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**HOW TO MANAGE
YOURSELF AND
FACE THE WORLD**



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How to Manage Yourself and Face the World

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CHAPTER 1

WHO IS THE PERSON BEHIND YOUR FACE? -- WHAT DOES YOUR FACE LOOK LIKE ANYWAY?

He was a rarity among American diplomats. He mastered a number of languages - including Japanese. That morning his delegation had a tough opponent. They had to negotiate tricky commercial issues with a Japanese delegation. The chief of the Japanese group was a very hard nosed gentleman. He had many good arguments to present and he would do so very effectively - the American knew. Even moderate success was unlikely. He feared utter failure. Yet, since he had to fight, he could try and come up with some unexpected punches.

When he arrived at the conference building, he got out of the car and went round the vehicle. When he was behind the rear of the car, he knelt down as if to tie up a shoelace. Instead he rubbed the little finger of his left hand against the inner wall of the exhaust. The tip of his little finger was quite black now. The American smiled and strode briskly towards the conference room. Against his habit he handed his attaché case to an aide.

The Japanese delegation was there ahead of him. He shook hands with his counterpart and said a few complimentary words in fluent Japanese. Then he got nearer. He pointed with his left forefinger to the Oriental's spotless white starched collar and said:

"I am afraid there is a grain of soot on your honorable collar."

Then he extended his hand and rubbed gently the tip of his little finger on the Japanese's collar. As he did so, his face clouded. He added:

"I am very sorry. I am afraid I did worse."

Then he looked at his black little finger and showed it apologetically to the Japanese diplomat. The Oriental assumed naturally that the stain had originated from his own collar and assessed that the black spot was at least the size of a Yen coin. A glimpse of his reflection in a window pane confirmed his suspicions. He was very embarrassed. He just said:

"It is of no importance. Very thank you all the same."

He was so upset that he began to speak English much worse than he usually did. He was untidy. He was not presentable. In fact he was guilty of gratuitous rudeness to these foreigners. He felt he had to make some kind of amend - but that was not the reason of the meeting. The Japanese

gentleman felt he had lost face. He had an inner conflict. His well known debating ability flowed away from him. He forgot his best arguments and introduced them much too late in the discussion. His performance was a failure. The American did not do too badly after all. His success was more than moderate. He congratulated himself. His trick had been a low and devious one but it had succeeded.

At this point the American diplomat began to rationalize. The trick he had played had just contributed to his success. The real basis of his success, though, had been his negotiating ability, his command of the Japanese language, all the homework he had done until he knew backwards all the relevant facts: in a word - his brilliant mind.

So: it is well known that Orientals in general hate to lose face and they tend to break down, when they think they did lose face. Westerners too - however - are happier when they think they are higher in the appreciation of other people. When they don't have enough clues on how much they are appreciated, they try to increase their own self-esteem - just as the American diplomat was doing after having played a dirty trick.

It is a general human trait. We all like to put up a good appearance. We also tend to be easily convinced that behind our - hopefully - good appearance there is a good, sturdy, competent personality. When this conviction becomes shaky, we feel ill at ease. We may become ineffective or depressed. Our performance deteriorates. Our peace of mind evaporates.

The situation would be a lot easier to understand - and to cope with - if it were true that whoever possesses better inner qualities also automatically puts up a better front, appears as a better person. But we know it is not true. In a market place the most successful peddler is not necessarily the one who is selling the better merchandise. One with a louder or more convincing voice may well sell a lot more of his wares. It is even trivial to note that a handsome candidate may be preferred by voters over a more competent opponent.

So learning more - knowing more - is certainly an asset. It is not the only asset we need. In order to be able to perform at all, we have to be reasonably at ease with ourselves. We must not think of ourselves as failures. We must not detect in the attitudes of other people towards us, neither sufficiency, nor contempt. On the other hand - we know it well - sometimes we despise a person, who is convinced of being very highly placed in our esteem. Sometimes we feel taken too lightly, underrated or abused - and there is no basis in reality for these feelings. Most people perhaps, do not think too much about us or they entertain favorable thoughts. We know it well: quite often we are poor judges of ourselves. We think we are quite rational, while our actions are steered by primitive passions. We think we are altruistic - and there are not many who would agree with us.

It is not surprising that there is so much confusion: in the way we see ourselves, in the way we think other people see us, in the way we would like to be considered by others. Conscience of ourselves and of others

ultimately rests in our brain: the most complicated piece of hardware in the world. We - neither the laymen, nor the famous experts - do not understand the inner operation of the human brain. We do not understand the mechanisms through which experience modifies the brain or its operation. We do not understand how the brain really communicates with other brains. We do not understand how conscience is modified by physical events inside the brain or by experience.

We know, however, that these things happen and we gather glimpses of their effects. We haven't got time enough. We cannot wait for the experts to solve all these problems for us. We have to go on. We have to operate as best we can. In order to operate adequately, we have to find solutions to these problems:

- how do we see ourselves
- how should we present ourselves to the test of the world
- how can we appreciate in which way others consider us.

We all are finding solutions - of sorts. It is advantageous to find better solutions. It's not just a question of asserting your own personality. It's not just a question of being one up. It often happens that people who are more assertive - or manage to be one up for some time - make such nuisances of themselves that, long term, they are avoided or hated by everybody and ultimately this may spell disaster.

So in this book I will present arguments, stories, anecdotes hypotheses, controversies and debates on subjects relevant to solve these very vital questions. For example:

- does each of us have an inner person or personality? or do we have many persons inside, many egos or Id's?
- is it more important to appear good (able, competent, etc.) or to be good?
- how should we take criticism? when should we pay attention to it and when we should not?
- how assertive - or how considerate of others should we be?
- is character one of our features? is it fixed or can we change it?
- is it more important to be highly intelligent (and what is intelligence?) or to have a good character?
- how should we present ourselves in order to be more successful in our job?
- is it better to set your targets too high or too low?
- can we - or can others judge our personality on the basis of success or failure - and in what fields?
- how much should we care for external appearance?
- what should you do once you realize you have made the big mistake or goof - something that really will hit you badly?

- should you ever admit to being afraid?
- how can you avoid saying "Yes" - and then whining about it and how can you learn to say "No" with a smile
- is jealousy ever justified ? what should you do when you feel jealous?

Of course it would be impossible to speak sensibly about all these questions without referring often to what others before have had to say. Philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, logicians, scientists, thinkers and novelists have devoted a lot of time to problems of this kind. Many of them have come up with important findings. So, from time to time I will quote from their works or report what they have found or thought. I will try to do so without getting into specialized - and unreadable - arguments or jargon. Then you could well ask:

"Why should we read about what you have to say about self management, about the presentation of self and the differences between the way we see ourselves and the way other people see us ? Why don't we read what the experts - the psychologists, the philosophers - have to say on the subject ?"

There are a number of reasons why you should listen to me, although I am not a specialist in these fields. The first is that I have actually read a lot on: psychology, character assessment and management of self. I have also come up with pragmatic solutions, which at least have been adequate for managing my own life. But, more important, the alleged real experts have not come up with complete scientific solutions. They just voice opinions - and these differ widely from the ones from the others. There is no consensus. So we can say that there are no real experts in the field of self management. There are just experts and specialists in particular sectors - in sub-fields.

It is easy to prove that the experts have not found good, general solutions. Look at them: psychologists, therapists, analysts, psychiatrists. Some of them - not all by any means - are quite good: but hardly ever they lead good lives. Their personalities are not well balanced. They are not happy. Some of them have a peculiar appearance. I ought to know. I have had many friends who were psychologists and professional advisers to other people. My first wife was a psychotherapist - and a good one. Well: they all wetted my shoulder a lot more than I wet theirs. They would come to me for advice time and again - and they found it. This means that I found something they had not found yet. I have found many practical shortcuts and rules of thumb which you can apply advantageously now. I could not put them all together to build up a significant theory. So I do not claim this book is a final treatise with which you will be able to solve all your personal problems. I hope, instead, that I have produced an honest job of work that can be useful for approaching in a rational and humane way the problems of self management and of self assessment.

This book is not meant to be read from cover to cover. Try and pick first the chapters that appear more relevant to you. I think you will find at least some ideas or hints that will be useful for living better. Knowing more will certainly help you to live better (in fact I wrote a whole book on that subject: "How to Learn More Things and Live Better". However in order to live better you don't just need to know more. You don't just need to see yourself and your own role in the world more clearly - but that vision helps. There is, of course, no simple solution to all human problems. Acquiring the ability to put together piecemeal solutions from different sources is a great asset. It may be an acceptable substitute for happiness.