



CONTINUING EDUCATION THAT MAKES A CHANGE

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Course Name: Life's Law #2: People do what they are going to do
Course Number: LL2
CEU: 2.0
Instructor: Philip Copitch, Ph.D.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. You will study Life Law #2.
2. You will read real life examples of how to work with angry young adult patients.
3. You will study ways to keep defensive walls down.
4. You will experience story telling as a therapeutic tool
5. You will see ways to open up a discussion with a teen or young adult patient.

SUGGESTED PREREQUISITE COURSES

None

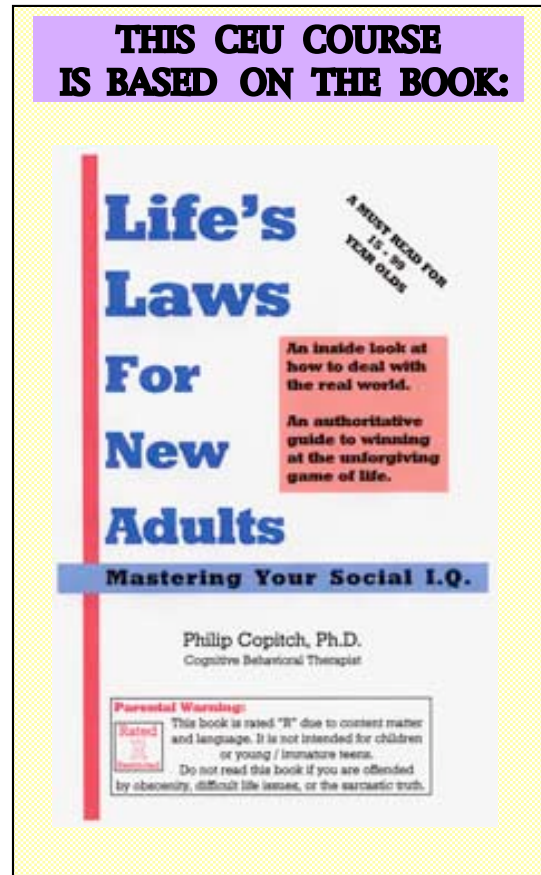
Introduction

I have developed ten life laws that I teach to teens and young adults to help them navigate the rough waters of young adulthood. I have found, over the years, that these life laws give my patients directional posts that guide them outside of our therapy sessions. It is my intent for the young adult to have a framework to build their social skills on. I tend to “teach” one life law a week. (Based on the individual’s abilities.) I find that my patients quickly begin to implement change and self control into their lives. In this CEU course we will look at Life’s Law #2: People do what they are going to do.

In my treatment of angry and “misunderstood” teens and young adults I take a cognitive behavioral approach and find that they appreciate my nonjudgmental frankness.

We are going to look at how to get teens and young adults to listen to you in an open minded way. The goal is to talk with your patient, not at them. This sounds easy, but unfortunately it is difficult. Over the years I have found that if I explain a needed concept to someone in a relaxed story format, it keeps their defensive walls down and lets them emotionally participate in the learning process. By sprinkling my conversation with humor and a little “I think it’s like this, what do you think?” humility, I find that my teen and young adult clients readily play off my stories and seriously challenge their own ways of dealing with their world.

The following is the way I introduce patients to the fact that they have to share the planet. And, that dealing with people is unavoidable, so they should do it well.



LIFE'S LAW #2: PEOPLE DO WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO DO

I would hate to be “normal.” In fact, I take great offense at the fact that in so many ways I am normal. Don't get me wrong. I'm perfectly okay with my skin producing normal cells. I definitely don't want skin cancer. But when it comes to who I am, at my core, I think normal is boring.

Life Rule #2 is about normal; how people tend to act; how people usually behave. Normal behavior.

I have often said that I am very impressed with mankind, but that individual humans tend to be embarrassing. If advanced aliens show up one day to conquer earth, to enslave us like, say a cow, and incorporate us into their alien economy, that would really piss me off. Mankind is spectacular. We are creative beings at our infancy. I have great hope for us.

But, as individuals, even the brightest of us is petty. We tend to be selfish, narrow minded, and basically fearful beings. Even large groups can be selfish, narrow-minded, and basically fearful.

At the present time there are approximately 65 wars that are being waged on planet earth. Each of these wars is over something petty. “My god is better than your god.” “Three hundred years ago your ancestors stole that piece of land from my ancestors.” Or some such thing. I wonder what we would do if a giant interplanetary invasion force presented itself just off the moon, would we be warring amongst ourselves, or scared shitless? I think initially we would be overwhelmed, and then we would organize and work together to protect ourselves.

This past week in my area of northern California there was a large forest fire that forced the evacuation of a mountain town some forty miles away. Homes were lost and lives were sent into upheaval. The local radio station announced that the local Red Cross needed money to help the fire victims. The next morning countless people drove by the Civic Center dropping off cash and canned food. In a few hours \$25,000 and two and a half truckloads of food were donated. This happened the same week that the mill, ten miles south of here, announced that it was closing for good.

One of the families I worked with the day of the donation drive came into my office in great spirits. I was somewhat surprised because just the week before that same family was talking about how they had been fighting a lot at home ever since they found out that Dad was to be unemployed. Last week the stress in the family was eating them up from inside. This week the family was rejuvenated.

The oldest child, Adam, plopped on the couch and said, “We just dropped off \$25 and a bag of groceries for the fire victims.”

We human beings sure can be wonderful.

Be a good animal, true to your instincts.

D.H. Lawrence

Didn't I just contradict myself? Are people petty or are people wondrous? Which one? Well, both. The same person can be wondrous in one situation and petty in another. Fair and even handed one moment and an irrational prick the next. This brings us to Rule #2; People do what they are going to do.

I don't care who we are talking about, your mom, the Pope, or the wino on Fifth and Plastered—they do what they are going to do. They react, feel, and do what they tend to have done in similar situations in the past. Humans are creatures of habit. To that extent we are individually predictable.

Understanding this predictability is how we start to uncover the secret rules of our friends, parents and teachers. It is our window into their real thoughts.

If your friend is always standing you up, or seems comfortable about being late, his behavior tells you something. His words may say, “That sounds great, I'll meet you at eight.” But his behavior says. “I'll show up at eight, if nothing better shows up.”

If your stud muffin says, “I think that women should get equal pay for equal work,” he seems respectful of women. But if his hands say, “You're a piece of my property and I like what I own.” You really know what he thinks of women.

All things being equal, believe the behavior.

The world is scary

Over the last few years, many of the teens and young adults that I work with have underlying fear associated with their futures. The following story about terrorism opens a discussion concerning future orientation and personal feelings of hope.

Terrorism

This book was outlined months before I actually sat down to write it. The section above was written one week before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Virginia. These horrific terrorist acts have changed our basic understanding of our world. The terrorists destroyed an icon in New York and damaged another in Virginia while murdering close to three thousand people. They gave themselves permission to murder. But this was only the ugly part of the story. Through all the initial shock, I noticed an amazing part of this unbelievable tragedy.

I watched CNN as the first building burned. The commentators explained that there was no information about what caused this accident. Then came the overwhelming sight of the second commercial airliner slamming into the second tower. At that moment the world knew the first building was not an accident. A short time later came the report of the Pentagon being hit. Next a plane crashed in Pennsylvania. The world was going crazy. It was unraveling in front of our collective eyes.

Then it happened. CNN showed people below the first building in New York. The video documented one man helping another man in an ash filled street. The video was shot from the relative safety of a mini-mart storefront. It showed a third man at a glass door watching the two men out in the debris-ridden street. The man at the door of the store was holding the door closed as the devastation outside stormed by. The man at the door was horrified. He was rigid with panic. Then he ran out into the horror and helped. Within moments, three men came out of the gray cloud of death. All three helping each other. All covered with ash.

This scene was very meaningful for me to witness. At the beginning of this video clip there were three ethnically different types of people. At the end, there was one skin color—ash. In a way, I saw the aliens attack and we became one. One person helping another for one good reason, *it seemed like the right thing to do*. People are amazing creatures.

The need to be right—the
sign of a vulgar mind.

Albert Camus

The self and personal responsibilities

This next section opens up the topic of the self and personal responsi-

bilities. I touch it only briefly at first, then reintroduce it later in the same session when I look at the connection between Life Law #1 and Life law #2.

You are a people too

Up to now I have been talking about others. How they act. But the same is true for you. You are also a creature of habit. You also have set reactions to particular situations. You too are predictable. You do what you are going to do.

If you say, “I want to go to college.” But your behavior says, “TV first, homework never!” Believe the behavior.

If your words say, “I’ll be back at nine, Mom.” When you know your ride clearly told you he wasn’t leaving this party until midnight or one. And then you show up at one thirty with that same old sorry ass story, “Joel refused to leave, what could I do, he was my ride!” Believe your behavior. You are comfortable lying to your mother.

All things being equal, you are going to do what you are going to do.

External influences

The concept of behavior and choice is brought into the discussion.

People do what works

In 1911, E.L. Thorndike first explained the **Law of Effect**. Thorndike showed that when learning, *responses may be altered by their effects on the environment*. What this means in plain speak is that behaviors (responses) that lead to positive outcomes (as defined by you) are increased, and behaviors that lead to negative outcomes (as defined by you) are decreased. Simply, Thorndike noted what we all know. If something works for us, we do it again. If it doesn’t work for us, we stop doing it.

“People do what works,” is a little statement with a shit load of power for you to grab and use. What I am talking about is that everyone does what works for them. Not sometimes—every time.

At first many people throw this truth back at me and say things like: “That seems a little harsh. You’re telling me that I’m fat because I want to be fat?”

“You’re saying I’m flunking Algebra because I want to flunk Algebra?”

“You’re saying I want to be shy?”

“That sounds stupid. You mean I’m choosing to have my parents treat me like I’m a little kid?”

Yep! That’s what I’m saying. On purpose or by accident, you influence how others treat you and how you treat yourself. I know it is common nowadays to blame something or someone other than yourself. But that sounds like denial to me. I watched a doctor on TV explain that due to the pain in our inner child Americans are overweight. We are trying to nurture ourselves by being our own mother’s breast. What psychobabble. I heard a psychologist on the radio explain that because birthing is so hard on the newborn’s psyche we all need to be channeled and re-birthing. A lady on an infomercial told me that our wrinkled skin was not age related, it was due to toxins from poor nutrition and poor emotional energy. For only hundreds of dollars she would sell me a meditation tape and food supplements to fix me right up. To this I say: “bullshit!”

There is a billion dollar industry teaching Americans that it is not their fault that something bad happened to them. It is usually called the Self Empowerment Industry or the Supplement Industry. I call it: Lie To Them And Take Their Money Industry.

I understand why people are paying to be told that they are victims. It’s easier than taking self-responsibility. But, I believe that we are really harming ourselves and our society. The truth is simple and boringly factual. People do what works. Period.

Would you do anything that didn’t work for you? We are creatures of reward and punishment. Reward increases behavior, punishment decreases behavior. It’s that simple. People work to reward themselves and work hard to avoid punishment. But, there are many levels of personal reward and punishment, read on.

Sally was a binge drinker. For the last four months she had been getting plastered almost every Friday and Saturday night. She told her group home housemother that she wanted to see me because her friend said, “He’s pretty funny!” When the housemother set up the appointment with me she told me that Sally was a little depressed but a nice kid. She also told me that Sally was removed from her single mother’s home when her mom was jailed for methamphetamine sales.

When Sally came into my office she seemed like a great kid with a lot of social skills. She had friends, got good grades, and had future goals.

She seemed like she was doing well considering her situation. About half-way through our first session I asked her, “Why are you *really* here.”

“I’m pregnant,” she snapped coldly.

Over the next fifteen minutes she told me about how she was spending Friday and Saturday nights drunk. Her mom had been out of jail for the last six months. And, for the last four months, she had been allowed by the county social worker to have home visits Friday after school to Sunday early evening. The social worker’s goal was for her to live with her mom by the end of the summer. Sally explained that during the first weekend of home visits her mom told her that she didn’t think it was fair. Mom was upset with Sally for interfering with her weekend fun. So, mom told Sally that as long as she didn’t tell anyone or get into trouble she could do what she wanted all weekend. “She told me,” Sally said, “As long as you’re doing good in school, your weekends are yours.”

Sally was spending the weekends drinking with the younger men in her mom’s apartment complex.

She said in a whisper, “I must have had sex when I was passed out.”

She wasn’t sure exactly when. She reported passing out at least one night most weekends. Sally was fifteen.

Over the next few weeks Sally kept blaming everyone for her problems. She was furious with the county social worker. She was upset with her group home. She hated men for using her. She was pissed with her mom’s boyfriend for letting her mom drink. When I explained that I thought that people do what works, I was elevated to the top of the list of people she hated because I kept suggesting that she was involved in her own life.

She initially refused to look at her involvement in her problems. Over time she taught me (and herself) that at first she was happy that her mother thought she was mature enough to take care of herself on weekends. Initially she really liked the freedom and the attention from the men in the apartment building. She truly liked getting over on the controlling county social worker and the nosey housemother. She loved the feeling of the alcohol and freedom from her thoughts that the alcohol gave her.

As time went on she worried that her mom didn’t really care about her and that mom only wanted to enjoy her weekends. Sally worried that if the county social worker found out what she was doing she would put her mother back in jail. She figured that booze was much better for her mom than meth.

Two sessions later she summed it all up:

“I knew I was being passed around and screwed by lots of men. But I kept telling myself that it was only fair. It made me feel nothing. It was my way of saying that my mom didn’t deserve me, and when I was dead she would know how terrible a mom she was. I hate her so much I hate me. I just didn’t have the guts to kill myself.”

Rewards are not always understood or a positive. Often when people do something that they really don’t want to do, the reward is hidden and painful. We have to reward undesirable behaviors or we wouldn’t do that to ourselves. We have to understand what works for us, and why it works for us, to get control over ourselves.

Sally’s reward system was so complicated that she needed therapy to sort out what she was doing to herself. I use her case as an example of how hard you might have to work to understand your personal system of rewards.

Let’s look at a few common “hidden” reward situations:

“That seems a little harsh. You’re telling me that I’m fat because I want to be fat?”

It is very common for food to be used as an instant reward system in our society. Many people reward themselves with food whenever a sad thought crosses their mind.

“You’re saying I’m flunking Algebra because I want to flunk Algebra?”

Often girls earn bad grades in junior and senior high school because boys don’t like smart girls. People do a lot to be popular.

Regularly people earn poor grades in school because they do not have the self-confidence to tell a teacher “I don’t get it.”

Recently a lineman for a high school football team told me that he didn’t get sixth grade math, so why bother with ninth grade math. He was planning to have a team of accountants that watched over his money when he turned pro. His future hope gave him permission not to look at his present reality—he needed help in math.

“Your saying I want to be shy?”

Shy must be working for you or you would be building your outgoing skills.

“That sounds stupid. You mean I’m choosing to have my parents treat me like I’m a little kid?”

Sure, you have a lot of influence on others, especially your parents. Read on!

Self-involvement

Next, the topic of how the patient is involved in their interpersonal relationships.

You influence how others treat you

I once did a weekend seminar for one of those big companies that can afford to advertise during the Olympics or the Super Bowl. The seminar was devoted to helping middle managers learn how to motivate their sales force. One Saturday morning I was surprised to find a room full of bright eyed, white-starched-shirt-wearing, power-tie-toting, middle-aged men. I had just crawled out of bed, showered under a tiny water saver shower-head, and had not yet had any coffee. It was 8:30 AM and my day was only thirty minutes old. The men in the audience were awake. Happily awake. I was disgusted. To me, the only way I could be happy at 8 AM was if I was up to deliver my wife’s baby. Saturday mornings are for sleeping, everyone knows that (except during youth soccer season).

I talked to the group about my plan for the day and pointed out a few goals and objectives. I asked if there were any questions and waited for some. I have talked to hundreds of parent groups, teacher groups and therapist groups. Someone always has a question. This group looked fearful. It dawned on me that this group wasn’t expecting to participate. They thought they were there to listen and absorb information. Boy, were they in for a big surprise!

I called on people. “What is your biggest problem with your work force?” “How do you motivate people to work?” “Tell me your biggest thorns-in-your-side and who put them there?” Finally, after some fifteen minutes, one older gentleman stood up and growled, “Well DOCTOR, I have to spend my weekend here, are you going to tell me how to find employees who will follow directions... I need winners! Where do I find them?” Then he crossed his arms and plopped himself into his chair. The room became alive with murmuring. It seemed that this man had shared a

common problem for the attendees. I was so excited. Anger. Pure and simple anger. An emotion I could work with. What a wonderful opportunity. So, I told a story (I'm a cognitive behavioral therapist—I always tell stories).

A couple of months ago I was at Sea World. I saw the dolphin show. This gray sleek mammal leaped out of the pool, did a forward flip over a bright red nylon rope, and dove back into the water. What a sight!

A small boy in front of me asked his grandfather, "How did they teach the dolphin to do that?" The grandfather said, "They go out into the ocean and scare the dolphins out of the water with their big boat engines. The ones that jump the highest they capture and bring here for the show."

This was an intriguing theory, but not an accurate one. I postulated the boy's question to my hostile audience: "How do you teach a dolphin to jump over a rope?" I ask you the same question, "How would you teach a dolphin to jump over a rope?"

The most common answer to the question was, "I'd hang a fish from a rope above the water." The problem with this is how do you get the dolphin to look up at the fish? Dolphins don't go around in their natural environment, looking up out of the water, expecting mackerel. Most fish don't jump out of the ocean. And, even the motivated ones that do, would not be enough to fill the bellies of many a dolphin.

The way you teach a dolphin to jump is by using a process called **shaping**. Shaping is the process of rewarding a behavior each time it gets closer and closer to the desired behavior. You can't go out into the ocean with a loud speaker attached to your boat yelling, "Jump! Jump! Come on Flipper, JUMP!" You won't get a dolphin to jump out of the water, do a back flip, smile at the camera and come to the boat to be captured. If you did, you would have what corporate middle managers call a "WINNER!" It just doesn't happen. At first, dolphins don't know anything about show biz.

Dolphins are not fools. They are readily willing to investigate their world and find food. That is their job. At first you have to get the dolphin to recognize the importance of the rope. If you place the rope in the pool so the dolphin can swim above it and below it they will do just that. When

the dolphin “accidentally” swims above the rope you drop a fish in the pool. After a few chance encounters the dolphin says to itself, “Hmm... I think there is an interesting relationship here. Something is going on between that lifeless piece of seaweed and a fish falling from the heavens. I’ll call that new kind of plant, hmm... rope. Now let’s see, if I swim under the rope nothing happens. But, if I swim over the rope, lunch. This I can live with. In fact, I feel encouraged to keep swimming above the rope.”

Then the trainer raises the rope. Just a little each time. Not to be mean, but making it harder for our friend Flipper. It’s just not much of a show if the rope is in the water. Spectators would say, “Big deal, the dolphin can swim at the top of the pool.” You’re not going to get \$14.50 a head for a dolphin fin poking out of the water-playing shark! The trainer keeps raising the rope slowly, over time, until it is well above the water.

Your parents did the same thing to you. If your mom wanted to teach 18 months old you to politely say, “Excuse me mother, could I please have a piece of toast?” She couldn’t wait until you were completely verbalizing your needs. If mom waited that long, you would have ended up one skinny ass dead kid. That’s not good!

What Mom wanted to do was to shape your behavior. Mom said, “Do you want toast? Toast, toast, toast?” Then one day you said, “Ta Ta Ta” for toast and Mom got all excited. She may have called Dad. She may have even had him get off the couch. She probably made you say “Ta ta ta” all over again. Kind of like a really cheap home version of dolphins jumping out of the water. Mom got out the video camera. She called the grandparents. Your mom declared you to be a genius. But, if at age 16, you started saying, “Ta Ta Ta” for toast, she’d have your urine checked for street drugs.

Your mom rewarded as she caught you making progress. “Ta Ta Ta,” worked for a while. But, in no time, “Ta Ta peas” was needed. Then “toes peas” was changed to “toast please.”

This is shaping. Some psychologists call it *successive approximation*. Shaping behavior accounts for the vast majority of complex learned behaviors such as how people treat you and how you treat others.

Through shaping, you influence the world and the world influences you.

Life Law in the real world

Finally, we look at how we can use new life skills to get through life’s problems.

LAW #1 AND LAW #2 IN THE REAL WORLD

Conner had just turned sixteen. He knew about the birthday party that his mother and three sisters were planning for him. He didn't want to participate. Three months prior, his parents had a huge argument in the living room. It went on for forty-five minutes. It was about money. It always was about money.

Conner had lain in bed with his pillow over his head trying to drown out the hate. The house got quiet. His bedroom door flung open knocking things off the dresser. His father looked crazed. He was red faced and breathing through enlarged nostrils. His father bellowed, "You're the man of the family now! I can't live with your devil-possessed mother! We're getting a divorce." He slammed the door with so much force that the doorframe splintered. As his father drove away with a screech, Conner went to console his weeping mother. He told her, "It'll be okay in a day or two. Dad will calm down."

Conner's mother turned on him with all her rage. "Your father's a bastard. Let him go live with that whore of a secretary."

Weeks after this major blow up, Conner said to me, "They were arguing about money. They always argue about money. He's an elder in our church. Everyone knows about my dad ... I've lost everything. I have nowhere to show my face." Conner didn't know about the affair. His world was shattered.

Conner used Law #1 and Law #2 to help deal with his family's on-going crisis. He knew that he had to get his mind around the fact that his parents were getting a divorce. He had no choice but to deal with the fact that his parents were out of control and he couldn't hope this problem away. He had to deal with the changes around the house. His father was living in a hotel, refusing to talk with anyone. His mother was sitting on the couch, crying twenty-four hours a day. His sisters were constantly bickering with each other. He wanted it all to stop.

He also knew that he had no control about how others were going to deal with this crisis. But, he wanted to help, to do something. He decided to ask advice from his mother's best friend. She seemed to be an understanding woman. Conner and Mrs. Powell worked it out that the girls all got invited to friends' houses for a few days. This way they could each get emotional support from their friends' families.

He would stay home and watch over his mother. His aunt would stay with her when he was at school. He knew that he needed to get out of the

house and at school he would be able to stop thinking about his problems for at least a few minutes every period.

Conner proved to be an amazing support system for his family. He also took care of himself, by taking care of his family.

Nicky, newly fifteen, had no friends at her very stuck up private school. She knew people, but she had no real friends, only acquaintances. When I asked her why she thought she had no friends she hemmed and hawed about the rest of the student body being stuck up or dumb, but in no time she got to the fact that, "I have a very morbid sense of humor. Others just don't like my jokes." As it turned out, Nicky pushed people away with her mouth. Her specific skill was associating others stories with her "gross" stories. Her family was all "fire people." Six of the nine family members that she spent most of her time with were emergency personnel with the fire department. The rest were "married to the department." She had spent her entire life hearing stories about death, destruction, and auto accidents. She was so used to it, she was never shocked at the family dinner table when someone talked about the latest victim he had scraped off the highway.

After a brief overview of Life's Law #1 and #2 she suggested that she should only talk about what the kids at school talked about. I assured her that her fellow students had a short memory and she could probably find things to talk about that never made the front page of the paper. Three days later she met Sondra, a popular girl in second period English. They had a lot in common. They both liked school. They both liked their families. And they were both sure that boys were immature slugs with bad breath and active hands.

Two weeks later:

Nicky: I got invited to a party on a huge houseboat. It was great, Sondra's family was so nice. It was almost heaven.

Dr. Phil: Almost heaven?

Nicky: Almost, her family talks a lot about money. Her dad is a stockbroker. Her mom sells real estate. They talk money non-stop. Sondra's so funny, she said, "Christmas is the worst. The uncles come over and fight about the new changes in the tax law."

- Dr. Phil: Have you talked to Sondra about the fire department stuff?
- Nicky: Sure. After a couple of days. She loves the stories. She said I should write a book ... maybe write a movie. Her dad said I could be a millionaire. Her mom offered to find me a mansion to buy. See what I mean, her family likes me!
- Dr. Phil: How about the other kids at school?
- Nicky: Most are boring. Lots of makeup and clothes gab. The same stuff everyday. But I'm not talking about the dead stuff and people are treating me like I'm in the room.
- Dr. Phil: You planning to run for class president?
- Nicky: That's not funny Dr. Phil. I want to *survive* at the zoo; I'm definitely not getting too close to the animals.

Nicky's problem was painful for her, but it took less than a week to get it under her control. Once she used Life's Law #1 and #2, she empowered herself to get her needs met.

People can learn and grow

It is important to leave the patient with the understanding that they can personally learn and grow. I advise patients to take notes between sessions of their observations concerning life laws. This gives the patient much more than my time with them.

POSTTEST

When you're ready, take the posttest to obtain your CEU certificate. Your test consists of 5 multiple choice or true/false questions per Continuing Education Unit (3 CEU course = 15 questions).

