

# “DEAR DICK” - SELF IMPROVEMENT

articles are reprinted from The Local Bulletin, Brisbane

## Table of contents

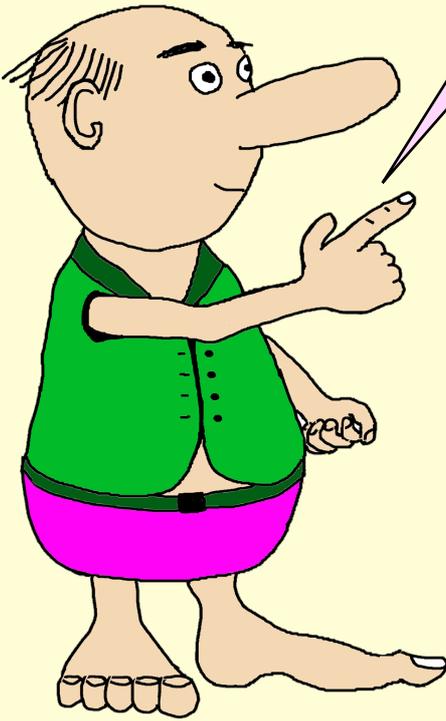
<b>Chapter 1. Fun things to do</b>	<b>3</b>
“Singing for Fun” .....	4
<b>Chapter 2. Becoming assertive</b>	<b>5</b>
“Ask for what you want” .....	6
“The cost of being assertive” .....	7
“Standing up for yourself” .....	8
“Nagging becomes assertion” .....	9
“How to deal with Telemarketers” .....	10
“How to say no” .....	11
<b>Chapter 3. Life in balance</b>	<b>12</b>
“The discipline of balance” .....	13
<b>Chapter 4. Personal journey</b>	<b>14</b>
“A personal journey” .....	15
<b>Chapter 5. Awareness &amp; honesty</b>	<b>16</b>
“Awareness and honesty” .....	17
<b>Chapter 6. Being present</b>	<b>18</b>
“Be here now” .....	19
“How to behave at a funeral” .....	20
<b>Chapter 7. Psychological health</b>	<b>21</b>
“Psychological health” .....	22

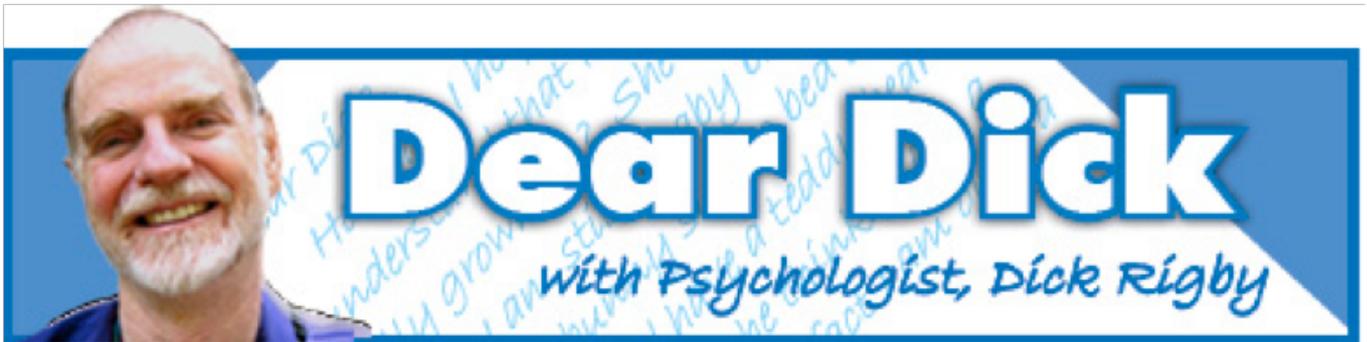
**Chapter 8. Self improvement**

“New Year Resolutions” .....24



# Chapter 1. Fun things to do





**“Singing for Fun”  
May 2001**

The “Louise was a shy person, and she loved to sing. She would only sing in the shower and in the car, but only when she was alone. She would never allow herself to sing in front of others. Louise believed she had a horrible voice and sang out of tune.

Last year, she went to a dinner party with friends. Everyone around the table took a turn at singing. Louise was so embarrassed that she refused to sing. Despite the encouragement of her husband and her friends, she just froze. After this experience, she was so fed up at herself that she decided to get some help from a voice therapist.

The therapist helped her to hear the “Inner Critic” in her head. When she really listened to what her Inner Critic was saying, Louise was able to recognise that most of what was said was unrealistic and extreme. She was then able to reduce the impact of her Inner Critic and hear that her singing voice was quite reasonable.

She learned to become more confident with her singing voice. She found that this confidence flowed over into other parts of her life. Louise went on to join a local choir. She was able to experience the joy of singing without the shame and embarrassment that she previously “rained on her parade”.

“Just about anyone can learn how to sing and can also learn to use their voice for healing.” This is the message from Dick Rigby, well known Psychologist and Voice Worker, and author of the book “Holistic Singing and Toning - Developing voice power for healing and enjoyment”. “The voice is such a wonderful instrument for having fun, bringing healing and spiritual development” Dick said.

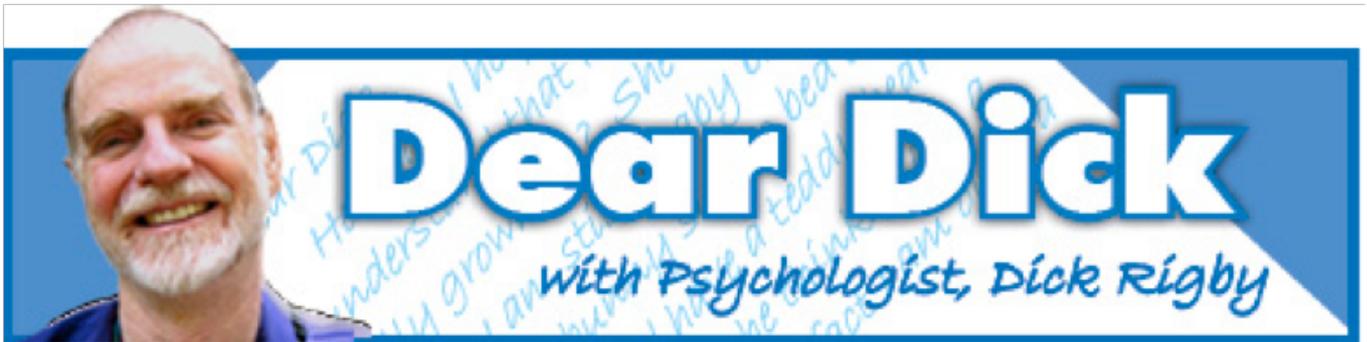
He explained that people can learn how to sing in tune and develop confidence in their voice. “To sing with confidence, we need to overcome the fear that many of us have of singing.” Many people may sing “a bit out of tune” at times. The good news is that people can be taught how to tune their voice. Training in listening is an essential part of learning how to tune the voice.

“Once we learn to overcome any unreasonable fears about singing, we can learn to sing just as we would learn to play any musical instrument.”

Singing and toning can also put energy into your life. Dick reported that “often people will come to a weekend workshop on Saturday morning feeling tired and drained, and by Sunday afternoon they are feeling full of energy”.

## Chapter 2. Becoming assertive





**“Ask for what you want”  
March 2004**

The other day I saw the movie “Something’s gotta give” with Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton. It was wonderfully entertaining. It brought up the issue of communication between courting couples. So many times in the movie Harry and Erica avoided asking for what they wanted. The reason that they didn’t ask, was the fear that their request would be rejected or ridiculed. Sure, it was risky for them to express their needs given the sort of relationship that they had. But I think that they played it too safe.

When we are starting to get close to someone, we are often scared of saying how we feel. But there are ways of testing the water. We could say; “I really enjoy your company, do you feel the same way?” Or we could say; “Do you get a bit scared when things go well as you get to know someone?”

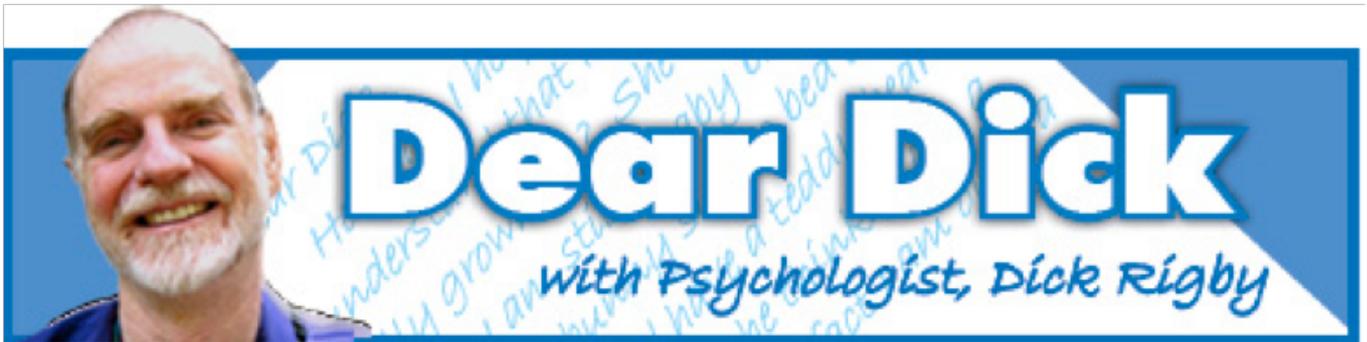
Take a risk. Ask for what you need. The chances are that if you don’t, your partner or friend will not be able to guess what you want. I know it sounds a bit extreme, but you can even ask for a compliment.

Lynn is 35 years old. She is the only daughter of Anne. Anne doesn’t do compliments. It was very rare for her to praise Lynn when Lynn was a child. Lynn learned not to expect praise, and certainly never to ask for it. Later on Lynn learned from raising her own children, that children thrive on praise and encouragement.

Lynn and her husband make sure that they give their children tons of praise. Their children have developed good self esteem. Lynn began to realize that compliments were an important thing missing in her relationship with her mother. One day she worked up the courage to ask her mother to pay her compliments.

Anne replied that “Too many compliments can spoil the child”. Lynn pointed out that she only got criticism from Anne and never a compliment. Lynn eventually did get through to her mother after many attempts. The change didn’t happen overnight, but they began paying each other compliments. It felt a bit awkward at first, but after many months it became more natural. It was an important change for the better in the relationship. Anne still slipped back into criticizing Lynn on occasions, but Lynn was more inclined to ask for a compliment in addition to the criticism.

Ask for what you want. You just might get it.



**“ The cost of being assertive”  
May 2004**

In my psychology practice, I help many people become more assertive. The other day I had an occasion to test my own assertive skills. I was returning a electric light stand to a major chain store. The shop assistant was quite offhand toward me. I had the choice of saying something about it or just letting it go. In the past, I would have just let it go. I have always hated conflict.

This time I made the decision to do something about it. I told him that I thought he had been rude to me. He shrugged it off without comment. He had the chance to apologize but chose not to. I asked to speak to the manager and I explained to him that the shop assistant had been rude to me. The manager was just as offhand and said “What do you want me to do about it?”.

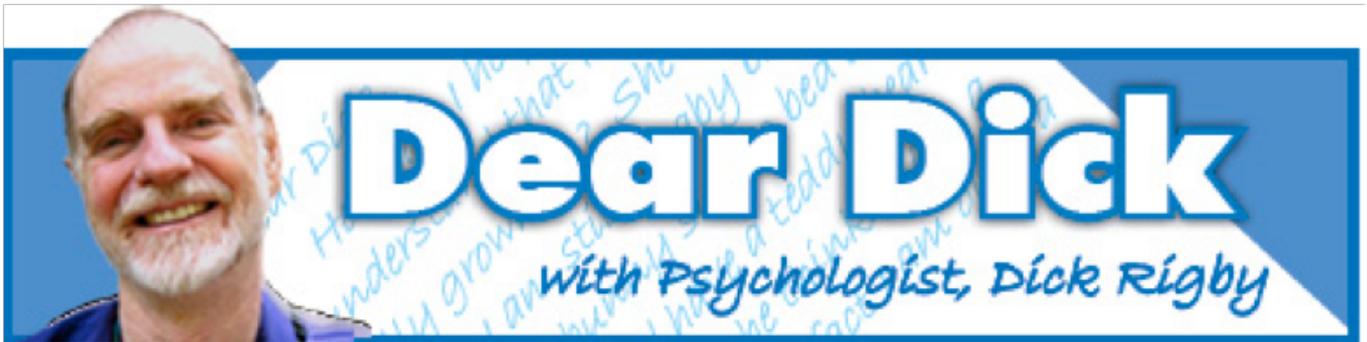
I was starting to get a bit upset. I said “an apology would be in order”. He mumbled an apology and walked away. It was then that I played my trump card. I spoke loudly so that all the customers in the area could hear. I said that I didn’t appreciate being treated this way and I wanted an apology from the shop assistant.

Eventually, the shop assistant grumbled an apology of sorts. I left the shop having won the battle. The cost was that I felt quite upset and it took me about half an hour to calm down afterwards.

Was it worth it? I had to weigh up the cost of being assertive against the cost of being treated rudely. Yes, it was worth it for me. It was part of my journey of standing up for myself. I really do have a deep understanding of how difficult it is for some people to be assertive when other people treat them badly.

Anthony is a client of mine. He has let people push him around all his life. He had low self esteem and rarely was able to put his views forward persuasively in a work situation. He did not command respect from his colleagues and at home he was considered to be a bit of a laughing stock by his teenage children.

Anthony began the difficult journey of overcoming his fears and becoming more assertive, he has improved his profile at work and is now treated with respect. He feels much better about himself. He still finds asserting himself in conflict situations difficult, but he really appreciates the gains that he has made so far.



**“Standing up for yourself”  
October 2005**

“If you stand up for yourself, you can get into a lot of trouble”. Well that’s true, but it depends on the circumstances and how it is done. If you live in Zimbabwe, I would not recommend standing on a street corner shouting “Robert Mugabe is a ruthless dictator who is murdering his own people.” That would land you into heaps of trouble.

Here’s a four step program to be assertive and stay out of trouble: The first step is to learn to believe in yourself enough to want to stand up for your rights. The second step is to assess the situation as to whether it is safe to be assertive. The third step is to work out your chances of having a win. The fourth step is to work out the best strategy for dealing with a particular situation.

That first step is by far the hardest for people who are not assertive. If it is hard for you, then do some work to improve your sense of self worth. If necessary get some professional help. One of the songs that I have written is called “I deserve”. It is designed to help people increase their sense of self worth.

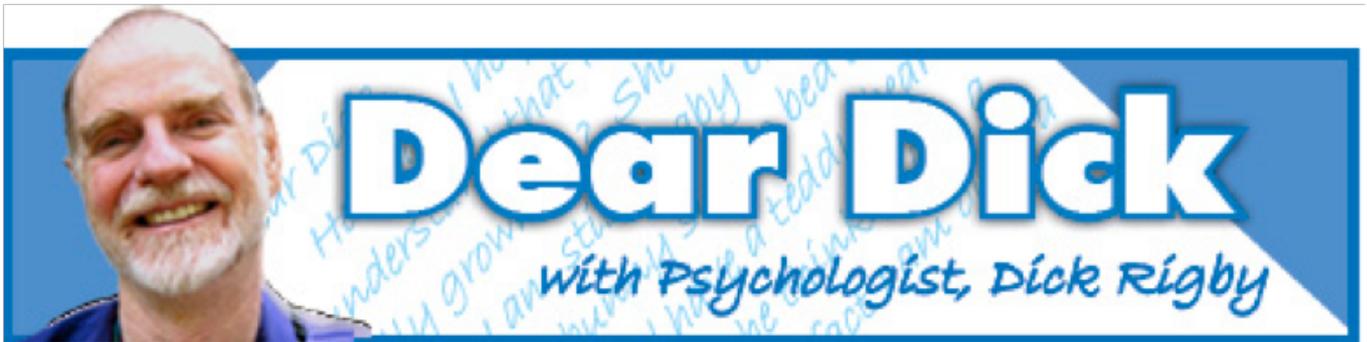
When you reach a point of believing in yourself, the rest is much easier.

Rod was having trouble with his boss John. John kept asking him to do more and more. Rod put in longer and longer hours to keep up. Rod became very stressed and anxious. When Rod complained to John about the pressure of work, John dismissed Rod’s concerns. John said that the company was relying on Rod to meet the deadlines otherwise they would loose a big contract.

Rod needed a dose of the four steps. About a year ago he got some professional help. He changed his core beliefs about himself from “not good enough” to “I am worthwhile”.

Once he believed that he was worth looking after, he started to develop strategies to deal with John. He decided on the number of hours that he was prepared to work in a week and presented this to John. John was very upset and felt that Rod had let him down. Rod (with his new self esteem) pointed out that he had been doing the work of two people.

John had to give way. He couldn’t fire Rod because he would have to hire two people to replace him. John made adjustments to the work place. Morale went up and so did productivity. Another happy ending.



**“Nagging becomes assertion”  
June 2006**

“Alice just won’t keep her room clean no matter what I say or do”. Patricia was at her wits end with her 15 year old daughter Alice. Nothing Patricia did seemed to make any difference.

Alice would say, “I’ll tidy my room as soon as I get home from school today – I promise”. It just didn’t happen. Lets have a look at what is going on in this family to try and find out why. Patricia was a good mum but when it came to discipline, she had difficulties being strong enough. Patricia could only take a strong stand when she got angry.

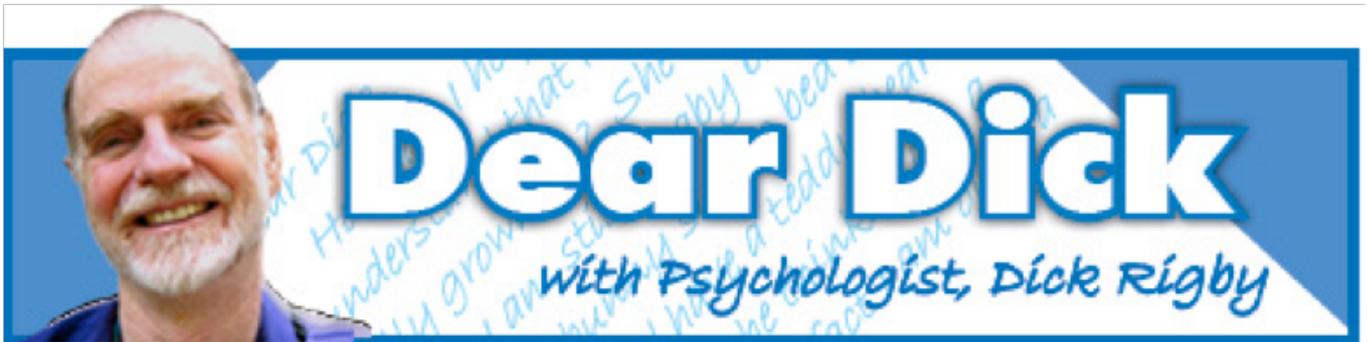
There was a repeating pattern. Alice would promise to tidy her room but then wouldn’t do it. Patricia would nag and threaten Alice. Only when Patricia reached the end of her tether would she get angry. Then there would be a heated argument between mother and daughter.

Alice would then tidy her room and be grumpy and resentful towards her mother. Patricia would be filled with guilt and remorse for over reacting and would apologize to her daughter. That would be the end of it until the next time Patricia wanted Alice to do something Alice didn’t want to do.

The pattern kept repeating. Patricia sought some help in managing Alice better. Her counsellor helped her to change her anger into assertiveness. It took quite some time for Patricia to learn how to change. She got lots of encouragement and support from her counsellor.

Patricia learned to say “I would like your room tidied by 6.00 pm tomorrow”. If the room was not tidy by the set time, Patricia was to give just one warning. If the room was still not tidy, Patricia was to give an appropriate punishment, such as not letting Alice go out with her boyfriend on the weekend.

This story did have a happy ending. Patricia was able to ensure a much greater level of compliance from Alice and a more peaceful home life.



**“How to deal with Telemarketers”  
August 2008**

If you like talking to Telemarketers then don't read on.

Robert is short tempered. He gets really annoyed with Telemarketers calling him at home just as he is sitting down for the evening meal. When he answers the phone to a telemarketer he yells abuse and slams down the phone. Robert is incensed that these people are allowed to invade his privacy.

Louise is the opposite. When she answers the phone she is always well mannered. She finds it very hard to be rude to people. She feels sorry for the person on the other end doing such a difficult job. Louise wastes about one hour a week talking to Telemarketers but she never buys anything.

Telemarketers are a nuisance for most people. So if you don't want them bothering you, here are some suggestions about what to do. Don't get angry and don't be too nice. It is a waste of your valuable life energy to get angry. The Telemarketer is doing a paid job. Their job is to invade your space and try and sell you something. You are a sales statistic to them.

I am not saying that Telemarketers are ruthless sociopaths (although this helps in the job). However, they would not be doing this kind of job if they felt guilty about disturbing your dinner. They have rationalized it in some way that they are not harming you.

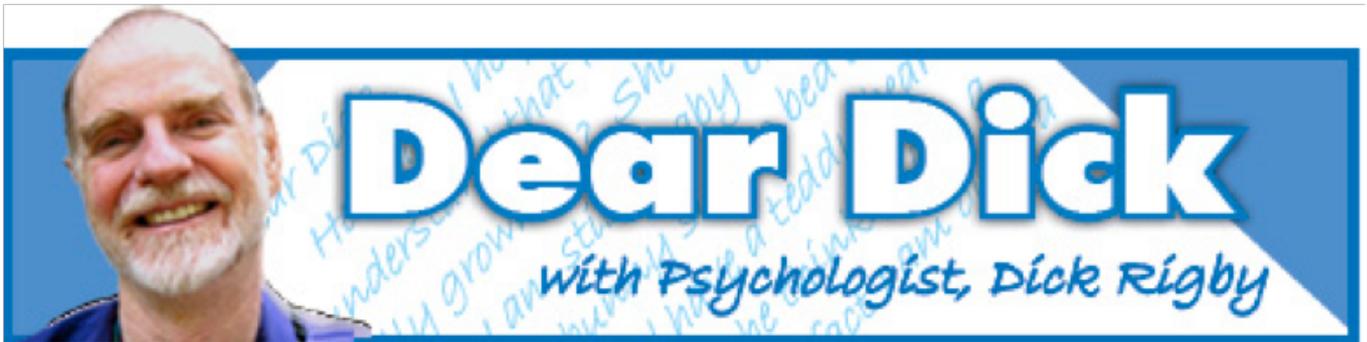
If you are like Louise and find it hard to be assertive, then you are also wasting your time and energy as well as wasting the Telemarketer's time.

I have my own approach that I would like to share with you. The first thing that I do when a call comes through is I look at the origin of the call. If it reads “out of the area” I let it go through to the answering machine. If it is a client ringing to make an appointment, they will leave a message (hopefully).

If I answer a call and it is a foreign accent (you know what I mean), I am immediately suspicious. I ask, “Are you telemarketing?” If they say yes then I say “thank you I am not interested” and hang up. If they beat about the bush I just hang up. Usually a person making a genuine call will come straight to the point.

I save myself a lot of time and energy by not getting angry and keeping it short. I never buy from a Telemarketer.

Next time I will talk about how to deal with other annoying intrusions on your time.



**“How to say no”  
September 2008**

Last month, I wrote about Telemarketers. As I promised, this month I will talk about how to say “no” in other situations. Still on the subject of telephone intrusions, I always say “no” to telephone surveys. If they want my input, they can send me a hard copy in the mail.

I find telephone fund-raising more difficult to deal with, particularly if it’s for a worthy cause such as Red Cross or Lifeline. I prefer not to donate across the phone for two reasons; firstly, the call might not be genuine, and secondly I don’t want to reinforce home intrusions. The answer is still “no”.

However, if a genuine charity such as Red Cross knocks at my door I will always donate.

Let me give you a different example of when to say no. I saw a client last year. (Let’s call him Charles.) Charles was in his 50s and well off financially. His younger brother Peter was always broke because he couldn’t manage finances. Peter was always asking for money from Charles.

Charles was always a soft touch for Peter. Charles was the oldest boy in the family. He had been trained as a child in the role of are looking after his younger brother. Peter was trained in the role was of being looked after by Charles.

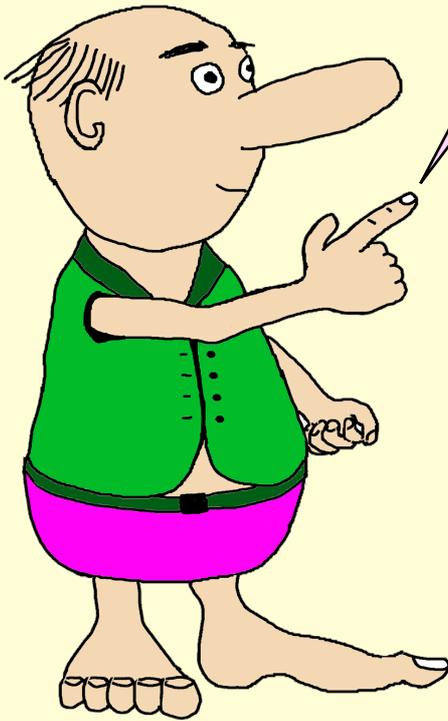
Things ticked along year after year with Charles bailing Peter out financially. As time went by, Charles built up resentment at his younger brother. As Charles came closer to retirement he decided to make a stand. He came to see me to work out what to do with Peter.

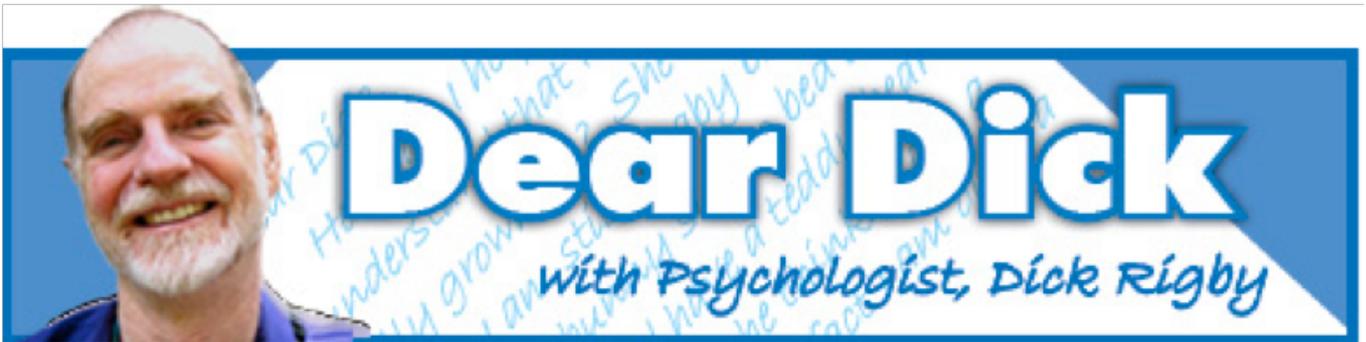
We looked at the role of rescuer that he had been trained for as a child. Charles had to work out how to overcome his guilt if he was to say “no” to Peter. After a couple of sessions, Charles did learn how to make a stand with Peter without feeling guilty. Naturally, Peter hit the roof when Charles refused to rescue him from his latest misadventure.

Peter tried to play into Charles’s guilt, but this time it didn’t work. Charles was able to recognize that Peter had been sponging off him for years, and that it wasn’t helping Peter by supplying him with money.

This story had a happy ending for Charles but not for Peter. Peter had to go on and find somebody else to rescue him. Whatever our childhood training, we can learn to say no when it is appropriate. This is an essential part of a journey towards self-care.

## Chapter 3. Life in balance





**“The discipline of balance”**  
**December 2005**

I like Terry. He’s a nice guy. Everybody likes Terry. He’s a senior doctor in a casualty ward in a major hospital. He is very good at what he does and he loves his work. He’s always busy. There’s always someone’s life to save.

Terry is a family man. He has three beautiful children and they adore him. That is, on the rare occasions when they get to spend time with him. You see, Terry is so busy helping other people that he doesn’t get much time to spend with his wife and children. He says that he would like to, but there never seem to be enough hours in the day.

Terry is not just busy. He is busy doing something very important. He’s a “hero”. He has status and he’s on a good salary. Life is good – or so it seems. There’s a problem. It came to a head last Christmas holidays.

The family went down to the Gold Coast for two weeks. Well, they were all meant to but Terry got called back into casualty at the last moment because the relieving doctor broke a leg. So Terry joined his family for the second week of their holidays.

As soon as he got to the holiday unit, he was organizing a day trip to the mountains. Busy busy busy. Terry didn’t know how to slow down and spend time with his family. He was used to living on the edge.

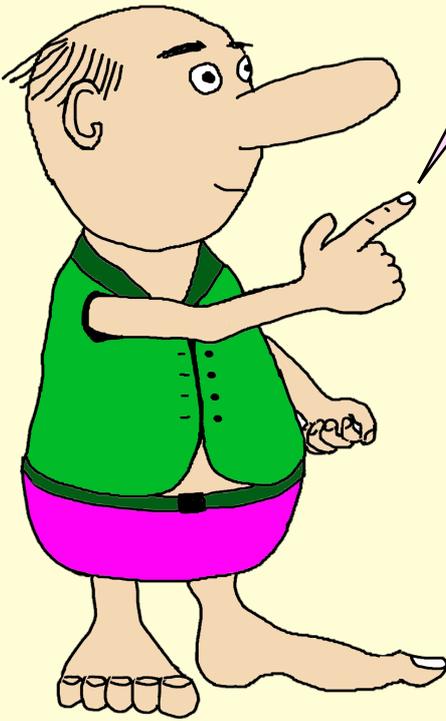
It all came to a head when his wife Julie said that she fed up with the way they were living. She told him that they never had any quiet times together. He never spent time just playing with his children. He was always organizing something and the more challenging and exciting the activity, the more Terry enjoyed it.

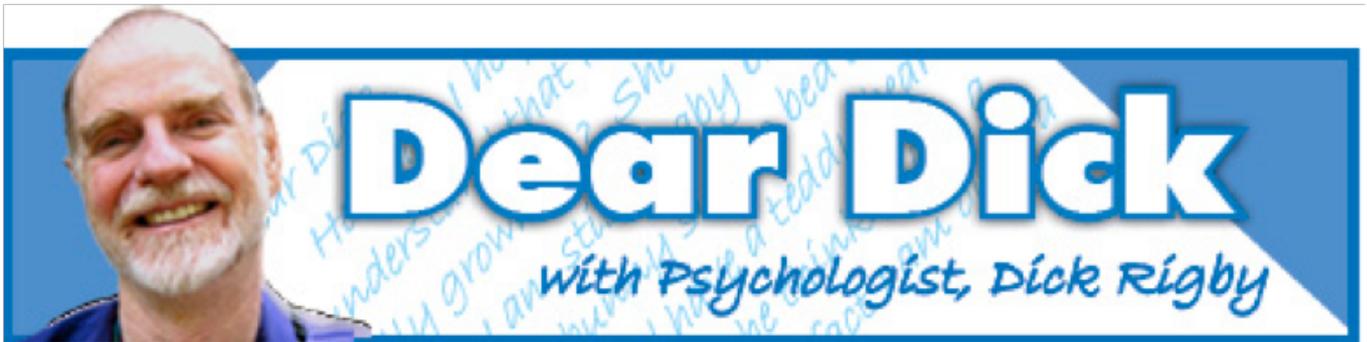
Julie gave Terry an ultimatum about getting help. Terry saw a psychologist over a period of nine months. In this time, Terry learned how to spend quiet times. He joined a yoga class. He learned how to be in touch with his feelings. He learned how to spend quality time with his children. (He had not had quality contact with his own father.)

He didn’t have to give up his job. He still had the buzz of working in casualty and saving lives. But, he learned to put it in perspective. He learned that he had daemons and that he could face them.

He is still learning the discipline of balance.

# Chapter 4. Personal journey





**“A personal journey”  
January 2010**

What a shock. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I felt a mild tightness in my chest while I was playing soccer. No pain, just a tight feeling. So I did the right thing and got a stress-echo test. Part of my heart actually stopped working during the test. Fortunately for me, it started again.

The next step was to have an angiogram. This is where they inject a dye into the heart via the femoral artery and x-ray the results. No anaesthetic was required, so I watched the screen as the dye went in. What I saw wasn't me. It couldn't be. But it was. I had a 90% block in my main heart artery and a 65% block in another major artery. I was lucky to be alive.

The blockages were due to a build up of plaque (a fatty substance) that had been laid down in the walls of the arteries. It can take 20 to 30 years for the plaque to build up.

What to do? Should I have a couple of stents put in or should I go for the bypass surgery. A stent is a metal casing that expands the blocked section of the artery. Stents were the easier option, but the better long term outcome was to have the double bypass.

This all happened in October 2009. Within three weeks of the initial stress test, I was being wheeled into an operating theater in the Wesley Hospital. I had a double bypass which involved using small arteries from my chest to go around the blocked areas. It was a major operation where my heart was stopped and my lungs were collapsed. As I write this, 8 weeks after the operation, I am doing very well. I am back playing soccer again.

I have shared my personal story with you for several reasons. Firstly, if there is any possibility that you may have coronary heart disease, then have a stress test now! Don't put it off.

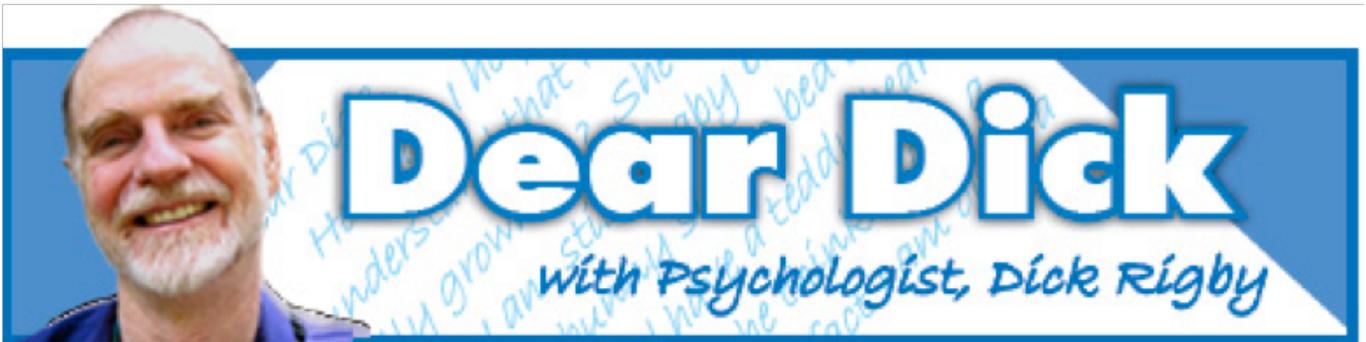
The second reason is about denial. It is easy to underestimate a problem. I put my stress test off far too long.

The third reason is about psychologically adjusting to major surgery. Many people suffer from depression after this surgery. I didn't. I prepared well. I had a positive state of mind and I accepted the love and support given to me.

My special thanks to my cardiologist, cardiac surgeon and all the staff at the Wesley Hospital.

# Chapter 5. Awareness & honesty





**“Awareness and honesty”  
June 2008**

We can not be honest with other people if we are not honest with ourselves. If we don't know what is going on inside, then we can't tell the truth about it.

When Chris said to his wife Helen, “I don't know why I yelled at Josh” he was telling the truth as he knew it. He really didn't know why at a conscious level. Chris was unaware that he had been angry with his 12 year old son. Chris had cause to be angry.

Later on Chris apologized to Helen for yelling at their son. Chris denied that he had been angry. He explained that had just been having a bad day. Now Chris wasn't telling the truth. He had been angry with Josh.

The reason that Chris denied his anger was because Helen was very protective of their son and it was not cool for Chris to be angry with him. Chris was telling the truth as he understood it. If he had a better understanding of himself he would have realized that he was denying his anger to keep out of trouble with Helen.

So Chris's lack of self awareness led him to tell a lie that he hadn't deliberately wanted to tell.

In past Dear Dick's I have made a big deal of our need for self awareness. I am still beating this drum. How can a couple have an honest and open relationship if they are not honest within themselves? Of course it is impossible.

A lot of the marital problems that Chris and Helen were experiencing were a result of dishonest communication. When they first came for help, I found a very entrenched system of denial by both of them. Neither wanted to look at what was going on underneath.

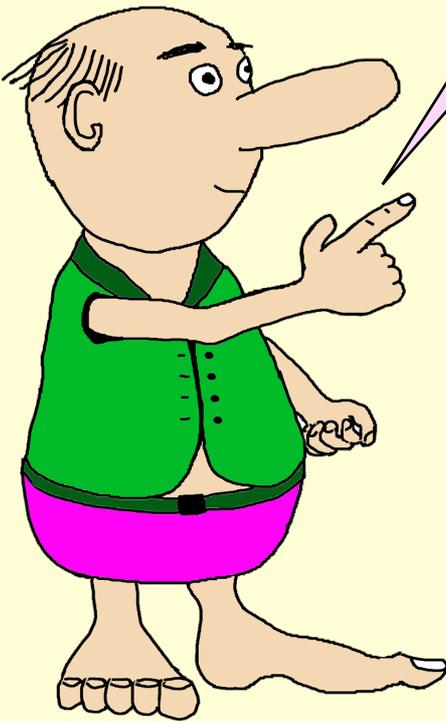
We persevered over many weeks and started to make headway. Helen started to look at why she was so over protective of Josh. The reasons lay in her own abusive childhood.

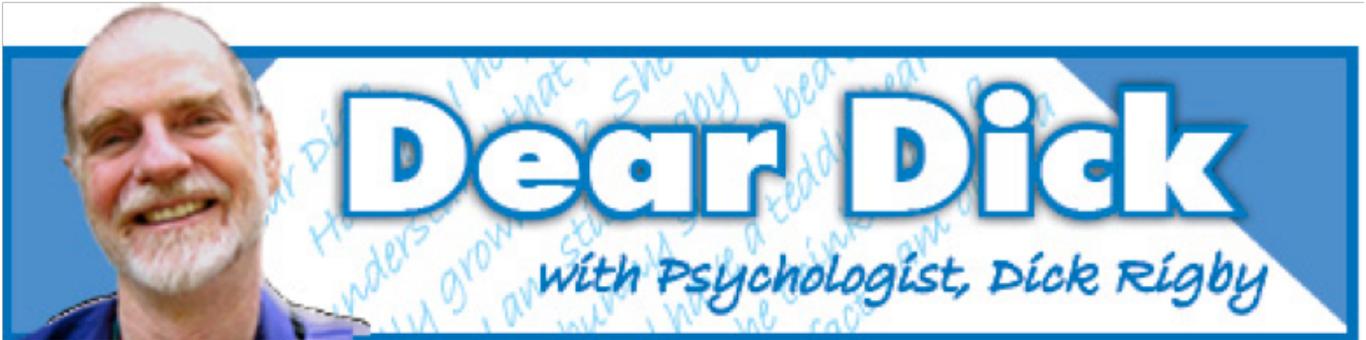
Chris started to understand why he was so afraid of getting into trouble with Helen. Again the reasons lay in his childhood. They were both able to make changes and they started to communicate more openly and honestly.

Chris didn't have to hide his anger any more. Helen didn't have to be so over protective. They could now negotiate issues because the real truth was out in the open.

Josh benefitted because he could no longer play one parent off against the other.

# Chapter 6. Being present





**“Be here now”  
March 2003**

Rod’s a planner. Always making plans. Rod and Liz went on this great holiday to Thailand. Fourteen days of bliss. Or so it would seem. But Rod spent his time planning. He planned what they would do the next day, he planned where they would go for dinner. He even planned their next holiday.

Out of frustration, Liz accused Rod of “Never being present in the moment”. Rod had no idea what she was talking about. He replied, “I’m here with you and we’re having a good time, aren’t we?” Liz said “That’s not the point”.

This set Rod thinking. He started to plan what he would do about it when they got back to Australia. He asked some of his friends and came up with the great idea of joining a meditation class. He worked out how he could fit this into his busy schedule.

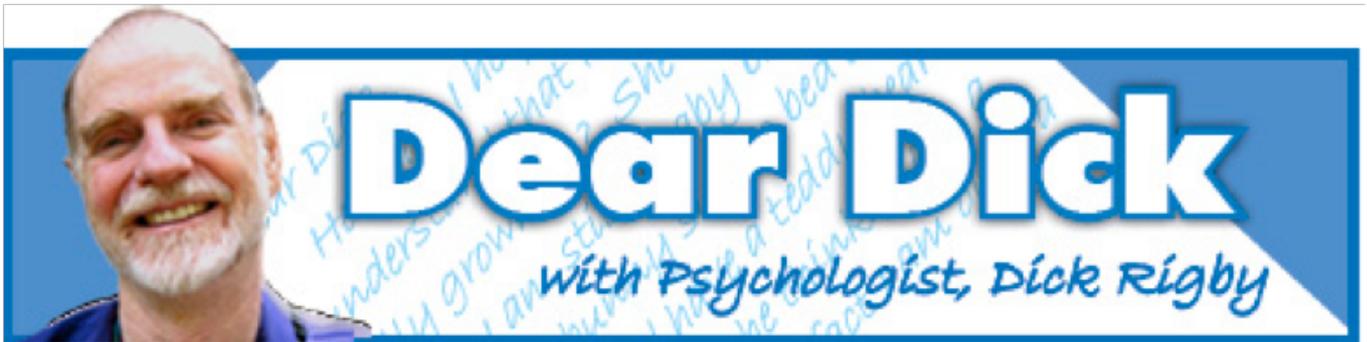
Bright and early next Monday morning, he arrived at his first class. He was well prepared with loose fitting clothes and yoga mat. He was always well prepared. After the instructor took the class through some preliminaries, it started. Silence! Rod had never encountered anything like it. He felt very uncomfortable not being able to be “productive”.

He knew that he had to “still his mind”, but it just wouldn’t still. He stayed for the hour and it had been a frustrating and uncomfortable experience. Nevertheless, he felt some calmness for the next hour after, so he decided to go to the next class.

That was a year ago. What a year of change it has been for Rod. He did learn to meditate. He did learn to still his mind. He found some amazing results. Firstly, he became more mentally alert. Secondly, he felt better about himself. And thirdly, time seemed to go a bit slower.

Rod learned the meaning of being present in the moment. For him it meant being able to feel deeply connected with what was going on around him. It meant being sensually connected. He learned to breath the air, smell the smells, and notice little things like how ants move.

Being present in the moment is good for us. It’s relaxing and it is the best way that I know to slow down time. If we spent fifteen minutes just looking at a flower, time would slow and we would notice beauty that would normally pass us by.



**“How to behave at a funeral”  
January 2004**

Funerals are interesting events. People behave in widely differing ways. Some people are very emotional and others maintain the “stiff upper lip”. The point of this article is that no matter how you chose to deal with your feelings, stay connected.

My father died in 1995. I travelled from Brisbane to Wangaratta to attend the funeral. I wanted to “be true to my feelings” at that funeral. I had a couple of days to prepare myself before I left for Victoria.

I worked on rehearsing how I would cope with the various things that came up. My dear friend Patricia helped me with these rehearsals. I made some decisions. The first was that I would view Dad’s body. This wasn’t done in our family. Nobody viewed a dead body. Death wasn’t even talked about.

I viewed my father’s body on my own to say goodbye to him. This turned out to be very good for me. I was able to spend half an hour with him as he lay in his coffin. I cried and wept and even did a bit of wailing. It wasn’t a pleasant experience, but it was incredibly helpful for me. I came away from the funeral parlour feeling that I had really said goodbye to my father. Because there was no one else there, there was no one to approve or disapprove of my behaviour. It was between me and him.

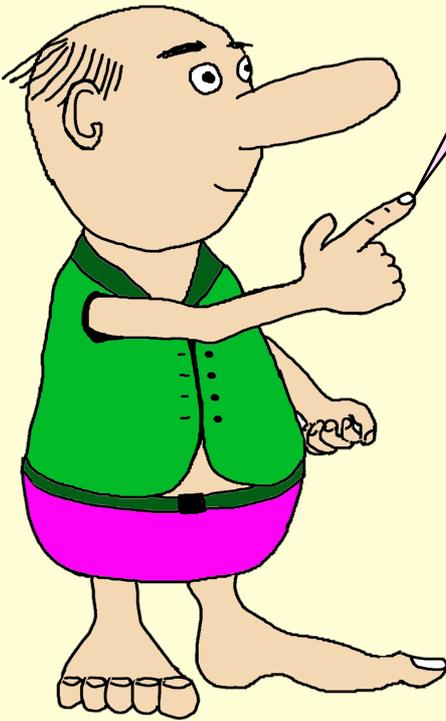
When it came to the service and the eulogy, my brother went first. He delivered a prepared speech telling of all Dad’s achievements. It was very well done. I took a different path. I hadn’t prepared my eulogy at all. I got up in Wangaratta cathedral before a full house (Dad was a popular man in the community), and I spoke from my heart.

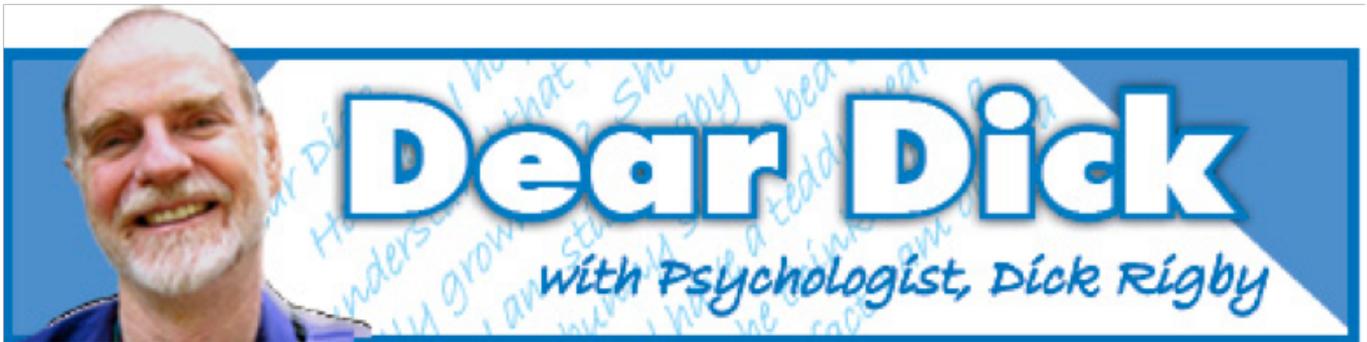
It worked for me. I felt very “present in the moment”. I was very emotional and wrestled with tears on several occasions. But at the end there wasn’t a dry eye in the house. So it worked for the congregation also.

Being present in the moment is about feeling “I am here right now”. The only job that I have to do is be true to myself and where necessary, convey my feelings to others.

I think it is important that we stay true to ourselves in any situation where there are performance pressures put upon us. Staying connected helps with emotional resolution.

# Chapter 7. Psychological health





**“Psychological health”  
April 2002**

What does it take to keep psychologically healthy? The most important ingredient is awareness. Without awareness of ourselves and others, we cannot know what is going on and therefore we cannot fix it. Take Lance as a case in point. Lance appeared to be bright and happy. He was easy to get on with at work and nearly everybody liked him. He worked hard and he was reliable.

Imagine everyone’s surprise when they found out that Lance had tried to overdose the other evening. Nobody knew that Lance was severely clinically depressed. Even Lance didn’t know. He spent a lot of energy hiding the problem for others and acting happy. He was in denial.

After his wife left him several months earlier, Lance’s solution was to work harder and try to please people more. He did not face his feelings of grief and loss. Fortunately for Lance, he got the help he needed following the suicide attempt. But it was a close call.

Here are a few simple questions you can ask yourself to check whether you are at risk of developing psychological problems:

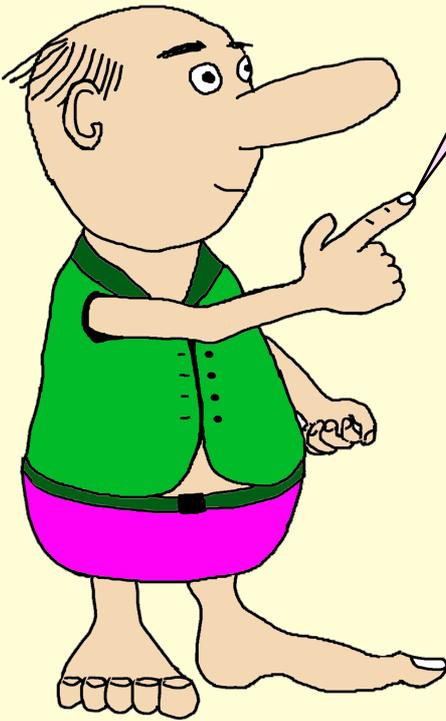
- Do I feel grounded and balanced? “Yes” is good.
- Do I listen to other’s people’s feed back on how they see me? “Yes” is good.
- Am I sleeping and resting well and do I wake up feeling rested? “Yes” is good.
- Am I engaging in addictive behaviour such as regular drinking, smoking, gambling, or excessive work? “No” is good.
- Can I laugh and have fun without the use of alcohol or drugs? “Yes” is good.
- Do I have excessive conflict in my life? “No” is good.

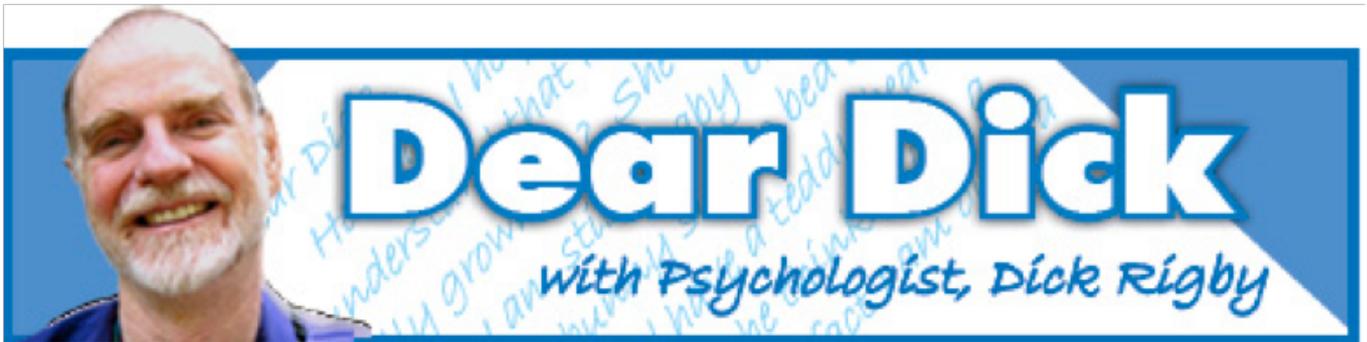
This list of questions is by no means complete, but is a quick guide to pick up some risk factors. If your answers to any of these questions suggest there is a problem, it may be a good idea to talk to a mental health professional and get some help.

Mental health is about balance. We seem to need an even balance between work, recreation and sleep. Some people can survive working very hard at the expense of sleep and recreation. If their work is enjoyable and not excessively stressful, then it can be counted as part of recreation. But if people are working long hours in a stressful unhappy environment, then they are putting their mental health at risk.

Keeping psychologically healthy is not only good for our overall health, but it also feels good.

# Chapter 8. Self improvement





## **“New Year Resolutions” January 2000**

Most people I know who make new year resolutions intend to keep them. But as we all know, the best laid plans etc..... In order to make your new year resolutions work, here are some simple steps to follow. Let me use the example of the resolution that “I will give up smoking this January”.

These are the steps to follow:-

1. Make sure your resolution is realistic. Giving up smoking in January sounds like a realistic goal. So often people make resolutions that are wish lists that are totally “pie in the sky”.
2. Write the resolution down. This means that you can’t forget what you said at the time. If you don’t do this, it is easy to modify your memory and it becomes “I will give up smoking sometime this year”.
3. Make it specific. “I will not have another cigarette after January 31 this year”.
4. Tell someone else about your resolution. Ask them to check on how you are going with it from time to time.
5. Develop a plan to implement the resolution. Work out exactly how you are going to give up cigarettes in January. Are you going to cut down day by day or are you going to go “cold turkey”? Are you going to use some help like nicotine patches? Are you going to get any counselling to help with withdrawals?
6. Develop a policy to deal with relapse. So often smokers who give up relax their grip after about four or five weeks and say to themselves, it’s ok to just try one cigarette to see what it tastes like. As anyone who has tried to give up smoking will know, trying “just the one”, is almost certain to get you hooked again.

New years resolutions are nearly always about changing difficult behaviour. But they don’t have to be about giving up something. John decided that he wanted to spend more time with his children. He applied the same steps as above:

1. Yes the resolution was realistic. It was something that he was capable of doing with some reorganizing of his time schedule.
2. John not only wrote his plan down, he made diary entries against particular important family occasions for the year.
3. He made his plan specific. For example, he told his son that he would attend at least half of his son’s soccer matches.
4. John told his wife and children about his plan.
5. John also told his secretary at work so that she could help him plan family time in his busy week.
6. John planned a monthly meeting with his wife to review how the plan was going.

Good luck John. When it’s time to get serious, may the force be with you.