrase helped me make a connection between my resentment and my discounting the possibility of having a good conversation about my future with my boss. I can still see the look of confusion on his face when I failed to take the partnership offer after complaining to him how unhappy I was.

It dawned on me that I wanted to be *right* about how unhappy I was more than I wanted to do something that might *make me happy*. That was my first glimpse of my "unhappy-at-all-costs" habit. Although I said I wanted to be happy, I wasn't, as we say here in the U.S., "walking my talk." Later, I would see it as part of my "nothing is ever enough" pattern.

If, beyond reflexes, emotions influence how we behave in certain situations or with certain people, emotional learning opens a whole new territory of

effective action. When we learn new emotions, new experiences are available. If our day-to-day emotions are affecting the quality of our lives, learning more useful or even pleasant ones might feed our practical sensibilities for feeling more rested and replenished. It's possible to learn alternatives to pessimism, anger, frustration, disappointment, sadness, and resentment.

Carol's Coaching Corner: There are hundreds of books on emotions and the new brain science that is making emotional learning more available to those interested in making important changes in their lives. I do not pretend to be anywhere near an expert on the science behind emotional learning. Here I offer a set of what I consider essential insights and provocative science from experts in their fields to help you trust yourself with the activities and practices in this book.

EMOTIONS ARE UNIVERSAL

Dr. Paul Ekman's extensive research in *Emotions Revealed* found seven universal emotional expressions: anger, sadness, fear, surprise, disgust, contempt, and happiness. His findings show that whether you are in New Guinea or New York, the facial expressions and recognition between people are the same.

Author's Story... When reading about these "behavioral essences" I found myself grateful that my own negative emotions were *not* individual character flaws, but simply a part of being human. I am even more grateful for the idea that being emotional is a part of being normal.

I noticed I was expressing a very limited set of these universal emotions. My emotional habit pattern included mostly anger, fear, and contempt (yet another aspect of resentment). I noticed a lack of surprise and especially of happiness. I wondered, if these were universal, how could I activate them in myself? Could I diminish the ones I was overdoing?

Looking at emotions as normal and seeing their patterns will be one of your strategic advantages for changing. You will see later in this book how you can determine when you are overdoing or underdoing a particular emotion. If you decide to change the pattern, you will be rewarded with plenty of activities, simple practices, and inspiring ideas from others who have preceded you.

WE CONFUSE BEING EMOTIONAL WITH BEING OVERLY EMOTIONAL

Some of our discomfort with admitting we have emotions, and our frequent avoidance of certain emotions, comes about because we confuse having normal emotional reactions with being overly emotional. We all have had experiences when we over- or underreacted. Feeling anxiety or even dread in anticipation of an important event, speech, meeting, or get-together is normal—often only to find our fears unfounded after a successful event. After a really bad day, we find ourselves joyful and excited as we see the taxi with our good friends arriving for a visit. Later, the bad day doesn't seem too bad at all. Having any number of emotions each day is natural. When getting married, we experience a confusing mix of happiness and anxiety, joy and fear. All appropriate if one accepts that all emotions are valid and a part of the human experience.

One of the skills you will develop from the activities in this book is learning to adjust your emotions. You will learn to interrupt undesirable emotions, as well as enlivening emotions you prefer. Over time you will find yourself over- or underreacting less and less, and feel a sense of increased well-being.

How can that happen?

THE SECRET TO SAVING YOUR INNER TORTOISE: EMOTIONAL AGILITY

Discovering a greater sense of well-being does NOT require more time, a new job, a different boss, or a bigger bank balance. To take a break from worry or suffering, you do not need a better past, or different family members or relationships. I present ... emotional agility. Without changing your current life circumstances, you can enter new emotional patterns and exit old ones, feel replenished, and find renewed energy.

You don't have to change everything for everything to change

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL AGILITY?

Emotion: The origin of the word emotion is *émouvoir*, “to set in motion.” What are you putting in motion emotionally these days? Are you calming, stirring up, disturbing, holding tenderly, or ...?

Agility is ease of movement and liveliness. For example, the ability to change the body's position efficiently requires the integration and coordination of isolated movements. As we learn a new dance move or software program, with practice we can become more and more agile and competent. So too with emotional learning.

Emotional agility: The ability to enter and exit emotions with skill, ease, and intentionality. Emotions that seem foreign to us or uncomfortable in the beginning become easier to access, as we activate them enough over time that they become part of our emotional repertoire.

Another way of looking at emotional agility is measuring your current level of agility. How agile, lively, and flexible are you? Members of the self-sacrificing, never-enough, overachieving crowd often push and pull at life. We frequently overextend ourselves for others, tolerate pain, or ignore health warnings and other signs indicating we should not do so much. Another part of our pattern? We have plenty of good reasons and excuses. We lack the agility or skill to balance all our efforts with activities that refuel us. For example, are you good at taking on challenges, yet not as good at doing what replenishes you? Do you end your days tired and satisfied with your efforts? Or just tired? Are you able to move effectively through your day-to-day commitments and then rest easy? Are you having any fun? (Or do you have to work before you play, and once your workday is over, there's no time left to bring joy to yourself or to others important to you?)

HOW DOES EMOTIONAL AGILITY WORK?

Aristotle offers a hint of the learning journey ahead:

*We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an action but a habit.*
~ Aristotle

Think about that ... we ARE what we repeatedly do? This holds true for honorable qualities like excellence, as well as less enlivening personal patterns like exhaustion or worrying. Where might this hold true for you?

- If you repeatedly overdo or say *yes* too much, feeling overwhelmed is the natural emotion that becomes a hard habit to break. If you keep justifying your way of being, it becomes an even stronger emotional pattern.
- Saying *yes* when you mean *no* breeds resentment. Do you blame others for your yeses?
- If you repeatedly say *I cannot*, can resignation and disappointment be far behind?

Carol's Coaching Corner: Exhaustion and dissatisfaction persist with never-ending shoulds, needs, and have-tos. There is no satisfaction if there's *always* more that could or should be done. Even when done, there is more to do.

The #1 rule of those living in insufficiency and “never enough”? *Nothing is ever enough*. Little emotional agility there.

ANOTHER SECRET TO SAVING OUR INNER TORTOISE? PRACTICE!

In *Destructive Emotions*, the Dalai Lama, Daniel Goleman, and other scientists offer us advice on why emotional agility can work:

A decade ago the dogma in neuroscience was that the brain contained all of its neurons at birth and it was unchanged by life's experiences...

But the new watchword in brain science is “neuro-plasticity,” the notion that the brain continually changes as a result of our experiences—whether through fresh connections between neurons or through the generation of utterly new neurons...

There is an undeniable impact on the brain, mind and body from extensive practice. ... The important idea is

that this process is within reach of anyone who applies himself or herself with enough determination. ... It can be trained because the very structure of our brain can be modified.³

The idea of neuroplasticity combined with a yearning to accrue desirable emotional changes makes emotional agility a skill and not just a hope. We do not have to feel trapped by familiar pessimism, resentment, and a nagging sense of insufficiency. We also are not condemned to excessive pleasing, self-sacrificing, guilt, and out-of-control perfectionism forever. We do not have to wait until our circumstances in life or the people around us change. With practice, I changed. I am still changing. Hundreds of students and clients are changing. So can you.

How much and how long to practice is something you will see for yourself. By doing the activities in Steps 1 and 2, you will find ways of shifting your emotions with more ease in a surprisingly short amount of time. My strategy for this book—simple and easy. I have designed the activities and practices with quick results for you in mind. As you build skill and confidence, you will take on the more difficult situations of your choosing.

Carol's Coaching Corner: Notice the absence of *hard* or *challenging* as a standard? Instead I am using *easy* and *simple*. That is intentional on my part. As an emeritus member of the self-sacrificing, never-enough, overachiever club, I know the patterns and tendencies. Work always comes before play. And if there is no play, so be it. Hard work is seen as more valuable than easy work.

I am proposing that, for a brief period, you consider replacing the “life has to be hard in order to be valued” belief with an orientation toward satisfaction and joy as your motivating force.

You will discover that *simple* and *easy* produces results too. You have choices as to how hard you make your life.

When I am in a period of drought, my chief enemy is despair. I am afraid to harbor hope, and yet it is the gentle harboring of hope that is the antidote to dryness of the spirit. In arid times, we must practice a very gentle discipline.⁴

At every step in this book, you will learn gentle disciplines for increasing your sense of well-being. Repetition will be key to your success. Doing a bit more of what you want for yourself every day is all that is needed to increase your sense of well-being. If we combine Aristotle's and Cameron's thoughts, by practicing hope, satisfaction, joy, or playfulness we can outwit despair or other emotions we consider destructive in some way.

Carol's Coaching Corner: Replacing destructive emotional patterns with new patterns associated with well-being—such as satisfaction and joy—is a part of this learning methodology. As you engage in the activities, these new emotions influence your behavior. More well-being creeps into day-to-day life. A benefit is that you will notice what does and doesn't work in your life. (Speaking up about disappointments sooner rather than later was better for me than staying mute.) You will have a choice of doing more of what does work or going back to your old pattern. Success for you will come by doing your part.

Author's Story... Leaving my own resentment habit required me to take responsibility for my happiness. I would have to leave blaming others behind. To be honest, at the time I wasn't so sure that was something I wanted to do. I found myself hedging. After all, unhappiness wasn't so bad. *I'm really not that tired or overwhelmed.* Being unhappy didn't take much energy on my part. Blaming others was a type of relief, taking the pressure off me.

To start undoing my well-honed skills of pleasing to the point of resentment, I needed my mentor coach Jan's simple instructions on satisfaction: to say yes when I meant yes, and no when I meant no.

Although the concept seemed simple, it was not easy in all relationships. (No surprise. My boss and clients were not used to me EVER saying no. They resisted at first. One even asked me if I didn't feel well.) This initial task extended over weeks. As Julia Cameron called it, this one "gentle discipline" was more than enough to bring a newfound feeling of control over my daily work schedule. (To remain responsible for my happiness, I remain mindful of this practice to this day.)

EMOTIONAL AGILITY IN REAL LIFE

Aristotle gives us a hint about emotional agility in real life:

Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.⁵

Author's Story... Initially, I thought my recently acknowledged anger and resentment were something to get rid of. (No surprise, given that I had waited until a boiling point to express them. Who wouldn't want to stop that?) To be more realistic, my challenge was not getting *rid* of some emotions, but employing them effectively, as Aristotle suggests.

For example, over time, I found that sometimes my resentment was indeed the appropriate emotion. After someone breaks a promise, resentment or anger is appropriate, given the betrayal of trust. However, we often assume that what has been will continue to be. We live our expectations as promises to be kept forever.

What I had to practice was speaking up about my disappointments and unfulfilled expectations MUCH sooner. Although clumsy with my first few attempts, I was able to tell my boss how angry and disappointed I was that he was changing the company. In those conversations, I learned the difference between an expectation and a promise. I expected that my good work meant I had a job forever. No one had promised me that. Even I wouldn't have said that—yet I behaved as if I did. I had assumed that our good working relationship meant he would continue to want my skills. (He did!

He offered me a partnership.) When I declined, he went forward with his changes. In the end, I simply didn't like the work I would be doing. That was my choice. I had not seen it as a choice until this conversation.

After months of angst, our issues were resolved. The air felt cleaner between us. I no longer felt dread on the way to work. I had found the right moment for the conversation and the right amount of time. (A lunch, not on the run to a meeting.) I had expressed my anger to the right degree and made a complaint. Instead of damaging my relationship with further muteness, I recovered our relationship by speaking up. That had NOT been obvious to me while I was under the influence of resentment. By discovering that I could employ the emotion of anger in more effective ways, I now had a way to not leave myself or my boss wondering why our relationship was off kilter.

Emotional agility helps you recognize how your emotions are influencing your life experiences and your relationships. As Dr. Ekman suggests, emotions affect the quality of our lives. If needed, emotional agility also can show us how to have the right conversations, with the right person, for the right purpose, in the right way, at the right time, and to the right degree.

If that is good news, here is more!

EMOTIONAL AGILITY IS SOMETHING WE ALREADY KNOW

Each of us has successfully shifted an emotion or changed an attitude toward something or someone. You have probably done it this past week a few times!

Each of these is an example of emotional agility in action:

- Sighing or taking a deep breath.
- Gritting your teeth or pounding on the steering wheel.
- Telling yourself to “grin and bear it” or “make the best of something” and doing just that.

- “Sucking it up,” as they say, and staying mute. (In other words, withholding a reaction.)
- Deciding to read one of those funny or inspiring emails you get that sometimes bother you, and being glad you did.
- Contacting a friend just to talk or feel better.
- Saying “enough for now” and taking a break.
- When frantic, asking for help and then feeling more at ease.
- When frantic, *not* asking for help and finding yourself more worried.
- When unhappy, intentionally doing a good thing for another and feeling your spirits lift.
- Avoiding doing something you know you will regret.
- Thinking you might regret something and doing it anyway.
- Needing a change of scenery and going to a favorite place.
- Sitting back in your chair, looking out the window for a few minutes, and then going back to work.
- Daydreaming.
- Treating yourself in a caring manner.
- Telling yourself to be nicer to someone and then doing that.
- Suspending your own desires for the sake of another.
- Being happy when you did what you said you would do—even when it was difficult.

Each of these and hundreds of other actions shifted your emotional state and, for a time, your life felt different!

Congratulations! You are *not* a rank beginner at emotional agility.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES FROM PRACTICING EMOTIONAL AGILITY

Before I invented my own ways of practicing emotional agility, my own skill was more accidental than predictable. My emotional wisdom tended to come after the fact and way too late in some situations. I kept hoping I would do better next time. Sometimes I did, but most of the time I did not. I now say that I lacked the right emotion for that situation at hand.

My aim with this book is to bring more intentionality and predictability to your developing skill of emotional agility.

As you try on new emotions in the coming days and weeks, here is what to expect:

- Less overwhelm and more relief or satisfaction
- More periods of contentment instead of ongoing frustration
- Courage or calm instead of persistent anxiety and fear
- Increased acceptance, graciousness, and dignity for yourself and others
- A vacation from persistent disappointment or regret
- Increased satisfaction instead of ever-present dissatisfaction and guilt
- Ambition instead of procrastination or inertia
- Peace instead of anger or bitterness

I hope that this section on my version of Emotions 101 has dispelled some of the mystery about having emotions. My hope is that I have triggered a desire in you to move forward with your own mastery of other approaches to a well-lived life. There is more Emotions 101 information to come, plus inspiring insights from clients and students from their journeys.

I have designed this book in an *owner's manual* format, offering dozens of insights as to *why* and *how* emotional agility works to initiate and sustain desired changes. In Steps 1 and 2, there are activities with step-by-step instructions to begin your transformation immediately. In Steps 3 and 4, as you gain confidence and skill, you will design your own learning activities for situations and relationships that you deem worthy of or necessary to change.

Ready to *save your inner tortoise*? Interested in crossing your finish lines with more joy and satisfaction?

Take a few deep breaths, and start when you are ready.