

PART I: PREPARING TO GET NAKED

Yes, this book involves getting naked. The most common process of doing this entails removing one's clothing to hop into the shower or climb into bed – or perhaps to stand inside a homemade rain barrel for a book cover photo. Here, however, we're referring to nakedness that means “without addition, concealment, disguise, or embellishment.”³ Achieving this type of bareness is much more rewarding, but also more challenging. Thus, a bit of prep work is required before we dive into things.

Reading a book, especially one that invites you to participate in life-changing activities, is like taking an exciting journey. Before setting out on any adventure, it's helpful to spend a little time planning so that you can enjoy the experience as much as possible. This is particularly true if you'll eventually be traveling naked – although this style does have its advantages including a reduction in baggage!

You may wish to consider the following:

- What are the ultimate destinations of your travels?
- What is the layout of the land?
- What attractions are along the way, and which may be most pertinent to you?
- What are you most likely to learn?
- What special language do you need to enjoy the trip?

Part I provides much of this information for our travels ahead.



1. Why Is This Book for Me?

This book is for you if you're a progressive-minded individual who wishes to make your personal life *and* the world more sustainable and authentic. This may seem challenging when powerful ideals and a deep concern for the world make it difficult for us to enjoy life – quite an irony if we desire to improve the quality of life for others.

This book is for you if any of the following also seem to fit:

- I'm a professional, student, leader or volunteer in an "idealist" career (health and human services, environmental issues, public policy, social justice, animal rights, creative arts, education, etc.) who often feels like a martyr.
- I love my paycheck, but my job or career isn't the "real me."
- In striving to live my ideals, I sometimes feel frustrated or isolated, like I'm on the wrong planet.
- I'm a concerned citizen or community leader who feels overwhelmed by the problems of the world.
- I'm ready for a major life transition but am not yet sure where I wish to go. I fear ending up midway between Fumble and Buck!
- Somewhere along the way I abandoned ideals, dreams or artistic talents that were important to me. I'd like to revisit them.
- I'd like to separate what I really *want* to do from what I feel I *should* do.
- I want to relate to others more authentically and effectively.



- I'd like to promote my ideals and achieve more impact in the world.
- I manage, own or work in an organization that provides socially or ecologically conscious products or services, or is moving toward this.

A *sustainable life* includes fun, fulfillment, balance, success and expression of what's most important to us. Without these elements, it's difficult to maintain energy over the long term. A *sustainable world* includes elements that contribute to a healthy, harmonious, peaceful and life-supporting existence: environmentally friendly practices, social justice, creative expression, and a deep respect for all living things, to name a few. *Authenticity*, a vital component of both, is full and honest expression of who we really are, through the activities we engage in, the visions we pursue, and the way we interact with others.

Several key assumptions drive this book:

- **When we understand and honor our authentic selves, and proactively create what's important to us** rather than reacting to problems, we're less likely to engage in socially and environmentally destructive consumption patterns. By clarifying and pursuing what we want more directly, we often reduce the need to seek materialistic replacements to "fill the void."
- **When we relate to ourselves and to the world honestly and authentically**, we reduce prejudice, fear and unnecessary competition that often result in conflict and suffering.
- **When we're happy with our own lives**, we're better able to share our energy and gifts with others. We're less likely to face burnout, and we can have greater positive impact in our career, hobbies, and volunteer activities.

If the previous thoughts strike a chord, we have a great deal to talk about, as I have struggled with many of these things myself – and still do! I share my thoughts with you not as an author who has completed a journey, but as a fellow learner in the continual process of striving to live more authentically myself. Writing this book has provided the courage to rekindle some long-delayed pursuits of childhood

dreams, and to address some areas where I've been "standing in my own way." I hope that reading it has the same benefits for you.

I've bounced among many idealist settings trying to find my niche: researching environmental public health issues, managing a citywide data system on child and family well-being, counseling formerly incarcerated men, and examining the outcomes of families leaving public assistance rolls, to name a few. In those activities, I often felt overwhelmed by the state of the world, not sure that I was making enough of a difference. I've also learned through the struggles of a few extended job searches and career transitions, and hold a special place in my heart for people striving to "find their place."

I've been quite an overachiever as well, always taking myself very seriously and setting exceptionally high self-expectations. My childhood was consumed with maintaining an image of consistent competence and proving my value to the world. I spent more time being a perfect student and people-pleaser rather than doing what I enjoyed. Although I always knew that I wanted to escape my low-income upbringing, I wasn't really sure where I wanted to go. Or perhaps I always had a pretty good idea, but just wasn't willing to listen to myself yet. Because of this, I had no way of gauging if and when I was doing enough. This translated into a desire to be the perfect employee, and I worked very hard for the praise I often received. Alongside all of this, I often felt miserable, frustrated, lonely and unfulfilled.

Over the last several years I've begun to move toward reconnecting with many of my ideals and living more authentically. This has required stepping outside the box (or outside the barrel), and it sometimes places me at odds with "the real world." Some have questioned me for anti-status-quo behavior like riding a bicycle with metal studded snow tires on icy winter days, making America's longest-running annual "waffle party" entirely vegan, building a large rainwater irrigation system in our yard, or constructing odd looking sound baffles in our home to aid with music recording. However, it has all begun to increase my happiness. It is part of integrating and expressing the important pieces of my life in a more meaningful way. I hope that this book helps you to advance in a similar process!

Are you ready for an adventure?



2. What Will I Obtain from This Book?

This book draws upon knowledge from the coaching, counseling, management, organizational behavior, positive psychology and peace psychology fields, weaving in my own background and experience in several disciplines. The primary focus is upon *how* to implement specific techniques, rather than upon the detailed background as to *why* they work.

I am not attempting to hand you an overnight quick fix, but rather concepts to sustain you over the long term. It will require effort on your part. As the saying goes, “Prepare someone tofu and feed them for a day; teach them how to prepare tofu and feed them for a lifetime!” Here, you’ll be preparing some of your own tofu.

My intent is that you be able to do the following by the last page:

- Understand some of the high costs of continuing to live sub-authentically.
- Describe the differences between a problem-solving approach and a proactive vision-based approach to creating positive change in your life and the world.
- Identify and understand key personal characteristics that set you apart from others.
- Communicate a sense of purpose that is true to your characteristics and experiences.
- Create and begin to pursue visions that build upon your authentic self.
- Utilize methods for handling adversity and self-imposed “thought obstacles.”
- Understand an approach for pursuing large and complex visions, and for connecting personal and community endeavors.
- Clarify motivations behind your interest in socially admirable causes, so that you don’t contribute to problems unintentionally.

- Relate to the world in a manner that advances you toward your desired results, encourages growth, and respects diversity and personal differences.

Because there are several pieces to this process, it helps to have a relatively simple big picture of how it's all connected. *Naked Idealism* is organized around the idea that our existence is based upon three aspects: *being*, *doing* and *having*.⁴ Shakti Gawain discussed this model briefly in *Creative Visualization*, defining these elements as follows:

- *Being* is “the basic experience of being alive...the experience of being totally complete and at rest within ourselves.”
- *Doing* is “movement and activity. It stems from natural creative energy.”
- *Having* is “the state of being in relationship with other people and things in the universe...the ability to allow and accept things and people into our lives; to comfortably occupy the same space with them.”

The above definition of *having* is likely very different than what the word generally brings to mind for you. We usually equate having with *possessing* something, but it goes well beyond that. For example, each of us may *possess* a car, but we may *relate* to that object very differently. I may use my car once a week, never taking the time to wash it, and the role it plays in my life is one of pure utility. On the other hand, you may depend much more heavily upon your car, utilizing it three times a day and spending two hours each weekend seeing that it sparkles and shines. Unlike me, you may view the condition of the car you drive as an important reflection of your identity. Neither of us is “right” or “wrong,” but *having* a car is very different for both of us. It really depends upon each of our sets of values and priorities, and what we each want out of life.

Gawain explains that we often “live life backwards,” first striving to have more resources (e.g., money) so that we can do what's important to us, which will then *finally* enable us to be happier. This leads, for example, to individuals working extra hard their whole lives at “just good enough” jobs to save for retirement, only to discover that they've never really found fulfillment.

The key to lasting happiness is the exact opposite – if we make efforts to discover and be who we truly are, we’ll develop the foundation to do what’s truly important to us, which will then enable us to have more of what we want in life.

In other words, we often engage in this pattern:

having → doing → being

When this would make us much more fulfilled:

being → doing → having

This often occurs because we attempt to fulfill our most fundamental needs and desires in roundabout and ineffective ways. We’ll discuss this more later.⁵

What are some of the more specific concepts we’ll cover under each of the three areas? The chapters in **Part II** focus on the self-understanding necessary for *being*, addressing the following topics: What are the characteristics of an *idealist*, and what is a *naked idealist*? What do we mean by purpose, values and strengths, the elements that make up our “Authentic Side” or foundational core? Why are they important and how can we clarify and expose each of them?

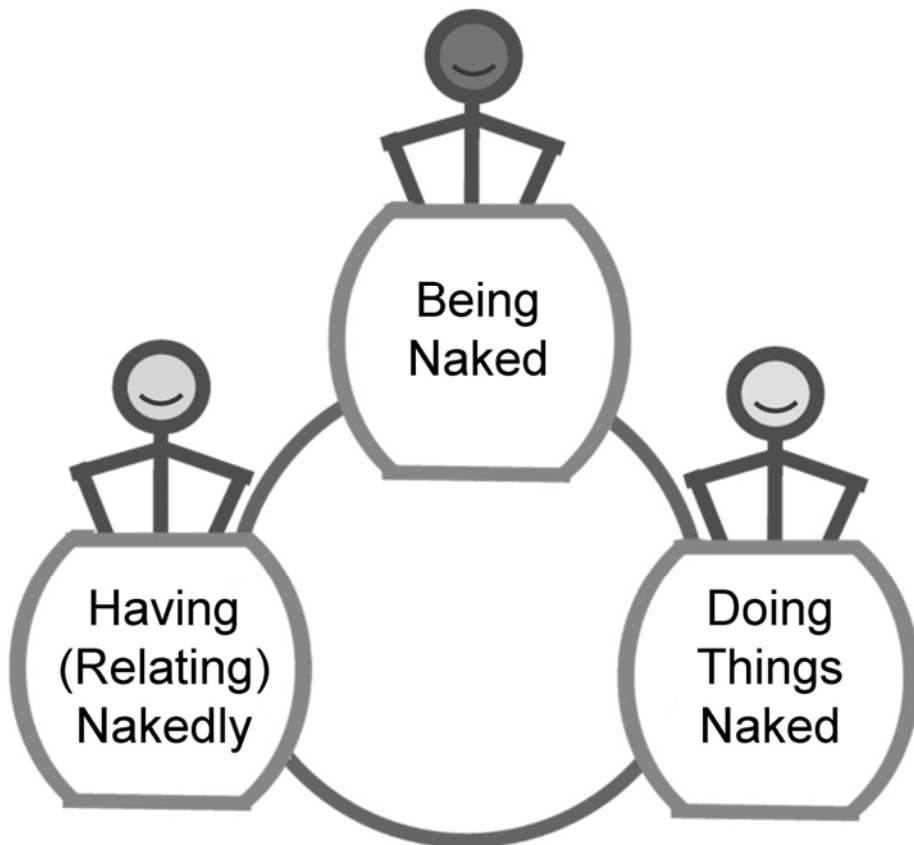
Part III provides some tools for *doing* or creating what’s important to us, leveraging knowledge of our Authentic Side from Part II. It provides guidelines on creating highly effective visions of the results we want, outlines how to set up a “creative tension” framework for pursuing them, and delineates a technique for connecting large and complex visions to smaller and more concrete ones. The latter enables us to place our personal endeavors into the larger context of creating a better world, so we can lead a more integrated and less overwhelming life. We also discuss how these techniques can apply to working with groups.

Part IV focuses on *having*. After exposing our Authentic Side and learning a framework for *doing* that aligns with this, we look beyond ourselves. To be fulfilled and successful, we need effective ways to relate to the world and its resources, handle differences in a constructive and respectful fashion, express our ideals, and plant “seeds of change.” This part also challenges us to examine parts of ourselves that may make us uncomfortable in the shorter term but much more authentic and impactful in the longer term.

Amidst all of this you'll encounter several brief "real-life lessons" that relate to topics within the book. Some very humorous and some much more serious, these vignettes illustrate that reality truly can be stranger than fiction.

Before moving on, I'd like you to meet three friends who will help us keep track of where we are in the bigger scheme of things: the Rain Barrel People.

Figure 1: How It All Fits Together



The Rain Barrel People will revisit us as we transition between the three major parts of the model, providing brief outlines of the topics ahead. Alongside adding cohesiveness and lightheartedness to occasionally serious subject matter, they possess great symbolic value:

- They represent a youthful playfulness and creativity that we frequently lose as we grow older, and often yearn to rediscover. As we'll see, our childhoods sometimes hold the greatest hints to our true, authentic selves.
- A multi-barrel garden irrigation system was my first creation using many of the techniques you'll be learning in Part III. It's an example there, and you've already seen part of it on the cover.
- A rain barrel may provide life sustaining, growth inducing water only after it has filled. Much of this book is about "filling our own cups" so that we may overflow with life energy and inspiration for others.⁶
- The circular hose connecting the barrels illustrates that the three aspects of existence (being, doing, having) feed into one another, and that the process of mastering them can be cyclical. We don't need to fully "complete" one stage before moving on to the next, and we must often flow back and forth between them.
- Wearing only barrels, the Rain Barrel People represent the nakedness or authenticity we seek to attain.
- While rain barrels represent environmental sustainability because they help to conserve water, the Rain Barrel People also symbolize another key component of sustainability with their multiple skin tones: acceptance of diversity in race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs, physical ability, and so on. Just like the Rain Barrel People, we are interconnected and interdependent.