

# *The Life Skills Approach*

**Discover the strength you need  
to cope with any disability**



Create a state of mind to consciously deal with your disability

Over 20 experiential techniques to better the quality of life

**Marc Lerner**

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# The Life Skills Approach

## *Introduction*

Richard Solomon MD

On March 15, 1981, Marc Lerner woke up and couldn't see. He didn't know it then but he was experiencing an acute, severe attack of optic neuritis, the onset of multiple sclerosis that would leave him legally blind and physically disabled. Marc, who is in his fifties, has now had MS for nearly half his life. Over these decades of living with a chronic and disabling condition, he has gained hard won insights on how to find the inner resources necessary to tap into what he calls "the Wisdom of the Body". *The Life Skills* methods taught in this book offer practical techniques that anyone can use to heal themselves. I use the word 'heal' not to mean 'cure'; for though Marc has remained vital and active, he still has MS. And though his disease process has stabilized, amazing his doctors, it is in the realm of attitudinal healing that Marc has the most to share.

As a pediatrician who has cared for thousands of children with chronic conditions, I have witnessed the difficult emotional struggle that families experience as they try to help their children cope with the daily disabilities, the pain and side effects of medical interventions and the fear of the future that illness brings. As Marc's close friend, I have also witnessed Marc's struggle with MS. So, when Marc asked me to write this introduction, I felt that, as a friend and physician, I could knowledgeably introduce Marc and this remarkable book to those with health problems.

Marc is legally blind but he can see just enough to allow him to get around. He walks with canes because his balance has been affected by MS. Despite this, Marc remains completely and competently independent, living on his own in Santa Monica. He swims everyday in the cold water of his apartment complex swimming pool to keep his muscles as strong as possible. He uses public transportation to go shopping, meet friends, and go to the UCLA Medical Center to make his doctor appointments. Marc is a full participant with his medical team and uses the latest advances in the allopathic treatment of MS to help himself. He has a close network of friends in the community and he has loving relationships with his family. He is kind, soft spoken, friendly and witty. He uses the word 'amazing' a lot. He amazes those of us who know him best not only because he has a better attitude about life than we do but because he contributes productively to society. He has a computer that talks to him so he can 'hear' emails and hear also what he has written. Despite all the obstacles, he is not depressed, anxious or angry. On the contrary, he is mellow, centered and dedicated to helping others. One feels a comfort in his presence. He teaches his *Life Skills* methods to people with chronic medical conditions all over the country and, for twenty years taught *Life Skills Seminars* to Vietnam Vets at the nearby VA hospital. Marc teaches not only through his seminars but through the example of his life.

This book, *The Life Skills Approach* is the gift of his life. His central theme, announced in the first chapter of the book, is that the fear of disability can give way to the 'Wisdom of the Body' and that the past can give way to the present in the service of healing. He emphasizes that those with chronic medical conditions can and must take an active role in their own healing process. Marc does not wear rose colored glasses. He has experienced the shock and chaos, the sadness and loss, of having a serious disabling condition. Marc describes how by working with the experience of mourning, he arrived at a profound understanding of his disease that allowed him to live fully in the present despite his losses. At the core of the book are a series of 'life skills' that can restore a positive sense of self and a positive orientation to coping with chronic illnesses. He teaches how to trust your deepest intuitions through the use of simple, elegant and effective methods that involve the use of breathing, deep relaxation and specific mental imagery. He teaches us how to permanently put our new found habits into our 'bio-computer' and then apply these habits to all the aspects of our lives.

As an academic physician with nearly twenty years in university settings, I am skeptical of methods that do not have a scientific rationale to support them. In fact, though, Marc is contributing to a long lineage of healing methods that probably began with shamanism and have evolved into the scientifically proven realm of physiologic self regulation. The methods of breathing, relaxation and mental imagery have now been well studied. Sound research provides strong evidence that how we think and what we think have immediate impacts on our physiology. Instead of allowing our chronic illnesses to demoralize us, depress us and make us sicker, we can, through Marc Lerner's *Life Skills*, develop ways to cope with our illnesses, indeed, use our illnesses to make us more alive to the present moment.

Despite having no major medical problems myself, I have personally benefited from each of the methods described in *The Life Skills Approach* and have found them to be profound, creative, practical and effective. Marc likes to say that 'to struggle is to grow'. Through his struggles he has grown into a wonderful teacher of life skills that can help each of us tap into our own powerful inner resources. I highly recommend this book.



## **Marc's Introduction: The Life Skills Approach**

The way we approach our disability is very significant. Our attitude determines how actively involved we will become and how we will receive help from medical professionals. The first question a patient has to answer is: *am I ready to consciously deal with this challenge?*

There are four qualities a person has to develop to create a proper attitude:

- 1.) A Positive self image; you have to feel worthy to improve.
- 2.) Self Trust, to feel you are capable of taking on this challenge
- 3.) You have to be free from the mind-made "reality" that depresses you.
- 4.) You have to be able to accept these qualities in your everyday life as naturally as you accept your name.

The word "patient" is derived from the Latin word *pati*, which means "to suffer," but being a patient doesn't mean that you need to suffer. Suffering happens when patients rely only on others for help instead of creating a proper attitude and taking charge of their own quality of life.

This book will develop the qualities listed above and create a better quality of life that is the expression of your deepest wisdom.

Within every single one of us there are powerful inner resources, which I call the Wisdom of the Body. For most of us, our minds have become so cluttered and busy with extraneous thoughts that we no longer recognize the Wisdom of our Bodies. Decades of ineffective habits and past experiences run our lives and keep us from tapping these resources.

Tapping into the Wisdom of the Body can enable you to take control of how you deal with your disability and enable you to participate in the coping process as a partner with your doctor. In this book, you will learn over 20 techniques that develop a positive attitude and gives you a significant role to play in the way you deal with the world around you.

What if, instead of just getting by on what's served you in the past, you learned to use every resource available to you? The Life Skills approach uses simple techniques to teach just that. The Wisdom of the Body can be the key that opens that door; you just have to be ready to accept it. This is not difficult; in fact, these techniques are so simple that our intellect has a hard time translating experience into understanding. *The Life Skills Approach* will enable you to focus your energy and allow the Wisdom of the Body to take over.

In *The Life Skills Approach*, you will learn how to adapt your mindset an expression of your deepest inner wisdom. This can be done without changing your belief systems or what you think is important to you; the real healing resources already exist within you. This book will help you to create habits to help in your struggles with the issues concerning your disability.

If you follow the *Life Skills Approach* for about six weeks, 15 minutes twice a day, you can learn to trust the Wisdom of your Body. This will enable you to deal with the physical discomfort and the frustration of being disabled without the limitations of your mind, a mind that, if you're like most people, may be stuck in a rut. You may even find that your disability becomes a blessing and that your challenges can become opportunities to evolve into a better person.

*This book is dedicated to my parents.*

My Dad recently passed away, but in my heart he left a beautiful example of the Wisdom of the Body. My mother has always had the ability to touch my heart directly. I dedicate this book to them, because simply through their love, they showed me the value of the Wisdom of my Body.

I also want to thank two groups which allowed me to share the techniques in this book through Life Skills Institute. First are Jim Dwyer and the PTSD clinic at the Veterans' Administration in West Los Angeles. I identified with these Vietnam War veterans in particular because we're around the same age, and because they faced struggles which forced them to accept a deeper reality within themselves. I have learned more from these vets and their struggle than from any other teacher.

I also want to thank Susan Dusseau at Midland Cancer Services in Midland, Michigan, a place where the combat experience was different from the veterans' but equally challenging. Both groups faced the threat of death and were forced to the depth where the Wisdom of the Body is found.

There are six people I also want to thank. Kathy Sullivan was a great help in developing the Life Skills Approach. Dr. Rick Solomon helped me organize these thoughts in this book; simply by interacting with him, my thoughts became clearer. Andy Bender, my editor, put a beautiful, professional touch to this writing. Monique Morgan was very helpful in developing my website and producing these books. Jeanette Fisher was my mentor who helped me enter the professional world of writers and coached me on how to market and publish my books. I would also like to thank Dean Kramer, the first person to thoroughly review my book. He works at MS World, a website/magazine that deals with multiple sclerosis and I thank him for the time he invested in evaluating this book. His positive review was very helpful in getting this book to the people that needs it the most.

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Beyond our conditioned minds is an innate wisdom that knows how to heal our body better. “The Wisdom of the Body” describes this inner wisdom and begins the learning process on how to invoke it.

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Mourning is a natural part of the healing process. When most people mourn they focus on their thoughts and grief, distracting them from healing. “The Beauty of Mourning” teaches the ability to mourn from a deeper wisdom, enabling people to move past their negative emotions.

### **Chapter 3 - Using Habits Instead of Habits Using You**

In the healing process we need to consciously create habits so the Wisdom of our Body responds to our life as naturally as our conditioned ego normally does. Each technique developed in this book turns into a habit so you can create the experience without getting caught in your thinking mind.

### **Chapter 4 - The Positive Self**

“The Positive Self” is a self image that is connected to your innate, deeper wisdom. This perspective is valuable and beneficial not only during the healing process, but in all aspects of life.

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The Positive Self Image is an amazing tool in the healing process. “Techniques to Support the Positive Self” teaches ways to integrate the Positive Self into daily life.

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Self Trust allows one to move past the superficial thinking level, instead focusing on inner wisdom. The Zero Point is when your focus goes beyond your thinking mind and receives the Wisdom of the Body.

### **Chapter 7 - Breathing into Silence**

“Breathing into Silence” is a direct way to connect to a deeper wisdom. In a simple breath you tap inner resources that activate the Wisdom of your Body and empower you to be active in your healing process.

## **Chapter 8 - The Bio-computer**

“The Bio-computer” teaches us how to refine the habits and connections we’ve made throughout the book, making the process of implementing the Wisdom of the Body automatic.

## **Chapter 9 - The Life Skills Approach**

This chapter is a review **of** all the techniques learned in this book. You are then introduced to Life Skills Inc., where all the Life Skill products are created. Then you will be introduced to Life Skills Institute a 501c(3) non-profit organization that offers support for those in a struggle, and the Life Skills Inc. website: <http://www.lifeskillsinc.com>. Contact information for the Life Skills companies and Marc Lerner are also included.

There's a different perspective between what I call the Positive and Negative self. I believe that the Life Skills experience will be far richer *if The Life Skills Approach* is read from the perspective of the Positive Self. Since I feel this insight is so essential to the overall experience of the book, I invite you to do this following technique and see from your own experience the difference between your Positive and Negative self. To get the best benefit from this technique, I suggest that you enter a relaxed state of mind. Close your eyes and take 5 deep breaths, relaxing after each one of them.

### **Connecting to Your Positive and Negative Self**

Answer the following questions with candid, first impressions.

Step One: think of a goal, one that you can really put your heart into. Let that goal slip into the background and this technique will show you what part of you has that goal-- your Positive or your Negative Self.

Step two: We will first connect to the negative part of you. This is the self-image created by your past conditioning. Think of the worst personal experience you can remember, for that experience helps you to connect to your Negative Self. Capture that negative experience in a word or a phrase and record it.

\_\_\_\_\_

Step three: describe how you feel when you experience this negative feeling in two ways.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

Step four: think of all of these words or phrases, and put them together to give a creative nickname to your Negative Self. What would you call that character?

Now let's create your Positive Self; the part of you that was created from times where you were connected to and manifested your powerful inner resources.

Step one: recall the best moment you have had and capture that experience in a word or a phrase

\_\_\_\_\_

Step two: think of two ways this experience makes you feel and express those feelings in a word or a phrase.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

Step three: now give a creative nickname to your Positive Self, what would you call that character?

Step four: state the name of your Positive Self in an "I Am Statement".  
I am \_\_\_\_\_ (use your Positive Self's nickname)

Step five: while saying the "I Am Statement", imagine your Positive Self. Then breathe into your Positive Self as if your breath gives it life, and then let images bubble up in your mind of times that you connected to your Positive Self. This is an important habit to develop; for it becomes a shortcut to connect to the wisdom of your body. Once you develop your Positive and Negative Self, this book will use these aspects of yourself to develop valuable life skills that promote a higher quality of life.

When every thought you have activates your Positive Self our own minds create a constant support system that bio-chemically supports living a better life. When our minds support our conditioned ego—thinking can support sabotaging influences in our life that are created by our own mind.

Now, read this book with your Positive Self and each technique will naturally connect you to the Wisdom of your Body. This minor control will give you tremendous influence how you deal with your disability. Try this first technique with the intention of positively affecting your attitude with your own mind.



*Chapter 1*  
**The Wisdom of the Body**

There is nothing profound about the Wisdom of the Body.

Once I was running a seminar for mentally ill homeless people. I mentioned “inner wisdom,” and one participant said “I don’t have any wisdom”.

Then I asked him, “When you sleep, does your heart beat?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Do you breathe?” I asked.

“Of course,” he said.

That’s the Wisdom of the Body.

The Wisdom of the Body has a very simple purpose: to harmonize every function of the mind and body. It is as though every cell works toward the miracle that is the human body, and when all of these cells work together independent of our thinking mind, it puts you in “the Zone.”

Simply put, these are times when we are performing at our highest potential. I’ve seen it in people facing a threat of death, or in mothers in the throes of childbirth. These types of events move us into the moment where we trust an inner wisdom; we were born with it, and it is our real potential.

But you don’t need an extraordinary event to be in the Zone; you can get the same feeling when you’re all alone.

The mentally ill man in my seminar was ignoring the Wisdom of his Body because, like most people, he had been taught to think this way. Many of us are no different: our experiences, the people we’ve encountered and our environment make us who we are today – or so we think! Our everyday cares and the patterns we develop over a lifetime take over our lives, and we tend to ignore this amazing resource we have within.

The Wisdom of the Body is not just for extraordinary moments: the goal of this book is to connect you to the Wisdom of your Body no matter what your situation. For most people who are healthy, the Wisdom of the Body operates unnoticed. The heart beats on its' own; we breathe without being conscious of it. Even for some patients in a coma, the Wisdom of the Body works to preserve that most basic function: the instinct to survive.

In my seminars, when I ask people to define their ultimate challenge, many say connecting to God, or defeating a life-threatening illness. But even to prepare to get to that point, you need to become receptive to the Wisdom of your Body. Once you connect to that wisdom, attaining those goals becomes easier and more natural. No matter what your goal, from healing and dealing with a disability to relationships, from spirituality to work or sports, the Wisdom of your Body allows you to go beyond the self you think you know.

### **How I Discovered the Wisdom of my Body**

In 1981, at age 29, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), and I have been on a journey of self-discovery ever since. The disease left me legally blind, handicapped in walking and with poor balance, just to name a few. There isn't a cure for MS (at this time) and no way to regain the physical functions; modern medicine can only slow down the progression of this devastating illness.

This could have been a frustrating challenge, but I knew from past experiences that my greatest resources were deep within me in a place frustration could not reach. I just needed a way to tap those inner resources as I dealt with my health.

Being legally blind left my outer world blurry and frustrated me, but it also gave me an opportunity to study my inner world in a way I never had thought to before. When I began to connect to the Wisdom of my Body, I was no longer a victim, suffering from a crippling disease. Let me share with you how I discovered the Wisdom of my Body.

After my symptoms set in, I received visits from many well-wishers, but not all visits were the same. I found that people who connected to my heart were very easy to talk with. With other visitors, conversation was difficult and uninspiring. The conversations appeared normal, but there was no connection.

I realized that the difference wasn't in what we talked about; it was how they related to me. People who related to my whole being were able to pull me out of my mind and share from my heart. Others spoke only to my superficial thinking, and our communication stayed on that level. I was never able to have a quality conversation with them.

When the visitors went away, I looked inside myself and reflected on what I'd experienced, and I began to draw parallels between my own self-image and the

interactions I'd had with visitors. I realized that I had two types of self-images within me, a positive and the other negative. When I was in the mind-frame of a positive self image, it was like talking to the visitors who touched my heart, and when I had a negative self image, it was like talking to superficial visitors.

I also noticed that when I approached life from the perspective of this positive self-image, I had more creative, sometimes profound thoughts, and I felt better able to deal with what MS had dealt me. It also improved other aspects of my life: making friends, relationships with family... This became the beginning of the Life Skills techniques, the Life Skills Institute and now this book.

Through my work with Life Skills, I realized that our society puts so much value on information and intellect that we tend to ignore our inner resources. Do not get me wrong: I do not believe thinking is bad. Rather, there are just times in one's life where we need the qualities found in the Wisdom of the Body, and there's no substitute. As I dealt with my handicaps, I needed the comfort and inner resources found at that depth. The Wisdom of the Body accepted my challenge of being handicapped; but dealt with it from a deeper perspective, which made it easier to handle that struggle.

### **Limits of Past Conditioning**

When you drive, do you spend all your time looking in the rear-view mirror? I hope not!

By the same token, if all you do is focus on the things you've learned and experienced in the past, it's the same as looking in the rear-view mirror as you drive. Eventually you'll have an accident, and it may have terrible consequences. Of course, it's helpful to know where we've come from, but looking backward does not help us to know where we are or where we're going. If you rely on the way your mind has always worked, you become almost like a robot, not equipped to change course if necessary.

To some people, looking forward means having an outside goal. How many times have you thought to yourself: "If I only had a new car/a new house/a new whatever, my life would be so much better." The assumption is that a change on the outside will help you feel better on the inside, or at least different.

In my Life Skills classes, on the other hand, I teach people to change from the inside out. In this book, you will learn how subtle inner changes can alter your perception of the world around you and how you deal with your disability. As you change from within, the way you see – and interact with – the world changes, and this can lead to profound changes in your situation.

## **How to Use this Book**

When you go to a restaurant, you read the menu. The problem with a menu, though, is that you don't actually get to sample the food before to see whether it's to your liking. The menu might say "banana cream pie," but is it a good banana cream pie?

It comes down to the difference between thinking and knowing. When we think, our thoughts look at a situation and create what I call a "mind-made reality." All too often, though, our mind-made reality is colored by our past conditioning; many people come to conclusions about an experience before they've even had it. When dealing with the challenges of being disabled, we need to deal with more than just ideas.

To know something, you have to experience it, ideally not just with your thoughts but with your entire body: your heart, your soul, your creativity and your intellect. Meanwhile, your thinking brain is stuck reading the menu! The purpose of this book is to help you taste the real meal and become an effective participant in creating a quality life.

As you read this book, go slowly, the way you'd linger over a fine dinner. Speed-reading may be a useful way to learn, but even if you memorize every word of this book, you've missed the point if you haven't experienced it.

You'll find over 20 exercises to help you connect to the Wisdom of your Body. Take time to become completely involved in the exercises, and if you do, you'll develop habits that you can use to better deal with having a disability. You will be re-conditioning your sub-conscious mind so the habits you have developed to create your personality will now include being connected to the Wisdom of your Body.

## **The Gift of Struggle**

Albert Einstein once said "Opportunity travels incognito, disguised as misfortune." The word for "crisis" in Chinese is written with characters meaning both "danger" and "opportunity." But like the pressure that turns coal into diamonds, a crisis can transform us into the people we were meant to be.

Eventually every one of us struggles, whether we know it or not, in ways that force us to look beyond our past conditioning, to someplace deep within. I call this my ultimate challenge because going to this depth isn't easy. It is, though, something we have to do to live a quality life.

If you remain at the level of your thoughts and past conditioning, struggle can mean defeat. Maybe you're stuck in the same old ruts that haven't worked for you all along; they may even be the ruts that led you into the struggle in the first

place! Many people, consciously or otherwise, remain in this state of quiet suffering until they are confronted with a shock to the system.

Other times, though, when faced with major stress, illness or even death, people somehow, somewhere find inner resources they never knew they had. Think of the driver whose split-second reactions stop a car accident, or a rescue worker who does incredible acts to save someone.

Nobody would wish these situations on anyone, but often they do have one powerful effect: to bring out inner resources.

So you see our struggles are really a gift.

In my own case, my past conditioning was beautiful. I grew up in a wonderful family with two loving parents. Still, I was never taught how to be disabled.

For over 20 years, through the Life Skills Institute I have worked with people in crisis, from Vietnam vets with post-traumatic stress disorder to people with cancer or AIDS, helping them connect to the Wisdom of their Bodies. Like most people, these folks had to undergo some kind of trauma before they began to access these resources.

Read this book, and learn how Life Skills can make a difference to you. Learn the Life Skills Approach with me, connect to the Wisdom of your Body, and realize the incredible miracle we live in.

### **One Important Point**

This book is not intended to replace medical professionals or any external help. Inner wisdom is not a cure for every problem; sometimes it needs the help of others. Rather, the techniques in this book can empower you to work with these professionals, to help them help you. When you are able to accept external help from your deepest inner wisdom, you'll be much better able to use it effectively.



The original book, *The Life Skills Approach: Discover the strength you need to cope with any illness*, has been rewritten with specific examples for the disabled community. Instead of focusing on healing, this book is intended to help a disabled person deal with limitations from an inner depth, and avoid the discouraging thoughts a struggle sometimes creates.

This book, *The Life Skills Approach: Discover the strength you need to cope with any disability*, is intended to help recondition the subconscious mind, changing the way a disability is perceived. Over a matter of weeks, many simple patterns and habits are established to utilize a deeper inner wisdom instead of a frustrated ego.

This has been a small view of the book *The Life Skills Approach: Discover the strength you need to cope with any disability*. If you would like more information on this incredible, life changing book or Life Skills Inc., please go to:

<http://www.lifeskillsinc.com>