



Prince Louis held that paradigm of himself so tightly that nothing could shake him. In like manner, if you walk through life wearing glasses that say “I can do it” or “I matter,” that belief will put a positive spin on everything else.

At this point you may be wondering, “If my paradigm of myself is all contorted, what can I do to fix it?” One way is to spend time with someone who already believes in you and builds you up. My mother was such a person to me. When I was growing up, my mom always believed in me, especially when I doubted myself. She was always saying stuff like “Sean, of course you should run for class president,” and “Ask her out. I’m sure she would just die to go out with you.” Whenever I needed to be affirmed I’d talk to my mom and she’d clean any negativity from my glasses.

Ask any successful person and most will tell you that they had a person who believed in them . . . a teacher, a friend, a parent, a guardian, a sibling, a grandparent. It only takes one person, and it doesn’t really matter who it is. Don’t be afraid to lean on this person and to get nourished by them. Go to them for advice. See yourself the way they see you. Oh, what a difference a new pair of glasses can make! As someone once said, “If you could envision the type of person God intended you to be, you would rise up and never be the same again.”

At times, you may not have anyone to lean on—and you may need to go solo. If this is the case with you, pay special attention to the next chapter, which will give you some handy tools to help build your self-image.

• PARADIGMS OF OTHERS

We have paradigms not only about ourselves, but also about other people. And they can be way out of whack, too. Seeing things from a different point of view can help us understand why other people act the way they do.

Becky told me about her paradigm shift:

As a junior in high school, I had a friend named Kim. She was essentially a nice person, but as the year progressed, it became more and more difficult to get along with her. She was easily offended and often felt left out. She was moody and difficult to be around. It got to the point where my friends and I started calling her less and less. Eventually we stopped inviting her to things.

I was gone for a good part of the summer after that year, and when I returned I was talking to a good friend of mine, catching up on all the news. She was telling me about all the gossip, the different romances, who was dating who, and so on, when suddenly she said, "Oh! Did I tell you about Kim? She's been having a hard time lately because her parents are going through a really messy divorce. She's taking it really hard."

When I heard this, my whole perspective changed. Rather than being annoyed by Kim's behavior, I felt terrible about my own. I felt I had deserted her in her time of need. Just by knowing that one little bit of information, my whole attitude toward her changed. It was really an eye-opening experience.

And to think that all it took to change Becky's paradigm was a smidgen of new information. We too often judge people without having all the facts.

Monica had a similar experience:

I used to live in California, where I had a lot of good friends. I didn't care about anybody new because I already had my friends and I thought that new people should deal with it in their own way. Then, when I moved, I was the new kid and wished that someone would care about me and make me part of their group of friends. I see things in a very different way now. I know what it feels like to not have any friends.

Seeing things from another point of view can make all the difference in our attitude toward others. I'll bet Monica will never treat new kids on the block the same way again.

FRANK & ERNEST © by Bob Thaves



The following anecdote from *Reader's Digest* (contributed by Dan P. Greyling) is a classic example of a paradigm shift:

A friend of mine, returning to South Africa from a long stay in Europe, found herself with some time to spare at London's Heathrow Airport. Buying a cup of coffee and a small package of cookies, she staggered, laden with luggage, to an unoccupied table. She was reading the morning paper when she became aware of someone rustling at her table. From behind her paper, she was flabbergasted to see a neatly dressed young man helping himself to her cookies. She did not want to make a scene, so she leaned across and took a cookie herself. A minute or so passed. More rustling. He was helping himself to another cookie.

By the time they were down to the last cookie in the package, she was very angry but still could not bring herself to say anything. Then the young man broke the cookie in two, pushed half across to her, ate the other half and left.

Some time later, when the public-address system called for her to present her ticket, she was still fuming. Imagine her embarrassment when she opened her handbag and was confronted by her package of cookies. She had been eating his.

Consider this lady's feelings toward the neatly dressed young man before the turn of events: "What a rude, presumptive young man."

Imagine her feelings after: "How embarrassing!? How kind of him to share his last cookie with me!"

So what's the point? It's simply this: often our paradigms are incomplete, inaccurate, or kinda messed up. We shouldn't be so quick to judge, label, or form rigid opinions of others—or of ourselves, for that matter. From a limited point of view, it's hard to see the whole picture or have all the facts.

In addition, we should open our minds and hearts to new information, ideas, and points of view. We should be willing to change our paradigms when it becomes clear that they're

wrong. Is it obvious that if you want to make big changes in your life, change your lens. Everything else will follow.

When you really think about it, you'll realize that most of your problems (with relationships, self-image, attitude) are the result of a messed-up paradigm or two. For instance, if you have a poor relationship with, say, your dad, it's likely that both of you have a warped paradigm of each other. You may think he's being harsh, or putting too much pressure on you; he may see you as being a spoiled, ungrateful brat. In reality, both of your paradigms are probably incomplete and are holding you back from real communication with each other.

As you'll see, this book will challenge many of your paradigms and, hopefully, will help you create more accurate and complete ones. So get ready.

• PARADIGMS OF LIFE

We don't just have paradigms about ourselves and others, we also have paradigms about the world in general. You can usually tell what your paradigm is by asking yourself a few questions: "What is the driving force of my life?" "What do I spend my time thinking about?" "Who or what are my obsessions?" Whatever's most important to you will become your paradigm, your glasses, or, as I like to call it, your life-center. Some of the more popular life-centers for teens include Friends, Stuff, Boyfriend/Girlfriend, School, Parents, Sports/Hobbies, Heroes, Enemies, Self, and Work. Of course they each have their good points, but they are all incomplete in one way or another, and, as I'm about to show you, they'll mess you up if you center your life on them. Luckily, there is one center that you can always count on. We'll save it for last.

Friend-Centered

There's nothing better than belonging to a great group of friends and nothing worse than feeling like an outcast. Friends are important but should never become your center. Why? Well, occasionally they're fickle. Now and then they're fake. Sometimes they talk behind your back or develop new friendships and forget yours. They have mood swings. They move.

In addition, if you base your identity on being accepted, being popular, or having the most friends on Facebook, you may find yourself compromising your standards or changing them every weekend to accommodate your friends.

Believe it or not, the day will come when friends will not be the biggest thing in your life. In high school I had an amazing group of friends. We did everything together—swam in irrigation canals, gorged at all-you-can-eat buffets, snowmobiled all through the night, dated one another's girlfriends . . . you name it. I loved these guys. I figured we'd be close forever.

Since high school graduation, though, I've been shocked by how seldom we see one another. Now, years later, we live far apart, and new relationships, jobs, and family take up our time. As a teen, I never could have fathomed this.



Make as many friends as you can, but don't build your life on them. It's an unstable foundation. People will change, you will change.

Stuff-Centered

Sometimes we see the world through the lens of possessions or "stuff." We live in a material world that teaches us that "He who dies with the most toys wins." We feel as if we're supposed to have the fastest car, the nicest clothes, the latest smartphone, the best hairstyle, and the many other *things* that apparently bring happiness. Possessions also come in the form of titles and accomplishments, such as—head cheerleader, star of the play, valedictorian, student body officer, editor in chief, or MVP.

There is nothing wrong with achieving success and enjoying our stuff, but *things* should never become the center of our lives. In the end, they have no lasting value. Our confidence needs to come from *within*, not from without. From the *quality of our hearts*, not the *quantity of things* we own. After all, he who dies with the most toys . . . still dies.

I knew a girl who had the most beautiful and expensive wardrobe I'd ever seen. She never wore the same outfit twice. After getting to know her better, I started to notice that she had a bad case of "elevator eyes." It seemed that whenever she talked with another girl, she'd eye her from head to foot to see if her outfit was as nice as her own, which usually gave her a superiority complex. Her self-confidence depended on owning *stuff*. It didn't come from her own personality, smarts, or kindness. It was a real turnoff to me.

I read a saying once that says it better than I can: "If who I am is what I have and what I have is lost, then who am I?"

Boyfriend/Girlfriend-Centered

This may be the easiest trap of all to fall into. I mean, who *hasn't* been focused on a crush or a boyfriend or girlfriend at one point?

Let's pretend Brady centers his life on his girlfriend, Tasha. Now, watch the instability it creates in Brady.

TASHA'S ACTIONS

BRADY'S REACTIONS

Makes a thoughtless comment:

"My day is ruined."

Talks to Brady's best friend:

"Are they flirting? They're both betraying me."

"I think we should date "other people:"

"My life is over. You never loved me."

The ironic thing is that the more you center your life on someone, the less attractive you become to that person. How's that? Well, first of all, if you're centered on someone, you're no longer hard to get. Second, it's irritating when someone builds their *entire* emotional life around you. Since their security comes from you and not from within themselves, they always need to have those sickening "where do we stand" talks (shudder).



If who I am is what I have and what I have is lost, then who am I?

ANONYMOUS

When I began dating my wife, one of the things that attracted me most was that she didn't center her life on me. I'll never forget the time she turned me down (with a smile and no apology) for a very important date. I loved it! She was her own person and had her own inner strength. Her moods were independent of mine.

Believe me, you'll be a better boyfriend or girlfriend if you're not totally obsessed with your partner. This goes for *getting* a boyfriend or girlfriend, too. If you make your crush the center of your life, it can sometimes come off as desperate or needy. Independence is far more attractive than dependence.

Besides, centering your life on another doesn't show that you love them, only that you're dependent on them. You can usually tell when a couple becomes centered on each other because they are forever breaking up and getting back together. Although their relationship has gone to pot, their emotional lives and identities are so intertwined that they can't let go of each other.



Have as many girlfriends or boyfriends as you'd like, just don't make them your center, because, although there are exceptions, teenage romantic relationships are usually about as stable as a yo-yo.

School-Centered

Among teens, centering one's life on school is more common than you might think. Lisa, from Canada, regrets being school-centered for so long:

I have been so ambitious and so school-centered that I haven't enjoyed my youth. It has not only been unhealthy for myself—but it's been selfish, because all I cared about was me and my achievements.

As a seventh grader I was already working as hard as a college student. I wanted to be a brain surgeon, just because it was the hardest thing I could think of. I would get up at six every morning all through school and not go to bed before 2 A.M. in order to achieve.

I felt teachers and peers expected it of me. They would always be surprised if I didn't get perfect grades. My parents tried to loosen me up, but my own expectations were as great as that of teachers and peers.

I realize now that I could have accomplished what I wanted without trying so hard, and I could have had a good time doing it.

Our education is vital to our future and should be a top priority. But we must be careful not to let ACT or SAT scores, GPA's, and AP classes take over our lives. School-centered teens often become so obsessed with getting good grades that they forget that the real purpose of school is to learn. You can do extremely well in school and still maintain a healthy balance in life.

Thank goodness our worth isn't measured by our GPA.

Parent-Centered

Your parents can be your greatest source of love and guidance and you should respect and honor them, but living to please them above everything else can become a real nightmare. (Don't tell your parents I said that or they might take away your book . . . just kiddin'.) Read

what happened to this young girl from Louisiana:

I worked so hard all semester. I just knew that my parents would be pleased—six A's and one B+. But all I could see in their eyes was disappointment. All they wanted to know was why the B+ wasn't an A. It was all I could do not to cry. What did they want from me?

That was my sophomore year of high school, and I spent the next two years trying to make my parents proud of me. I played basketball and I hoped that they would be proud—they never came to see me play. I made the honor roll every semester—but after a while straight A's were just expected. I was going to go to college to be a teacher, but there was no money in that, and my parents felt that I would be better off studying something else—so I did.

Every decision I made was prefaced with the questions—What would Mom and Dad want me to do? Would they be proud? Would they love me? But no matter what I did, it was never good enough. I had based my whole life on the goals and aspirations my parents thought were good, and it didn't make me happy. I felt out of control. I felt worthless, useless, and unimportant.



Eventually I realized that my parents' approval wasn't coming, and if I didn't get my act together, I would destroy myself. I needed to find a center that was timeless, unchanging, and real—a center that couldn't shout, disapprove, or criticize. So I started to live my own life, by the principles that I thought would bring me happiness—like honesty (with myself and my parents), faith in a happier life, hope for the future, and belief in my own goodness. In the beginning I sort of had to pretend that I was strong, but, over a period of time, I became strong.

Finally I struck out on my own and had a falling out with my folks, but it made them see me for who I was, and they loved me. They apologized for all the pressure they put on me and expressed their love. I was eighteen years old before I ever remember my dad saying "I love you," but they were the sweetest words I have ever heard, and well worth the wait. I still care about what my parents think, and I am still influenced by their opinions, but, ultimately, I have become responsible for my life and my actions, and I try to please myself before anybody else.

Other Possible Centers

The list of possible centers could go on and on. Being *sports-* or *hobbies-centered* is a big one. How many times have we seen a sports-centered jock build his identity around being a great athlete only to suffer a career-ending injury? It happens all the time. And the poor kid is left to rebuild his life from scratch. The same goes for any hobbies and interests—dance, debate,

drama, music, or clubs.

And what about being *hero-centered*? If you build your life around a rock star, famous athlete, entrepreneur, or powerful politician, what happens if they die, do something really stupid, or end up in jail? Who will you look up to then?

Sometimes we can even become *enemy-centered*, and build our lives around hating a group, a person, or an idea. There are countless websites dedicated to hating particular topics or celebrities. What a waste of time! Why not put that energy toward something that makes you happy?

Becoming *work-centered* is a sickness that usually afflicts older people but can also reach teens. Workaholism is usually driven by a compulsive need to have more stuff, like money, cars, status, or recognition, which can never fully satisfy—because there's always a new model of iPhone coming out that will put your old one to shame!

Another common center is being *self-centered*, or thinking the world revolves around you and your problems. This often results in being so worried about your own condition that you're oblivious to the walking wounded all around you.

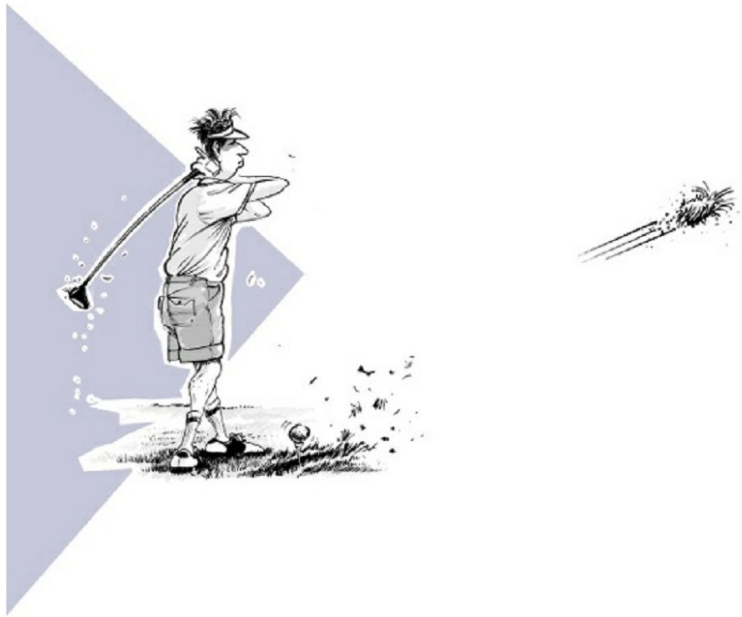
As you can see, all these and many more life-centers do not provide the stability that you and I need in life. I'm not saying we shouldn't strive to become excellent in something like dance or debate, or strive to develop rich relationships with our friends and parents. We should. But there's a fine line between having a passion for something and basing your entire existence on it. And that's the line we shouldn't cross.

Principle-Centered—*The Real Thing*

In case you were starting to wonder, there is a center that actually works. What is it? (Drumroll, please.) It's being *principle-centered*. We are all familiar with the effects of gravity. Throw a ball up and it comes down. It's a natural law or principle. Just as there are principles that rule the physical world, there are principles that rule the human world. Principles aren't religious. They aren't based on nationality or race. They aren't mine or yours. They aren't up for discussion. They apply equally to everyone, male or female, rich or poor, famous or obscure. They can't be bought or sold. If you live by them, you will excel. If you break them, you will fail (hey, that sorta' rhymes). It's that simple.

Here are a few examples: Honesty is a principle. Service is a principle. Love is a principle. Hard work is a principle. Respect, gratitude, moderation, fairness, integrity, loyalty, and responsibility are principles. There are dozens and dozens more. They are not hard to identify. Just as a compass always points to true north, your heart will recognize true principles.

For example, think about the principle of hard work. You may be able to scrape by using shortcuts and faking it for a while, but eventually it'll catch up to you.



I remember one time being invited to play in a golf tournament with my college football coach. He was a great golfer. Everyone, including my coach, expected that I'd be a fine golfer as well. After all, I was a college athlete and all college athletes should be great golfers. Right? Wrong. You see, I stunk at golf. I'd only played a few times in my life, and I didn't even know how to hold a club properly.

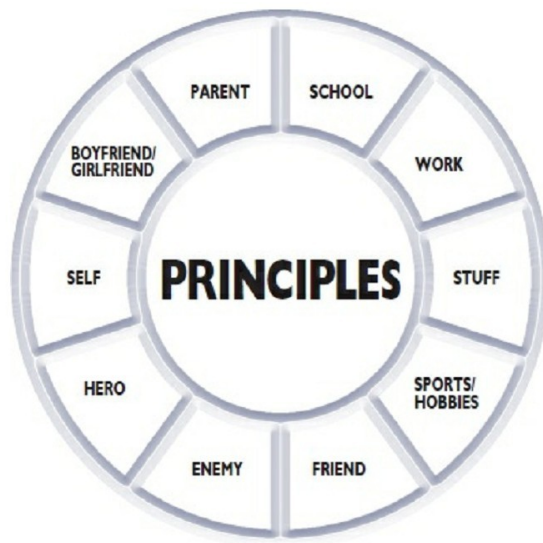
I was nervous about everyone finding out how bad I was at golf. Especially my coach. So I was hoping that I could fool him and everyone else into thinking I was good. On the very first hole there was a small crowd gathered around. I was first up to tee off. Why me? As I stepped up to hit the ball, I prayed for a miracle.

Swoooooosssssshhhhh. It worked! A miracle! I couldn't believe it! I had hit a long shot, straight down the middle of the fairway.

I turned around and smiled to the crowd and acted as if I always hit like that. "Thank you. Thank you very much."

I had them all fooled. But I was only fooling myself because there were $17\frac{1}{2}$ more holes to go. In fact, it took only about five more shots for everyone around me, including my coach, to realize that I was a complete golf sham. It wasn't long until the coach was trying to show me how to swing the club. I'd been exposed. Ouch!

You can't fake playing golf, tuning a guitar, or speaking Arabic if you haven't paid the price to get good. There's no way around it. Hard work is a principle. As the NBA great Larry Bird put it, "If you don't do your homework, you won't make your free throws."



Principles Never Fail

It takes faith to live by principles, especially when you see people close to you get ahead in life by lying, cheating, indulging, manipulating, and serving only themselves. What you don't see, however, is that breaking principles *always* catches up to them in the end.

Take the principle of honesty. If you're a big liar, you may be able to get by for a while, even for a few years. But you'd be hard-pressed to find a liar who achieved success over the *long haul*. As Cecil B. DeMille observed about his classic movie *The Ten Commandments*, "It is impossible for us to break the law. We can only break ourselves against the law."

Unlike all the other centers we've looked at, principles will never fail you. They'll never gossip behind your back. They don't move away. They don't suffer career-ending injuries. They don't play favorites based on skin color, gender, wealth, or appearance. A principle-centered life is simply the most stable, immovable, unshakable foundation you can build upon, and we all need one of those.

To grasp why principles always work, just imagine living a life based on their opposites—a life of dishonesty, laziness, indulgence, ingratitude, selfishness, and hate. I can't imagine any good things coming out of that. Can you?

Ironically, living a principle-centered life is the key to excelling in all the other centers. If you live the principles of service, respect, and love, for instance, you're likely to pick up more friends and be a more stable boyfriend or girlfriend. Putting principles first is also the key to becoming a person of character.



It is impossible for us to break the law. We can only break ourselves against the law.

CECIL B. DEMILLE, FILM DIRECTOR

Decide today to make principles your core life-center, or paradigm. In whatever situation

you find yourself, ask, “What’s the principle in play here?” For every problem, search for the principle that will help you solve it.

If you’re feeling worn out and beaten up by life, perhaps you should try the principle of *balance*.

If you find no one trusts you, the principle of *honesty* might just be the cure you need.

In the story *Loyalty to a Brother* by Walter MacPeck, *loyalty* was the principle in play:

One of two brothers fighting in the same company in France fell by a German bullet. The one who escaped asked permission of his officer to go and bring his brother in.

“He is probably dead,” said the officer, “and there is no use in your risking your life to bring in his body.”

But after further pleading the officer consented. Just as the soldier reached the lines with his brother on his shoulders, the wounded man died.

“There, you see,” said the officer, “you risked your life for nothing.”

“No,” replied Tom. “I did what he expected of me, and I have my reward. When I crept up to him and took him in my arms, he said, ‘Tom, I knew you would come—I just felt you would come.’”

In the upcoming chapters, you’ll discover that each of the 7 Habits is based upon a basic principle or two. And that’s where they get their power from.

The long and short of it is *principles rule*.



COMING ATTRACTIONS

Up next, we’ll talk about how to get rich, in a way you probably never thought of. So carry on!

A Word About Baby Steps

One of my family’s favorite movies is an old classic called *What About Bob?* starring Bill Murray. It is the story of a dysfunctional, phobia-laden, immature, pea-brained leech named Bob who never, ever goes away. He attaches himself to Dr. Marvin, a renowned psychiatrist, who wants nothing more than to get rid of Bob and finally gives him a book he wrote called *Baby Steps*. He tells Bob that the best way to solve his problems is not to bite off too much at once but to just take “baby steps” to reach his goals. Bob is delighted! He no longer has to worry about how to get all the way home from Dr. Marvin’s office, a big task for Bob. Instead, Bob only has to baby step his way out of the office, and then baby step his way onto the elevator, and so on.

So I’ll give you some baby steps at the end of each chapter, starting with this one—small, easy steps that you can do immediately to help you apply what you just read. Though small, these steps can become powerful tools in helping you achieve your larger goals. So, come along with Bob (he really becomes very likable after you accept the fact that you can’t shake him) and take some baby steps.

BABY STEPS

- 1 The next time you look in the mirror say something positive to yourself.



- 2 Show appreciation for someone's point of view today. Say something like "Hey, that's a cool idea."
- 3 Think of a limiting paradigm you might have of yourself, such as "I'll never be outgoing." Now, do something today that totally contradicts that paradigm.
- 4 Think of a loved one or close friend who has been acting out of character lately. Consider what might be causing them to act that way.
- 5 When you have nothing to do, what is it that occupies your thoughts? Remember, whatever is most important to you will become your paradigm or life-center.

What occupies my time and energy?



- 6 The Golden Rule rules! Begin today to treat others as you would want them to treat you. Don't be impatient, complain about what's for dinner, or bad-mouth someone, unless you want the same treatment.
- 7 Sometime soon, find a quiet place where you can be alone. Think about what matters most to you.
- 8 Listen carefully to the lyrics of the music you listen to most frequently. Consider if they are in harmony with the principles you believe in.



- 9 When you do your chores at home or work tonight, try out the principle of hard work. Go the extra mile and do more than is expected.
- 10 The next time you're in a tough situation and don't know what to do, ask yourself, "What principle should I apply (i.e., honesty, love, loyalty, hard work, patience)?" Follow that principle and don't look back.