



CONTINUING EDUCATION THAT MAKES A CHANGE

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When you are done with the course, take the posttest. When you pass the posttest (70% or higher) and pay the course fee (\$10 per unit), you will be issued a CEU Certificate of Completion.

Enjoy!

Course Name:	Life's Law #9: Invest in yourself
Course Number:	LL9
CEU:	2.0
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COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. You will study Life Law #9.
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

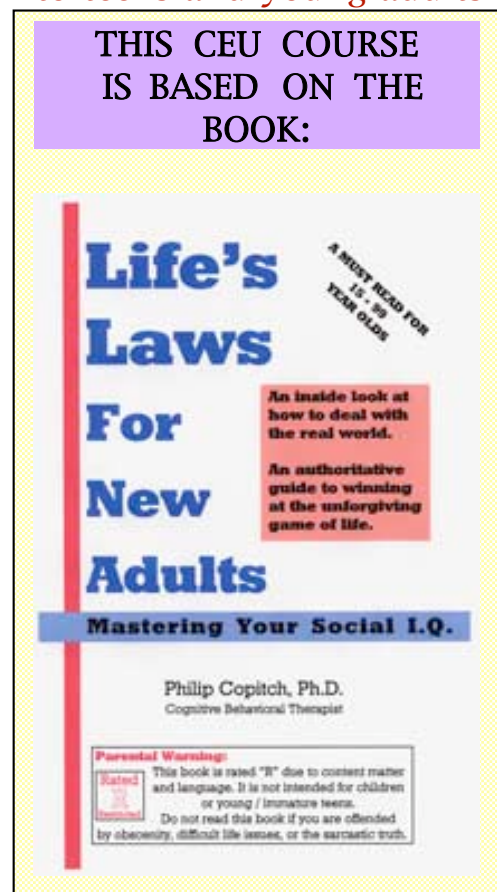
Introduction

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 #9:

Invest in yourself. 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 openminded way. The goal is to talk with your patient, not at them. This sounds easy, but unfortunately it isn’t. 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 life saving art of forgiveness. Many patients hold pain so well that it saps their life’s energy away. As therapists, we need to teach that through forgiveness one can invest in themselves.



LIFE'S LAW #9: INVEST IN YOURSELF

Life law #9 is relatively short and sweet. It consists of doing what is best for yourself and letting go of emotional prisons. In my practice I find that individuals tend to have a hard time dealing with this life law. Lots of people seem to hold on with all their emotional might to the very things that they should let go of so they can find happiness.

There are two major ways to invest in yourself: one is to add to your own skill level, and the second is to divest yourself of emotional baggage.

Add to your own skill level

This is a straightforward statement. When you are making choices keep in mind that you are a work in progress. You need to challenge yourself towards higher skill levels. Part of making a life decision should be asking yourself the following questions:

What will I learn?

How will this help me develop stronger skills?

How can I use my new knowledge?

Who will I be around?

Will these people be a positive or negative influence on me?

Irving, age 17, visited my office because his grades had fallen from 'B's' to 'D's.' His mother was concerned that he didn't care about school any longer. Irving told me that his life was going OK and that he was bored in school because he didn't see any reason to learn all the subjects. He had a plan. He was going to work for a video game company when he graduated. He wanted to "play games all day long."

Dr. Phil: So, what are you doing to make you look good to a gaming company? I would think there are lots of applications for video development jobs.

Irving: I know all the games. I'm good at them, everyone calls me for cheats. I'm awesome on them all.

- Dr. Phil: That's great, but that makes you a consumer, someone who buys computer games, not a programmer and/or author.
- Irving: I read a lot. I like to read.
- Dr. Phil: What kind of stuff?
- Irving: I read all the gaming magazines and I read lots of sci-fi books. I've seen every sci-fi movie ever made. I'm into the old black and white ones, better writing, but lame special effects.
- Dr. Phil: Let me ask you a tough question, what can you put on your job application when you go to get work at a gaming company?

This question hit Irving like a ton of bricks. He had never thought about what his life would look like on a job application or what he would look like through the eyes of an employer.

Irving is not alone. I meet lots of young adults with lots of hope but no plan. About once a month I am told by someone:

- "I don't need school, I'm going to play pro ball."
- "I don't need school, my old man is rich."
- "I don't need school, I have big plans, I'm going to make it large in the music business."
- "I don't need school, my dad never graduated and he is doing OK for himself."

To these types of statements I reply, "I can't predict the future, but it seems to me that education doesn't get in the way. It seems to me, the more you know the safer you are. I'm not necessarily talking school, but I am talking education."

In a nutshell, life goes by. Invest in yourself every day. Add to your skills. Add to your abilities. If you don't choose to invest in you, who will?

Therapist "permission"

Many patients need "permission" from their therapist to release emo-

tional baggage.

Divest yourself of emotional baggage

Ali entered therapy because she was getting nothing done with her life. She was thirty and spent most of her time alone. She went to work, then went to an aerobics class, then she went home. She reported that she had no social life.

When I asked her why she had no social life she replied in a matter of fact way: “I was raped by a friend in college.”

She explained:

I used to be more outgoing. I went on lots of dates. When I left home and went off to school I was very active in stuff at school. I was always invited to all the parties. I got good grades and had lots of friends. At the end of the year party my sophomore year, I got real drunk. I got so drunk I really acted out. I passed out and I was raped. End of story, I was stupid. I don't even know for sure who did it. A few days later, one of the other girls told me that she knew of three guys who were bragging about the great time they had with me. I never thought that it was more than one. I sat in my dorm room and cried for the rest of the day. I went to the school counseling center and they gave me tests, but the police said that they couldn't do anything because I didn't know who raped me.

I spent the summer at home hiding. I got angrier every day. I never told my mother. She wouldn't have understood. I told her I was unhappy and I changed schools. I thought it would be all right. I would start over.

Now I just go to work and go home. I started to gain weight, so I started doing aerobics.

After a long pause:

My life was stolen from me. I wish I could find the bastards who raped me and tell them what they did was wrong ... show them that they ruined my life, that they deserve to burn in hell. I hope they will.

Eight years later, Ali was still living the horror of her rape. She had built a prison of fear, anger, hatred, and sorrow, and locked herself within it.

Emotional pain lasts much longer than the initial event

A large portion of the human brain has been developed to store memories. We have the ability to recall positive and negative events. Most people find that they can remember negative events better. In fact, there is lots of evidence that it was important to our very survival that we remembered negative events. The quicker a species learns from negative events, the more likely that they will survive to produce offspring. It was, and still is today, important that we learn quickly from dangerous situations. If our ancestors had not learned about the dangers, they would have been easy dinners for predatory animals.

Our minds recall negative memories with great skill. Most of the time this is probably a good thing, but sometimes we spend so much time remembering the negative, we forget to have a life. We live with one foot stuck in the past.

A good reason

Often I find that patients need a good reason to change long held dogma. The next few sections are full of good reasons for patients to allow change into their world.

Emotional pain influences your health

Research has shown that the process of thought influences the body at the system and cellular level. It is well documented that your thoughts influence your immune system, which in turn influences the way your body fights off disease.

Researchers at Ohio State University studied caregivers of Alzheimer's patients. The female volunteers agreed to have a large hole punched into the skin of their forearms. Another group of similarly aged woman, who did not take care of relatives with Alzheimer's had the same procedure done. It is fair to say that taking care of a relative with Alzheimer's is abnormally stressful. The caregivers (abnormal stress) healed in 49 days whereas the control group (normal stress) women healed in 39 days. It took ten more days for the women who were taking care of their ill family member to heal.

In another study researchers talked dental students into having a gash put into the roof of their mouths, twice. The first cut was placed days

before the dental students took their final exams, the hardest and probably most stressful exams of their lives. The second cuts were placed weeks later, after school was out. The researchers found that it took 40% longer, on average, for the pretest cuts to heal.

Another study found that when researchers deliberately squirted a cold virus into the nasal passages of volunteers, the volunteers who reported high stress levels developed the most colds. The volunteers with the lowest life stress stayed cold free. The researchers noted that test subjects that had an “avoidant-coping” style of dealing with stress stayed healthy. Positive self-talk is an avoidant-coping skill, which distracts one from the negatives in life and helps one to focus on the positives in life.

On a side note, how do researchers talk people into allowing them to cut them or stick cold viruses up their nose? I’m glad that people volunteer for scientific studies, but pity the scientist who has to ask, “Can I stick a cold up your nose, please!”

Fortunately, the immune system is less intrusive to test. Researchers at the University of New York at Stony Brook found it took only a few minutes for illness-fighting cells to decrease when college students were placed in a stressful situation. Other researchers have found that illness fighting cells are lower in people who are taking care of ill relatives, people who worry about living next to nuclear power plants, and medical students during exam week.

It seems reasonable to assume that if you are lingering in emotional turmoil you are not supporting your own overall good health. I bring this up specifically because, if you are unable to forgive, you are allowing yourself to continue the abuse ... daily. That is an awful lot of power you are giving to the aggressor from your past. Power that you are taking from yourself. Life energy that you are wasting.

Forgiveness is about you

Forgiveness is all about you. It is about you taking control of your present and future life. When Ali decided that she was not going to allow her life to be controlled by her pain and misery, she regained her life. When Ali took her pain and made it into a positive action, she started the road to self-recovery.

When she was being consumed by hate she said:

My life was stolen from me. I wish I could find the bastards who raped me and tell them what they did was wrong ... show them that they ruined my life. That they deserve to burn in hell. I hope they will.

When she forgave:

Once I realized that forgiveness was for me, that I deserved not to feel the hate any longer, I started to look at ways I could take control of my life. I decided that I needed to feel safer. I made a rule for myself that I would never drink to where I was out of control. Now I will have a beer or two, but I am always aware of my surroundings. I took a self defense class at the YMCA and thought a lot about how to be aware of my surroundings. One interesting thing about the self defense class I took was learning all the ways I can protect myself way before having to fight off an attacker.

I also had a heart to heart talk with my sister. She is three years younger than me and I wanted to make sure that she didn't get into the same trouble I got into. We took the class at the Y together.

Forgiveness needs to go from a thought to a behavior. You never say what the aggressor did was OK with you, you just know, deep within yourself, that you will not let them continue to control you through your own fears. The types of forgiveness behaviors are very personal. Some find that the behavior must be grand, while others find that subtle behaviors work best for them. It will depend on your personality. Forgiveness behavior is never revenge.

Forgiveness Behaviors that have worked for others

The following is a list of forgiveness behaviors that others have found to work for them. It is in no particular order. Forgiveness needs to become a behavior, but that behavior is very personal.

Smaller issues such as when someone wrongs you:

- Avoid the offending person. Know that they don't warrant your attention.

- Learn to recognize this type of person so that they can be avoided sooner.
- Forgive and then forget, move on.
- Write a letter—mail it or not.
- Talk to the person who wronged you, calmly explaining that you do not allow people to treat you that way.

Bigger issues such as when someone violates you:

- Call the police and make a formal report.
- Attend a victims' group.
- Write an article that will help others.
- Talk to a loved one, sharing what you have learned.
- Help others who are less fortunate than yourself.
- Take a self defense class.
- Write a letter—mail it or not.
- Talk to the person you are focusing on and tell them that you forgive them (with or without them understanding what this means).

What can you do for you? (I use this question as a brainstorming and homework assignment.)

Your goal is to obtain emotion closure. This is shrink speak for bringing an end to your emotional involvement. When you are emotionally done with the individuals who hurt you, the hurt stops. You no longer have an emotional need to focus backward, freeing you to focus on you and your future. Emotional closure is emotional freedom.

People can learn and grow

It is important to leave the patient with the understanding that they personally can 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).

