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A New Model for Empowered Living



*Courage is not the absence of despair;
it is, rather, the capacity to
move ahead in spite of despair.*

ROLLO MAY

THE DISEMPOWERMENT DILEMMA

Building on Abraham Maslow's model of the hierarchy of needs,¹ I conceive of empowerment in life and work as a four-level continuum. Empowerment begins with the most basic human relationship—your relationship with yourself. If your self-concept and way of viewing yourself is secure and loving, you have the foundation for constructing positive, healthy relationships with others. As this is achieved, you gain strength and support to become effective in the world, using your abilities for your own good and for the good of the world around you. Finally, empowerment builds to the most expansive dimension—your relationship with your higher self. Empowerment at this level allows you to tap into a breadth of abilities, perspective, and knowledge that is otherwise not available.

Beginning with a look at full empowerment, this chapter demystifies the twelve common crises women face today by revealing what is missing or what needs to be revised for empowerment to grow. It identifies the potential root of each crisis and offers specific recommendations for shifts in thinking and behavior that will help you gain strength in the areas where you most need it. By the end of this chapter, you'll know which crisis is most relevant to you at this time. You'll also understand what is necessary to resolve it, in order to claim passion, power, and purpose in your life and work.

Full Empowerment in Life and Work

Full empowerment in life and work means that you can say the following:

- I feel great about myself.
- I relate well, lovingly, and respectfully with others.

- I use my talents and gifts joyfully to make a difference.
- I meet my financial needs successfully.
- I have balance and harmony in my life and work.
- I live and behave authentically, in alignment with who I am inside.
- I am connected to higher-level support, wisdom, and guidance.
- I am powerful, and I can create the life I desire.

If the statements above reflect how you feel about yourself and your life today, congratulations! You are empowered. You can successfully handle all types of challenges that come your way, and you are able to shape your life as you dream it to be. If, however, you are less than fully empowered in one or more of these areas, it simply means that there is room for you to grow. To understand where to begin your empowerment development, let's explore what full empowerment means on each relational level: with self, others, the world, and the higher self.

I. Relationship with Self

At the root level of empowerment in life and work is your relationship with yourself. This involves the way in which you connect with and experience your core being, and the degree to which you honor and esteem your natural self. The more empowered you are at this level, the more unconditional your regard for yourself. You are not constantly seeking outside acceptance, validation, and love from others. When empowered, you love and honor your physical being. You understand that your body facilitates what you are here to achieve. You are conscious of, and view with kindness and acceptance, all key aspects of your nature.

II. Relationship with Others

This level represents how you communicate and interact with others. It involves how you perceive yourself in relation to other people. When empowered at this level, you are an effective communicator and an empathic listener, and you nurture yourself and others. You are as comfortable advocating for yourself as you are for others, and you use your voice in loving but commanding, compelling ways. You understand that we're all interconnected. You value interdependence and acknowledge the dynamics of circularity (I impact you/you impact me). You are drawn to pursuits that both

bolster you and support others. At this level of empowerment, “winning at all costs” and deliberately climbing over others to achieve superiority is not only unappetizing but undesirable.

III. Relationship with the World

This level involves your ability to be an effective, positive instrument in service to the larger world. When you are empowered at this level, you view yourself as important, valuable, and useful to others. You’ve found meaning and purpose in your life. You feel energized by who you are and what you’re doing, and you are excited about living in today’s world, despite the many complex challenges you face.

IV. Relationship with Higher Self

When empowered at this final level, you gain access to the vast wisdom, resources, and knowledge of the collective mind, above and beyond your individual capabilities. You feel deeply connected—to yourself, to others, to your world, and to a higher source of creative power that lives within each of us. You honor the divine that is within you and within everyone else. You accept and embrace others’ differences, and you focus on what is positive, exciting, and enriching in your life, not on what is negative and irritating. You say YES! to all aspects of a joyful, fulfilled life and feel worthy of it. You’re aware of the tremendous creative power you have to make a difference in the world, and you’re excited about stepping into this power. You know that you have support, and that a broader perspective is available whenever you ask for it. You know, too, that whatever occurs in life brings with it a potential for growth and expansion. You embrace challenge and change as a way to grow and be all that you can be.

A representation of the Hierarchy of Empowerment Needs in life and work appears on page 26. This hierarchy is depicted as a pyramid that consists of four levels regarding one’s relationship with self, others, the world, and the higher self.

The lowest level is associated with needs for nurturing the self, including accepting, loving, and honoring yourself, and being able to openly express the basic dimensions of your personality. In the middle levels, needs pertaining to relating effectively with others and applying yourself in positive ways in the world are addressed. The top level pertains to needs associated with expansion, life balance, inspiration, and authentic living. At the top level you experience the deepest connection to your inner self, your



HIERARCHY OF EMPOWERMENT NEEDS

creative power, and higher dimensions of living and being. These top-level needs revolve around forming and maintaining a close relationship with higher-source wisdom, support, and guidance.

Self needs must be met first. Once these are met, we seek to satisfy needs about relating to others and having an impact on the world. The highest needs are about being all you can be in this lifetime, and doing so joyfully, feeling supported and connected to all that is. The higher needs in this hierarchy come into focus only when the lower needs are satisfied. Once an individual has moved up to the next level, needs in the lower level are no longer a priority. If a lower set of needs is no longer being met, you will temporarily reprioritize by focusing attention on the unfulfilled needs, but you will not permanently regress to the lower level. For instance, a high-level professional woman who experiences a serious illness may spend time focused on her physical needs (Self), but she will continue to attend to the needs of her family (Others) and her professional endeavors (World) and will likely return to focusing on her professional activities and goals after the illness has been addressed.

A Guide to Gaining Empowerment

Living in full empowerment is possible, as many can attest. But thousands of us struggle with challenges that keep us from a full and powerful connection with ourselves, our lives, our world, and our higher selves.

It has been said that no problem can be solved at the same level of consciousness that created it. I believe that causes underlie each disempowerment crisis. But only after you step back to gain an expanded perspective of the contributing factors can new possibilities emerge. Doing the inner and outer work to explore and address your challenges brings more positive shifts in your thinking and behavior. In this way, empowerment grows.

Pages 28–35 provide a synthesized guide to the essential steps for overcoming each crisis of disempowerment. These steps involve STEPPING BACK to gain perspective, LETTING GO of actions and beliefs that keep you stuck, and SAYING YES! to yourself and to new self-affirming actions and thoughts. Let go of pessimistic and negative actions and beliefs, which are often remnants from others' experiences. Say yes! to beliefs and behaviors that are positive and proactive, reflective of the human spirit's creative and expansive nature.

EMPOWERMENT GUIDE

I. EMPOWERMENT WITH SELF

EMPOWERMENT CRISIS	STEP BACK TO EXPLORE	LET GO
Resolving Chronic Health Problems	The body is communicating what the lips are not.	LET GO of ignoring or resisting <i>what is</i> .
Overcoming Loss	Grieving lost parts of yourself.	LET GO of overidentifying with one aspect.
Achieving Self-Love	Needing to reclaim your power from a source outside of you.	LET GO of giving up your power to others or things.

SAY YES!	BREAKTHROUGH	BEST ADVICE
<p>SAY YES! to hearing your body, your intuition, and your heart.</p>	<p>"I am healthy and strong."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hear your body. • Heed your intuition. • Follow your heart.
<p>SAY YES! to healing lost parts of yourself.</p>	<p>"I am integrated and whole."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring suppressed parts forward. • Avoid overidentification. • Find a "better way."
<p>SAY YES! to acting in alignment with the <i>real</i> you.</p>	<p>"I love and accept myself."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover where you are being false. • Find the power inside you. • Disentangle from your struggle.

II. EMPOWERMENT WITH OTHERS

EMPOWERMENT CRISIS	STEP BACK TO EXPLORE	LET GO
Speaking Up with Power	Reliving past trauma over speaking up.	LET GO of your pain from past suppression.
Breaking Cycles of Mistreatment	Boundaries in need of strengthening.	LET GO of your belief in your powerlessness.
Shifting from Competition to Collaboration	Feeling the need to prove your worth over and over.	LET GO of feeling “not good enough.”

SAY YES!	BREAKTHROUGH	BEST ADVICE
<p>SAY YES! to your personal power through words and action.</p>	<p>"I use my voice to support myself and others."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say what you want to say. • Use positive language. • Heal past suppression.
<p>SAY YES! to developing healthy boundaries.</p>	<p>"I am treated with love and respect."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop healthy boundaries. • Stop pleasing others to fill your needs. • Get advocacy.
<p>SAY YES! to your innate worthiness and value.</p>	<p>"I am enough."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heal not feeling good enough. • Look at the cost of "winning at all costs." • Get real—you don't want to play this game.

III. EMPOWERMENT WITH THE WORLD

EMPOWERMENT CRISIS	STEP BACK TO EXPLORE	LET GO
<p>Escaping Financial Traps</p>	<p>Valuing money above all else.</p>	<p>LET GO of beliefs, relationships, and actions that keep you small.</p>
<p>Using Real Talents in Life and Work</p>	<p>Denying the power of your unique gifts.</p>	<p>LET GO of your fears of failure and inadequacy.</p>
<p>Helping Others and the World</p>	<p>Resisting the fact that you can make a difference.</p>	<p>LET GO of believing you don't have what it takes.</p>

SAY YES!	BREAKTHROUGH	BEST ADVICE
SAY YES! to a balanced relationship with money.	"I fulfill my financial needs and honor who I am."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance your money relationship. • Know what you long to do and honor it. • Shed what keeps you down.
SAY YES! to believing in your talents without fail.	"I use my real talents in life and work."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your natural talents. • Get solid in your belief in yourself. • Be open to angels in your life.
SAY YES! to changing the world.	"I help others and the world."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop resisting your new path. • Enjoy life's preciousness. • Trust you can help the world.

IV. EMPOWERMENT WITH HIGHER SELF

EMPOWERMENT CRISIS	STEP BACK TO EXPLORE	LET GO
<p>Falling Together After Falling Apart</p>	<p>A connection to struggle and to what no longer serves.</p>	<p>LET GO of making excuses.</p>
<p>Balancing Life and Work</p>	<p>Overfunctioning and perfectionism to control your world.</p>	<p>LET GO of your fears about not being in control.</p>
<p>Doing Work and Play You Love</p>	<p>Believing others who say you should let your dreams go.</p>	<p>LET GO of "shoulding."</p>

SAY YES!	BREAKTHROUGH	BEST ADVICE
SAY YES! to creating your new life as you want it.	"I know what is important to me, and I honor it."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop making excuses. • Get someone to hold you accountable. • Find a powerful role model.
SAY YES! to being helped by others and your higher self.	"I balance my life and work with joy."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop overfunctioning. • Address what you fear most. • Get help from others and your higher self.
SAY YES! to doing what you can't live without.	"My work and play represent the real <i>Me</i> ."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relax, it's not all up to you. • Reconcile making a living doing what you must. • Get higher source help.

Fundamentals of Empowerment Work

To overcome feeling powerless and to ensure that negative situations will not be repeated, you need to gain awareness of where you lack ability to move forward. Taking positive action—unlike any you’ve tried before—will reverse habitual negative patterns and help you trust your own internal strength, value, and capabilities.

As you make progress, new doors will open to you and options will expand. In doing this work, you will notice shifts in your experiences and in what emerges. You will have more hope and understanding, and you will know that what appears in your life can be used as tools for your growth.

Those who have achieved true empowerment in life and work can say, “*What I do for my work and play represents the real me. I value and cherish myself and others, and I have found peace, joy, fulfillment, love, and meaning in my life.*”

A Loving Relationship with Self Is Key

A loving, accepting relationship with yourself is essential to achieve empowerment at other levels. If you are experiencing gaps in your self-acceptance and self-esteem, or if physical ailments or emotional disturbances have not been responsive to healing, these problems need to be addressed first. Once you have developed a kinder, more loving relationship with yourself, moving to the next level of empowerment is possible.

Growth Occurs in a Nonlinear Way

At different times, you may move up or down a level of empowerment, depending upon particular life circumstances. An outside crisis such as serious illness or the death of a loved one may present new challenges that send you back a level to help you deal with unresolved issues.

Expansion and Growth Are Continual

Each level of empowerment represents new challenges and opportunities, but you’re never “done.” Once you reach the level of empowerment with higher self, different challenges will allow you to achieve an even broader perspective. Each crisis points to a need to access your inner power, honor yourself more fully to make use of this power, and focus your power for your good and that of others. Once you’ve unlocked the underlying meaning of each crisis, these situations will cease to rock you to your core—you will have developed the necessary tools to address your challenges more quickly and easily.

Facing Multiple Crises Is Not Unusual

Experiencing different crises at several levels at the same time is not uncommon. When this occurs, focus your efforts on your relationship with yourself, then on your relationship with others. These efforts will give you strength and support to address the farther-reaching challenges.

What's Ahead

In the coming chapters, you will hear compelling and inspiring stories of real women who have navigated through the twelve disempowerment crises and been transformed. Each woman, through her journey, gained much-needed perspective and took new, proactive steps to move successfully through her challenges to a new level of living.

The chapters also provide commentary on what each woman learned and how she achieved the passion, power, and purpose she so longed for. These women share their fabulous advice and explain how reinventing aspects of themselves was not only called for, but a blessing that changed their lives.

MOVING FORWARD TO BREAKTHROUGH

The exercises in the *Moving Forward to Breakthrough* section in this chapter and all subsequent chapters aim to connect you more deeply to yourself, and to help you *Step Back* to explore your situation from a new vantage point. You will also be given exercises to *Let Go* of what isn't working and *Say Yes!* to new positive and powerful thoughts, beliefs, and actions. These will fuel your strength and confidence and help you direct your life in satisfying, enriching ways.

* STEP BACK

Review the Empowerment Guide (pp. 28–35).

- Which crisis resonates most deeply with you now?
- How do you *know* you're not where you want to be in this area?
- What are your thoughts when you read the “Breakthrough” listed for that crisis? Can you say that statement today? Is it something you'd like to be able to say?

* LET GO

Forgiveness is essential to letting go of pent-up resentment, pain, and disappointment. When you release your anger and your feelings of being wronged, you make room for more positive feelings, experiences, and events.

- Who are you harboring a deep resentment against?
- What do you need to do to let go of this burden and forgive this individual, once and for all, and be done with it?
- Can you do this today? If not, when and how? Forgiving is a choice, and this choice is up to you.
- After you forgive this individual, write in your journal about what comes into your life because of the fresh, clean space you created.

* SAY YES!

Review the Empowerment Guide about the possible underlying issues of the crisis (or crises) you selected. In your journal, record your thoughts on the following questions.

- How does this underlying issue apply to you?
- How does the *Let Go* and *Say Yes!* information relate to you and your life at this time?
- With regard to this empowerment challenge you face today, what do you think *specifically* needs to be modified in your life for you to be happier and more satisfied?
- Brainstorm new ways that you might gain additional support in exploring where your life is not working as well you wish.