



CHOOSE COURAGE

**In Your
Relationships**

Thrive Together

Ruth M. Schimel, Ph.D.

Choose Courage

In Your Relationships:

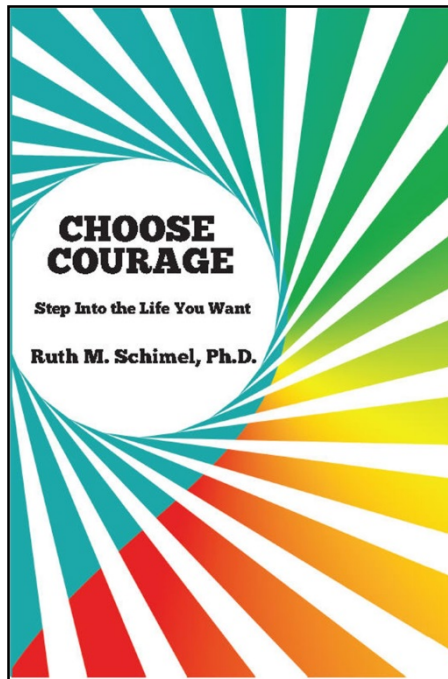
Thrive Together

by Ruth M. Schimel, Ph.D.

Career & Life Management Consultant

**DON'T MISS THIS GROUNDBREAKING BOOK THAT
PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION FOR THE HANDBOOKS**

Choose Courage: Step Into the Life You Want



**by Ruth M. Schimel, Ph.D.
Career & Life Management Consultant**

**Available at www.amazon.com or through
neighborhood bookstores**

In Paperback and Kindle editions

ISBN: 13:149034303

[Choose Courage: Step Into the Life You Want](#)

ACCLAIM FOR CHOOSE COURAGE

We are in the era where individuals can express who they are, what they believe in, what they seek, and where to move forward as never before across most of the globe.

Technology has enabled and empowered the ability to have a platform to express your opinion (from Tweets to blog posts, to other means). Thus the timely publication of the Dr. Ruth Schimel's new book entitled "Choose Courage: Step Into the Life You Want" is ideal to guide individuals to not only pursue their dreams but also to realize them.

Choose Courage offers a unique set of guidelines that is sensitive to the individual reader and allows everyone to tailor the recommendations to their own set of circumstances. Most "How to Books" dictate with a lofty set of rules and principles to the reader for the pathway to success. Dr. Schimel offers a positive, manageable, and realistic process.

Choose Courage is an outstanding life map that guides a range of individuals from business leaders to elementary teachers to exhibit their courage and to use their respective talents without boundaries, without fear.

Dr. Hubert Glover, Drexel University, Author of Giraffes of Technology: The Making of the 21st Century Leader

USE AND BENEFITS OF CHOOSE COURAGE

***Choose Courage: Step Into the Life You Want* transforms what could be a heroic cliché into concrete ways you can realize your true capacities. Based on doctoral-level research with everyday people, the book provides a 21st century definition of courage. The array of tools and guidance will help you build on your strengths and skills as well as transcend emotional barriers. Photos, art, humor, and poetry will also inspire your continuing action.**

The design of *Choose Courage* echoes the dynamism of life. Like the blended, spontaneous nature of jazz, this interactive book uses a range of disciplines to support fresh ideas and menus of processes; weave them into what you want and need. Since the approach reflects the incremental nature of actual progress, take the small steps in whatever order makes sense to you. Or use the sequence offered. You'll be prompting your own potential and useful contributions from and to others.

THE CHOOSE COURAGE HANDBOOKS

Promote your progress based on what engages and inspires you in Ruth's major book: [Choose Courage: Step Into the Life You Want](#). For further encouragement, explore the series of related handbooks already available; more will be forthcoming. Custom-designed for your enjoyment, adaptation, and action, all handbooks are about 50-80 pages and interactive. They also offer powerful processes for group training and development. Click on the handbook titles to purchase your copies!

Currently available handbooks

	<p>Step Into the Success You Want: Sparking Your Powers (Choose Courage Handbook 1) July 31, 2014 By Ruth Schimel, Ph.D.</p> <p>See how to combine your strengths and interests to spark success as you define it. Practical ways to reduce barriers to your progress are also provided.</p>
	<p>Step Into the Success You Want: Building Bridges to Achievement (Choose Courage Handbook #2) November 11, 2014 By Ruth Schimel, Ph.D.</p> <p>Take action steps to a brighter future. Transcend what keeps you stuck in your comfort zone. Get motivation from your purpose and focus, as you continue clarifying and demonstrating what success means to you.</p>
	<p>Choose Courage In Your Relationships: Empower Yourself First (Choose Courage Handbook #3) March 29, 2015 By Ruth Schimel, Ph.D.</p> <p>Summon your strengths and skills to influence people in your personal and professional life. Expand your repertoire with intangibles such as charm and care to inspire mutually beneficial relationships.</p>

Copyright © 2015, Ruth M. Schimel, Ph.D.

Career & Life Management Consultant

202.659.1772

www.ruthschimel.com ruth@ruthschimel.com

Use your good judgment, intuition, intellect, and common sense as you apply and adapt suggestions and guidance from this handbook.

Please do not use the guides and information in this handbook for commercial purposes without written permission from the author. If used for academic purposes only, do not make any changes and notify the author in advance with details of use.

Copyright© 2015 Ruth M. Schimel, Ph.D.

All rights reserved.

Cover graphic by Blen Getahun, www.blengdesign.com

ISBN-13: 978-1517463472

ISBN: 1517463475

LIMIT OF LIABILITY AND DISCLAIMER

The publisher and author have made their best efforts to prepare this book for your effective use and benefit. By all means use your good judgment and intuition to make the most of your experience with it.

They make no representations or warranties to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book. Any implied warranties, merchantability, and fitness for a particular purpose are also disclaimed.

This book is meant to be informational and educational. As such, it does not constitute psychological or medical advice. Bear in mind that the advice and strategies may not be suitable for your situation. You should therefore consult with a professional as appropriate.

Neither the author nor publisher shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, or consequential other damages.

DEDICATION

This handbook is offered with appreciation to my clients and readers, as well as to my collaborator and production editor, Kathleen Sindell, Ph.D.

(www.kathleensindell.com)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
NATURAL COMPLEXITY IN RELATIONSHIPS	4
SHIFTS IN INTERPERSONAL NORMS	5
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES	7
OPPORTUNITIES IN RELATIONSHIPS	9
RELATIONSHIPS PROVIDE IMMEDIATE BENEFITS	9
RELATIONSHIPS CAN IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH	10
ASSESS AND STRENGTHEN QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS	11
THE VALUE OF GENEROSITY	12
GUIDE ONE: ENCOURAGING RARENESS IN OTHERS	15
PREPARATION	15
INGREDIENTS	16
LIKELY RESULTS OF YOUR EFFORTS	16
BENEFITS AND RISKS IN ORIGINALITY	16
PRIMARILY PROFESSIONAL SITUATIONS	17
PRIMARILY PERSONAL SITUATIONS	18
CONCLUSION	18
FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT, LEARNING, AND GUIDANCE	21
GUIDE TWO: PERCOLATING GOOD PARTNERSHIPS	21
PREPARATION	21
INGREDIENTS	21
LIKELY RESULTS OF YOUR EFFORTS	22
BEING ALERT TO COMPLEX CHOICES	22
PERCOLATING PROCESSES	22
CLARIFYING POSITIVE CRITERIA FOR CHOICE	23
CLARIFYING CRITERIA FOR CONCERN	25

RUTH M. SCHIMEL, PH.D.

INTEGRATING YOUR INFORMATION FOR ACTION..... 27

FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING, INSIGHT AND GUIDANCE 28

GUIDE THREE: SEASONING FRIENDSHIP 29

PREPARATION 29

INGREDIENTS 30

LIKELY RESULTS OF YOUR EFFORTS..... 30

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FRIENDSHIP 30

SPARKING YOUR OWN POSSIBILITIES FOR FRIENDSHIP 33

FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT, LEARNING, AND GUIDANCE 35

GUIDE FOUR: QUENCHING YOUR THIRST FOR LASTING LOVE..... 37

PREPARATION 38

INGREDIENTS 38

LIKELY RESULTS OF YOUR EFFORTS..... 38

FOCUS ON CREATING GOOD MATCHES..... 38

IMPRINTS FROM THE PAST: STORIES AND MODELS..... 39

MAKE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF ACCESSIBLE..... 47

CONTINUING ACTION 48

FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT, LEARNING, AND GUIDANCE 49

GUIDE FIVE: STRENGTHENING LINKS BETWEEN GENERATIONS..... 51

PREPARATION 51

INGREDIENTS 52

LIKELY RESULTS OF YOUR EFFORTS..... 52

 CHOICES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITIES: SHARE A MEAL..... 53

 EXPLORE THE FUTURE..... 53

 SHARE VARIETIES OF EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES..... 54

 PLAN SMALL AND GREAT ADVENTURES TOGETHER 54

 SHARE “FINDS” WITH ONE ANOTHER 55

 DISCUSS ISSUES THAT AFFECT THE RELATIONSHIP 55

 USE A VARIETY OF COMMUNICATIONS 55

CHOOSE COURAGE: THRIVE TOGETHER

TEACH ONE ANOTHER NEW SKILLS56
SUM UP FOR ACTION56
KEEP TRAVELING TOGETHER..... 56
FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT, LEARNING, AND GUIDANCE 57

APPENDICES

INDEX..... 60
APPENDIX A: DEFINITION OF COURAGE..... 63
APPENDIX B: CYCLES OF COURAGE 67
ABOUT THE AUTHOR..... 70
CHOOSE COURAGE SERIES ORDER FORM 72

CHOOSE COURAGE

In Your Relationships: Thrive Together

INTRODUCTION

A sign of health in the mind is the ability of one individual to enter imaginatively and accurately into the thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears of another person; also to allow the other person to do the same to us.

~ Donald Winnicott, English pediatrician, psychiatrist, sociologist, and psychoanalyst ~

Becoming courageous involves the willingness to realize your true capacities by going through discomfort, fear, anxiety, or suffering and taking wholehearted, responsible action.

~ Ruth M. Schimel, Ph.D., Career & Life Management Consultant ~

RUTH M. SCHIMEL, PH.D.

Imagine being a gardener as you develop and sustain worthwhile professional and personal relationships. You provide the soil: fertile, dry, or temporarily depleted due to overuse. The seeds you plant can vary among proven producers, hybrid, and experimental.

From actual experience and your common sense, you can appreciate that soil keeps its productive power with regular tilling, mulching, or healthy fertilizing. In addition to such individual choices are many social, economic, biological, and political influences. Some of these situations can be anticipated or managed, others not. Even what seems threatening may be merely new to you. With exploration, they could support growth. Just ignore or avoid the ones that limit it

Insofar as possible, prepare for actual or symbolic droughts, tornadoes, and floods that bring unwanted drama and danger. To anticipate problems, some experienced gardeners choose to thin their crops by overplanting and then weeding out the weaker plants. As you keep the healthiest specimens for eventual harvest, decisions about what to reap or plow under to support future growth will emerge.

Like human beings, gardens come in many varieties depending on cultivation, available resources, and their intrinsic nature. A less traditional approach for growing things is hydroponics. Without using soil, it shows alternative resources are viable for development. Another example is Singapore's recent experiment with vertical gardens. Their design offers still other formats and assumptions for growth, symbolically and actually, to renew work, family, and relationships. <http://tinyurl.com/nhryrgn>

However you proceed, keep your own soil and other sources for growth productive with varying enrichment and uses; invite a range of contributors to join the process of development. Such continuing investment can bring anticipated and surprising benefits for most people involved.

In your life, the metaphor of gardening can enrich any dynamic, interactive opportunities and situations related to nurturing and growth. You could use your knowledge, attention, and even love — however you best express that — to influence others for mutual benefit. Such creative processes will not only avoid boredom, but also generate new possibilities and adventures.

More important, your gardening efforts can benefit daily life, whether you assess what matters to you quantitatively or qualitatively or some combination. The experience will also expand and deepen your confidence. That can translate into progress toward goals for yourself and assistance to others, bringing increased pleasure and meaning for all.

CHOOSE COURAGE: THRIVE TOGETHER

There are probably opportunities to be a gardener in many aspects of your life that you choose. They could be available within work, family, friendships, community, health, home, and play. What other areas would you add? Any aspects you decide to cultivate will be strengthened by good relationships, a foundation for helping all to flourish.

Based on your experiences with helping yourself and others improve and grow, take and adapt the garden metaphor for relationships as far as your patience and imagination go. Some questions to ask yourself are:

- How varied and satisfying are your main two or three relationships (the ones that involve most of your time and interest, for example)?
- How well do they support your current life, potential, and dreams?
- Name below one or two of your most valuable relationships that would benefit from a renewal of caring, nurturing, and focusing. Specify one or two concrete actions you will take within this month.

You may assume that initiating and improving relationships depend on your personality and talents. But generally the process is not contingent on being charming or attractive, extroverted or introverted, creative or expert. Whatever your capacities and tendencies, assess success by quality rather than quantity.

However you gauge your strengths, they may not matter as much as:

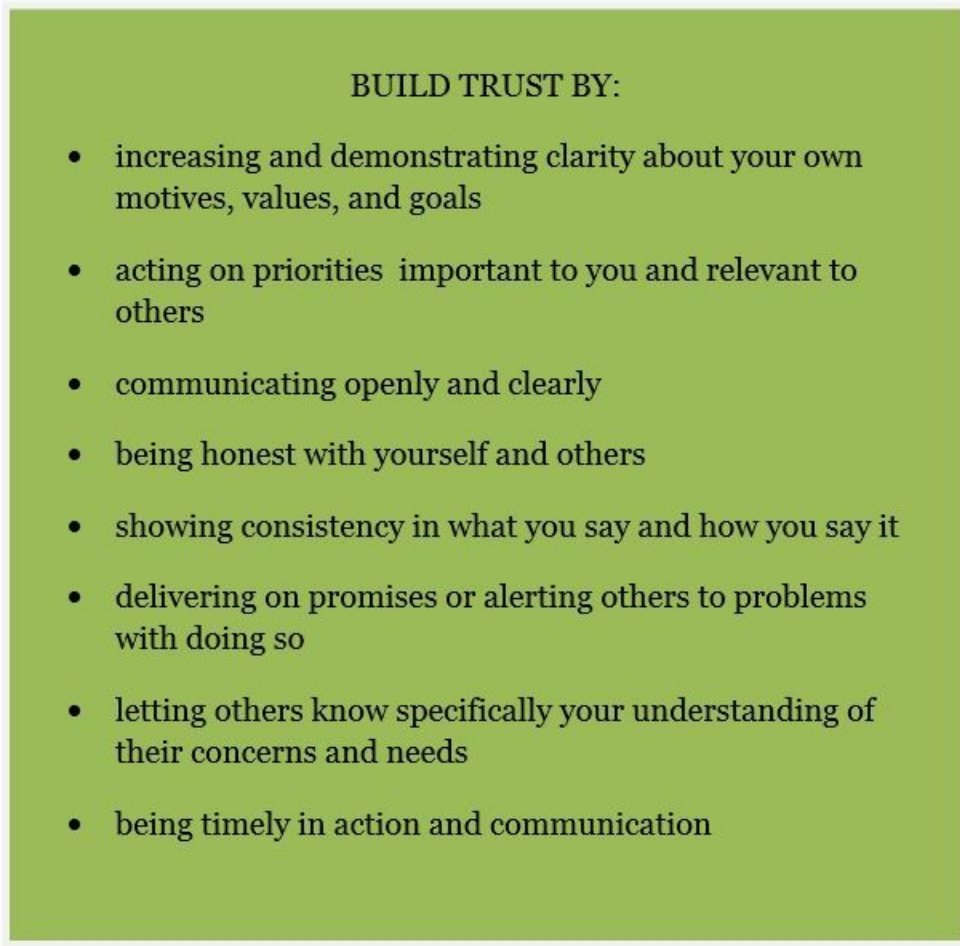
- sincere, expressed interest in others
- willingness to keep exploring and learning
- action to support your own interests and inform others of them
- good judgment and intuition about situations and people
- your own authenticity and motivation, including honesty with yourself

Given natural expectations that an action will dictate a specific outcome on your timetable, it's best to keep a sense of humor about realities you encounter. Patience with yourself and others of value also adds some balance to the work involved in promoting effective connections. Though sometimes frustrating, accepting that progress rarely proceeds in straight lines or other neat ways can actually smooth progress and save energy.

Although I bet you already have good insight into yourself and your own motivations, you may want to at least explore the table of contents for the third handbook: *Choose Courage In Your Relationships: Empower Yourself First*. Then you'll see how well these handbooks can work together.

As a reminder or introduction, here's a short summary of one of the major themes at the start of *Empower Yourself First* — how to build trust:

Figure 1.0 Building Trust



NATURAL COMPLEXITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

From your own experience, you know there are few significant relationships that

CHOOSE COURAGE: THRIVE TOGETHER

flow entirely neatly or consistently. Internal issues emerge from individuals' differing personalities, values, and backgrounds. Anticipated and surprising environmental influences will also continue. Most require attention and accommodation over time as well as commitment to caring and doing appropriate work. As with being courageous, your willingness is a crucial catalyst.

Furthermore, rarely does each participant in a relationship come to the table with the same levels of interest, effort, styles, and openness at the same time. In such situations, use discussion and negotiation to promote fairness and reasonable outcomes for each person. Gentle humor helps as well.

When negotiation would help a significant relationship in your life, mention below one important matter that would benefit from the process now and one related action you will take. Also indicate briefly when and how you will follow up. (Extended guidance on conflict resolution will be provided in the third handbook on relationships, *Profit from Problems*.)

Context can be as important as content for determining the flow of relationships. Therefore consider how the following short discussions of family and behavioral norms, as well as political and economic influences, may affect your situation. To identify opportunities for action, just highlight for follow up whatever applies in the following sections.

SHIFTS IN INTERPERSONAL NORMS

As you've seen and possibly experienced, there are shifts in the definition and make up of families, what is considered acceptable behavior, and modes of communication. For example, the nuclear or traditional family with a mother, father, and two children is no longer the norm in many communities. Selected highlights of the 2012 United States Census Bureau report for periods between 1970 and 2012 mention that:

- 66% of households were considered family units, down from 81%
- Households of married couples with children under 18 halved from 40 to 20%

RUTH M. SCHIMEL, PH.D.

- One-person households increased 17 to 27% (in 2011, there were 56 million married-couple households and 32 million one-person households)

One out of five individuals in their 20s and 30s are living with their parents. Stay-at-home mothers have risen from 23% in 1999 to 29% in 2012. In contrast, the percentage of childless women, ages 40-44, doubled from 1976 to 2006; those numbers have decreased somewhat to about 15% since 2006, however.

About one in five adults has been married two or more times. This tendency to remarry reflects in part longer, healthier lives that can offer motivation to enter into new arrangements. Other shifts include increasing numbers of same sex marriages, couples living together, and interracial adoptions. Along with demographic changes in the proportions of ethnic groups to the current population, these influences can change what defines a family as well as communities.

All these shifts suggest the value of even greater attention to understanding and accepting different behaviors that transcend assumptions about what's typical or normal. While attention to generational categories is useful, it may also distract from appreciating individuality and dynamism that can benefit from deeper communication and flexibility of attitudes.

Depending on your preferences for seeing people in categories, explore the books on intergenerational differences at the end of the final guide, *Strengthening Links between Generations*, in this handbook. You'll no doubt notice how various life experiences during particular decades can influence individual norms, values, and behavior in many people.

At the same time, continue to be alert to how people differ from such neat categories and labels in order to note individual uniqueness and complexity. As New York City mayor Bill de Blasio's wife Chirlane McCray so dramatically says: "Labels put people in boxes and those boxes are shaped like coffins." Possibly providing a reassuring sense of predictability, such labeling may over simplify the challenge of figuring people out. The cost could be losing insight about the richness of differences and human capacities. Then opportunities for your appropriate adjustment and accommodation over time could be missed.

Such flexibility and sensibility become especially relevant given the one in four people likely to suffer from mental illness at some point in life. Inattention to your own possible issues as well as those of people who are significant in your personal and professional life could miss benefits from early care or even avoidance of contributing

CHOOSE COURAGE: THRIVE TOGETHER

issues. Similarly, other disabilities may be ameliorated given opportunities in psychological and educational assistance, medications, devices, and environmental adjustments — especially when useful integration is provided.

Effective communication can be the bridge between being in autopilot to creating opportunities for improved quality in relationships, whatever their nature and nuance. However touching NPR's Scott Simon's reporting on his mother's passing, relying on impersonal sound bites only goes so far. Among other options, texting, email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn can also be useful for quick information drops, but do not substitute for deeper, face-to-face interaction that offers new insights and enjoyment. Even conversations over meals in public can sometimes be a struggle given high noise levels in many popular restaurants.

Within family units, recent research by Melissa Milkie and Kei Nomaguchi in the April, 2015 issue of the *Journal of Marriage and Family* reports that quality, not quantity, of time, spent with children affects academic achievement, behavior, and emotional well-being. Parents' attention can even be harmful when they, mothers especially, feel stressed, guilty, sleep-deprived, or anxious. The challenge is to set priorities that serve individual, family, and professional requirements. In many cases, some matters have to be let go, adjusted, or negotiated.

For another point of view on quality time, see *The New York Times*' Frank Bruni on *The Myth of Quality Time* at <http://nyti.ms/1UtOuLV> for September 6, 2015. Bruni believes that being present ensures that significant occasions are not missed; "nothing nourishes intimacy and love like an investment of hours." Of course, he was writing about participating in a one-week, large family vacation and as an uncle. Still another perspective to explore is *I Know How She Does It* by Laura Vanderkam. She gathered information from American mothers working full time. (See <http://tinyurl.com/q3yz5ue>.)

Whatever the choices available to you, taking care of yourself as a parent and relative can contribute to others' welfare as well. One way of doing this is by addressing mindless habits and automatic reactions. You may find that practicing mindfulness for short periods regularly can improve quality of life and ultimately quality of relationships. If interested, explore a recent *New Yorker* article on the prevalence of mindfulness practice, *The Higher Life* by Lizzie Widdicombe at: <http://tinyurl.com/nb4wtwr>

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES

Given effects on relationships, brief mention of economic travails since the great

recession that started in 2007 is warranted here, even if unemployment numbers are improving for many and the stock market is tending up, for now. Real median income for middle class families, adjusted for household size, has not increased since 1999, according to Matt O'Brien in an October 1, 2014 *Washington Post* article. In other words, "the middle class has not gotten a raise for 15 years."

Typical pre-recession employment patterns seem to be fading. Many who have not found full-time work are doing temporary, part-time, and contract work. Half of the 53 million freelancers began that work by choice. According to a 2014 study partially commissioned by the Freelancers Union, nearly nine in 10 would prefer their current employment arrangement to traditional full-time work.

Though unemployment statistics for workers 55 and older are 4.1%, compared to 5.7% for the population in general, they hide a harsher reality. According to AARP data, older workers spend longer periods out of work; when they find a job, half receive lower pay. Even more disquieting is about 16% of men, 18-55, are not working at all. In fact, that percentage has been increasing over time.

Given these realities, conventional planning for long-term careers no longer seems relevant these days. To explore and anticipate the future, see *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*, 2014 at <http://tinyurl.com/nsgtxff>. Expectations about neat job titles and linear careers already need to be adjusted to reflect constantly changing work realities as well as influences of globalization.

For example, the Department of Labor reports that 65% of school-age kids will have jobs that don't exist now. This challenges individuals to keep learning transferable skills, not to mention updating knowledge, to prepare for future developments. Educational institutions at all levels and employers must also question their assumptions about the value and categories of content knowledge and modes of organization. Today's silos and titles that confer credibility must give way to acknowledging the increasing value and uses of interdisciplinary knowledge and processes. (See Gillian Tett's 2015 book, *The Silo Effect* at (<http://nyti.ms/1LTwwOj>)) As these dynamic challenges and opportunities for work and learning, as well as less conventional situations evolve, so too will relationships at work, home, and other locations.

Meanwhile, back at the political ranch, many Republicans and Democrats appear constrained by their ideologies and short-term choices. Even as Independent voters increase in numbers, few politicians seem ready to break patterns that pour great energy and resources into re-election and *overly* careful self-presentation. While many

CHOOSE COURAGE: THRIVE TOGETHER

decry this political constipation and the influence of campaign financiers, reviewing historical patterns shows that unfortunately our current situation has precedent.

What seems missing today, though, is the kind of inspiring responsible leadership, compromises, and openness that can unlock doors and gather support for what serves the public interest. While individuals have some flexibility in designing and pursuing their education and earning their living, there seem to be fewer opportunities to influence political policies and behavior, whether related to foreign or domestic matters — unless there is extensive time and money.

Nevertheless, any topic or passion of value is still amenable to organizing for action and improvement as motivation, strategy, and incentives coalesce. Over time, building relationships and trust will be key for engaging others in promising efforts that benefit the polity. Individuals can still learn from one another and develop their psychic muscles as they reach beyond their comfort zones.

OPPORTUNITIES IN RELATIONSHIPS

RELATIONSHIPS PROVIDE IMMEDIATE BENEFITS

You can influence relationships right now among those you have and are willing to cultivate. Consider opportunities involving:

- family, friends, and colleagues
- service providers
- people met in stores, on lines, and at meetings
- community members
- activities related to learning, sports, religious and spiritual practice, and other matters

Instead of taking for granted people you see regularly or think you know well, try moving beyond quick “how are you?” to showing actual interest with concerned inquiry. How about a conversation about your actual situations? Offering something pithy and real about yourself that’s not the hyperbole of “everything is great” can also prompt discussion. Small shifts in such communication habits are at least worth a try to move into deeper connections that build interest and bonds, if you wish.

To open conversation, take a few seconds to imagine how you would express genuine interest. What about just introducing yourself, if it’s a first connection, with an appropriate, interesting detail? Also consider and improve upon the following:

RUTH M. SCHIMEL, PH.D.

- Bring up mutual interests.
- Ask about their concerns related to work, family, and other matters.
- Refer to something discussed earlier that engages you both or experience in a current or shared situation.
- Ask relevant, sensitive questions usually starting with “what” and “how.”
- Comment positively and specifically on an aspect of the person’s appearance or action.

Of course, in your busy life, you may understandably ask why take the time? To reconsider, here are some coming attractions that could emerge. Imagine how trying a variety of new approaches would:

- bring opportunities to deepen and improve personal and professional life
- lessen boredom and empty routine
- contain unexpected, pleasant surprises and possibly productive adventures

RELATIONSHIPS CAN IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

Perhaps, even more important than the immediate contributions of relationships to quality of life mentioned above are the years that good friends and colleagues can add to lives. Health experts and researchers point to the value of personal relationships to longevity. John Roberts, who wrote *Healthy at 100*, considers them the most important indicator of good health as well. Expert on nutrition and heart disease Dean Ornish agrees: “I’m not aware of any other factor, not diet, not exercise, not genetics, not drugs, and not surgery that has a greater impact on our quality of life, incidence of illness and premature death from all causes.”

If you prefer data to quotes, researchers analyzed 148 studies of the effect of social relationships and death risk. Reported by WebMD, a longitudinal study included 308,849 people followed about 7.5 years. If they had strong social relationships, these people were more likely to be alive. Results held regardless of age, gender, or health status and for all causes of death.

Complementary to this data is a March, 2015 article in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* that analyzed 70 studies involving 3.4 million people who were on average 66 years of age. At the start of the study, the 26% who reported being lonely were more likely to have died. “Mortality risk was 20% higher for those who were socially isolated than those who were not.” This negative effect on longevity was the same for all people who were alone, whether actually so or just feeling lonely.

Given this information and accessibility of your own resources for improving

CHOOSE COURAGE: THRIVE TOGETHER

quality of life, relationship building is likely a good investment. As motivation, think of how improved relationships could decrease time and money devoted to medical care. Use this handbook to help test the possibility.

To promote progress, identify how you can collaborate with others who want to develop or improve your relationships. Follow up with one or two ideas for action and briefly describe them in the space below. Name promising people to involve as well.

**ASSESS AND STRENGTHEN QUALITY OF
RELATIONSHIPS**

At the same time that relationships can improve your health, they can also sap energy and time, distract from important priorities, and lessen self-confidence. Yet even in such negative circumstances lurk opportunities for improvement. As you choose courage, benefits can evolve. Of course, easier said than done.

Letting go of or modifying some relationships can also affect an identity such as “good person,” “spouse,” or “friend.” In such situations, unknown or imagined outcomes could seem threatening. But would they be any worse than a current problematic situation that possibly puts your self-worth, health, happiness, or future in jeopardy in a variety of ways? Only you can say.

Rather than look at such realities in just dramatic ways, one incremental approach is to consider the boundaries you have with significant others, professionally and personally. Here are some questions to help you assess the health and permeability of such boundaries:

- Do you serve the person’s interests primarily to the detriment of your own?
- Do you accede to others’ wishes out of anxiety, habit, guilt, or fear or from sincere commitment, pleasure, and interest?
- Over time, how mutual or balanced is the commitment, considering both material and intrinsic benefits?

Use your responses and insights to consider actions that could provide opportunities for improved use of time and energy. Sometimes, discussing main issues with the person or others, including professionals, will be useful. As you wish, clarify and

express your own preferences and motivations in such exchanges; possibly practice saying what you want from a relationship beforehand. Other choices are to avoid, negotiate, or limit such connections.

Ultimately, though, let your emotions tell you when you're on a healthier path. They could include feeling relieved, unburdened, or a transitory anxiety about change. Instead of connecting to others because of obligation, history, or habit, you'll probably act based on anticipated enjoyment, interest, or curiosity. Then, expect a better use of time and energy. With those improvements, your capacities to contribute to others, now and in the future, in authentic, appropriate ways will be strengthened.

THE VALUE OF GENEROSITY

The previous discussion may imply that relationships need to be mainly reciprocal. Although the work of Wharton School professor Adam Grant strongly supports giving without expectation of immediate gain as a basis for creating meaning in life, not everyone has Grant's seemingly endless capacity. As a means of developing durable, worthwhile relationships and positive outcomes, Grant's studies mention the value of exercising the giving muscle: "By consistently overriding their selfish impulses in order to help others, they had strengthened their psychological muscles to a point where using willpower for painful tasks was no longer exhausting."

Of course this approach can backfire when others are proven takers, the kind of people who seem like bottomless pits; they prove that by wearing you out with requests and demands, often things they can or should do themselves or for which they should seek or pay for other assistance. Whether people are takers or fall in between givers and takers, your emotions can also help you distinguish where benefits lie — or not. Just attend to how bored or depleted you feel after being with or communicating with someone. Use such cues as a basis for considering whether or not you want to offer assistance and attention in the future or even stay connected beyond polite acknowledgement of a connection you define.

As a test of value and good use of yourself, see how your assistance results in personal satisfaction and meaning. Are you encouraging the other person's self-sufficiency or dependence, for example? Are you seeing effective or beneficial results, unanticipated, positive outcomes beyond expectations, or hope for reasonable progress? Can you imagine how your actions will contribute to paying forward what you have received from others previously? Your emotions and common sense will often be the most accurate guides for choosing what to do next.

CHOOSE COURAGE: THRIVE TOGETHER

To get good data for your barometer for action, review the variety of significant people in your life and their tendencies. From a positive perspective, who are the:

- collaborators and connectors
- cheerleaders and supporters
- questioners and critical thinkers
- helpers and providers

While none of these roles are mutually exclusive, all offer promising relationships, often varying with the recipient and situation. For effective focus and reciprocity, mention below three to five main capacities you want to offer people who have meaning to you in your life.

To pursue themes that appeal to you in this Introduction and strengthen opportunities for mutual thriving, use and adapt the following five guides in the handbook as well as other sources you add:

Encouraging Rareness in Others

Percolating Good Partnerships in Love, Work, and Play

Seasoning Friendship

Quenching Your Thirst for Lasting Love

Strengthening Links between Generations

As you make progress in your relationships, consider how you may want to apply this latest fortune cookie advice I received. It seemed more immediately useful and astute than many I've read. "Be direct. Usually one can accomplish more that way." In fact, that's a good prelude to the next handbook on relationships, *Profit from Problems*. It focuses on converting problems to opportunities.