

Scripts for Living—a Mini-Monograph

Make your “script” your own

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*To be authentic is literally to be your own author ...,
to discover your own native energies and desires, and then to find your own
way of acting on them. —Warren G. Bennis*



Think of “scripts” as perceptions about life and guidelines for living it. These components can be spoken or unspoken, written or unwritten. They can involve generalizations or specificity, sometimes to the nth degree of minutia. When these scripts touch on areas of sexuality, religion, or politics, they can be especially powerful.

Be very clear that on this planet you usually give up something to get something. That’s one of the reasons it’s so critically important to become aware of and identify the scripts that are impacting you. Otherwise you may automatically incorporate those scripts (partially or in total) into your own family or personal script. This may be helpful or unhelpful. It will usually involve giving up something.

Especially in the case of religious and family scripts (and to some degree other scripts such as political, social, education, and sports), unless you identify the script you were handed, you often have little or no awareness of what you are giving up to follow that script or of what it will entail to not follow the script.

Making the script you were handed *your own* can help you avoid blindly following another’s script and can bring to conscious awareness a sense of what you are giving up and what you are getting by following that script. As usual, what you don’t know you don’t know has a huge impact on your life. Some have suggested that healthy, functional maturity involves asking yourself hard questions about your own script and about expectations that you follow the scripts of others.

In part it boils down to asking questions such as:

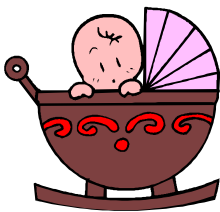
1. What does following this script give me?
2. What do I have to give up to follow this script?
3. Which option is a better match with who I am innately?
4. Which script allows me to follow and achieve my vision for life?



Picture a group of screen actors pouring over their scripts. Reading, dissecting, practicing, getting feedback, doing almost anything within reason that will enable them to give the performance of a lifetime. You are the primary actor in your own life. You were handed a script. How much do you know about what it contains? You may be very familiar with portions of it and virtually unaware of others.

Scripts are handed out early

As Desmond Tutu pointed out so succinctly, *you don't choose your family*. Nevertheless, at birth they hand you a script. It contained the spoken and unspoken rules and expectations for your family system. Sometime expectations may begin before your birth. For example, I was supposed to be a male child and was expected to be born on my father's birthday, January 26. Somehow I started not conforming early in life. Not only was I six days late for his birthday, I was a female. Part of my mother's severe post-partum depression was likely hormonal; however, some of it may have been because she would need to go through another pregnancy to get the requisite male.



At some level I probably sensed not having met expectations which may have been reflected in the severe colic I reportedly experienced during the early months of my life.

Your script comes from your parents and forebears, often at least as far back as three or four generations. Since the only brain you know is your own—and that often only superficially—equally so your parents and grandparents only know their brains. At some level they might tend to believe that their children will be like them. Some even *need* their children to be like them in order for the parents and grandparents to feel okay as care providers.

A problem is that every brain is unique, and your brain may not have the same innate giftedness as that of your parents or grandparents. When this mismatch occurs, parts of your handed-down script may not work for you. In fact, the script may be absolutely horrible—if not downright abusive—for a specific child’s brain. The more unique the child and the more different from his or her parents, the more likely this situation is to occur.

Listening In . . .

Ted was the middle of three sons. Their father was a five-star something or other in a branch of the military, as was their grandfather and great grandfather, to say nothing of a smattering of uncles and cousins. It went without saying in his family, that *if you were male you’re in the military, preferably for life.*

Ted was definitely male but not the least interested in the military; not even for a couple of years and definitely not for life. A gifted painter from the age of seven, Ted’s life passion was to paint and travel. “The military will get you travel,” his father said in his squared-jaw style. “Forget the painting unless you want to paint an aircraft carrier.”

Ted earned no points when he quipped that seeing as portraits were his favorite subject, he doubted an aircraft carrier wanted to be turned into a floating art gallery. His no-nonsense father grounded the boy for a week commenting that if his grandfather had been involved, Ted would have been grounded for a month.



When it came time for college, Ted’s father gave his son two choices: the military academy his father had attended or the academy his grandfather had preferred. Ted wanted neither and patiently explained his love of art. Ted’s older brother, who appeared cut out to follow in their father’s footsteps, even tried to intervene on Ted’s behalf, to no avail. Come September, Ted what shipped off to basic training at his father’s preferred academy.

At Thanksgiving break, Ted returned home a shadow of his former self. Depressed, thin, discouraged, hopeless, and begging to be allowed to go to art college. His father’s response was a hearty slap on the back (that nearly felled the young man) and instructions to make sure he didn’t miss the bus back on Monday. “You’ll toughen up over time,” said his father.

On Tuesday of the following week a phone call informed the parents that Ted had hanged himself in the dorm-room closet. In his frustration and grief, the father's response was to round on his wife, berating her for "throwing such a pantsy-antsy son."

The president of the academy made a special trip to visit the family to offer condolences and to bring them the collection of portraits that had been found in Ted's dorm room. The president expressed his stunned astonishment at how good the portraits were and commented that the world had just lost another potential Rembrandt. The father threw the portraits in a cardboard box and buried them in the attic.

The bad news was that the father threw himself into his career even more heartily, further distancing himself from his family. The good news was that when the youngest son (with support from his mother and eldest brother) informed his father very politely, but informed him nevertheless, that the young man's passion was cooking and that he had enrolled at a prestigious culinary institute. By way of response, his father had shrugged and said rather sarcastically, "Maybe you'll get good enough to cook for the military." Mother and both sons had heaved a huge sigh of relief.

In December, the budding chef prepared the entire Christmas dinner—a fabulous meal by all accounts. Everyone at the table had been effusive about how beautiful the presentation, how the food tasted even better than it looked, and how they hoped the young man would take a job in a restaurant close to home. The father, having been silent the entire meal, now stood to leave. Looking at this son the man remarked somewhat sarcastically, "Well, if you weren't cut out for the military, it appears you were cut out for cooking." That was *high praise*, sarcastic or not.

The Power of Family Scripts

Family scripts are far more powerful than many people realize. They often involve recurring themes or patterns of thought, perspective, and behaviors. The content of a family script can relate to almost any aspect of living and often does, including issues such as:

- Gender
- Sexuality
- Pregnancies - wed and unwed
- Age of partnering



- Children - biological, adopted, foster, or none
- Education
- Finances and level of financial health
- Divorce
- Fidelity or infidelity
- Alcoholism or other addictive behaviors
- Presence or absence of suicide
- Work types and history
- Choice of location to live
- Aging issues
- Presence or absence of domestic violence
- The role each family member was expected to play
- Religion (or none)
- Types of social activities
- Military service expectations
- Health challenges and/or approach to health
- Cellular memory
- And so on

NOTE: Epigenetics may be a factor in family scripts. It does seem to play a part in at least some of the behavioral patterns that repeat generationally in many family systems. To that extent cellular memory may lend itself to discovery through family-of-origin work. Based on emerging information it may be possible that a subconscious push toward specific behaviors may be triggered by cellular memory, whether or not this represents the family script.

Refer to www.arlenetaylor.org
Brain References
Brain Learning and Memory
Cellular Memory

*Rewriting family scripts follows the sequence
of a scripted pattern giving way to some improvisation followed by the
establishment of a new pattern. —John Byng-Hall*

More Than One Script

Your family script is really a collage of information. At any given time, it tends to combine aspects from at least three different types of scripts:



1. Replicative scripts: scenarios from childhood that are repeated in adulthood. In some sense, family life is just a rehearsal for the next generation.
2. Corrective scripts: attempts to avoid repeating uncomfortable childhood patterns by selecting an opposite style of parenting or relationship choice in a specific situation.
3. Improvised scripts: choices based on observing behaviors used by other family systems or individuals. Sometimes the improvisation works well and is incorporated long-term into the family script.

You will be impacted by more than just your immediate family script, too. Some of these scripts may include:



1 Governmental scripts – Where do you live? Different countries have different scripts. Some define what you can say and write, what you can wear, what you can do, where you can travel, who is welcome to live in the country, ad infinitum. Others have much less specific scripts that provide for a great deal of freedom (except when it comes to issues of national security). Over the centuries, people have left their homelands and moved to countries with governments whose scripts were more aligned with personal desires.



2 Organizational scripts – Where do you work? These scripts define what you must do or not do if you want to be part of the organization. Hospitals, for example, require confidentiality of patient information and careful attention to asepsis in order to prevent or minimize infections. If you do not follow the script, your employment may be in jeopardy to say nothing of being in danger from a law suit. There are scripts for belonging to labor unions, social media networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, membership in the ever-present genre of political parties, and so on.



3 Military scripts – These scripts provide guidelines for being a member of any branch of service including the army, air force, marines, navy, special branches, and so on. If you follow the

guidelines you have every chance of being successful and of being honorably discharged (if you are not killed in action). On the other hand, there are examples of those who did not or could not follow the guidelines and who received a dishonorable discharge.

4 Sports scripts –These scripts outline expectations for participation in a specific sport. Membership depends on knowing and following the rules (script). Otherwise, the person may be kicked out of the *club*.

For example:

- National Football League
- National Hockey Association
- National Soccer League
- National Basketball Association
- Major League Baseball
- National Golf Foundation
- National Rugby League
- National Rifle Association
- National Tennis League
- Volleyball and Curling Associations, and so on



5 Denominational scripts – From time immemorial, a variety of religious groups/orders have had scripts. Often referred to as dogma or theology, these scripts describe what an individual is expected to do (and in many cases is expected to believe) in order to be a member in good standing. Sometimes the scripts define the behaviors that are permitted in churches, cathedrals, synagogues, mosques, and so on. In some cases, the scripts appear to have existed for eons.

When the script fails to change with the times, it can create problems for at least some would-be adherents (e.g., the Amish script that prohibits the use of cars and mandates a specific type of dress *uniform*).

In general, you must make a decision about what the script requires and whether or not this is something you want to embrace. The script itself is not necessarily good or bad but you need to know the script and make decisions about conforming or not conforming.

You also need to know the consequences for choosing one option over the other. There always are consequences.



6 Family Scripts –In any form, family scripts are powerful expectations that seem to reoccur generation after generation. In fact, the term best describes relationships that involve more than one generation. Family scripts likely began as an attempt by one generation to help individuals in succeeding generations make sense of their family and societal environment or as an attempt to conform to rules laid out by an organization or political entity that had overriding importance to the individuals. Sometimes the script followed one person’s behavior, based on what was available, that then was picked up and repeated by others.

Study any prominent family system (e.g., Britain’s House of Windsor; America’s Rockefellers, Kennedys, Roosevelts, and Bushs; the ruling family in Monaco, China, or Japan) and you can pick out at least pieces of their family script. As time goes by you can often identify ways in which following the script has worked for some individuals in that family system and not for others. Sometimes the biggest mismatch occurs when individuals marry into a family but naturally bring different family and personal scripts. The disconnect can have national if not global consequences, to say nothing about the health, wellness, and success of the individuals themselves.



7 Your Own Script – How you embrace your own script will have far-reaching consequences for your entire life. These consequences can include your level of health and happiness, the legacy you leave when you die, and maybe even your longevity. This is a process that many people are either unaware of or ignore. Those that embrace it typically report how beneficial the process is and anecdotally describe exponential benefits.

There may be any number of other scripts for you to identify and deal with, as well. If you are partnered, for example, your partner’s family and personal scripts will impact you.



Partnering gives you an opportunity to be impacted by another person’s family script, especially if there wasn’t already sufficient dysfunction in your own to meet your needs. —Unknown

Listening In . . .

Lucille's family script assigned responsibility for the care of aging parents to the eldest daughter. Lucille was the eldest of thirteen. Not only did she help raise her dozen siblings but also accepted the designation as the parental care provider. In her case, this meant she remained single because by the time both parents died, she was well into her sixties. The family home went to one of the boys and Lucille moved into one small room in a boarding house.

When Marcia (Lucille's younger sister) became a widow, she moved in with her eldest daughter, Juliette. The results were mixed. Juliette had never been Marcia's favorite child, but hey, "that's what we do in this family." When Marcia finally died at age 88, it was a huge relief to Juliette and her immediate family. They reveled in the lack of tension in the home.

Laura was Juliette's eldest daughter. Laura's hasty marriage lasted only long enough to produce two sons. There was no daughter for Laura to live with. Neither of the boys elected to take Laura into their home. They did see that she was well cared for in a retirement center. Laura frequently remarked how unfortunate it was that she had to live in a retirement center simply because she had produced no daughters. This did not endear Laura to either of her daughters-in-law.

Toni was Juliette's second daughter. She had often remarked to close family members that although she loved her mother (Juliette) it was such a relief knowing it would never be her job to take care of her. That responsibility always went to the eldest daughter. When Toni's eldest daughter married, Toni encouraged the couple to buy a home with plenty of bedrooms. "Remember, Angelee, one of these days I'll be moving in with you," she said.

Angelee and her husband purchased a home with five bedrooms: a master suite, a bedroom for each of the three children, and a guest room (although everyone knew the guest room was really waiting for Toni). As the years went by, Angelee began to experience episodes of depression and required prescription anti-depressants. She didn't like the medication's side effects but it was better than feeling hopeless and helpless much of the time. Her physician, not having sufficient time to dig out triggers for Angelee's depression, referred her to a gifted counselor.



With counseling, Angelee became aware of the connection between family expectations that Toni would move in with them and Angelee's depression. She also became clear that this would not work if she wanted to continue a busy, fulfilling life into older age. When Angelee broached the topic with her brothers, they responded with, "Don't come knocking at our doors. That's your job. Our mother is never going to live with either of us." End of discussion.

Angelee finally found the courage to broach alternative long-term living arrangements with Toni, who promptly "fell apart" and had to be hospitalized for cardiac arrhythmias. Naturally Toni laid the blame with Angelee. "The very idea that she could even think of my not living with her," she told the nurse. "Why, just the thought of it nearly finished me off with a heart attack!"

Finding this all so stressful and guilt-producing, Angelee quickly backtracked and told Toni she could move in with the family upon discharge from the hospital. That night Angelee did not sleep at all well, knowing that this plan was not a good fit for her and her family, berating herself for giving in at the last moment, and utterly at sea about how to make a different choice.

Early next morning the social worker called to explain that Toni really needed nursing-home-level care and would be discharged to a local facility. Angelee cried so hard that her husband became concerned until she explained she was crying from pure relief. Three months later Toni died, still angry that she had been unable to move in with her daughter and telling anyone who would listen what an uncaring child Angelee had been.



With a few more visits to her skilled counselor, Angelee was able to map out some of the components of her family's script and better see the generational picture. She openly discusses what she is learned with her family. She also has made it very clear to the couple's eldest daughter that Angelee's generation is rewriting a portion of the family script. She and her husband are already making plans for what they will do when they can no longer live on their own and be self-sufficient.

The difference between life and the movies is that a script has to make sense, and life doesn't. —Joseph L. Mankiewicz

Family scripts and Behaviors

If you find yourself pushed toward a specific activity or behavior (especially when that behavior is energy-exhausting), pay attention. Ask yourself:

- Was I expected to exhibit this behavior in childhood, or is it 180 degrees from the behavior that was expected? Remember, 180 degrees from dysfunctional is still dysfunctional.
- Does this expectation work for my brain and my lifestyle, or am I trying to be something that was written into my script?
- If this behavior doesn't work for my brain / lifestyle, what would?

Listening In . . .

Laura and Lucille were the first females in their maternal generational inheritance to graduate from college. Prior to that, formal education was encouraged for males but considered unnecessary for females. When Laura's daughter was born, Laura tweaked the family script to include "college for females." However, post-college degrees were not in the family script, at least not for females.



Laura's daughter, Lilly, loved to learn and showed a thirst for knowledge early in life. She followed the family script and graduated from college. Then she decided to go on for a master's and a doctorate, something not in the family script. Lilly was surprised at the anxiety exhibited by other family members. In some cases—to be perfectly honest—the behaviors they exhibited were unsupportive, disaffirming, discouraging, and even shaming. Fortunately, Lilly did not permit her family script to divert her efforts to pursue her goals. However, not one family member attended any of her post-bachelor graduation ceremonies.

Lilly's success is not predictive of all cases. Sometimes the scripts are so strong they can actually derail an individual's ability to respond to innovation and alterations in environments, even changes in the world. Old scripts can actually handicap succeeding generations.

*Family scripts are revealed
when repeating patterns of family interactions are either
observed or described. —John Byng-Hall*

Tweaking Your Script

When figuring out the script you were handed and making it work for your brain, there may be several options:

- Leave a section of script as it is because it works for your brain
- Delete a section of script because clearly it does not work for your brain
- Rewrite a section of script to make it a better match with your brain
- Add a section of script that matches your passion, vision, and innate giftedness but which was missing from the script you were handed at birth.

Family scripts are what they are. They can be helpful and unhelpful, functional and dysfunctional. Portions may be desirable, other parts may be undesirable. They can be lifesaving for some family members and relatively lethal for others. And they can bring connection or division.

Some families have developed very self-destructive routines that are passed on to succeeding generations in such a predictable style that outsiders may conclude that each member is merely following a script, living out a role. As the generational plot unfolds, details may differ while patterns seem to reappear as if on cue.

The bottom line is that family scripts (by whatever label) do exist. They can be altered, however, sometimes by one family member and sometimes by a group of family members. Since family scripts rarely align for any one family member against the backdrop of that person's innate giftedness, it is important that you become aware of the family script you were handed. Based on the script's content and who you are innately, you may need to delete parts, tweak others, and perhaps even write entirely new sections.



We all grow up with the weight of history on us. Our ancestors dwell in the attics of our brains as they do in the spiraling chains of knowledge hidden in every cell of our bodies. —Shirley Abbott

Listening In . . .

Tom, Dick, Harry, and Hal (not their real names, of course) were accountants in a prestigious firm. Collectively they represented nearly 100 years of accountant work. That's a lot of years, considering that the least amount of time spent in an accounting career could be attributed to Hal. It wasn't that he was that much younger than the other three, but he had finished college later.

The four colleagues got in the habit of hanging out with each other once or twice a month. Eventually they joined a bowling league and enjoyed the weekly competitive exercise and the camaraderie. Conversation typically centered around work assignments, current events, sports topics, hot cars, and so on. All were married with children, and from time to time one or the other would mention that he was so exhausted by the time he got home from work that he feared his family was getting short shrift.

One Friday afternoon, after a particularly harrowing week filled with intense audits, Hal suggested they stop on the way home for a drink. "To help us unwind," he said. Tom, Dick, and Harry agreed. They sipped in silence and then Hal said, "I hate this job. My dad hated it, too."

There was a moment of stunned silence. Tom, Dick, and Harry set down their drinks. The four men looked at each other then looked away. Finally Harry asked, "Do any of you have any idea how we ended up doing what we're doing?"

Hal laughed. "That's easy," he said. "I'm an eldest son and for the past four generations eldest sons are always accountants. Period."



"Oh my goodness," said Tom and Dick in chorus. Turns out they, too, were eldest sons and at least their fathers and grandfathers had been accountants. In Harry's case, both parents had been accountants. And in all cases, accounting had apparently not represented a career that any of the guys had chosen based on passion for the work.

After an hour of discussion, the men came to the conclusion that accounting itself wasn't so horrible, but the specific accounting tasks and company job expectations were. They decided to go job hunting. Over time, each man found a new position, often associated with an organization that oversaw or regulated one of the man's favorite sports.

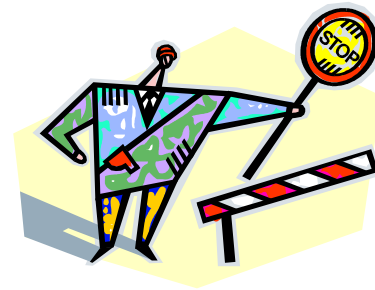
Although in different companies, they continued to bowl together and keep each other informed about how their work lives were going. Three years down the line there was night and day difference in the quality of their lives. Furthermore, they had made a pact not, repeat NOT, to expect or encourage their eldest son to go into accounting.

Never about blame

No one reaches adulthood without experiencing some dysfunction and loss because no one experiences an entirely functional family and social system. No one's role models were completely actualized (to be real and to reach one's potential) and differentiated (to identify and hone one's innate giftedness) as no two brains on the planet are identical in structure, function, or perception.

Your parents and caregivers undoubtedly did the best they could with what they knew and what they had at the time. Most people do. As such, this concept has nothing to do with blaming yourself or others.

It does mean that, hopefully, you have some perception and/or behavioral area(s) where improvements would help you develop in positive ways.



If you were fortunate enough to have excellent role models (to whom you paid close attention), you can continue the process of development and maturation. If you didn't, you may have work to do in order to become the person you were designed to be and achieve the success you are capable of achieving. This improvement process can help you to:

- Complete unlearned developmental tasks of childhood
- Raise your level of emotional intelligence or EQ
- Exhibit an affirming communication style
- Grieve your persona losses appropriately and effectively (and avoid continuing to grieve for someone else's losses)
- Identify who you are innately and learn to live your unique giftedness

Listening In . . .

Since early childhood Ellen had been told, “Members of our family ALWAYS marry someone who goes to our church.” There were no other instructions provided to Ellen about how to select a healthy, functional, desirable partner, just that the person must go to her church. That’s the way it had been for the last five generations and that’s the way it would be for the next five generations.

Ellen married a very charismatic individual who was in the public eye of their denomination by virtue of his being an excellent speaker. Before their first child was born, Ellen often accompanied her husband from city to city, state to state, and country to country. Always in the background, always accepting his verbal abuse (initially) and then his physical abuse (subsequently). How much of each he heaped upon her was inversely proportional to his perception of how well his presentation had been received and how many accolades had been heaped upon him.

And he lied. Many times Ellen was left trembling along in a hotel room waiting for her husband to return. When he did, sometimes smelling of alcohol, his story typically was that he was praying fervently with some attendee or others. Based on other bits of information she received from time to time, Ellen doubted her husband’s stories. But what could she do about it? Certainly if she questioned him, that would be sure set-up for emotional and physical battering, with her being the victim. He was careful to hit her only in parts of her body that were covered by clothing.



Their lives followed that pattern of abuse, apology, honeymoon period, then back to more abuse. One day her husband was in the process of landing yet another blow when Ellen happened to turn and his fist connected with her left eye. There was no hiding the swelling and discoloration although he insisted Ellen wear dark glasses whenever she went out of the house.

When Ellen’s parents showed up unexpectedly to visit, there was no hiding the swelling and discoloration, either. She told her parents about the abuse but they shook their heads in disbelief. “He’s such a wonderful man,” they said. “You must be doing something to provoke his rages. Figure it out and we’re sure you’ll have a wonderful life.’

Ellen tried to figure it out. She was not having a wonderful life. In fact, her husband turned out to be a sociopath. When she disclosed to her

husband that she was pregnant with their second child, he went into such a rage Ellen feared for her life. When he decided to take a shower “to cool off a bit because you are such a trial to me,” Ellen grabbed her child and her purse and left.

Fortunately she went to a woman’s shelter instead of to her parents’ home. The counselors there helped her to evaluate the situation, put her in touch with a good attorney, and effectively “hid” her for nearly six months. When Ellen went to court, the judge granted her custody, child support, and a restraining order. That would likely have not happened had her husband not nearly demolished the inside of their house when he found she had left, killed their parrot by twisting it’s neck, and drowning the dog in the toilet and putting its little body in the garbage can because of its “incessant barking.”

Ellen has little contact with her parents. The upside is that she no longer has to listen to them berate her for a failed married; no longer has to hear about the stigma they bear because one of their children is divorced. Ellen has no contact with her church, either. The church-of-origin had removed her name from membership records as soon as the church clerk got news of the divorce.

That piece of family script—you must marry a member of our denomination—had definitely not worked for Ellen and could have resulted in her death and that of her unborn child. Fortunately, she is developing a more functional life. Ellen now has a family-of-choice and is basking in acceptance, nurturing, and personal growth emphasis.

Recently she found what she thinks may be a church-of-choice. And as far as marriage goes, she is very clear that the expectation that had been written into her script (you must marry a member of our denomination) is not going to be in the script she passes on to her children.

Behaviors with Negative Outcomes

Becoming aware of behaviors that result in negative outcomes is the first step on the continuum of positive change. Think of your script as containing common characteristics repeatedly exhibited by your parents and ancestors, whether or not that script worked well for them. Behaviors that result in negative outcomes for you often reflect the script you were handed. You can learn to create and implement behaviors that not only work well for your brain but also result in positive outcomes.

Here are examples of behaviors that often result in negative outcomes:

1. Asking “why” questions (e.g., *Why* did you do that? *Why* didn’t you do such and such?) The brain cannot really answer the question “why,” although it can offer possible contributors. “Why” questions tend to trigger downshifting and emotional reactivity. In all likelihood, you were asked *why* questions growing up. How did your brain like that? Were you able to answer in a way that the other brain accepted without argument?



- Learn to elicit information without using the word “why.” Role-model that behavior.

2. Demanding that family members perform a specific activity the way you do it, even though there are many ways to skin the proverbial cat. Perhaps you were only affirmed or felt *okay* when you did that same activity that specific way. Since it is human nature to want to feel okay, you may have conformed to the demands of others to receive approval.

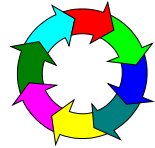
- In adulthood, you can identify your preferences and stop insisting that everyone else follows your preferences, too.

3. Getting upset or allowing your feelings to be “hurt” when something doesn’t go your way. Your script may say that you feel safer when you tell others what to do and they do it—although the illusion of being in control of another’s behaviors is pretty much of a dead-end street. Once you are clear that every brain is unique and only has its own opinion, the opinions of others become just that: their opinions.



- You can choose whether or not to allow the opinions of others to dictate the feelings you hang onto.

4. Failing to take good care of yourself physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, sexually, socially, financially, or you-name-it. You may have been scripted to feel better about yourself when you were doing things for others and to feel guilty whenever you made healthy choices for yourself. Caretaking from the well of your own unmet needs, as a temporary way to feel better about yourself, is unhelpful in the long term.

- Develop your superego, the part of you that orchestrates healthy self-care, and live in balance.
5. Blaming others for the behaviors you exhibit or for the way you feel as though you are not responsible for your behaviors and feelings. It's the old *the-devil-made-me-do-it* stance that was made popular decades ago by Geraldine Jones' boyfriend (remember Flip Wilson?). It may have been funny but that excuse has never been functional. Since feelings follow thoughts, you can change your feelings by changing your thoughts.
- Take complete responsibility for the behaviors you exhibit and the feelings you hang onto (and avoid taking responsibility for what rightfully belongs to someone else).
6. Criticizing others for exhibiting behaviors of which you or your family disapprove. When you tell yourself, "I would *never* do that," you might get a momentary self-esteem boost, but it is really an illusion. The good feeling typically glows only for a few seconds at best. Getting another little boost requires finding something else or someone else to criticize. A vicious cycle often develops. It can go something like this:
- 
- You feel bad → criticize → feel better → feel guilty / bad → criticize → feel better → feel guilty / bad → criticize → feel better → and so on.
- Develop a positive mind-set and an affirming communication style. Give others the benefit of the doubt, even as you set your own personal boundaries, and you may get something similar in return (at least some of the time).
7. Taking personally the comments made by others instead of realizing that every brain is different and only has its own opinion. What people say usually has everything to do with them and often little or nothing to do with you. Ask yourself, "Is this a momentary blip on the screen of my life and will it even matter a year from now?" Or, "Do I need to make a comment because I want to continue having a relationship with this individual or do I accept it's just that brain's opinion and choose to spend less time with the person?" Make your choices based on the answers to those types of questions.
- When another person makes a negative comment to or about you, analyze it briefly and decide whether or not you are going to take it

personally, get upset, overreact, defend yourself, retaliate, etc., or just learn something and move on.

*With a good script, a good director can produce a masterpiece.
With the same script, a mediocre director can produce a passable film.
But with a bad script even a good director can't possibly
make a good film. —Akira Kurosawa*

Listening in . . .

The newlyweds, back from their honeymoon, were fixing dinner together in their new apartment. The menu was pot roast, one of Jed's favorite meals, and he was demonstrating to his wife how he liked it prepared. Before placing the roast in the baking dish, he cut off the end piece.

"Is there something wrong with the end piece?" Janet asked.

"Not that I know of," Jed replied.

"Then I don't understand the reason for cutting it off," she said.

"Beats me," said Jed, shrugging his shoulders. "That's how Mum always did it,"



Janet persisted in asking questions because she did want to learn how to fix Jed's favorite meal, but cutting off the end of the roast made no sense to her. Because Jed couldn't answer her question, the couple called his mother.

In response to their question, Mum replied, "That's the way my mother always did it."

Now three people were curious and seemed to be enjoying the discovery process. The next step was to call Jed's grandmother, his mother's mother. In response to their question, grandmother replied, "That's the way your great grandma always did it."

Obviously, the next step was to call great granny, who was very elderly but still as sharp as the proverbial tack. The group of four made a conference call to the retirement center. In response to their question,

great granny replied, “Goodness me. We were so poor that I only had one baking dish. The roast never quite fit so I always cut the end off.” That triggered some healthy laughter.

Janet and Jed never cut the end from a roast again. They could afford a larger baking dish! And, according to Jed, Janet’s recipe tasted just as good as his Mum’s and grandmother’s and granny’s had tasted.

Family scripts: Often nothing changes until someone asks a new question. —Unknown

Find the Humor

Sometimes humans are so entrenched in following the script that was handed to them that they fail to even realize what they are doing. And if the mismatch has been so profound as to result in some level of depression, it can seem too difficult, too exhausting, or even too frightening to review.

Of course, it’s an ongoing process. But every correction to your script, every tweak that makes it a better match with your innateness, and every deletion that sheds unhelpful expectations make it all worthwhile.



Whatever script you were given can be fine-tuned. And since each person is acting out his/her own script, a good actor can improve almost any script. And sometimes, when you really dissect a scene, it’s just plain funny! Think of mirthful laughter is another good tool to help you flow through the process of developing, owning, living, and enjoying your own script, which is another definition of thriving!

Re-parenting as a tool

In a sense, re-parenting goes hand-in-glove with owning your own script. Re-parenting not only helps you to evaluate your own script but also to delete portions that do not apply to you, add portions that do, and tweak the contents to fit your individual uniqueness. Managing your own life script is an ongoing process as you increase your emotional intelligence and monitor whether or not your behaviors consistently result in positive outcomes.

Picture a wise and loving parent helping a child learn to exhibit a more functional behavior or develop a skill set to enhance overall success. When

you re-parent yourself, you are doing that for you. Most people likely could use re-parenting in at least one area.

Re-parenting can help you to select behaviors that represent optimum functionality. You role model all the time anyway, whether or not you realize that. If done subconsciously, you likely are exhibiting subconsciously absorbed attitudes, beliefs, and expectations from childhood, often those absorbed prior to the age of three. Some of these are likely dysfunctional because they fail to give you positive outcomes on a consistent basis.

When done consciously, re-parenting may be the most unselfish legacy you can pass along to the next generation. It can help you to role model:

- Taking care of yourself,
- Identifying and dealing with your issues,
- Completing unfinished business,
- Recovering from losses,
- Growing up emotionally, and
- Becoming an actualized, differentiated adult who consciously models behaviors that result in positive outcomes.



Learn to treat yourself as you would have wanted to be treated had your providers been able to offer high-level care and role modeling. Undoubtedly they did the best they could with what they knew. That doesn't mean, however, that what they actually provided was healthy, functional, nurturing, and/or desirable.

Re-parenting involves taking responsibility for yourself and your role-modeling, including personal growth and development along with your identification and recovery from less-than-optimal care giving. Remember, life is a process. How many years does the average parent *parent* a child? Eighteen, on average, and in one sense for as long as the parent is alive.

Likewise, re-parenting yourself is an ongoing process. You are the only person who will be with you your entire lifetime. Such a deal! Make the process one of practicality as well as joy. Be your own best friend.

A Word About Gender

Most family scripts clearly have a gender section that identifies and describes ways of behaving and thinking that related to sexuality. The gender section in your family script might include expectations related to:

- Clarity of being male or female, 50:50, or none of these
- Clothing styles (whether or not your brain matches your body)
- Sexual orientation / sexual preference
- Sexual preference
- Permitted sexual behaviors
- Age of partnering (and whether cohabitating or marriage)
- Monogamy, serial monogamy, or non-monogamy
- Permitted careers (especially in politics and religion)
- Financial remuneration for work performed
- And so on . . .

While there is some evidence that socialization into these old gender scripts seems to be waning a little (at least for girls), their continued existence is amply illustrated by recent research and clinical observation. Awareness of out-dated gender scripts may be the first step toward relationship partners developing a script that works for them, especially in the 21st Century.



Until partners can identify their family scripts, especially in relation to gender, they cannot evaluate their impact and choose which to keep or discard. In part, this is because gender sections of family scripts embrace aspects of love, intimacy, independence, dependence, interdependence, power, connection, and perceived control, to name just a few.

According to Mahoney and Knudson-Martin, gender scripts pose problems for new millennium families since most are based on earlier family forms developed to meet social and economic conditions that differ from typical families today. The old scripts, built into the very fabric of human lives, are difficult to identify and let go. Like lines in a play that actors have learned so well that they become automatic, partners fall back on them without considering whether they make sense for life today.



This can be especially problematic for women in cultures and even entire countries in which scripts have been transmitted relatively intact to the next generation for thousands of years, especially when these message contain clear messages about gender roles and the place of females in family and society. It can also be problematic for women in denominations that clearly define gender roles and whether or not females can even participate in, much less administer, specific rites and rituals. On a personal level, it can be hugely problematic for women whose family scripts proscribe how a female can be “saved” or move on to another “level” of development; and whether she can do this of her own volition or whether she must do it through attachment to a male.

These old scripts touch many aspects of love and intimacy. In particular, they keep intact the idea that women should seek relationship and connection, while men should protect their independence and maintain control. Such scripts subtly affect most couples, not only those where overt male power is obvious. Unfortunately, studies have shown that old gender scripts continue to dominate marriage, notably in marital decision-making.

Contributors include the fact that these script pieces are so often absorbed subconsciously during childhood and cling to them tenaciously. In addition, some social institutions, religious organizations, and cultural norms tend to lag behind the new ideals. In contrast, couples who identify and discard unhelpful or no-longer-relevant portions of their family scripts are more able to address conflicts and problem-solving and be truly intimate.

Listening In . . .

Trevor had been raised in a very devout home, one in which his parents not only embraced the tenants of their chosen denomination but lived them religiously. One of their beliefs related to birth control. Any form of it was wrong. The mother had birthed nine children in 13 years until a miscarriage (one of five) ended in a hysterectomy to save her life.

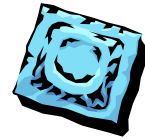


In due course Trevor married. The first two years of marriage produced two children. Trevor and his wife, Bunny, talked about the prohibition against birth control. Bunny, not having been raised with the same iron-clad family script as Trevor, suggested that she take birth control pills. After all, they had already concluded that the maximum number of children they could afford financially (every-wise, actually) was three and Bunny was in no hurry to get to three.

Trevor voted against birth control pills because he feared what his parents might say if they found out. “So what?” asked Bunny. “What can they do about it? It’s our family!” With Bunny’s persistence, Ted finally agreed to get serious about the rhythm method. When the third year of marriage resulted in a third child, the couple laughingly decided that the rhythm method was not working to their advantage. What to do about it, on the other hand, was no laughing matter.



Bunny threatened to go ahead with birth control unless Trevor agreed to use a condom, every time. But every time Trevor used a condom he felt guilty. Sometimes he felt so uncomfortable that the couple’s intimacy was negatively impacted. Between feeling guilty and wondering if the condoms were going to do the job, Trevor started enjoying sex less and less and less.



One night a condom broke. When this resulted in Bunny’s fourth pregnant pregnancy, she decided to take matters into her own hands. She had to change doctors but succeeded in establishing pregnancy care with a physician who was willing to perform a tubal ligation. After all, this would be the couple’s fourth child and state law allowed for sterilization after the third.

Trevor was secretly relieved. Much later he joined a men’s group and confided, “Here I am a grown man in the 20th Century and what with worrying about going to hell or feeling like my parents were peeking over my shoulder and frowning, the first four years of marriage were close to the hell I was trying to avoid. There must be something wrong with me that I could be so impacted by my family script!”

“Hey, if someone I loved and trusted told me I’d go to hell and burn for eons if I used birth control, you can just bet that might impact my ability to function effectively, to say nothing about being so worried as to not enjoy any of it,” said one of the group.

Another added, “I *know* family scripts can be that powerful. Just think about the vendettas that have operated and are still operational in parts of the world today. At least your family script didn’t instruct you to kill someone, no matter whether they had done you dirt or you even knew them! Mine did! That’s one reason I left home and came to America. ”

Five steps to evaluate

If you choose to evaluate your gender script, you might consider these:



- a. Examine the extent to which old gender scripts still influence your thinking about gender. Do you inadvertently encourage the creation of equality myth by using language and methods that mask inequalities? Women are more likely to accommodate than men. You can avoid unintentionally reinforcing that pattern.
- b. Assume that most differences between women and men are socially created and can be changed. Do you frame gender differences as natural or biological? If so, that makes ideas regarding change difficult to envision and almost inevitably reinforces gender inequality. Learn to speak more about *habits* or *choices* and less about *natures* or *instincts*.
- c. Ask questions about how roles and behaviors came to be. Have you spent much time being curious and increasing your awareness of gender issues in general and against the backdrop of your family in particular? A wealth of studies exist, the conclusions of which can serve as a starting point for discussion.
- d. Externalize issues by noting how often perceived difficulties are simply expressions of larger social problems that plague many people. Do you have a need to blame and personalize differences you observe? You can decrease a need to blame and encourage yourself and others to make conscious choices regarding relationship patterns.
- e. Learn how to tolerate and manage conflict. How comfortable are you dealing with conflict? Old scripts often minimize conflict at the expense of equality. Early conflict resolution may be a way to avoid the anxiety that typically emerges any time old power differences are challenged.

Benefits of Living Your Own Script

In a practical sense, writing, managing, and following your own script means that you:

- ★ No longer feel compelled to work upon or act out the unresolved problems or indiscretions of the previous generations or even to mimic what were perceived as successes for them. Your brain is not only unique but also may be very different from theirs.
- ★ Stop carrying within you any toxic burden of unmourned loss and grief, unrealized goals, or emotional pain carried over from the experiences of the previous generations—including abuse.
- ★ Consciously realize no obligation to ritualize in your own life the beliefs, perceptions, customs, and expectations of your ancestors.
- ★ Give up any tendency to become immobilized either by the lack of validation or the conditional praise/love of previous generations.
- ★ Are no longer controlled by the need to make restitution for past generational failures or unfulfilled longings and have given up that goal.
- ★ Let go any need to confront, chastise, get rid of, demand from, or expect/require generational ancestors to be different and have accepted them exactly as they are, setting your own personal boundaries as necessary.
- ★ Can accept and value previous generations simply for the position they hold in your generational inheritance and can learn from what you know of their lives and outcomes.
- ★ Free yourself to become the person you were intended to be, utilizing your innate giftedness in all its uniqueness to help you live a rich, rewarding, joyful, and productive life.
- ★ Purpose to leave the world a better place than you found it and maybe even achieve a portion of, if not all, of that goal.



Passing it on

Children tend to absorb and mimic the attitudes and behaviors of their parents and care providers. So, what if the family script passed down to you was dysfunctional? Without awareness and vigilance, you may pass on some very undesirable expectations to the next generation.

The outcome depends on many factors, including your own willingness to look at the family script you received, the script you are living out, and the script you are passing on.

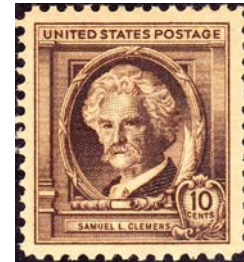
Do you recall the quote by Warren Bennis that was included at the beginning of this mini-monograph?

To be authentic is literally to . . . discover your own native energies and desires, and then to find your own way of acting on them.

This defines the script you are *living out*.

No surprise that Mark Twain, at age 70, described authenticity in quite a different way:

*You can't reach old age by another man's road.
My habits protect my life, but they would
assassinate you.*



That defines the script you are *passing on*.

Your mission—should you choose to accept it—is to identify your script. Evaluate and tweak it as needed. Make it your own if for no other reason than someone else's script could discourage, depress, even destroy you—those, of course, that don't can simply make you laugh.

