

*A clearly written, step by step, and research-based guide  
to life transformation. Definitely worth the read.*

**—STEVEN C. HAYES, Ph.D.**

Author, Professor, Originator of Acceptance & Commitment Therapy  
and Co-developer of Process-Based Therapy

# ACE YOUR LIFE

*Unleash Your Best Self  
and Live the Life You Want*

**MICHELLE P.  
MAIDENBERG**

Ph.D., MPH, LCSW-R

ACE Your Life

A clearly written, step by step, and research-based guide to life transformation. It simplifies without talking down; guides without being bossy. A fun and helpful ride that will stick with you. Definitely worth the read.

**Steven C. Hayes, Ph.D.**, Foundation Professor of Psychology, University of Nevada, Reno, Originator of *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*, and Co-developer of *Process-Based Therapy*. Author of 47 books including *A Liberated Mind*, *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*, and nearly 670 scientific articles.

Dr. Maidenberg nailed it! She has distilled substantive personal change into three key ingredients—acceptance, compassion and empowerment. Her approach is scientifically-supported and it puts change on the foundation of self-understanding and self-kindness. Before you take on another self-improvement project, please read this book.

**Christopher Germer, Ph.D.**, Lecturer on Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, author of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, and Co-developer, *Mindful Self-Compassion* program.

Dr. Michelle Maidenberg's book, *ACE Your Life*, is an inspiring and helpful guide that will help you accept yourself and others, have more compassion for your vulnerabilities, and empower you to accomplish valued goals. We often find that our own thinking and habits have become the major obstacles to getting what we want. This book will help you overcome obstacles within yourself and obstacles that you face in the real world. Sometimes we must go through it to get past it and the journey is challenging. This book is what you will need to get your life back.

**Robert L. Leahy, Ph.D.**, Director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Clinical Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry at Weill-Cornell University Medical School. Author of *If Only...Finding Freedom from Regret*, *Don't Believe Everything You Feel*, *The Jealousy Cure*, *Beat the Blues Before They Beat You*, *Anxiety-Free: Unravel Your Fears before They Unravel You*, *The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You*.

Recognizing that perfection is a figment of our overactive imagination, Dr. Michelle Maidenberg developed an ingenious method to identify ways of acceptance, compassion and empowerment (ACE). Actualizing the ACE method puts you in the driver's seat like never before. Exceptionally well written, *ACE Your Life*, will motivate and guide you to make fundamental changes in your life which will make you fulfilled and proud.

**Ruth Gotian, EdD, MS**, Thinkers50 #1 emerging management thinker in the world and author of *The Success Factor*. Chief Learning Officer and Assistant Professor of Education in Anesthesiology at Weill Cornell Medicine.

If you want to change behavior and become the version of yourself you most wish to be, acting with self-compassion and commitment is the royal road to realization. Michelle's book beautifully illuminates this path.

**Dennis Tirsch, Ph.D.**, Founding Director, The Center for Compassion Focused Therapy and Associate Clinical Professor, Mt. Sinai Medical Center. Author of *Compassionate-Mind Guide to Overcoming Anxiety: Using Compassion-Focused Therapy to Calm Worry, Panic and Fear*, *The Compassionate Mind Approach to Overcoming Anxiety*.

Is acceptance a fall back strategy? No! In this book, Dr. Michelle Maidenberg serves as a thoughtful and encouraging guide to learning how to accept yourself, embrace your values, and be empowered to act toward what's most important to you. It's chock full of exercises, strategies, and stories that you can use to be your best self.

**Jason B. Luoma, Ph.D.**, CEO, Portland Psychotherapy – Clinic, Research, and Training Center and Affiliate Faculty, Oregon Health and Science University Associate Scientist, Oregon Research Institute. Author of *Values in Therapy* and *Learning ACT*.

The pressures and uncertainties of everyday life make it is far too easy to lose touch with what keeps us resilient, happy and strong. Integrating valuable psychological research with practical and proven exercises (along with lots of engaging graphics), Michelle Maidenberg's *Ace Your Life* allows you to reconnect with your best intentions and live an easier and more empowered life.

**Mark Bertin MD**, Developmental Pediatrician, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at New York Medical College, and on the faculty of the Windward Teacher Training Institute. Author of *Mindful Parenting for ADHD*, *The Family ADHD Solution*, *Mindfulness and Self-Compassion for Teen ADHD*, *How Children Thrive*.

*ACE Your Life* is a gem. Dr. Michelle Maidenberg uses evidence-based research and her vast clinical knowledge to guide the reader through barriers and practical implementable strategies so they can truly ACE their life. Acceptance, compassion, and empowerment is the key, and understanding the barriers and how to overcome them unlocks the door to living the life we all want. *ACE Your Life* is an essential and inspirational read if you want to make progress, forge ahead, and cultivate a meaningful life.

**Marci G. Fox, Ph.D.**, Licensed Psychologist and author of *Think Confident*, *Be Confident for Teens*, *The Think Confident*, *Be Confident Workbook for Teens*.

This is such an important book. With this clearly and beautifully written work, Dr. Maidenberg has captured the essence of how anyone can feel good in today's world. She has identified the elements that keep people stuck in the ruts that keep them unfulfilled and provides a clear roadmap to long-term substantive change. With her warm, engaging style, she provides practical exercises that immediately change how one can see him or herself differently. She has created a new and unique system to feel good.

**Robert S. Schachter, Ed.D.**, Licensed Psychologist and Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Author of *Mindfulness for Stress Management: 50 Ways to Improve Your Mood and Cultivate Calmness*.

Dr. Maidenberg takes a unique approach to self-help with her comprehensive guide to personal growth and self-fulfillment. With the world facing adversity and many searching for new ways to cope, *ACE Your Life* could not be more timely. Its emphasis on breaking the cycle of stuckness seems particularly salient now, in the midst of a pandemic—where boredom and fear of the future reign. Individuals and clinicians alike will find this guide useful. Having it on hand is like having a life coach nearby, whenever you need one.

**Ann Goelitz, Ph.D., LCSW**, Psychotherapist and author of *From Trauma to Healing*, now in its second edition, and *Shared Mass Trauma in Social Work*.

If you are stuck, *ACE Your Life* is exactly what you need to figure out how to move forward to live our best lives. Dr. Maidenberg offers a three-pillared approach to build self-acceptance, compassion and empowerment. It isn't easy to take a hard look at our values, past trauma, coping mechanism and barriers. But with the help of *ACE Your Life*, Dr. Maidenberg takes the reader through the steps with a great deal of support. In the end, the reader is in a much healthier space to live life to the fullest.

**Catherine Pearlman, Ph.D., LCSW**, is 'The Family Coach' and author of *Ignore It!* Assistant Professor at Brandman University and writes the nationally syndicated "Dear Family Coach" column.

With relatable stories, powerful exercises and state-of-the-art tools, Dr. Maidenberg's well-written book expertly provides both an inspiring and practical guide to living a more psychologically rich life. An essential boost of hope and a proven path for change in today's challenging times!

**Michelle Brody, Ph.D.**, Licensed Psychologist and Executive Coach. Author of *Stop the Fight! An Illustrated Guide for Couples* and *Own Your Armor: Revolutionary Change for Workplace Culture*.

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This is dedicated to the women warriors in my life who have all passed on but whose presence is forever in my heart through all my life's journeys. They continue to inspire me by all they modeled to me. They embodied authenticity, being with what is, and never forgetting who they fundamentally were and where they came from. I miss and love you deeply—Irene Berger, Rose Farkas, Margaret Gibelman, Mrs. Krieger, Augusta Sentizer and Selma Turkel. I am so blessed to have known you and to have learned so much from you.

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## FOREWORD

Have you ever been on a train or airplane and sat next to a person who was just incredibly exciting and informative? Time runs by in a heartbeat. It's as if the trip ends too early. So much to learn. So engaging.

You say to yourself, *I was lucky today.*

Enter Michelle Maidenberg, PHD. This book, ***ACE Your Life*** is, of course, a double entendre. The *ACE Method* is intelligent and can change your life. The author frames acceptance, compassion and empowerment in just the right way to help us truly think differently.

It's so well done that as I read this work—truth be told—my mind began to shift. We have here a gifted healer practicing her craft. *For me, the read was a gift.*

At a deeper level, Dr. Maidenberg speaks to us, in some ways showing rather than telling, that we all possess a power to ace our lives; a power to be tapped with a just slight change of thinking. Power over ourselves, over our perceptions of others, over injuries of the past—*and over what is to come.*

This is a competent person. A capable person. A person who has taken the best of what she's learned over the years and granulated it into a book that is so easy to read, that you'll wonder why you never quite thought this way before.

Dr. Maidenberg teaches self-awareness about core values; about a form of acceptance that's radically liberating. Who wants, for instance, to be bitter anymore? It only gives power to the person you're angry with—and leaves you diminished.

She teaches about compassion. First towards yourself and then widens it to others. How to set healthy limits. How to begin detoxifying past injuries that no longer serve. *As a psychiatrist I often suggest to patients that the next 10 years are infinitely more important than the last 10 years.* Yet

many of us seem to be dragged back incessantly. Negative self-talk, cycles of procrastination, repeating bad patterns.

Dr. Maidenberg helps us move forward.

Then, there's empowerment, A methodology that allows you to cultivate a new way of being. Imagine once again you're on the train or plane with that special person. Not only have you had an important conversation. But you walk away with concrete steps about what you can do to change your life.

***ACE Your Life*** is not really a book. It's a course in how to live a better, freer life with worksheets, good questions and a methodology for empowering and sustaining progress. Dr. Maidenberg helps us to reframe past hurts, confront tired habits, deal more constructively with disappointment and see into the future with optimism.

A breath of fresh air. An important contribution.

It's funny. While writing this Foreword I was struggling with a particular problem. After reading ***ACE Your Life*** the problem had repositioned to a much better perspective.

I felt lighter.

Step-by-step.

I think you'll feel lighter too.

**Mark Banschick MD**

Child, Adolescent and Adult Psychiatrist, New York & Connecticut

*Psychology Today* Blogger

Cofounder of the Katonah Study Group of Integrative Medicine

Cofounder of Alums for Campus Fairness

## INTRODUCTION

# Transforming Your Life

---

*Are you truly being your best self and  
living the life you want to be living?*

It's safe to say most of us *want* to do this—we want to be intentional, proactive, confident, successful, and present, so we can fully experience each moment. But if we're being honest, all too often we allow our thoughts and feelings to drive and constrain us. We become remiss, reactive, complacent, and trapped by our inner commentator, our habitual patterns of behavior, and what we've learned within our social-cultural structures throughout our lives. We're unable to break free from patterns and monotony, bogged down in the “stuckness.”

We have regrets. Our relationships might be strained. Other parts of our life suffer. Our self-worth and our confidence take a nosedive. We wonder where we went wrong and wish we could have a do-over. Sometimes we're so anxious, overwhelmed and exasperated; we get stuck in our own head and can't see a way out. We may feel confused or lack the focus to strategize and plan. We may be left feeling hopeless and helpless, doubtful our circumstances can ever change.

As a psychotherapist, I work with individuals who face a wide variety of situations and challenges. Some want general coping strategies to deal with everyday issues that they face. This can include navigating relationships, strategizing business and career problems, improving behavior and developing new habits, enhancing health and well-being, reducing stress, and functioning better. Some patients struggle with their mental health, while others experience a wide range of traumas—lost relationships, death of a loved one, unexpected diagnoses, and the chaos and uncertainty of



a global pandemic. I am honored to provide a safe space for people to be seen, heard, and validated, as I help them discover internal resources to put them in the driver's seat and make the changes they want.

I've developed the *ACE Method* for behavior change to facilitate being our best selves and living the life we want based on the pillars of *Acceptance*, *Compassion*, and *Empowerment*.

## **“ACE” DEFINED**



I've seen incredible change happen—absolute miracles—as patients rediscover their own values, their own truths, their own intrinsic worth.

They work to create a new reality where they finally turn down the volume on their inner critic, take control of their lives, and truly are their best selves. One where they are excited to wake up and face the day. One where they see themselves making real progress toward their goals. They are healthier physically, mentally, and emotionally and they have learned to be more gracious and kinder to themselves and others.

I'm not advocating for perfection—there's no such thing. Our humanness doesn't allow for it, and in any case, mistakes and failures give us experience and pivotal life lessons. But there is always the opportunity for substantial enhancement and progress. *We want to strive for progress, not perfection, and inevitable permanence of value-driven behaviors.*

I believe each one of us deserves to live fully and authentically. The ACE Method entails walking myself, patients—and now readers—along the roadmap step-by-step, with inspiring stories, examples, and self-reflective exercises along the way. The beauty of ACE is that I'm not the one with the answers; I'm just the friendly guide providing direction and encouragement. The answers lie within your own heart and mind. They always have. And they always will. You will observe your inner commentator evolve into an inner coach, inner advocate, and inner nurturer.

I include *unleash* in the title purposefully. The capability and power are already within you. To use that power, you must reach into your internal reserve and unleash it. It gets repressed or suppressed for a reason, typically a very good one. Your inner power helped you survive; it was never fostered; or you were in circumstances that didn't allow you to acquire the skills to access your power. It's not your fault, but as an adult, if you want a better or different life, you have the capability to do so. You become responsible for your own growth and healing. It's empowering to know that the magic is within you, and you don't need to rely on other people or anything outside of yourself to enhance you. With openness, flexibility, and curiosity, you can unleash your self-belief, self-love, and self-compassion.

## **WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK?**

It is far more meaningful and sustaining when a person works toward personal growth and life enhancement and reaches “aha moments” on their own. The journey to a more fulfilling life begins with the willingness to look within, to uncover what we believe and why, to rediscover our core truths and values, and then to align our actions and mindset accordingly. Because we are all intrinsically worthy, we *all* deserve this chance.

*ACE Your Life: Unleash Your Best Self and Live the Life You Want* is my approach to creating a life and legacy of fulfillment and love for yourself and others. I have worked hard to convey the strategies so that they're relatable. My hope is that you find the content encouraging and easily actionable so that it inspires you to take action. This approach to transformation is far-reaching. It could apply to people who are experiencing slight “stuckness” or who simply want personal growth and enhancement. It's also highly effective for people whose “stuckness” is more profound because of a trauma, cumulative stress, or other significant challenges that cause pain and distress. Individuals who want to enhance their life in a significant way and become their best self through the work and wisdom of personal growth will benefit.

## **WHY I CAN HELP**

I am a person who practices what she preaches. I know my methods work because I practice them every day, personally and professionally.

One reason I'm so passionate about my work is my own history. Throughout my formative years, circumstances put me in a vulnerable position. Each of my four grandparents survived the Holocaust, while most of their family members were tortured and murdered. There was obvious generational trauma.

My very young parents divorced when I was three and constant relocating resulted in my attending five elementary schools. There was familial drug and alcohol abuse, constant arguing, instability, and emotional neglect. I often felt overwhelmed and that my life was out of my control.

Drama defined my childhood, which I now know put me at risk for repeated reactivation of the sympathetic nervous system and the stress response and an overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones. I rarely knew what to expect or when the next shoe would drop. Fortunately, I had the wherewithal to seek out people and resources to help me to develop healthy coping responses and ways of thinking about myself, my relationships, and the world around me. From early on, I knew I'd dedicate my life to helping others, and I'd work my way toward a future that isn't controlled by the effects of the intergenerational trauma that I was exposed to.

My decisions coalesced during college when I thought intently about my values and how I wanted to live my life. I developed a healthy lifestyle and lost thirty pounds and put myself in therapy. I later broke off an engagement that wouldn't serve my future well, and I took out student loans to put myself through my graduate studies. Nothing would stop me from fulfilling my life and career goals. Every day I continue to strive toward living a better life.

I have seen people suffer physically and emotionally as a result of giving up, acting and reacting from a subconscious or unconscious place, and being remote from their values. In my practice and personal life, I'm exposed to individuals who want to make positive change but simply do not know how due to "*stuckness*." Fundamental change only comes when we're able to be present, gain keen self-awareness, and choose to behave in accordance with our values.

The ACE Method has shifted my habits, philosophy, and behavior. I'm aware of my patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. I don't deny my impulses, hide from them, or avoid them. I lean into my feelings, observe them, and revel in my humanness. I consistently remind myself how important it is to be my authentic self and live a value-driven, meaningful life. Through practice, I have fully incorporated these skills into my daily life. Of course, I falter at times; I'm human. But I study myself, learn from those experiences, and apply self-love and self-compassion. I accept that growth is an ever-evolving process I'm willing to take on for the price

of a fulfilling life. I love the sentiment: *You only have one life to live, and if you live it meaningfully, one life is enough.*

Many books speak to a specific aspect of life. But with my method, you will be equipped to make positive changes in all areas of your life. I'm trained in many types of modalities, which allows me a more global perspective of what a person might need in order to grow and heal. I am advanced-trained in a variety of psychological evidenced-based treatments such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), for which I am a certified member of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which is a third-wave highly effective behavioral treatment, and Structural Family Therapy. Additionally, I am Level II trained in Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), traditionally a trauma-based treatment, but one that has expanded to helping people overcome inertia and achieve meaningful behavior change. I am also a Certified Group Therapist through the American Group Psychotherapy Association.

My experiences lend to my understanding of human and cognitive development, and behavior change. I teach a graduate course in Mindfulness Practice as adjunct faculty at New York University (NYU), I serve on the Board of Directors of the Westchester Trauma Network (WTN) in Westchester County, NY, and am on the Board of Directors of The Boys and Girls Club in Mount Vernon, NY.

I am the Founder and Clinical Director of *Thru My Eyes*,<sup>1</sup> a nonprofit 501c3 foundation offering clinically guided videotaping to chronically medically ill individuals who want to leave video legacies for their children and loved ones. When videotaping individuals, they often disclose regrets about not accomplishing all that they wished they had because of missed opportunities due to maladaptive thoughts and behaviors that stood in their way.

I enjoy writing and have authored another book titled *Free Your Child from Overeating: 52 Mind-Body Strategies for Lifelong Health*.<sup>2</sup> I contribute to newspaper and magazine articles on numerous topics, blog for *Psychol-*

*ogy Today*, and am dedicated and invested in health and mental health advocacy.

There is no prescribed way I treat individuals I work with. Depending on their challenges and needs, I utilize a combination of treatments and teach skills based on what would be most helpful. Because each of us has a unique anatomy, upbringing, and experiences, within these chapters I describe skills in general ways so you can apply them to yourself, based on who you are, what you need, and the life you want to continue developing for yourself.

## HOW ACE YOUR LIFE WILL HELP

When you learn these skills, you will be able to use them in all areas that challenge you. The lessons will endure over your lifetime if you continually reset, reconnect, and reinvest. There's endless usage for this knowledge, and expansive opportunities for change, growth, and healing. The more curious you become about what you believe and why, the more you're able to continue peeling back layers and learn about yourself.

The ACE Method applies to—and benefits—anyone's life. No matter your race, your religion, your socioeconomic status, your country of origin or community, how you were socialized, or how you identify, it's accessible and comprehensible. The ACE Method is effective at creating change and healing because it's individualized and unique to YOU.

From a very young age, we learn to avoid discomfort of all kinds, and the evasion perpetuates as we grow into adulthood. As far back as we can remember, when we got hurt, our parents would just kiss our boo-boos to immediately make everything okay. When we argued with friends, we were told to apologize. "I'm sorry," and all would be forgotten. We participated on sports teams and received awards simply for showing up.

Social media inundates us with glorified messages that happiness is the ideal state. We think we need to be happy *no matter what*. If we're not, we need to *become* happy. Our culture is indoctrinated toward avoiding discomfort and finding any means by which to secure physical, emotional, or social comfort.

We expect a quick fix for anything that challenges us or evokes negative feelings. If we can't solve or repair what makes us feel bad, we've failed, and therefore, there's something fundamentally wrong with us. We avoid or try to get rid of all discomforts, and that inherent pressure to be content often leads to overwhelming emotions, distress, and suffering. We relentlessly pursue what feels good—what we instinctually and understandably want more of, and we perceive that to be what's best for us.

Don't believe me? Consider how often you avoid discomfort. Reflect on times you opted to feel less in order to avoid the complexity of self-reflection, sitting and being present with the discomfort. Reflect on when you turn from making challenging decisions that might intensify and prolong the discomfort.

When we choose to shut down, yell, overeat, or procrastinate, we act out of impulse in an attempt to diminish or rid ourselves of fear, sadness, shame, frustration, or disappointment. During these moments, our inner commentator overwhelms us and takes over. Our behavior is led by our fear or anger, rather than by our core values.

*When we're willing to come close, welcome, and befriend negative emotions, validate ourselves, and engage in self-compassion, we "leave room" for growth. Then these feelings can direct and clue us into what's important to us. The feelings will provide guidance as to how we can behave in accordance with our values to be our best selves.* That's where the real growth occurs. The power lies within *US* if *WE* are open and curious.

When we approach life with openness and curiosity, we make a statement about our level of commitment to our most important asset—*ourself*. We wouldn't dare invest in a car or phone unless we researched and studied what it's capable of. We owe it to ourselves to gain an understanding and appreciation for all we are and do, which we can achieve when we approach our lives with mindfulness, care, and value-driven behaviors.

Accepting our own humanness allows us to appreciate the humanness of others, inclusive of their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and judgments.

Approaching the world with *curiosity and flexibility* opens us up to new experiences and opportunities to facilitate personal growth and self-satisfaction. Through acceptance, compassion, and empowerment, we find our strength, our fortitude, and the life we were meant to live.

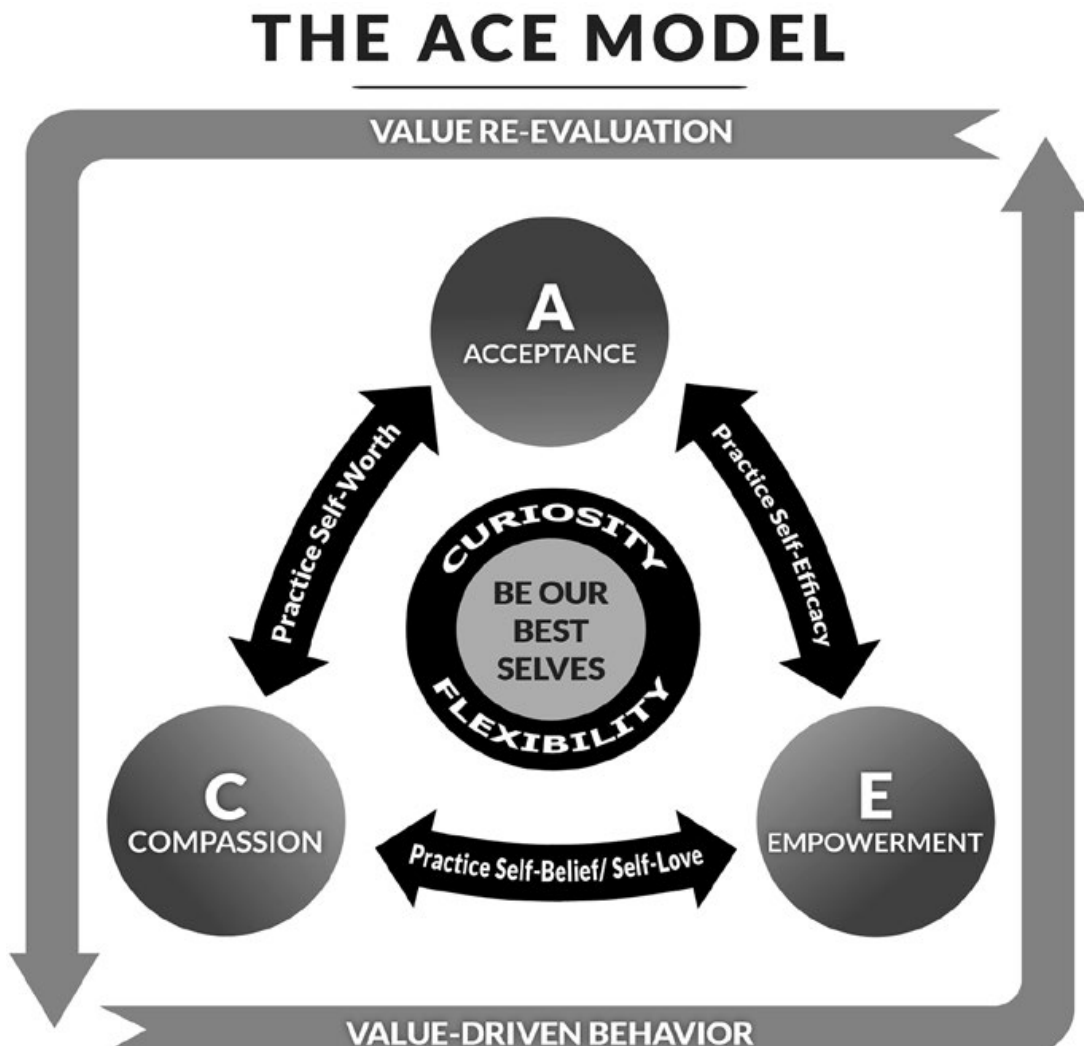
## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

*ACE Your Life* is divided into four parts: Our Thinking & Connecting to Our Values, Acceptance, Compassion, and Empowerment. Each section walks you through definitions, benefits, barriers, methods, and strategies to effectively cultivate and embody the skills. The end of each chapter includes curiosity-based questions and self-guided growth exercises to promote growth, healing, and a path toward personal fulfillment. I've also included links to applicable guided meditations where you can log on and participate.

Whether you are learning or refreshing the skills, or you are seeking a reminder, encouragement, and support, please keep in mind that you can easily go in and out of chapters based on your needs. *ACE Your Life: Unleash Your Best Self and Live the Life You Want* does not replace working with a mental health practitioner if warranted and you would benefit. This book can be used independently or with a therapist, coach, or another practitioner.

Also, please note that all the examples in the book are based on actual individuals I assist and support. Their names and minor details of their stories were changed to maintain their privacy and confidentiality.





This figure represents how you can ACE your life. The outer circle represents a continual process of reviewing your values and behavior based on those actions. You begin the circular process with a Values Review and conclude by engaging in value driven actions. Throughout the ACE process, you're fostering your self-worth, self-love, and self-efficacy while exercising curiosity and flexibility. With each chapter, we build on this method of cultivating your best self and the life you want to be living.

# Chapter-by-Chapter Synopses

## **PART I: OUR THINKING AND CONNECTING TO OUR VALUES**

To get grounded in the ACE Method, you'll first gain self-awareness through understanding how your mind functions. You'll better recognize your inner commentator and how you beat yourself up. Following this, you'll identify and specifically define your core values. Value clarification will help you stipulate daily actions and behaviors to make more mindful decisions, enhance your self-confidence, be kinder to yourself, and lean into living your best and most meaningful life.

### **Chapter 1: Our Self-Protective Mind and Thinking**

You'll learn the evolutionary and biological purposes of our thinking, and how it affects us psychologically, socially, and spiritually.

We can go from *autopilot* to *mindfulness* as we get to understand our thought processes and what drives us. Understanding how our mind works, our thought patterns, and gaining self-awareness regarding our behaviors will create space for processing thoughts and constructing a life where actions are underpinned in our core values. Transforming our inner commentator to an inner coach and inner nurturer leads to a fulfilling life of self-discovery, so we become our own self-advocate and behave in a manner that enhances us and instills personal pride.

### **Chapter 2: Discovering Our Values: What Are Core Values, and How Do We Select Them?**

What does it mean to have values, and what are the benefits? Values help us understand what's meaningful. They guide our choices and decisions. They reflect the direction we'll take in order to adjust how we want to live. You'll learn ways to formulate a practice where your core values proactively guide you into the thriving life you want.

**PART II: ACCEPTANCE (THE FIRST STEP IN THE ACE METHOD)**

Self-acceptance lets us embrace who we truly are without expectations, conditions, or qualifications.<sup>3</sup> The concept of Acceptance champions being who you are, remaining present with where you are, and using energy and inspiration to work toward becoming that better version of yourself. Foundationally, we are all good enough, worthy, and deserving of love and respect.

**Chapter 3: What Is Self-Acceptance & What Are the Barriers That Get in Our Way of Cultivating It?**

You'll learn what self-acceptance and radical acceptance are and the benefits of practicing them. You'll learn several ways to practice overcoming barriers as you build self-acceptance. You'll embrace your shadow self, overcome negativity bias, let go of your need for control and forgive yourself for past mistakes and regrets. You can then be intentionally more accepting of yourself, others, and the world around you.

**Chapter 4: Why We Resist Self-Acceptance and How to Embrace It**

Societal influences, such as comparing ourselves to others, striving for positive and comfortable emotions, while refusing to acknowledge our full range of thoughts and feelings build barriers to self-acceptance. You'll learn to work through those barriers toward acceptance, gain self-awareness regarding self-acceptance, and assess your self-belief and self-efficacy. Lastly, you'll learn steps toward self-acceptance and how to cultivate a self-acceptance mindset.

**PART III: COMPASSION (THE SECOND STEP IN THE ACE METHOD)**

Having compassion means noticing: feeling emotionally moved by, and responding to your own and others' suffering. At its core, compassion means to "suffer with." Self-compassion entails acting in a warm and caring way toward yourself when you are having a difficult time, fail, or

notice something you don't like about yourself.<sup>4</sup> Instead of harshly judging yourself or ignoring your pain, you acknowledge and validate it. You realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection are part of a shared human experience.

## Chapter 5: What Is Compassion & What Are the Barriers That Get in Our Way of Cultivating It?

The best, most enduring, and most authentic source of validation comes from within. It is internal and intrinsic. We're more likely to receive it because we always have access to ourselves, not others. You'll learn what self-compassion is and its benefits, including how it increases our satisfaction and sense of self, and how it can have a positive influence on interpersonal relationships. Also, you'll learn to overcome the barriers that thwart it and the types of limiting thinking and rationalizations that inhibit it.

## Chapter 6: Discovering and Practicing Compassion

The many barriers to compassion include our core beliefs, our shadow self, and regrets. Thankfully, there are just as many ways to practice overcoming the barriers and building self-compassion as there are barriers themselves.

It is challenging to fully face all facets of ourselves. There are parts we are proud of, revel in, and want more of. There are other parts we try to avoid, are ashamed of, or want to get rid of. Through several exercises you'll learn how to practice being more self-compassionate toward all parts of yourself.

## **PART IV: EMPOWERMENT (THE THIRD STEP IN THE ACE METHOD)**

Changing how you look at yourself and continually shifting your narrative helps unleash your awareness of all the goodness that's already there within you. You have the ongoing task of accepting, showing compassion to, and empowering yourself. This is an ongoing process of development

that will continue throughout your life. Your quest to be your best self and live the life you want to live is continual and everlasting.

## Chapter 7: What Is Empowerment & What Are the Barriers That Get in Our Way of Cultivating It?

You'll learn the definitions and benefits of empowerment, as well as empowerment barriers such as how language influences self-perception, your fixed mindset, and a lack of concrete values. But you'll also see how developing a strategy for maintaining and sustaining positive and value-driven behaviors can change everything.

You'll learn the importance of self-efficacy and psychological flexibility, the characteristics of individuals who lead empowering lives, and what it takes to attain self-empowerment. You will get clearer about your values and what it takes to engage in committed action so you can practice mindful daily living.

## Chapter 8: Discovering and Practicing Empowerment

Constant reminders of how fragile and unpredictable life can be bombard us daily. Although we have limited control over the curve balls thrown our way, we do have control over what we *do* to ensure we're living our best life even when facing difficult situations.

You'll discover ways to work on habits to foster the empowerment process, how to recognize sabotaging cycles, and how to effectively handle setbacks, slips, and falls. Lastly, you'll explore facets of your confidence, behaviors of empowered people, and how to commit to the 3Rs—Reset, Reconnect, and Reinvest.

With this information, examples, and exercises, you'll be able to see a path ahead of you that is enhancing, uplifting, and full of hope. Your empowerment allows you to assume responsibility for the things in life you can control so you can take full ownership of your decisions, and ultimately, your life.

## ON YOUR WAY

You took the first step and picked up this book! This promises to be an eye-opening exploration, one well worth embarking on. You'll take inventory and accept who you are with your full array of thoughts and feelings. You'll learn to be self-compassionate and how to engage in behaviors that further connect you to your values. Unlike temporary shifts you may have experienced in the past, you'll have the skills to promote long-term changes.

Thank you for your courage and willingness to commit and invest in *you*. You are well worth the time, effort, and investment. Think about how many times you've tried to make changes (just like everyone else—it's not just you!). Calculate how much money, time, and energy you've spent on Band-Aid methodologies. This time will hopefully be different. This book is written with warmth, care, and support for you. I appreciate and believe in you, wholeheartedly and unconditionally.