

Attitude - a deeper approach to “being the best you can be”

Stage 1

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Can you “think big”?

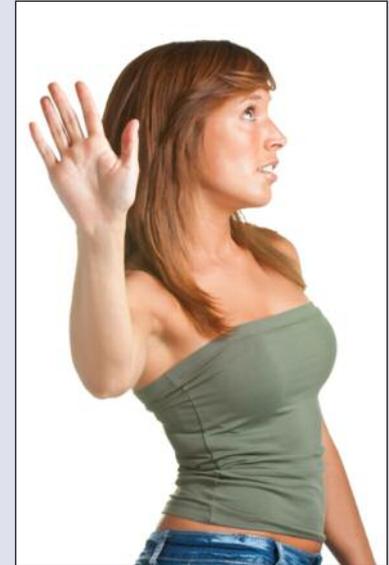
Avoidance doesn't work

Simple but entrenched

Avoidance is all around us, everywhere. It's become a normalised way of being; everyone does it. It is a lesson taught and learned by all. And because everyone avoids - in some area or another, to whatever degree - the subject of avoidance is usually avoided. It is a deceptively simple strategy which has become firmly entrenched.

The aim of avoidance is self-protection. Eventually, it becomes the blocking hand as you say "Whatever!", giving yourself permission to shut off to that which is emotionally uncomfortable or painful. You only hear what you want to hear, and selectively see what you want to see.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the first psychologist to appreciate the importance of avoidance. He realised that anxiety is an unpleasant inner state that people seek to avoid, using various defence mechanisms to help reduce these feelings of anguish. Others have since further developed our knowledge. However, psychologists still haven't fully grasped the extent to which avoidance influences current human behaviour. Again, avoidance is a deceptively simple strategy.



1c. Avoidance doesn't work

Avoidance begins during childhood when disappointment or some other emotional pain happens. Our parents do not teach us how to properly deal with such upheaval; in fact, they teach us the lessons of avoidance. School likewise fails to help. Instead of learning how to think clearly and constructively respond to these early disappointments, we instead opt for shutting the pain out: the strategy of avoidance. From this point onwards, we steer away from situations, subjects, or thought patterns that produce the same or similar negative feelings. Our responses to potential trauma determine who we become, often for the rest of our lives.

This social conditioning continues throughout adult life, adding even more reasons to avoid that which is painful. It simply becomes easier to look away, at least as a means to short-term relief. Why suffer, when you can comfortably shut off? It's like becoming addicted to pain-relief tablets. And if something is exceptionally difficult to face, then you can employ extreme avoidance: denial. Same thing, bigger dose.

As people are intelligent and capable in some areas of life, psychological avoidance becomes increasingly subtle and complex - as well as blatant and basic. It also becomes habitual, ever-present, and ever-ready. And because avoidance teaches and reinforces avoidance, it is rarely challenged. If, occasionally, it is questioned, the fog of intentional forgetfulness then soon reinstates the normalised state.



1c. Avoidance doesn't work



It begins with innocence.
We then learn avoidance.

1c. Avoidance doesn't work



1c. Avoidance doesn't work

Avoidance is Ronseal; it does exactly what it says on the tin.* It is a brilliant strategy, if psychologically limiting. To repeat: it is deceptively simple and its potency should not be underestimated. This is the drug of all drugs.

Common strategies of avoidance

The tricks of avoidance are varied. Making an excuse is frequently used, even if “the reason” for excusing yourself sounds silly. Projection or displacement, perhaps through blaming others as a convenient scapegoat, is likewise common. Intentional forgetfulness is selective in nature. A lack of responsiveness is similar. Retreat into fantasy or myth is yet another option. Intellectualisation is preferred by “clever” people. Trivialisation reduces or minimises what should really be of considerable importance. Denial or repression is a measure of final desperation. Shaggy made avoidance famous with his *It Wasn't Me* hit song, taking it all to ridiculous lengths.

The usual aim is to temporarily shut out reality so that you don't have to face or deal with a particular issue. Our materialistic society provides us with many

** Note: If you don't know, Ronseal is a UK company that produces wood preservatives and similar products. Their memorable advertising slogan is “It does exactly what it says on the tin!”*



*“At some point,
life starts to pass you by
and becomes about
avoidance.”*

Daniel Craig

1c. Avoidance doesn't work

ways to avoid. There's alcohol, anti-depressant pills, or illegal drugs. Shopping - when you don't really need to - is a slightly more subtle distraction technique. Pay-for-it entertainment is another version. And comfort-eating has become so common that it is now a major international health concern. We will examine this problem of distraction in greater detail later on in the course.

It is common for people to select friends and acquaintances who are comfortable playing the same or similar "supposed-to-be" game. The tactic in this case is mutually agreed avoidance, each person acknowledging the "no-go" areas; words to this effect may never have been uttered, but there is nevertheless an unspoken understanding of what is what. Socialising in this way assists in staying "safe", as nobody rocks the proverbial boat.



Consequences

The overall effect of avoidance is dumbing down. You are less than your best, accepting certain limitations that are unnecessarily self-imposed. Your potential remains unrealised, to one degree or another. This is a waste of life or a form of cowardice. You live with fear and insecurity, at some level, buried or not.

Perception of reality is warped. A veil or fog is produced, distorting or preventing a view of what is possible. In terms of the natural law of cause and effect, avoidance results in less.

1c. Avoidance doesn't work

Looking at the bigger picture, society reflects the dysfunction of individuals with countless instances of unnecessary suffering. The problems of some are deflected onto others as a direct result of psychological avoidance. Even attempts to solve these problems are weakened or frustrated for the same reason - because there is avoidance. The world, including our environment, is poorer.

Individual conscience is suppressed, including cutting off to the pain of others; "I'm alright, Jack!" dominates. Dreams are crushed or just left ignored to collect dust on the shelf. There is confusion, frustration, and contradiction - rather than the clarity of a way forward - due to the defensive barriers. Intelligent and capable people suddenly become illogical and incapable when the limiting bars on their mental prisons are rattled. Rather than growing, with the aim of becoming fully alive, you settle for being stuck in the mud - second or third best, perhaps content with mouldy old crumbs. To quote one of Pink Floyd's most famous songs, you "have become comfortably numb". You live behind "The Wall".

What is considered to be normal is, in fact, sub-normal. The acceptance of avoidance makes it so, whether on an individual or society level. Limitations are accepted, when they could be overcome. Dysfunction and unnecessary suffering is tolerated, when life could be much better for all. Peak psychological health remains little more than a potential, when it should be achieved as standard. The hidden agenda of avoidance twists and thwarts what you do, as you are at the mercy of anxiety.



1c. Avoidance doesn't work



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A healthier approach

There is a way forward that is psychologically healthier and more practically efficient: face your fears and limitations, and go for gold. This, obviously, is the aim of our course. But it is not as simple as just learning the 16 key factors. You must also unlearn the conditioning of avoidance. In fact, to be bluntly honest, the biggest problem of all that you will encounter in your personal development is avoidance.

In most of the various self-help or coaching advice, this problematic matter of avoidance is - hopefully, you've got it! - conveniently avoided. It's not what people usually want to hear; they want a nice, feel-good package without any unpleasant taste. This is a major reason why such advice invariably falls well short of what is promised. We, by contrast, have a "no bullshit" approach.

So, one of the things that you'll need to learn is to recognise the patterns and frequency of avoidance. If you want to change anything, then it's better to face reality than to hide from or ignore it. Begin by asking yourself, specifically, what you avoid. And remember that you *do* avoid, therefore the answers might not be immediately obvious. You'll be surprised at how much you have learned to avoid. One helpful tip to get you started is to identify whatever makes you feel emotionally uncomfortable or excessively worried. Don't be put off by this task of exposing yourself, remembering that it's part of the way forward.



1c. Avoidance doesn't work



Attitude delivers.
Avoidance frustrates.

Komsberg as an example

Wild animals don't avoid. They live in an environment where danger is all around, ever present. They need to be on their toes, alert for whatever happens next. If this was not so, they would fail to survive.

Black-backed jackal are a good example of alertness. In sheep farming areas, they are persecuted. In nature reserves, they are in competition with other predators. Jackal also need to be vigilant if they want to capture their next meal.

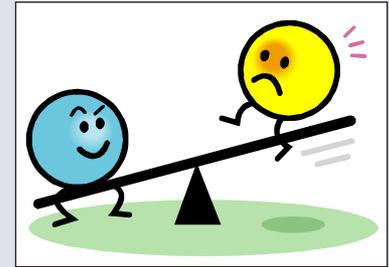
The agama lizard is a much smaller creature but another worthwhile example of preparedness. The agama featured (right, bottom) is a breeding male - identified by the bright blue head and forelegs - so he also has a territory to defend, as well as watching for predators and hunting for food.

It is unfortunate for our human beings that, as modern life has become physically easier for many, we have lost our edge that wild animals still display. Yes, it is necessary for basic survival. But it is also crucial for the achievement of excellence.



1c. Avoidance doesn't work

Change your perspective. Avoidance only “helps” as a short-term tactic. It does a lot of harm in the medium and long-term, keeping you stuck in the past and fearful of what might happen in the future. Get hungry for learning - really want to change - more than you want to ignore. Tip the balance. Break out of the trap. As you begin to do this, gaining increased awareness and understanding, you'll soon discover a new depth of living life. When the blinkers start to come off, it will get easier to see what you have been previously blocking. You'll also then be better able to help others with their problems. The rest of your life begins now.



Activity (optional):



We suggest you watch the excellent film
Hotel Rwanda.

Email us at attitudcourse@gmail.com for the next module.

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