



UK Extension's
**Universe of
Possibilities™**

SKILLS FOR CREATING HAPPINESS AND BLESSING OTHERS

Making the Growth Choice

Talking to his grandson, a Native American man said, “I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is selfish, insensitive, and strikes out at those around me. The other wolf is kind, courageous, and loving.” The grandson asked, “Which wolf will win the fight?” His grandfather replied, “The one I feed.”

Like the Native American grandfather, we feed either our positive or negative tendencies with each choice we make. When you frequently think a particular thought, you feed that thought with your time and energy and allow it to grow in strength and express itself in your life.

For example, have you known someone who constantly worried about getting sick? Because such people repeatedly feed thoughts of sickness, they often experience more than their share of illness. Our thoughts are like mental magnets; for better or worse, whatever we choose to dwell on, we tend to draw to us.

In each of your many daily decision points, one choice is usually the best for you. It's called the Growth Choice because it promotes your vitality, growth, and happiness. As each of us increases the number of Growth Choices we make, our loved ones, our communities, and our world family all benefit.

7 Core Principles

- 1** For each of us, life is a continuous series of choices, and as we begin to pay close attention to these choices and their impact, we awaken to a new sense of power, freedom, and possibility.
- 2** Nearly all of our choices can be understood as yes or no decisions—saying no to that third piece of carrot cake, telling your daughter it's OK to borrow the car, sending a blessing to a friend who comes to mind, or saying yes to putting 5 percent of your paycheck into savings.
- 3** In each of your daily decision points, you can usually sense one choice—called the Growth Choice—that is the best option for you and all those concerned.
- 4** Each Growth Choice you make simultaneously promotes your growth and happiness as well as the growth and happiness of those around you.
- 5** Often, it is difficult to make the best choice because there is a war raging within and around us between positive and negative tendencies.
- 6** By learning to engage skillfully in the battle between positive and negative forces, you more frequently make wise choices, thus growing in strength, wisdom, and happiness.
- 7** Remember, the more centered you are on the Target of Life, the greater your well-being, the wiser your choices, and the more effective you are in everything you do.

Put yourself in the center of the heart of the Target of Life. **Notice that the heart of the Target is clear, unobstructed, full of light.** From there, you see clearly and make choices that are good for you and those around you. You are attuned to your inner guidance and best judgment. You feel at peace, strong, compassionate, joyful, energetic, and creative. Your reflexes are sharp, your immune system strong. You stumble and fall less often, and you handle life's inevitable challenges with more confidence and skill. Your ability to endure prolonged hardship increases. You are naturally more sensitive to others—more patient, generous, and understanding. You more easily express the richness of your authentic self. The more deeply centered you are in the heart of the Target of Life, the more love you feel and share. **You are at your best—physically, mentally, and spiritually.**



Target of Life

Although you undoubtedly have experienced being relatively centered, often little and big things happen that go against your desires and expectations, and you are likely to find yourself thrown off center and pulled out of your heart's wisdom into the surrounding web of minor frustrations and energy-drainers. Your vitality, peace, and sensitivity begin to fade, and little tensions, doubts, and fears start to emerge. Stress creeps in and things bother you more easily. You are more critical of yourself and edgier with the people in your life. Your effectiveness, spiritual attunement, and physical health start to slip.

All of this can pull you even further away from the center of the Target of Life into the area of increased darkness and sharp edges. When you are in this portion of the Target, you have strayed still further away from your center—your heart of hearts, your home of love, wisdom, and joy. Stress levels are high, and it's much more difficult to sense your inner guidance. You're far more likely to become irritable with co-workers and friends, to yell at family members, and to make poor decisions in every area of life. Tension, disharmony, and fatigue take their toll on your creativity and physical well-being. You and everyone around you are affected negatively.

Beyond this portion of the Target of Life is the outer darkness. Here you can't see well at all; it's a terrible place to be. Insecurity, doubt, confusion, and selfishness are rampant. Stress soars to dangerous levels, and good judgment plummets to an all-time low. You feel heavy and burdened and make decisions that hurt yourself and others. You are driven by fear, blindness, and anger. In this outer darkness your health suffers tremendously, and all kinds of abuse, destruction, and violence flourish. Despite your inherent goodness, you may find yourself saying and doing horrendous things. Truly, it's a living hell.

Every individual has a Target of Life as does every relationship, organization, city, and nation. Even the world as a whole has a Target of Life, and when the world moves too far from its center of love, an array of major problems erupt, including disease, poverty, environmental disasters, international strife, and war.

It is our individual and collective choices that move us away from our intuitive wisdom at the center of the Target of Life into varying degrees of stress, confusion, frustration, and conflict. **Fortunately, by making wise choices at any time, we can move back toward the center of the Target into greater levels of peace, vitality, kindness, and opportunity.**

In the gift of choice lies our greatest power—a power that can be used to uplift or destroy. The Target of Life is a helpful way to understand our individual and collective well-being. **With awareness and practice, we can become highly skilled at detecting and creatively responding to the early signs of harmful stress.** We can gradually learn to stay more deeply centered with increasing frequency, saving ourselves all kinds of trouble and our society billions of dollars in unnecessary health care costs.

If you have a strong spiritual orientation, you may find it helpful to think of being centered as being in the heart of the Divine Presence—the source of all goodness, harmony, abundance, and creativity. As temptations confront you and you allow yourself to be lured into making less than optimal decisions, you stray from the center of Divine Love into varying degrees of fear, pain, and self-defeating behaviors. To move toward the center of Divine Presence or toward a self-created hell of outer darkness, to go more deeply into love and joy or to separate yourself from the Divine and become lost in fear and confusion—these are decisions that you face each day. By staying centered and honoring your intuitive guidance, by remaining alert and choosing wisely, you can be at your best more frequently and help to create a world of marvelous possibilities.



Many of us spend large amounts of time on “automatic pilot”—a state in which our power of choice is partially asleep. We behave in a habit-like, almost mechanical way. When we’re on automatic pilot, we react to the events of life instead of creatively taking charge. We lose touch with our power of choice and the immense freedom and vast possibilities it bestows.

You and I are always “at choice.” We can decide to say yes or no, to go here or there, to listen to the “still, small voice within” or not. ***When you think about it, life is a continuous series of choices, and to a large degree, the hundreds of mostly small decisions we make each day are the ones that shape our character and our lives.***

In a world where death is the hunter, my friend, there is no time for regrets or doubts. There is only time for decisions.

Carlos Castaneda

Some decisions—whether to have chocolate swirl or mango ice cream, for example—may not be all that important, but countless other daily decision points do play a vital role in shaping the quality of our lives and our happiness. ***When we choose wisely at these decision points, that’s called making the Growth Choice.*** As we become more aware of our decisions and more skilled in making Growth Choices, a bright new world of opportunity opens up.

Then, even in the most deeply oppressing circumstances, we can stay in charge of our own dignity, feel good about our choices, and be a blessing to others. Victor Frankl, psychiatrist, author, and Holocaust survivor, said it well: “We who lived in the concentration camps can remember those who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from us but one thing: the last of our freedoms—the freedom to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

The purpose of this entire publication is to remind you of one simple but incredibly powerful fact: ***In every circumstance, you are given the amazingly powerful freedom to choose your thoughts, attitudes, and actions.*** This gift of choice is your ticket to optimal success in a world filled with problems and almost limitless possibilities. When you awaken fully to your precious gift of choice, new achievements become possible, you grow in happiness, and you have far more to give to loved ones and to our troubled world, which so desperately needs an influx of positive energy.

LIFE IS A BATTLEFIELD

As you no doubt have noticed, making the Growth Choice—doing what you inwardly feel is best—can be difficult. That’s because ***there is an almost continuous battle going on between your negative tendencies and your positive tendencies.***

It might be a conflict between taking an invigorating walk in the fresh evening air versus mindlessly watching television as you eat the last two pieces of that cherry cheesecake. It might be a split-second decision on whether to make an unnecessary critical remark or to remain silent, or it might be a surprisingly seductive invitation to cheat on your spouse, catching you totally off-guard. The temptation to side with our lower nature can be almost overwhelming. At these times, it often becomes crystal clear that life is, indeed, a battlefield and that a war rages within each of us.

We can’t escape this battle between our lower and higher natures. To be alive is to be on the battlefield, and if we are to grow in peace, love, and joy, we must summon the general of wise decisions to fight off the inevitable attacks by the negative forces of fear, greed, and unkindness.

Throughout history, in the great stories of life and in popular movies such as the Star Wars series, we see the cosmic battle between good and evil played out. In our everyday lives, we also witness battles of this same war in every act of injustice that is challenged and in every expression of courageous creativity that lessens pain, gives birth to beauty, or stretches the boundaries of what is possible.

All the answers are within you right now if you just take the time to be still and listen, in quiet and solitude, and then act on what you hear.

Susan Smith Jones

Properly understood, the battle of life is an opportunity for building our muscles of discernment, strength, faith, and loving-kindness.

It's a training ground for being alert and choosing to make the wisest decisions possible. It's the way we gradually learn, with ever-increasing skill, to choose love instead of fear.

It's what Francis of Assisi meant when he said, "Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy." In each of these examples, Francis encourages us to choose compassion and love, to be a blessing to ourselves and others, to make the Growth Choice.

GRAY CLOUDS AND PINK HEARTS

Your life is maintained by energy that continually pours into you and through you. Where does this energy come from? Many would say that the gift of life and the energy that sustains it ultimately come from God or the universe. On a more basic level, however, we can say that your life energy comes from solid foods, liquids, and the air you breathe, as well as from the sun and from the extremely fine atmospheric or cosmic energy that continually surrounds us. Through the intelligent use of willpower, we can draw more extensively on the omnipresent cosmic energy. In all these ways, immense amounts of energy pour into your brain and heart and all the tissues of your body.

In addition to nourishing the cells and atoms of your physical body, the stream of incoming energy is employed each time you think, speak, or act. As you use energy in these ways, you inevitably put your personal stamp on it—in either a positive or negative way—and send it back into the world where it plays a small but important role in either uplifting or burdening

us all. Energy works this way for each of us, and ***our decisions to use energy in positive or negative ways dramatically affect our individual and collective well-being.***

When we use energy positively in kindness, creativity, laughter, or self-discipline, for example, we benefit physically, mentally, and spiritually. When we use energy negatively in fear, anger, or striking out at one another, we reap pain and heaviness. Once again, our actions not only affect us personally, they also influence those around us and our entire world.

Think about it this way: Imagine that with every negative thought, word, and action, you send into the world a little gray cloud. Similarly, imagine that with each positive use of energy, you send forth a little pink heart. It works this way for each of us, and when there are too many gray clouds and not enough pink hearts, all kinds of troubles crop up in our families, our communities, and our world. On the positive side, as we each take responsibility for increasing our loving thoughts and actions, the massive accumulation of little pink hearts can literally help to transform our relationships and our world.

You should carefully observe the way toward which your heart draws you, then choose this way with all your strength.

Martin Buber

If you think all this talk about energy, gray clouds, and pink hearts is mere symbolism with no substance to it, think again. ***In recent decades, respected frontier scientists from across the globe have amassed an impressive body of findings that strongly suggest we do, indeed, live in a common energy field, that our individual choices make a collective difference, and that we are all far more powerful and interconnected than we previously realized.*** In her book, *The Field*, investigative journalist Lynne McTaggart has summarized a portion of this groundbreaking evidence.

CHOICE POINTS

So, life is a battlefield upon which our positive and negative tendencies war against each other; and to be victorious, it is essential that we become keenly aware of our choices and decide to use our energy in positive ways according to the dictates of our inner guidance. ***Perhaps the most important choice we can make in our daily lives is repeatedly to opt for love instead of fear.*** The Christian Bible tells us that “perfect love casts out fear.” Other scriptures and philosophies the world over echo the same sentiment.

Love is a Principle of Happiness and, on the battlefield of life, the opposing negative force is fear. The chart on the right outlines other significant choice points. Look over this chart carefully, and ponder the little and big decisions we often make with regard to each Principle of Happiness. ***What other Principles of Happiness would you add to the list?***



QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

One good question at the right time, a question that prompts you to think in a fresh and positive way, can be worth a shelf full of books. ***Think about the broad topic of making Growth Choices and the many associated factors; then write down several related questions that come to mind.*** Ponder your questions and discuss your responses with a friend or with a small group. In addition to questions you come up with, you may also draw from the following questions:

- ✧ *The more centered a person is in the heart of the Target of Life, the more victorious he or she will be on the battlefield of life.* Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- ✧ How quickly can you catch negative thoughts and prevent them from controlling your life?
- ✧ *Like a boomerang, the energy we send out (positive or negative) tends to draw to it more of its kind and then return to us.* How much truth do you think lies in this observation?

A SAMPLE OF CHOICE POINTS

| Principle of Happiness | Opposing Negative Force |
|-------------------------|---|
| Love | <i>fear</i> |
| Calmness | <i>restlessness, worry, agitation</i> |
| Enthusiasm | <i>apathy, indifference</i> |
| Spontaneity | <i>being ill at ease, self-conscious</i> |
| Cheerfulness | <i>gloominess, despondency</i> |
| Optimism | <i>pessimism, hopelessness</i> |
| Honesty | <i>not being forthright and truthful</i> |
| Compassion | <i>failure to feel for others</i> |
| Kindness | <i>insensitivity, hurting another</i> |
| Acceptance | <i>denial of what is</i> |
| Perseverance | <i>quitting without good cause</i> |
| Adventure | <i>boredom, dullness, monotony</i> |
| Friendship | <i>loneliness, unhealthy isolation</i> |
| Loyalty | <i>not being true to another</i> |
| Assertiveness | <i>failure to act on inner knowing</i> |
| Authenticity | <i>hiding, not being real</i> |
| Simplicity | <i>clutter—physical or mental</i> |
| Playfulness | <i>overly serious and sedate</i> |
| Humor | <i>lack of lightness and laughter</i> |
| Joy | <i>sadness, depression</i> |
| Tolerance | <i>not allowing other viewpoints</i> |
| Order | <i>disorder, chaos, confusion</i> |
| Beauty | <i>disharmony, ugliness</i> |
| Patience | <i>unwillingness to trust and wait</i> |
| Poise | <i>lack of grace and composure</i> |
| Concentration | <i>restlessness, inability to focus</i> |
| Humility | <i>false self-importance</i> |
| Stewardship | <i>selfish, wasteful use of resources</i> |
| Nutrition | <i>poor eating habits</i> |
| Exercise | <i>detrimental inactivity</i> |
| Rest | <i>fatigue, lack of sleep</i> |
| Safety | <i>unwise exposure to injury</i> |
| Confidence | <i>self-doubt, feeling inadequate</i> |
| Flexibility | <i>inability to bend, stretch, flow</i> |
| Creativity | <i>lack of initiative and originality</i> |
| Respect | <i>discourtesy, rudeness</i> |
| Vision | <i>lack of purpose or direction</i> |
| Appreciation | <i>criticism, fault-finding</i> |
| Smiling | <i>bland or harsh expression</i> |
| Relaxation | <i>stress, strain, blocked energy</i> |
| Faith | <i>doubt, disbelief, insecurity</i> |
| Gratitude | <i>lack of appreciation</i> |



SKILL BUILDERS

Skill builders help you exercise your creative muscles to give you the strength you need for success. *See what kinds of imaginative exercises you can come up with on the topic of making Growth Choices.* Let the skill builders below trigger additional ideas. As with physical fitness workouts, benefits come from actually *doing* the exercises.

- ◆ At night, examine impartially the events of your day. How well did your positive tendencies fare in their skirmishes with the forces of negativity? Learn from your victories and shortcomings.
- ◆ List what energizes you and what zaps your energy. Then find creative ways to bring more energizers into your daily life and to eliminate or reduce energy drainers.
- ◆ On a little card, write this truth: *Happiness is a choice!* Carry it with you, refer to it often, and apply its wisdom to the present moment.
- ◆ Be a secret agent whose mission is to add happy energy and sparkle to the lives of others.



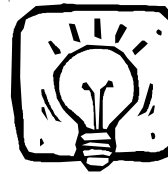
A NEW POSSIBILITY

Bringing a dream to life is a journey. It begins and continues one step at a time. Think about all that you have learned from this publication and how you might put it into practice. Then choose one small goal that you want to accomplish in the next few days. Move toward a new possibility that is really important to you—one that you are enthusiastic about and are confident you can achieve.

Take a card or a piece of paper and at the top, write "A New Possibility." Under this heading, briefly state what you will do and by when. Sign this action plan and put it where you will see it often. Tell a supportive friend or family member about your goal, and frequently visualize yourself

following through. Be prepared just in case doubts or roadblocks crop up. Know that you can always draw upon faith, firm resolve, and creativity to overcome any obstacles that may arise.

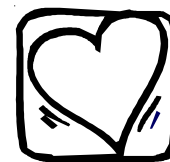
When you put the deepest desires of your heart into action, it naturally benefits others, either directly or indirectly. Have fun with your action plan; make a difference; inspire others. Dare to envision new possibilities, and then create your dreams one step at a time.



POSITIVE THOUGHTS

You may find the following brief thoughts (or similar ones that you create) to be simple yet powerful inspirational tools. You might, for example, memorize and, with deep feeling and concentration, mentally repeat one of these seed thoughts or write it on a card and place it where you'll see it often.

- ♥ Today I pay careful attention to each decision I make, always being sure to consult the unfailing counsel of my inner guidance.
- ♥ No matter what happens to me, I choose to respond in a positive, constructive manner.
- ♥ I strive to make choices that are good for the environment, that benefit others, and that spread joy and kindness to all.



LOVE MADE VISIBLE

Together, let us envision and build a world where all people enjoy optimal well-being. Let us strive to awaken fresh thinking, new enthusiasm, and abundant love. Let us create a world of unimagined possibilities. It can be done!

10 Educational Modules

UK Extension's Universe of Possibilities™: Skills for Creating Happiness and Blessing Others is an educational series containing 10 modules. Each module is accompanied by a Macromedia Flash® movie, a PowerPoint® presentation, and other teaching tools. All these resources, along with a Facilitator's Guide, are available free-of-charge in camera-ready format at the following website: www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/possibilities.

1. **Your Vision Map**

2. **Making the Growth Choice**

3. **The Way of Peace**

4. **Heart Intelligence**

5. **The Freedom of Self-Discipline**



6. **Embracing This Present Moment**

7. **Accepting and Loving Your Body**

8. **Healthy Relationships**

9. **Unleashing Your Creativity**

10. **Gifts of Gratitude and Blessing**

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