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Preface

If you were all alone in the universe with no one to talk to, no one with which to share the beauty of the stars, to laugh with, to touch, what would be your purpose in life? It is other life, it is love, which gives your life meaning.

Mitsugi Saotome

Writing and speaking about finding better balance and happiness in life is extremely fulfilling. It creates new experiences from which I draw interesting insights and connections and lets me share my observations with others. The more I talk about it and write about it, the more I get to share. What good is wisdom if it's not shared?

In my first book, *21 Days to Better Balance*, I introduced 21 themes to help readers connect with themselves and find more balance in their mind, body, and spirit. With this book, I help readers connect with others and find better balance in their relationships.

Balance is a natural state. Returning to better balance means removing the barriers to balance within us, many of them created by our own thoughts and behaviors. In this book, I highlight several of the guiding principles I've found that have had the largest impact on the balance in my relationships. Sometimes the best teacher is our own experience.

Human beings were designed to work in harmony and unity with one another. My hope is that the personal observations and insights that I've used to help find better balance in my relationships will help you find better balance in yours.

To your best balanced life!

Michael Thomas Sunnarborg
August 2012

Introduction

Relationships are the foundation of our personal growth and expansion in this lifetime. We are naturally wired to connect and collaborate with others—those with the same energy source contained within ourselves—the collective human life force. Regardless of whether the relationship is with a family member, significant other, co-worker, friend, or acquaintance, all of our relationships are extremely powerful and assist us in creating our life stories.

Balanced relationships contain core essential elements including respect, appreciation, and freedom. In a balanced relationship, each person is responsible for his or her own behavior. Balanced relationships are equitable; both people contribute equally. Lack of balance in a relationship can show up as criticism, control, or neglect. Unhealthy relationships not only erode the mind and body, they create barriers and slow our spiritual growth.

In this book, I will lead you through 21 steps based on a larger three-stage balance process of awareness, alignment, and activation, designed to gently shift your perspective, remove barriers, and help you find better balance in your relationships. Through this process you will have the opportunity to establish new thoughts and perspectives that will help bring more balance and harmony to your connections with others.

There are three chapters in the book, each focusing on one of the three stages. Each chapter leads you through seven steps included in the balance process. At the end of each chapter is an exercise to help reinforce that stage of development.

Each of the 21 steps has a theme. At the end of each theme are questions for a Balance Plan and a Call to Action. You can find the questions and the

calls to action easily by looking for the following icons at the end of each section.



Balance Plan questions



Call to Action

You might find it useful to journal about the questions or simply mull them over during your day. They can also serve as a useful meditation focus; simply bring the questions into your mind during your regular meditation practice and notice the thoughts that float up in response. The Call to Action is a “to-do” activity designed to help you apply the lessons from each step. Putting theory into practice helps integrate the concepts into your experience.

The steps are progressive. You will understand them best if you read them in order—at least the first time through. Once you’ve completed the book you can return to any of the themes or exercises to refresh yourself as needed.

The content in this book is very direct. If any of the introductory text feels overwhelming, try skipping ahead and reading the accompanying story before rereading the larger messages. This may help you set the appropriate context for the theme.

As well as supplying you with information, this book will help you create a Balance Plan. The plan is meant to help you apply the insights contained in this book. A plan template is included in the *21 Steps to Better Relationships Workbook* available online and at 21stepstorelationships.com. Start by thinking of a current relationship in your life where you’d like to create better balance and use the plan to document your answers to the questions. Your plan can help shed light on aspects of your relationship, and it will

21 Steps to Better Relationships

support you in brainstorming potential actions and improvements. You can make a Balance Plan for any relationship in which you'd like to find better balance—simply apply the questions from any or all of the steps.

Remember: The power to change your relationships is *always* in your hands. Make a commitment to pay closer attention to your interactions with others and create the momentum to bring more love, peace, joy, and harmony to all of your relationships. It's your choice.

Let's get started!

Chapter 1: Welcome to Awareness

Awareness

*I awoke, only to find that the rest
of the world is still asleep.*

Leonardo da Vinci

Our relationships are central to understanding our purpose in this lifetime. We learn from our connections with others through our similarities and contrasts. We make choices by harnessing the power of our thoughts, feelings, and intuition. In order to find better balance with others, we must first become aware of the factors that influence our relationships.

The first seven steps focus on awareness. Raising our awareness reminds us that the power to change our relationships always begins with noticing what's happening in the present moment.

Step 1: Know Thyself

*This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

William Shakespeare

All relationships begin with you. The words "Know Thyself" were inscribed on the entrance to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi thousands of years ago. Knowing your current limitations and learning from your experience continue to be essential today. Take the time to develop the most important relationship—the one with yourself.

To know yourself is to love and accept yourself *as you are*—even with the attributes you strive to improve. Being in a healthy relationship with yourself starts with the awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and intuition, and then using that knowledge in your life and relationships. Your experiences become your story. Only *you* are the expert on your life.

Relationships with others are always a direct reflection of the relationship you have with yourself. When you know yourself—your strengths, joys, limitations, and fears—you can present yourself to others with truth and transparency. Take the time to know yourself—your *best* self. Know that you have worth and value. Believe in yourself and others will believe in you.

Being aware of who you are brings truth and transparency to your relationships.

It was apparent at an early age that I was gifted with an abundance of energy, naturally extroverted, and happiest around people. It wasn't until after college, when I moved to Hawaii, that I started exploring my true *expanded* self. I found balance for my exuberance by connecting with the quiet spirit within—a deeply curious side of me that was hungry

for more meaning. As I began to spend more time with myself, I learned to appreciate the value of solitude. I had always been energized by people, but I was now also energized by nature. I had discovered a newfound peace in simply watching waves and appreciating sunsets.

This new relationship with myself was exhilarating! Once I became acquainted with my deeper inner self, I was able to stretch my imagination to new heights. I found myself with access to a wider variety of thoughts, emotions, and creative energies than ever before.



In what ways could you know yourself better? What parts of yourself seem undeveloped, hidden, or mysterious?



In what ways do your closest relationships help you to be your “best self”?



Excuse Me, Who Are You?

Make a list of the most important people in your life, and then answer the following questions: How do those who love you see you differently? What feels true? What feels false or inauthentic? Which relationships reflect your best self, and which reflect the parts you want to change? Recognize and appreciate your ability to become aware of your relationships and how they are reflections of you.