



Module #2 of 10—*Short Version*

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 this wise 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.

Target of Life. Look at the Target of Life symbol that appears at the upper left side of this page. Put yourself on the Target in the center of the heart. 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 feel peaceful, energetic, 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. You are naturally more sensitive to others—more patient, generous, and understanding. 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.

However, when difficulties arise and things don't go your way, you're likely to be pulled off center into the darker areas of the Target. You say and do things you regret. Your immune system weakens and your productivity declines. You lose touch with what's really important to you. Unhealthy stress increases and your sensitivity toward others decreases. And the further away from the center you move, the worse it gets! You experience more heaviness and darkness, more fear and negativity. That's why it's so important to catch early signs of stress and to use all of your creativity to stay as centered as possible.



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.
- 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 our 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.

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 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 seemingly intractable problems and with almost limitless possibilities. When you awaken fully to your precious gift of choice, marvelous 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. It could even 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 wisely choose compassion and love, to be a blessing to ourselves and to 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.

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

Martin Buber

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—a simple yet powerful metaphor that modern field theory research supports: 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.



Sam Quick, Ph.D., Extension Specialist in Human Development and Family Relations, and **Alex Lesueur, Jr., M.S.L.S.**, Staff Support Associate. (References and background reading can be found in the eight-page version of this publication.) A hearty thank you to the many professionals who reviewed and helped edit these publications. They are acknowledged on the Possibilities website noted below.

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**