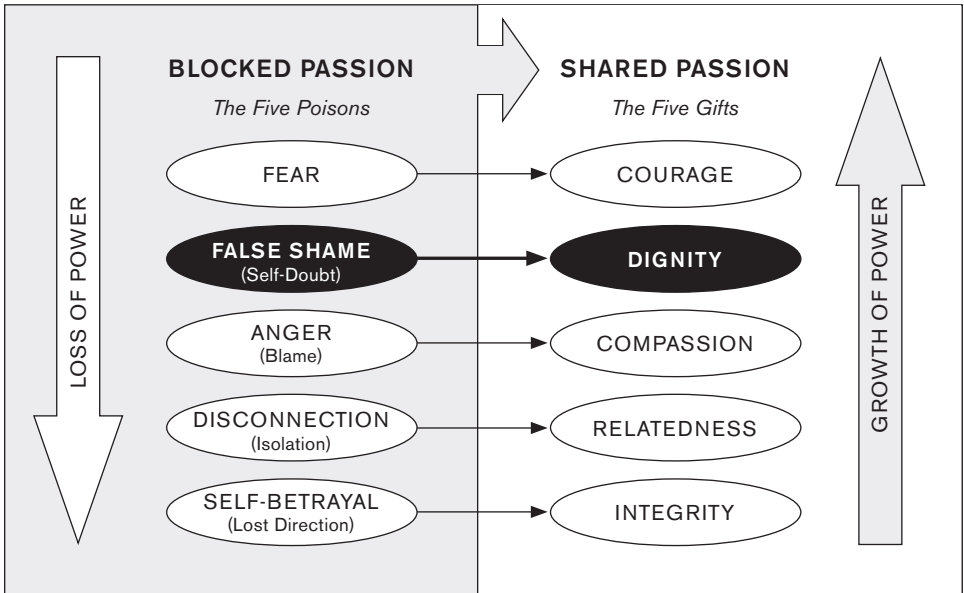


TRANSFORM YOUR FALSE SHAME INTO DIGNITY



The Five Gifts Roadmap

RECOGNIZE YOUR FALSE SHAME IN ITS MANY GUISES



If you look inside of yourself and look closely, you will likely find feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy. Do not be surprised, for such feelings are very common, including in leaders. These emotions are called false shame because you would never feel badly about yourself if you could see yourself clearly. As you come to recognize your false shame in its various guises, you will see how it limits you and blocks your passion. It may manifest as fears of failure or rejection. Or it may manifest as a fear of learning about yourself and how others perceive you. Then you may deprive yourself of information crucial to you. To counter your feelings of inadequacy, you may also try too hard to be right or nearly perfect, or you may compete needlessly. This

will only strengthen your self-doubt and turn others against you. It may be painful to see your false shame, but that's the first step in its transformation.

Feelings of inadequacy are very common, including among leaders. If you look inside, you will likely find them present within you too. They may arise as feelings of being unworthy or “insecure.” You may feel a lack of self-confidence or a bothersome self-doubt. You may feel like an “impostor” and, in comparison to others, find yourself lacking. As you identify these emotions, observe how much they may be holding you back and blocking your power. Your self-awareness is the first step in their transformation.

I call these emotions in their different variations *false shame*. Shame is the emotion that tells you, “I’m not good enough; I’m unworthy.” The shame is false because it is irrational and unwarranted. If you could only see yourself clearly and fully, and with compassion, you would never feel any shame. Instead, you would be touched by the sincerity and magnitude of your efforts. You would be moved by your inherent goodness and value. Even reading the prior sentence or two may activate your false shame. You may find yourself saying, “That’s not true!” That’s your false shame talking. It’s a dense filter that grossly distorts your self-perception. It is very unfair to you.

You need not conclusively decide at this moment which perceptions of you are accurate. In the sections that follow, I will give you tools and more information for doing so. For now, simply consider how active your false shame is and how much it may be harming you. When I work with leaders, I pull out the Five Gifts Roadmap and I ask them, “Where

definition

FALSE SHAME

Unwarranted and irrational feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, and self-doubt. The shame is false because if you could see yourself fully, clearly, and compassionately, you would never feel any shame.

are you?” The great majority of them point to “False Shame” and say, “Right here.” Does that describe you, too? Open to seeing these feelings that are operating inside of you. Then you can start freeing yourself from them.

False shame often appears as a variety of fears. In fact, fear and false shame often go together. For example, when you fear failing in a job or in a challenge, your fear is likely intensified by your feeling unworthy. When you transform your false shame, much of your fear of failure will fade away, too.

POWER TALK (to self)

- “Is my false shame keeping me from taking on an important challenge?”
- “Is it keeping me from approaching others?”
- “Am I letting it stop me from seeking feedback about myself?”

If you fear rejection, that, too, is mostly driven by your false shame. So when you fear approaching a person and asking for an opportunity, when you fear “asking for the sale,” and when you fear telling others what you most deeply want to give and what you desire, this is really your unwarranted feelings of unworthiness impeding you. When you know your own true worth and *feel* it, you will not be so afraid of how people may respond to you. You

will know they cannot affect how you experience your own value.

One of the most harmful expressions of false shame is the fear of seeing yourself clearly. If you, like most people, have this fear, what you actually fear is the *false* shame you may feel when you observe yourself closely. But self-awareness is the foundation for your self-mastery and your power. If you don’t see yourself accurately, you cannot change most effectively. And to modify how people respond to you, you need to know how they currently see you.

Yet, many leaders avoid this type of information. They are letting their false shame govern their actions. One CEO took it a step further. Just as he feared his own false shame, he also feared activating it in others. So he avoided getting clear and direct feedback, and he avoided giving it as well. When I attempted to give him feedback about this very point, he denied it was an issue. He insisted, “I’m *always* very

open with my feedback.” And then he signaled he wanted to change the topic.

Tragically, his direct reports were only learning of his unhappiness with them when he was already close to firing them. And then it was often too late.

Consider, then, if you are letting your false shame block your access to essential information about yourself, including how others see you. This is similar to not looking at your financial statements, or not looking in the mirror, for fear of what you may discover. To navigate in life and lead most effectively, you need this knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to resolve the false shame that keeps you from it.

Instead of acting directly on your false shame, you may try to move in the opposite direction. In doing so, you may hope to counteract these feelings and “make up for” them. But if your self-doubt is still driving your actions, this is merely *compensation*, which I described in the prior chapter. Acting in this way does not lessen your false shame. Rather, it gets you more ensnared in it.

For example, do you sometimes need to be “right” and show others how knowledgeable you are? If so, perhaps you are trying to avoid feeling unworthy. Perhaps, even, you go further and neither seek nor use others’ ideas, lest they prove to be better than your own. If you act in these ways to guard against your feelings of inadequacy, you are likely triggering those same feelings in others. They will therefore resent you and may take action against you to make you feel inadequate instead.

A university administrator I observed at a meeting appeared to automatically disagree with nearly everything his colleagues suggested. By the end of the session, they seemed dispirited and exasperated. In my private conversation with the administrator afterward, it became apparent that he was unaware of his pattern of behavior. He was especially surprised by my suggestion that, given his conduct, his peers were feeling devalued. “Really?” he asked. “But they all seem quite confident.”

When I inquired about his own level of confidence among his colleagues, he acknowledged this was a bit of a challenge. “I secretly feel

rather flawed,” he confided. “Is it a secret,” I asked, “that you even try to keep from yourself?” “Most of the time,” he said quietly, as he leaned back in his chair and folded his arms across his chest.

DEEPER WISDOM

Your false shame can impel you to hide your vulnerabilities. But if you seem too perfect, people will not be able to relate to you and feel connected with you. The most popular and effective leaders show some flaws and vulnerability. People relate better to such leaders because they feel more of their humanity. They can say to themselves, “She’s just like me.”

Perhaps you use an alternative strategy and, like many people, try to do some tasks perfectly, or nearly so, unaware you are seeking to buttress your own value. If this describes you, consider that you are likely doing more than is needed. Consider, then, the costs of this pattern to you. It may be draining your energies and diverting you from greater opportunities.

In fact, your excessively high standards may be protecting you from taking on greater tasks that can activate your false shame. For example, perhaps you are avoiding thinking more deeply about the direction in which your company needs to grow. Or perhaps you are avoiding where you personally need to develop.

Because these tasks are not so discrete and clearly defined, because they can’t be done perfectly and checked off your list, they can naturally stir up your feelings of inadequacy. But the most important tasks are often like this. Avoiding them and indulging your perfectionism with small tasks instead is likely harming you.

Personally, it is easier for me to work on perfecting the appearance of a document or presentation than to stare into the face of my greatest self-doubts and then take action. But I have noticed that the more I indulge this pattern, the more I feed my feelings of inadequacy. Perfectionism, I have come to see, is false mastery. It typically only provides a mastery of things that are not important. Consider instead working toward a mastery of your true power.

Your self-doubt may also emerge in the form of counterproductive competition. Executives compete with each other to get the most influence and resources. Siblings compete about who will be most success-

ful. And parents compete to see whose child is doing better. This competition is typically fueled by false shame. If you truly felt good about yourself and your value, what, if anything, would you really need to prove?

This does not mean you should eschew all competition. But be careful that when you do compete, it is not shame-based, but honors you and your opponents. View the competition as a noble contest that has, as its ultimate purpose, your and your colleagues' growth and evolution. This is the true meaning of "good sportsmanship." It is where the mere results of the contest are secondary to the humanity and dignity of the participants.

If you are engaging in shame-based competition instead, you are erecting walls between yourself and others. Likely, those around you are feeling intimidated, annoyed, and resentful. In these ways, you are harming your relationships and thereby blocking your power. Rather than depleting your energy in competition that does not serve you, consider instead transforming the false shame that propels it. Once you know your true worth, you will have no need to prove it to others.

Likely, you've already been told many times, "Be confident." That simple advisory probably does not help you. The question is *how* to transform your false shame so that you can indeed be confident. In the following sections, I will show you.

POWER TALK (to self)

- "Is it false shame that makes me so competitive?"
- "How else is my false shame controlling me?"
- "How is it harming my relationships and blocking my power?"

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, and self-doubt are very common in people, including in leaders. Therefore, they are likely present within you as well. These emotions undermine your relationships and obstruct your power.
- These feelings, called *false shame*, are irrational and unwarranted. The shame is false because if you could see yourself clearly, you would never feel any shame or feelings of inadequacy.
- Becoming aware of your false shame and the various ways it manifests within you gives you power over it and enables you to begin its transformation.
- False shame may appear within you as fears of failing or being rejected. And it may arise as a fear of learning about yourself and how others see you. That can cause you to avoid information crucial to being more effective.
- You may want to counter your feelings of inadequacy by trying to always be right or nearly perfect and by needlessly competing against others. Acting in these ways, though, will only strengthen your false shame and cause others to fear, resent, and avoid you.

ACTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR POWER

- Review the descriptions of the different ways people directly and indirectly allow false shame to govern their actions. While reading, ask yourself, “How does false shame affect *my* conduct?” See if you can identify at least three habitual ways of acting that are fueled by your false shame. Then assess how each of these patterns may be harming your relationships and undermining your power. Determine which of these patterns you are ready to free yourself from now. The following sections will provide you the necessary tools and strategies.

CORRECT THE DISTORTED BELIEFS FUELING YOUR FALSE SHAME



Negative and highly distorted beliefs about yourself are feeding your false shame. You may think your self-critical views push you to higher levels of achievement, but that's a false belief, too. Your self-criticism actually undermines your confidence and dangerously depletes you. No doubt you have your limitations, but your beliefs are likely magnifying them and thereby harming you. So when you notice your false shame emerging, clearly identify the underlying beliefs and directly challenge them. Review the evidence supporting the beliefs and the evidence opposing them as well. In doing so, you will likely find many of them to be grossly untrue. As you correct your beliefs about yourself, your false shame will shrink, thereby unblocking your passion and enhancing your power.

Your false shame emanates from beliefs about yourself that, typically, are grossly untrue. As you identify these beliefs and challenge them head-on, they will begin to release their hold on you. Then your false shame will fall away in equal degree.

Look carefully, then, to determine your beliefs that undermine your self-worth. For example, you may say, like a brilliant scientist-leader I knew, “I’m not that intelligent.” Or despite your many obvious achievements, you may say, “I haven’t done much at all.” Deep inside, you may even be saying, “Really, I’m a failure.” In my work with successful leaders, I often hear them make these self-critical remarks and many more. Their beliefs are utterly irrational and unfounded, yet they go unchallenged. So when you hear yourself thinking such self-judgments, ask yourself, “How do I know this is true?”

DEEPER WISDOM

Your negative beliefs about yourself also harm you in the eyes of others. People will detect your self-beliefs, and they will sense your related feelings of inadequacy as well. Then they will value you accordingly. The simple logic is that people will value you similarly to how you value yourself. They will take their cues from you.

You may believe your tough self-criticism strengthens you and makes you work harder. But that’s just your false shame trying to justify itself and control you. Your self-disapproval actually undermines your confidence, feeds your false shame, and therefore weakens you. So when you hear your self-deprecatory beliefs emerge, consider it your duty to challenge them. They are as much a threat to you as attacks made by others questioning your competence and denouncing you. Therefore, just as you would appropriately defend against unjust external critiques and state the

truth, defend yourself against unfair internal critiques as well.

Many people I encounter, and especially leaders, also belittle themselves by dismissing and discounting their many achievements. They barely acknowledge them and instead focus on what they have not yet done. Do you do that, too? You may think this is helpful as it keeps you focused on your goals. But that is an irrational belief, too. It’s your false shame trying to justify itself again. When you fail to honor what you’ve

done so far, you deprive yourself of the self-esteem your prior achievements can provide you.

I came to know a senior executive who grew up in a poor, working-class family. He was the first to graduate from high school and then worked as a machinist in an oil refinery, a significant accomplishment in the eyes of his family. He went much further, though, attending college and ultimately achieving at very high professional levels. Yet, he would compare himself with his executive colleagues and in some small ways continuously find himself lacking. Others complained he lacked sufficient confidence and passion. But really, the problem was his distorted self-perception.

He told me he was beleaguered by recurring dreams of returning to his old job at the refinery. “It’s always the same in the dream,” he said. “I see all my old coworkers there and they say to me, ‘We knew you would come back.’ And I say, ‘Yeah, I guess this is where I really belong.’”

Clearly, his self-doubt had a strong hold on him. To help him overcome it, I suggested he was in a long-jump competition. But unlike his peers, his starting point was many feet back. Although he’d had far fewer resources than they had enjoyed, he leaped so far forward that he had drawn even with them. His leap, therefore, was much greater than theirs. “You know,” he said, “I’d never seen it that way.” With this new perspective and by continuously questioning his old views of himself, my client came to see he’d been carrying around an inaccurate self-appraisal. He came to see his false shame more clearly and began to free himself from it.

When I last heard from him, he told me of yet another extraordinary step in his career he had just taken. This had doubled both his responsibilities and his income. He then added, “Remember those dreams I used to have about going back to the refinery? They’re all gone now. You know, I think I’ve finally defeated that irrational self-doubt.”

Many people, in at least some areas, have had starting points far behind those of their peers. Usually, these are the very areas in which they have challenged themselves greatly, yet now judge themselves harshly.

Does that describe you, too? Which of your uneven starting points are you not now acknowledging? Perhaps you are judging yourself by the distance from where you aspire to be rather than by how far you have already come. That is very unfair to you. And it undermines your confidence and therefore your power.

POWER TALK (to self)

- “What am I believing about myself that is harming me and may not be true?”
- “What’s the evidence for these beliefs—and what’s the evidence against them as well?”
- “I don’t need to believe what my self-doubt is telling me.”

To correct your false beliefs about yourself, there are several specific approaches you can use. First, expose the beliefs by making them visible on paper or in another medium directly in front of you. So when the voice of the false shame tells you, for example, “You’ve hardly accomplished anything at all,” write down that statement. Then take a moment to look at what you have written. When the false belief is no longer swirling inside your head but is placed at a distance outside of you, you have more power over it. From your new perspective, you can begin to see that it’s actually a distortion.

When you have identified a shaming belief and have written it down, next collect all the evidence that relates to its accuracy. If, for example, you believe, “I’m not very good at what I do,” consult the actual data and write it out in front of you. List all of your relevant successes and achievements. Include the other evidence that disproves the belief and the evidence that tends to support it too. Seeing all the facts on paper will clarify your thinking. Your belief that was hounding you may begin to appear ludicrous.

Also consider collecting relevant information from others that you trust. Just as you need others to tell you where you are blocking your power, you also need them to tell you your talents and gifts. This is because, in both cases, you likely cannot see yourself clearly.

I personally used this approach to help me write this book. My self-doubt was telling me I had little of importance to say. But when I asked my colleagues, they had a much different view. Consulting with them

helped me gain a perspective different from my self-doubt. I came to see my self-doubt was not “me,” but just a voice I did not have to believe.

What I say here about false beliefs does not mean you have no limitations. Like all people, you probably have your share. But notice how your false shame magnifies them. Your beliefs around them are likely holding you back more than the limitations themselves.

Look carefully, then, at the beliefs that fuel your false shame. When you hold your power in objectively appraising them, they will dissipate and even disappear. You need not believe everything you hear, especially when it’s coming from inside of you. By protecting yourself against what’s not true, you enable yourself to be more powerful.

summary

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Your false shame is based on beliefs about yourself that are likely untrue.
- You may think your self-critical beliefs help you and make you work harder. But really, your self-criticism undermines your confidence and weakens you. You are more powerful when your efforts are not driven by feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.
- To correct the beliefs driving your false shame, listen for them when your self-doubt emerges. When you identify them, write them out in front of you. This gives you a distance from your beliefs that allows you to more clearly assess them.
- For each belief you identify, list the evidence that supports it, and the evidence that counters it as well. As you assess the evidence, the belief will likely appear to be quite distorted.
- In evaluating your beliefs about yourself, also consider asking for the views of others you trust. This can be helpful as it is very difficult to view yourself clearly.
- As you take these steps and challenge the beliefs supporting your false shame, both the beliefs and the false shame will dissipate and even disappear.

ACTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR POWER

- At least three times over the course of the next week, notice when you are feeling inadequate or are otherwise feeling badly about yourself. If you notice those feelings right now, start doing this exercise now as well. Each time you notice these feelings, ask yourself, “What am I believing about myself that is triggering my self-doubt? What am I telling myself?” Write down the beliefs you identify. Then, next to each belief, write out all the relevant evidence that supports it, and that which discredits it, too. After you’ve written out the evidence and have reviewed it, ask yourself, regarding each belief, “What does the evidence show? What would a reasonable and compassionate person determine to be true?” Notice the effect your answers have on the feelings of inadequacy that, moments ago, were active within you.
- Identify three beliefs you have about yourself that cause you to feel inadequate. For example, you may believe, “I have not accomplished much” or “I am not very likable.” Then identify three people you trust highly, whom you can be vulnerable with and whom you think would honestly and compassionately provide you information about yourself. Approach these individuals separately and tell them the beliefs you identified. Ask them to what extent they agree or disagree with the beliefs. This exercise puts you in a vulnerable position, but it can provide you information that powerfully negates and unravels some of your most negative beliefs about yourself. As a result, you may experience a significant lessening of your false shame.

COUNTER THE SELF-REJECTION OF FALSE SHAME WITH DEEP SELF-ACCEPTANCE



You are rejecting yourself when you yield to your feelings of inadequacy. The antidote for these feelings, then, is deep self-acceptance. So instead of condemning yourself for your current limitations, accept them even while you work to change them. Your self-acceptance implies that you treat yourself with kindness and compassion—and that protects you from falling into more negative states that can harm you. As you more fully accept yourself, the manifestations of your false shame will subside in equal measure. You will become less fearful of rejection, less perfectionistic, and less interested in nonproductive competition. This will free up your energies and your passion.

Your false shame is actually a form of self-rejection. When you feel inadequate, when you immerse yourself in self-doubt, when you say, “I don’t have what it takes,” you are rejecting yourself as not worthy. And

that rejection harms you. It undermines your self-esteem and confidence, and therefore your power. It also undermines your leadership. If you don't accept yourself, how can you expect others to accept you? A potent antidote for your self-rejection, then, is self-acceptance—a deliberate choice to accept yourself just as you are.

We talked about self-acceptance in Chapter 2, but because it's so crucial to resolving false shame, we need to address it here too. Remember that self-acceptance does not mean you are collapsing into your limitations and giving up on growing. Rather, it means that you are accepting your limitations even as you work to change them.

DEEPER WISDOM

Whatever you don't accept about yourself, you will not be able to accept in others either. Yet people—especially your spouse and, even more so, your children—will often manifest those very things and reflect them right back at you. This is the source of much conflict in families and relationships. When you come to peace with the parts of yourself you've been rejecting, you will be more at peace with others as well.

Remember, also, that self-acceptance implies you are being compassionate with yourself. When you get lost in your false shame, you are being unkind instead. In fact, your self-rejection is naturally painful to you. It takes you into negative emotional states and keeps you in them. Your compassionate self-acceptance, on the other hand, actually protects you. By enhancing your confidence and your mood, it lifts you out of your negative states that can damage your relationships and impair you.

As you come to accept yourself as you are, the different manifestations of false shame will release their grip on you. For example, if you fear rejection, you will find that your kind self-acceptance dramatically decreases that fear.

One amiable and animated marketing consultant felt hurt and rejected whenever potential clients refused his services. So to protect himself, he became rather stiff and formal in entering new relationships. "I felt my personal style was not acceptable to a lot of people in the corporate world," he explained to me, "so I decided to change it." He was responding to his false shame by becoming enclosed and self-protective.

Ultimately, as he found, this inauthentic approach was not effective. So after much intense frustration, he reversed course with his prospective clients, opened up, and became more self-revealing. Accordingly, he became more personable and easier to connect with. Many reacted quite favorably and this brought him significantly more business. He said to me, “I’m not for everyone. But in the end, I just had to be me.” He could tolerate whatever outcomes arose because he was committed to liking and accepting himself regardless.

Other people who fear rejection may react to their false shame by trying too hard. They have something to prove, which is their own self-worth. Naturally, their prospective clients—or prospective mates—are not comfortable with their tense self-absorption. The feared rejection, then, is even more likely to happen.

So if you fear rejection as many people do, ask yourself, “How am I dealing with my fear? Do I protect myself and close myself off? Or do I try too hard?” Either way, you’re not really connecting. And you’re likely setting yourself up for more rejection. So consider instead simply accepting yourself just as you are. You will likely find that as you accept yourself more, others will, too. And from that stance of self-acceptance, you will build relationships that are more authentic and enduring.

If your feelings of inadequacy make you want to do things perfectly, your compassionate self-acceptance will help you here too. As you fully accept yourself as you are, you will no longer need to appear so exceptional when that doesn’t benefit you. You will know where the boundary lies between “good enough” and inefficiency. Large swaths of time, previously devoted to unnecessary perfection, may start opening for you. Any excessive time you’ve been spending polishing your creations—or your appearance—can then be spent in other activities that better serve you.

If you deplete your energies with unproductive competition, your greater self-acceptance will help you here as well. You will have less to prove and therefore less of a need to compete when that doesn’t benefit you.

POWER TALK (to self)

- “Am I willing to view myself with compassion?”
- “Am I willing to accept rather than condemn whatever I see?”
- “Am I willing to forgive myself?”

Your compassionate self-acceptance will be especially helpful for your overall self-awareness. As we’ve discussed, observing your mistakes and how they limit you can be painful. It may activate your false shame in such strong degree that you avoid looking. But your kind self-acceptance protects you against your false shame so that you’re more willing and able to see yourself clearly. Ask yourself, then, “Am I willing to look at myself with compassion—and accept rather than condemn whatever I see? Am I willing to forgive myself?” Your answers are crucial to your growth and to your greater power.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- When you fall into a state of false shame, you are actually rejecting yourself. The antidote, therefore, is complete self-acceptance.
- As we discussed in Chapter 2, self-acceptance means that you are not condemning yourself for your limitations, but are accepting them even as you work to change them.
- Self-acceptance also implies that you are being kind and compassionate with yourself. This protects you from negative states that can otherwise harm you.
- Your compassionate self-acceptance will diminish the manifestations of your false shame such as your fear of rejection, your perfectionism, and any unproductive competition. This will release your energies for other activities that better serve you.

ACTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR POWER

- Set aside 20 minutes to reflect. Identify at least two or three aspects of yourself that are difficult for you to accept. Once you have identified these items, notice the negative feelings about them and about yourself that arise and begin to swirl around within you. Then take the following steps.
 - Ask yourself, “Is my refusal to accept these things about myself really serving me? Or might it be harming me?” Try adopting a kinder and more accepting view of yourself. You might say, for example, “I’m really doing the best that I can” or, “I’m not going to condemn myself for this anymore.”
 - Make a commitment that at least for the next week, whenever you hear self-criticism about these items, you will repeat your statements of self-acceptance. Then see what effect that has on your confidence and your power.
 - Remind yourself that your self-acceptance does not mean you are giving up on changing these things. Instead, you are only being kinder and less condemning of yourself so that you can actually make the changes when you are ready to do so.

**DEEPEN YOUR DIGNITY WITH
HUMILITY AND THE CONNECTEDNESS
THAT COMES WITH IT**



You may respond to your false shame by seeking to be superior to other people. That strategy is unlikely to succeed and is not sustainable. So consider instead adopting an attitude of humility. That would flow from your understanding that you and all others are fundamentally equal. When you no longer need to be “better than” anyone, you will find you no longer have concerns about being “less than” anyone, either. Humility, then, is a powerful cure for your feelings of inadequacy. Together with deep self-acceptance, it propels the transformation of your self-doubt into dignity. Humility also affirms your shared bond with all people and connects you more with them. That greater connectedness, and your greater warmth toward others that naturally follows, will further transform your false shame and heighten your self-value.

Your false shame can have you thinking, “I am fundamentally less than other people.” But that is a difficult thought to bear. So as a compensation, you may tell yourself, “Actually, I am better than other people.” But that perception is difficult to sustain as well. So you may find yourself spinning back and forth between these two opposing views of yourself, driven by your false shame. This will only pain you and deplete your power.

Your most powerful response to this quandary is to affirm, “In reality, I am fundamentally equal to all.” This is the voice of your humility. It tells you that, essentially, you are no better and no worse than others. As you accept being equal to everyone, you are liberated from your efforts to be better than anyone. In that state of humility, you no longer have anything to prove. Then you can stop comparing yourself with others and stop activating your false shame. And you can stop judging yourself by standards that oppress you. With humility, you can more fully accept yourself just as you are. That lessens your self-doubt and heightens your self-value.

When you act with complete self-acceptance and humility, the result will be a palpable sense of your own dignity. As shown on the Five Gifts Roadmap, this emerges from the transformation of your false shame. Self-acceptance neutralizes the self-rejection of false shame. And humility neutralizes the opposite—the unsustainable self-inflation also triggered by false shame. When you neither denigrate yourself nor seek to elevate yourself above others, your consequent dignity will provide you great self-respect, and therefore great power.

A highly successful entrepreneur shared with me her encounters with this challenge. She moved in elite circles that included people even more successful than she and this was triggering her feelings of

definition

HUMILITY

Conducting yourself based on the understanding that you are fundamentally equal to all people.

definition

DIGNITY

The demonstration of profound self-respect. It results from the combination of complete self-acceptance and humility.

inadequacy. So when she was with them, she labored to demonstrate her worth. “I would talk about who I know, I’d talk about my successes, I’d talk about what I’m going to do. I was trying so hard to impress them and be someone I wasn’t. Then I’d come home feeling nauseated and icky.

“After a while,” she said, “I realized they’re really no different from me. They have to brush their teeth just like me. They get happy and sad just like me. And they’re going to get old and die just like me. So why would I put them above me—or try to compete against them? Now, I’m simply myself around them.”

DEEPER WISDOM

Nearly all people feel a significant amount of false shame. So when you feel inadequate compared with others, remind yourself that this is actually a commonality you share with virtually all people. You may feel less inadequate and more connected as a result. And if you look more deeply, and see the inherent dignity in yourself and in everyone else, you will feel even less inadequate and even more connected.

This executive had initially responded to her self-doubt in a way that limited her relationships. That is a very common pattern. Are you doing something like that, too? For example, do you act on your false shame by needlessly comparing yourself with others and trying to match them? Are you excessively focused on performing better than those around you? Look carefully, as you may be hurting yourself and blocking your power. Consider instead showing greater humility. Then observe what benefits flow back to you.

You will find that your greater humility actually aids you considerably in joining with others. And that expanded connectedness will even further decrease your feelings of inadequacy. When you feel connected to

people, you are less likely to feel inadequate in relation to them. So try extending yourself more toward others. Then watch and see what happens.

Even better, from the foundation of your humility, show greater warmth and compassion toward others as well. Likely, your sense of your worth and dignity will grow even greater. This is a law of human nature. As you increasingly treat others with care and respect, you will

feel ever more respect and care for yourself. As you increasingly honor others' value, you will increasingly know your own.

The person who most demonstrated humility to me was a close friend and mentor of mine, 35 years my senior. He was a carpenter who, when still young, had been orphaned. Yet, by the time of his death, he had amassed a considerable fortune. But he did little to advertise his abilities or success. He drove around town in a very modest car barely big enough for his large frame, and judging from his appearance, I sometimes wondered if he had more than two or three shirts in his closet. He was so focused on what he could do for others that he paid little attention to what people thought of him. As a result, his dignity simply shined through. And an ease and grace was visible in nearly all of his efforts.

POWER TALK (to self)

- "I don't need to try so hard anymore to be better than anyone else."
- "We're all fundamentally equal."
- "How would I be acting right now if I remembered all of my inherent dignity?"

Imagine what you could accomplish with such an ease and grace and dignity. Imagine the trust you would inspire. It starts with compassionately accepting yourself as you are. It continues with your humility—seeing yourself as no better than and no less than other people. Recognizing your true place among others, you will no longer need to struggle against yourself or struggle against them. As you practice self-acceptance and humility, your false shame will be progressively transformed.

You may have thought that humility is an acknowledgment of your unworthiness. But really, it is a powerful affirmation of your shared bond with all people. And it is a potent remedy for your false shame. It is therefore a crucial source of your power.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Humility is based on your understanding that you are not fundamentally better than anyone else—and not fundamentally less than anyone, either. When you accept being equal to everyone, you no longer have anything to prove. Humility, therefore, is a powerful cure for your false shame.
- Humility combined with deep self-acceptance yields dignity. As shown on the Five Gifts Roadmap, dignity is the product of the transformation of your false shame.
- Humility will also help you be more connected with others. When you are more connected to people and when you show them greater warmth and compassion, your feelings of self-worth will naturally increase even further.

ACTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR POWER

- At least once every day for the next week, offer a smile, a hello, or other words of kindness to a person whose social status is so different from yours that you would normally not interact with him or her. This may be, for example, a clerk, someone cleaning the sidewalk, or a homeless person. You might remind yourself prior to each interaction, “This person and I are fundamentally equal.” After you have these exchanges, ask yourself, “What am I feeling right now?” Notice the likely positive impact of the experience on your self-worth. Notice the positive effect on your overall mood as well.

TAKE ACTION TO CONCLUSIVELY DISPROVE YOUR IRRATIONAL SELF-DOUBT



As the final step in the transformation of your false shame, take action despite what it tells you. This is one of the most powerful things you can do. Yet, as you move forward and push into your self-doubt, its voice at first will likely grow louder. Especially then, don't back off but keep moving forward. In doing so, you will prove that you, rather than your false shame, are stronger. Probably, your action will also prove that the messages of your self-doubt are grossly untrue. Your self-doubt may continue to arise even after you've repeatedly defeated it. But its voice will have diminishing power.

When your false shame arises, summon all your strength and take action despite what it tells you. Likely, your action will prove that the messages of self-doubt are not true. Every time you so act, you will enhance your power and your false shame will grow smaller. This principle of taking action is easy to explain but difficult to follow.

For example, do you know people who, nearly every time you see them, talk about what they *want* to do but never do it? Perhaps they want to start a new business. Or begin a new career. Or develop a creative talent. You may have offered them advice, encouragement, and more. But still, nothing happens. Perhaps you've concluded that these people are "lazy" or "just can't" do what is necessary. Perhaps they have come to believe the same things about themselves, too. But none of this is likely true. What really holds them back is that they heed their own false shame and thereby cripple their power.

Now, instead of looking outward, look inward. Are you one of those people, too? Likely, there are many instances in which you have conquered your self-doubt, but are there other areas in which it is conquering you? Do you tell others—or tell yourself—what you will *someday* do, and never do it? Are there things you secretly and deeply want to do, but you hold back on account of your self-doubt? Do not berate yourself for this. Do not add even more to your false shame. Instead, just notice your predicament. Simply seeing it and knowing you have a choice will empower you.

Perhaps you have already taken a step or two in the direction of your goal. If so, you may have encountered one of the principal qualities of false shame: As you begin to challenge it and take action despite what it tells you, it will likely grow dramatically larger—before it ultimately yields to you. So as you contemplate approaching your employer and asking for more responsibility, or approaching investors to fund your new venture, or approaching the woman or man you want to marry, or approaching any other goal that will expand your existence, the voice of self-doubt will probably get increasingly active and frantically try to stop you.

Your central challenge at such times is to keep on moving despite what your false shame is telling you. You will hear it say things like, "I can't do this, I'm going to fail." Simply notice these voices and acknowledge them. And then keep on moving forward even as they grow louder. You will finally reach a point where you prove that you, not your

false shame, are in control. Then its voice will grow quieter.

At other times and in other instances, your false shame may get active again. But as you refuse to heed it time after time, it will just be a voice with very little power. A CEO who built a thriving business told me he still sometimes hears the voice of self-doubt pestering him. It whispers to him that all he built may “come tumbling down.” Sometimes, it even awakens him at three or four in the morning. The voice gets especially active when he’s about to break through to his next level of success. Instead of panicking and reacting, he simply acknowledges, “There it goes again.” And then he keeps on moving forward. He knows his false shame only has the power he lets it have over him.

So when your false shame arises, first rationally assess its messages to confirm they’re probably invalid. Then take the necessary action despite what those messages tell you. Throughout your encounters with false shame, remember that it is your steady presence and onward movement that continuously defeat it.

I personally have a tendency to let my self-doubt control me. If I am not vigilant, I will retreat in the face of it until I’m enclosed in a small and unhappy prison cell of my own false shame. However constricted I find myself, though, I know I can always push forward into the self-doubt and gain back my freedom. Many of my most important successes and relationships have come from my doing so. This book would not exist if I had not repeatedly pushed into and through my false shame.

Make this your mantra, then, your constant refrain: “I will take action despite my false shame.” Usually, you will find this leads to far

DEEPER WISDOM

As you progressively overcome your self-doubt, your enhanced confidence and greater success may be threatening for others. Be careful lest you activate their own false shame. But do not be so careful that you diminish yourself, as many people do, to avoid making them feel inadequate. Instead, as your confidence and power expand, continuously include and validate others so that they feel powerful *with* you rather than feeling eclipsed by you.

POWER TALK (to self)

- “Given the self-doubt I’m feeling, what is the one thing I can do right now to be most powerful?”
- “I will take action—and keep moving forward—despite my false shame.”

greater success than what your self-doubt was advising you. But even when your actions do not get you to your goal, this will still be a victory for you. That’s because by taking action regardless of your self-doubt, you will have enhanced your free will and your power. You will have diminished the rule of false shame over you. Nearly always, this is more important to your long-term success and happiness

than the outcome of a single effort.

So when you hear the voice of self-doubt emerging, ask yourself, “What next steps will make me most powerful?” Then take the necessary action. One of your most important investments in your own success is to continuously move forward despite your false shame.

summary

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The final step in the transformation of your false shame is taking action despite what it tells you. When you do so, your self-doubt will likely intensify. At such times, be sure to continue moving forward. Ultimately, the self-doubt will subside and yield to you.
- When you take action contrary to your self-doubt, you will prove that its messages to you are untrue. You will also prove that you, rather than your self-doubt, are in control.
- As you repeatedly take action despite your false shame, it may still emerge from time to time. But its authority over you will be decidedly weaker. Your dignity will be more apparent and you will have more power.

ACTIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR POWER

- Take some time alone with yourself where you will have no distractions. Sit comfortably, take several deep breaths, and let yourself relax. After a few moments of simply breathing, start reflecting on what you *want* to do but, because of your self-doubt, haven't been doing. Make a list of the items that come to mind that are important and meaningful for you. For each item, confirm that practical constraints such as time and money are not preventing you from taking action. Be careful, though, because your self-doubt may masquerade as concerns about practical issues. Once you have created your list, do the following:
 - Select one item you are willing to take action on. To ease into this and avoid overwhelming yourself, consider selecting an item that only moderately activates your self-doubt when you imagine doing it.
 - For the item you select, identify the beliefs underlying your self-doubt and confirm that they are likely invalid. For this purpose, you may want to use the tools provided in the second section of this chapter. If you cannot make this confirmation, select a more appropriate item from your list.
 - Next, identify the first step you are willing to take to fulfill your identified desire. Make the step as small as it needs to be for you to actually take it and begin moving forward. For example, your first step may be spending an hour doing some research or it may be preparing what you will say to a person whose support you need.
 - After you have completed your first step, then take another in the same way. And then another. And so on until you are actually doing the very thing that your self-doubt was keeping you from. As you encounter the likely intensification of false shame and other emotions, use the tools in this book for managing those emotions and moving through them.
 - Once you have completed one item on your list, then take on another. As you continue addressing these challenges, watch your self-doubt shrink and your power expand.