

Part One



You Can Do It Anyway

It's a Crazy World



Okay, you're right. The world is crazy. Your world may be especially crazy. But I promise that you can still find personal meaning and deep happiness.

The Paradoxical Commandments are guidelines for finding meaning in a crazy world. That's why the first phrase in each commandment is about adversity, or difficulty, or disappointment. But each statement about adversity is followed by a positive commandment to *do it anyway*.

The paradox in each case is that even when things are going badly in the world around us, we can still find personal meaning and deep happiness. We can do that by facing the worst in the world with the best in ourselves.

You and I, as individuals, can't control the external world. We can't control the economy or the rate of population growth. We can't control the weather or natural disasters like fires and floods.

We can't control when terrorists may strike or wars may break out. We can't control which companies will acquire which companies, or which jobs will be eliminated, or which jobs will open up. We can work hard, and prepare, and seize opportunities. But there are lots of things in our external world that we just cannot control.

For example, your sector of the economy may take a hit, and the company you work for goes bankrupt. You are talented and good at your work, but suddenly you are out of a job.

You may start your own small business, and a fire destroys your files, records, and product designs. You have to start all over.

You may be in line for a political appointment, but your party loses the election. You don't get the job, even though you worked hard for it and are qualified to do it.

Your supervisor may be very competent and not interested in changing jobs. You are qualified for promotion, but her position is not likely to open up for a long, long time.

There are lots of circumstances that we just can't control. However, there is something very important that we *can* control.

We can control our inner lives. We get to decide who we are going to be and how we are going to live. We can decide to love people, and do good, and succeed, and be honest and frank, and think big, and fight for the underdog, and build, and help people, and give the world our best. We can live our values, and stay

close to our families and friends, and do what is right and good and true—no matter what. *No matter what*. The good news is that these are the things that give people the most personal meaning and the deepest happiness.

What do I mean by “personal meaning”? I mean something that is significant and meaningful to you personally. And what is “deep happiness”? I think of it as the kind of happiness that touches your spirit and connects with your soul. People have many names for it. Some people may call it self-actualization. Others call it self-fulfillment. Still others call it being centered. People of faith may call it finding God’s will for their lives. But whatever you call it, finding personal meaning is the key to being deeply happy. And that personal meaning can be yours, no matter what.



How am I coping with a crazy world?

1. What do I think is crazy about the world?
2. What is crazy about *my* daily world?
3. What can I do to influence the craziness in the world?

4. What can I do to influence the craziness in my daily world?
5. Do I decide each day to control my inner life? Why? Why not?
6. What is “deep happiness” to me? What words do I use to explain it?
7. How do I feel when I’m not deeply happy?
8. How do I feel when I am deeply happy?



A Personal Declaration of Independence

The Paradoxical Commandments are a personal declaration of independence from all the external factors we can't control. We don't have to depend on the external world for meaning and happiness. We can find them in our inner lives.

Executive coach Ken Hill came across the Paradoxical Commandments in the early nineties. For him:

The Paradoxical Commandments are a reminder that we aren't victims in this world. We are actors who can do what needs to be done—even in the face of resistance. It is

interesting to see how some of the leaders and professionals I work with seem to instinctively act in positive ways regardless of the odds against them. But all too often I have clients who are tempted to think of themselves as victims. It is a joy to help these clients strengthen their emotional competencies to the point where they can move beyond feeling victimized to feeling real confidence and a sense of empowerment. One of the questions they have to answer is: What steps can I take, independent of the actions of others, that will get me headed in the right direction? An understanding of the Paradoxical Commandments can help people answer questions like that and can help them go on to build fuller, richer lives for themselves.

Our personal meaning and deep happiness don't depend on the way the world treats us. They depend on how we *respond* to the way the world treats us. How we respond is always up to us. It's our decision. It's about our inner lives, the part of the world that we control.



*Do I understand the factors that I do
and do not control?*

1. What external factors affect me the most right now?
2. How am I responding to those external factors?
3. How can I find the most personal meaning and deep happiness in my response?
4. What can I do to strengthen my inner life, the part of the world that I do control?



No Excuses

The Paradoxical Commandments are also a “no excuses” policy. Sure, some people are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. So what? That’s no excuse. You need to love them anyway. Why? Because love is an important source of personal meaning. You don’t want to miss all that meaning, just because people can be difficult.

Typical Excuses for Not Finding Personal Meaning

Everyone has his or her own favorite excuses for not doing the things that would lead to personal meaning and deep happiness. Here are some typical excuses:

1. *I can't just now. I'm busy. Maybe tomorrow.*
2. *I'll think about it. I'll try to make a plan.*
3. *I'm tired. I just want to sit here on the sofa and watch TV.*
4. *The economy is bad. Maybe when things improve . . .*
5. *The economy is hot. Maybe when things slow down . . .*
6. *I would if I could, but circumstances just aren't right.*
7. *I don't know how to look for personal meaning and deep happiness. I'm not sure how I would adjust if I found it.*
8. *People will think I've gone off the deep end if I do something that is really meaningful.*
9. *People will feel threatened if I do something really meaningful.*
10. *I don't know how to do anything really meaningful.*
11. *I tried it once and it didn't work.*
12. *A friend tried it once and it didn't work.*

And maybe the good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. So what? That's no excuse. You have to do good anyway. Why? Because doing good will make your life meaningful.

I am always optimistic. I believe that if you follow the Paradoxical Commandments and live the paradoxical life, things will usually work out for you. If you love people, and help people, and do what's right and good and true, you're bound to receive recognition and praise.

But what if things don't work out, or nobody notices your good work? The answer is: So what? You still have to live the paradoxical life. No matter what the world does to you, you have to stay focused on personal meaning and *do it anyway*. Why? Because that is where you will find deep happiness.

In short, if you follow the Paradoxical Commandments, you won't let excuses prevent you from finding personal meaning and deep happiness. You'll do what is meaningful, *anyway*.



*What are my excuses for
not finding personal meaning?*

1. What excuses do I use most often in my daily life? Why?

2. How do I feel when I make those excuses? Why?
3. What are the real reasons I don't do things that give me personal meaning and deep happiness?
4. How can I address those reasons so that I can stop making excuses?



Breaking Away from a Difficult Past

I have met and heard from counselors and therapists who work with people who have difficult pasts. Some of these people grew up in poverty. Some were mistreated when they were children. Some have unresolved conflicts that seem to paralyze them. Some got a “raw deal” from a friend, a spouse, or an employer. Some have been addicted to alcohol or drugs. Some have committed crimes.

What the counselors and therapists have told me is that the Paradoxical Commandments have often been used by people who need to break away from a difficult past. Penny Patton, codirector of the Center for Therapeutic Justice, shares this insight: