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**CHOOSING YOU FIRST: WORKBOOK**

**Cherylspeaks.org**

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# INTRODUCTION

**You Matter**

Our society has changed from the one our parents knew. We spend our days rushing from one task to another at work and home. We are addicted to speed, see busyness as a status symbol and work as many hours as possible to keep ahead of the Jones’.

Is this the way you want to live? With all the time pressures we feel, self-care can feel like just one more thing on our to-do list. However, it’s vital to our physical and mental health to start making ourselves a priority.

Putting our own needs first is vital to health, happiness, and success. Choosing to put yourself first can help stave off burn-out, help you live a fulfilled life and focus on what’s important, help reduce overwhelm, prioritize tasks and reduce stress.

**EXERCISE 1)**

So, looking at your health, happiness, and success, what do you need or would like to improve? Think about the benefits of putting yourself first and how would they help.

**Health**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I need/would like to improve…. | Burn Out | Fulfilled Lifeut | Focusut | Overwhelmut | Prioritize Tasksut | Reduce Stress |
| Example, **I need more exercise. By putting myself first, I could focus on myself and better prioritize tasks & so find it easier to set time aside for exercise**  |  |  | **X** |  | **X** |  |
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**Happiness**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I need/would like to improve…. | Burn Out | Fulfilled Lifeut | Focusut | Overwhelmut | Prioritize Tasksut | Reduce Stress |
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**Success**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I need/would like to improve…. | Burn Out | Fulfilled Lifeut | Focusut | Overwhelmut | Prioritize Tasksut | Reduce Stress |
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# SETTING BOUNDARIES

**Personal Boundaries**

Many of us struggle to put out own needs above those of others because we lack strong personal boundaries. It seems more than ever before that people seem to be happy to let others pick up their slack or avoid taking responsibility for themselves and their actions.

What this means, to those of us who lack firm boundaries, is that we are the ones who take responsibility for others and pick up the slack. If we have weak personal limits, other people know this and take advantage of our desire to feel needed and of our over-developed responsibility muscle. They continue to expect us to put them and their needs first. It is up to each of us to determine what we are comfortable doing in any relationship so that we stop feeling manipulated and so can enjoy our lives.

You probably need to set stronger personal boundaries.

**EXERCISE 2)**

Look at the list of questions below and read each one carefully. Think of situations in your past relating to the question. Now rank each question in descending order from 1 to 18. Give the question you agree with most number 1 and the question you agree least with number 18.

Don’t rush this exercise. It might seem simple but having to grade each question will help you understand yourself better.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Question | Grade |
| Do you believe your happiness depends on others? |  |
| Are you unable to say no, even when you want to? |  |
| Do you feel responsible for other people’s feelings? |  |
| Are you more concerned with what others think of you than what you think of yourself? |  |
| Do you feel constantly drained by all you have to do? |  |
| Do you neglect your own needs, even basic care, such as eating and sleeping? |  |
| Would others say you are a people-pleaser? |  |
| Do you often feel resentful or taken advantage of, though you’d never admit it? |  |
| Do you find time to take care of others, but never find time to take care of yourself? |  |
| Do you find it hard to make decisions, and let others make them for you? |  |
| Do you consistently ask for others’ opinions before you take action? |  |
| Do you tend to take on the emotions or moods of others in your environment? |  |
| Do you find it nearly impossible to ask for help, even when you are struggling? |  |
| Do you feel others’ opinions are more valid than your own? |  |
| Are you frequently unaware of how you feel or what you want? |  |
| Do you often feel anxious or afraid, though you aren’t sure of what? |  |
| Are you overly sensitive to criticism and so try to please everyone all the time? |  |
| Do you always go only with what other people want instead of voicing your desires? |  |

Did you agree with a lot of the questions? That’s a sure sign that you need to set yourself some stronger personal boundaries.

**Setting Personal Boundaries**

Setting strong personal boundaries is an absolute must on your journey to making yourself a priority in your own life. Personal boundaries also teach others how to treat you—with respect and care. They encompass your feelings, thoughts, beliefs, choices, intuition, needs and wants.

Spend some time thinking about your boundaries now. The next exercise will help you to define your boundaries and prepare you for the times when you need to make use of them.

**EXERCISE 3)**

Complete the following tables. For each one come up with 10 or more statements that help define your personal boundaries. It’s important that you keep on thinking until you have at least ten statements for each. Add more than ten if you can.

|  |
| --- |
| * **Example: People may not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
 |
| **Expect an immediate response to email, texts or messages** |
| **Turn up unannounced**  |
| **Expect me always to say yes** |
| **Etc.** |

|  |
| --- |
| **People may not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
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| --- |
| **I am not responsible for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
| 1.
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| --- |
| **I deserve \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
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| **It’s safe for me to ask for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
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| --- |
| **It’s appropriate for me to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as a way of guarding my energy and time** |
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**Clarify your Values**

When we focus on other people’s needs and wants only, we stop spending time on ourselves to discover what we want and need. Complete the following to clarify what you value in your life.

**EXERCISE 4)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Your Answer – what do you value?** |
| 1. What do you want more of in your life?
 |  |
| 1. What are your deepest desires?
 |  |
| 1. How would you like to spend your free time?
 |  |
| 1. How would you like to practice more self-care?
 |  |
| 1. What do you want to achieve in your life?
 |  |
| 1. What things in your life would you like to change?
 |  |

Now that you know what you desire and value in life, it’s time to decide how you’re going to spend your time and energy in the future.

**EXERCISE 5)**

For each of the questions above and taking into account your answers, how are you going to change how you spend your time and energy over the coming days, weeks and months?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question** | **How are you going to spend your time & energy to achieve what you value?** |
| 1) |  |
| 2) |  |
| 3) |  |
| 4) |  |
| 5) |  |
| 6) |  |

# SAYING NO

Something that’s probably come out from the exercises you’ve already completed is the need for you to say no more frequently. Saying no to things that aren’t important to you or you don’t enjoy is empowering. But, people find it difficult to say no.

We can’t promise it will be easy, especially since it’s likely if you are going through this workbook you’ve spent a lifetime saying yes. But we do know it’s worth the effort! Here are a few things you can look forward to when you start saying no to things that aren’t important to you:

* More time for yourself
* More self-respect
* More energy
* Less stress
* Empowerment
* Fewer responsibilities
* More time to spend with loved ones
* More self-compassion
* More self-care
* The realization that life goes on without you being in control of everything

These are some common reasons for saying yes when you should say no:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. We’re scared we’ll look selfish
2. We’re afraid people will be angry or hurt
3. We don’t want to let someone down
4. We are comfortable being over-scheduled
 | 1. We’re afraid of missing out on something
2. It makes us feel important and valued
3. We feel guilty about turning down the offer
4. Our self-value is related to helping and pleasing others
 |

**EXERCISE 6)**

Think about situations that happened to you in the past when you said yes to something, and you really should have said no.

What was the reason you said yes?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **Why did you say ‘Yes’?****Put your reason from the list above or add your own** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
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Here are some typical situations when saying no might be in your best interest:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. When you are tired or overwhelmed
2. When you are ill
3. When you simply don’t want to
4. When the offer sounds boring or not in your wheelhouse
5. When you have another way you’d rather spend that time
6. When you’ve allocated that time to self-care
 | 1. It’s going to be stressful
2. You’ll need to dedicate more time than is comfortable
3. You already have a comfortable balance of obligations
4. It’s not a part of your values (you don’t care about it)
5. It will take time away from something important to you
6. It’s not your responsibility
 |

**EXERCISE 7)**

Think of situations in the past where you should have said no.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **Why was saying no in your best interest?****Put your reason from the list above or add your own** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
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Here are some tips for saying no:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Schedule ‘You’ time. Block out time for doing the things you want.
2. Don’t give in to guilt. Don’t give in to the guilty reaction you might get from some people when you say no.
3. Prioritize your life. Ask yourself what’s more important to you – having some downtime or making someone happy?
4. No justification is necessary. “Sorry, but I can’t make it” is all that’s needed,
5. Hit the pause button. Say you need to sleep on it, or you’ll check your schedule. No immediate response required.
6. Trust your gut. If it feels like a burden has suddenly landed on your shoulders, you should say no.
 |  |

**EXERCISE 8)**

Now think of situations likely to happen in the future where you would be better off saying no. Write down the situation and what you’re going to say next time it happens. Take your reasons from the list above or add your own.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Situation** | **What is your reason for saying no?****Put your reason from the list above or add your own**  |
|  |  |
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# CONCLUSION

We deserve to live the life we want and not feel ashamed or guilty for it. Today’s the day to begin treating yourself the way you treat others—with compassion and kindness.

If you’ve followed this workbook, you should have a better understanding of how you want to live your life and how putting you first is going to help you get there. You should understand how setting personal boundaries is important for you.

After going through Exercise 3) you will have a set of strong personal boundaries that encompass your feelings, thoughts, beliefs, choices, intuition, needs and wants.

The remaining exercises help you use those boundaries in your everyday life. They’ll help you determine how you want to live your life instead of your life being under the control of others. You can use your purpose and vision for determining how you spend your time and energy.

Don’t just use the workbook once and forget it. It’s something you should refer to frequently. You might like to incorporate some of the exercises into a daily journal to track your progress. To your success and the new you!