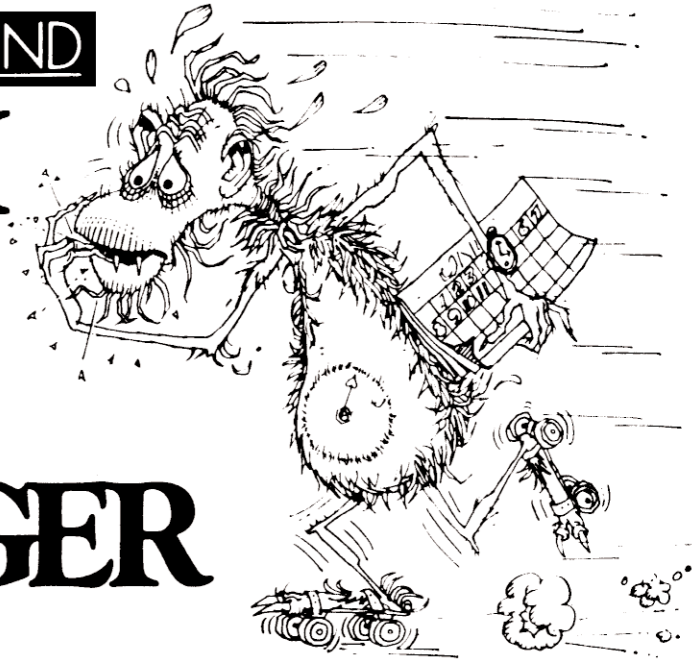


OF HEART AND MIND

RELAX AND LIVE LONGER



There is increasing research in the area of the link between various personality types and certain diseases, substantiating the ancient belief that "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones."

Perhaps the most research has been done in the area of the cause of heart attacks. A great deal of this has been done by Meyer Friedman, M.D., and Ray H. Rosenman, M.D., two cardiologists from San Francisco. "These two physicians have spent 15 years associating the aggressive, time-urgent, competitive, highly successful person (Type A) with the occurrence of heart attacks; and his or her counterpart, the more relaxed, easygoing Type B person with a lack of them" (Joan Arehart-Treichel, "Mental Patterns of Disease," *Human Behavior*, January 1976, p. 40). They were able to predict with surprising accuracy which of the men in their studies would have heart attacks.

On the opposite end of the scale is the "cancer personality." Caroline Thomas, M.D., of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine is a researcher in this area. She found that the cancer victims were "low-gear persons, seldom prey to outbursts of emotions. They had had feelings of isolation and unhappiness dating back to childhood" (*ibid.*, p. 41).

The article also discussed a study, by Claus and Marjorie Bahnson of the Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute in Philadelphia, which compared both these types. According to Mr. Bahnson, "The heart attack personality vents his frustrations, irritations, anxieties and other negative emotions outwardly by bellowing, cursing or what have you. The cancer personality takes the same negative emotions out inwardly, that is, he internalizes them."

In looking at these studies, one pattern soon becomes evident. The heart attack personality and the cancer personality seem to be opposites. Take

your pick—if you are a driving, hard-working, expressive person, you can possibly look forward to a heart attack; if, on the other hand, you are the more quiet type, internalizing your feelings and remaining outwardly calm, you could likely succumb to cancer. Surely there must be a positive side to the matter, a way to develop a personality which will bring about health and well-being?

The common denominator is summed up in one word: *negative*. The thing both of these personalities has in common is *negative emotional traits*. One type expresses them outwardly, the other holds them in, but they are present in *both*.

The Heart Attack Personality. The driving person described above is the type who not only works hard but does so anxiously. He functions under constant pressure. He has too many projects going and not enough hours in the day to get them all done, but all of them seem to be a matter of life or death. He feels as if the world will come to an end if he doesn't get everything done right now, or if he doesn't make that big sale.

Perhaps the biggest step in the right direction for this person is to learn to relax. By not taking life quite so seriously he can begin to develop some peace of mind and the mental tranquility to cope with life's problems without trying to conquer the whole world in the process. He needs to realize that, no matter how much it may seem so at the time, the world really won't come to an end if he misses just one sale or one deadline.

That is not to say that it isn't important to push for perfection and to take responsibility seriously, but the first thing to be realized while you are attempting to reach perfection is that *you never will* as long as you're "only human." That isn't nearly so discouraging as it may sound at first. It can really be rather reassuring. Think back. You've probably missed the mark some time before. The world is still

here, isn't it? And it's a pretty sure bet that if you were smart you learned something from the incident and became better equipped to deal with such situations in the future.

We're all entitled to a few mistakes. It's all a part of the process. Do your best, but when things don't work out, the way to make the most of it is to take what you've learned and go on. Giving yourself a heart attack by running in circles only makes matters worse.

Being Whole Won't Put You In The Hole. Another thing this person needs to learn to do is to leave the job in the office. You'll accomplish more in the long run, for many reasons. For one thing, you'll be guarding your health, and a healthy person is a more effective person. Also, sometimes a tough problem is solved more easily if you forget it for a while and take a fresh look at it the next day.

Don't let the standards of others rule your life. Their success is measured by what they are; yours by what you are. Comparison and competition lead to frustration. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's philosophy on this point is good to remember:

We should be bold enough to set our own objectives and standards. Your own skills should be valued, irrespective of what others do. Success experiences need not be earthshaking to be satisfying, if one takes the proper attitude. Inferiority is one of our major problems in life, and we can overcome it by cultivating skills and talents (Nicholas S. DiCaprio, *The Good Life*, p. 70).

The Cancer Personality. The cancer personality has a different problem. He or she too is plagued by worry, but this worry is more directly people-oriented. He tends to worry about failing, as does the heart attack personality, but in this case the biggest part of the fear may be a *fear of what other people will think of him personally*. He is basically insecure in decision-making and lacks self-confidence.

Confidence is necessary to carry on an even moderately effective and successful life. It is what allows a person to rise above the ordinary, to carry through a daring idea, even to simply get along with other people. The person who has confidence in himself and what he is doing can deal directly with people, without hesitation. By displaying confidence he can put across his ideas more effectively. In his personal life, it helps him by making it easier for people to like him. He doesn't run away from potentially rewarding relationships.

By confidence, of course, I don't mean conceit or stubbornness. But if a person constantly wavers and denigrates himself or runs down his own ideas, the person he's dealing with may simply assume, though perhaps subconsciously, that he knows what he's talking about. Part of a person's first impression of someone else is what that someone expresses both verbally and nonverbally about his image of himself. And so the person who has a right confidence comes across better.

Life Style vs. Strife Style. Your way of life must also be tried if it is going to be something you can have confidence in. In order to have

confidence in what you're doing and in what you stand for, you have to believe in it. Prove to yourself that what you're doing is right beyond a shadow of a doubt in your own mind, and you have no reason to be afraid to stand up for yourself to other people. Live in a way that brings good, positive results. Then you can hold your head up with the best of them. Ask yourself if being afraid of other people is going to advance you toward your goals, or if instead it is going to keep you from doing what you want and need to do; then, act accordingly. Fearing other people and allowing them to wrongly dominate our lives is something that has to be outgrown. It is a form of *immaturity*.

Alfred Adler's ideas of psychology enjoy great popularity today. He believed that basically people are striving to overcome inferiority and to achieve a sense of security, and that feelings of inferiority do not belong in a healthy adult personality:

In our lives as children, almost everyone is a giant; and for many of us, that state continues. Everyone is brighter, better off, more attractive, more socially desirable, and so on. Our perception of things may be so selective, under the force of the inferiority feelings, that we only see evidence of our inferiority in relation to others. We can always find people whose life and personal qualities are superior to ours. However it is done, we must all outgrow the sense of smallness and helplessness that we experienced so frequently as children (DiCaprio, p. 75).

It is not hazardous to one's health to work hard, or to be level-headed in a tense situation. The key is in developing healthy emotions to go along with these basic characteristics. But above all, the motivation for whatever you do has to be right in your mind. There is a philosophy of life that not only treats the effects but eliminates the causes of emotionally-induced poor health. Let's see what it is.

Worried About Me. Adler also stated that an essential aspect of neurosis is the *preoccupation with self*. The neurotic is a highly selfish person for whom *other people* are one of the major problems in life.

Concern for others is what makes a person's life mean something. It functions on a very practical level. It gives you confidence. You can't worry about yourself if you're too busy being concerned about the feelings of someone else.

Adler also observed that one of the things people are seeking is security. One form of security is a good relationship with other people; a sense of purpose and fulfillment comes from being needed by others. This is something that can't be demanded. It is one of life's paradoxes that you receive it only when you stop looking for it, and instead concentrate on giving what you can to others.

So, slow down and take a lighter stance in life. There are times to be serious, of course. But don't ever forget to have "a merry heart." By replacing fear and other negative emotions with confidence and concern for others, health and happiness can become your way of life.

—Julie Gallagher