



BOOK EXTRACT

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Chapter 6 Improve Your Morale

Some people wonder what are the skills of having good morale. I do not aim to give this question exhaustive coverage here, but I would like to show how, by attempting to think in more logical ways, you could achieve much better morale.

How important is good morale for being a good friend? Well, imagine that you are a school student and you and your best friend have auditioned for the leading role in a drama production. Sadly, you did not get the part but your friend did. Yes, your morale might suffer because of this. And yes, you might be envious or annoyed at your best friend.

According to cognitive therapists, the reason people can experience morale problems in such situations is because they see things in black and white and don't manage to consider alternative ways of looking at the situation. In particular, they tend to think either 'I'm on top' or 'I'm a flop'.

REBT brings two further theoretical considerations to help explain morale problems. People have a tendency to deal in 'awful' i.e. their thinking and feeling slip into 'This is awful' mode or 'Life is awful' or 'I am awful' - 1=0 as a result of this.

So one very important logical idea that a person should hold on to in a morale-sapping situation like the drama production catastrophe outlined above, is, 'When I am not on top I am not a flop'. An alternative way of looking at the crisis is to say to oneself, 'Never mind if I only get a small part. I could still be the best small-part person in town!' There are professional actors out there who make a mint out of being small-part actors.

Finally, think how good it is for your character to change the 'life is awful' verdict that we humans often suffer from. In this case the 'life is awful' verdict is a kind of demand that things be especially fair for you. REBT teaches us that there are no laws of the universe promising that life will be good and fair to us. The universe is a cold bleak kind of place. It doesn't care about you or me! So it would be better for you to adopt a stoical philosophy, which can help you to live with things if they can't be changed.

A very good way of helping oneself to escape from the demanding mood is to try actively to feel pleased for other people when they succeed and always be keen to play any support role that helps to further the group success or community success. This attitude really helps you to enjoy being a small-part player. It also justifies the idea that being a small-part player is good for you. It goes hand in hand with the value of wanting to contribute to the success of your group and community.

This attitude also helps you to cultivate other qualities that are considered valuable in friendship, such as being non-possessive, non-demanding and non-egotistical, being sincere and genuine. Now I wonder if you know exactly what these terms mean? The last part of Chapter 7 on being a good friend will help you to explore these terms.

Let us turn our attention to a final way in which a fall in morale can be seen to interfere with your friendship skills. Once again, we will see that a more logical way of looking at the problem helps to overcome the difficulty.

Imagine that in some way your friend has embarrassed you. Perhaps he/she has said something about you or has said something really silly that reflected on you. Of course to help yourself with the anger you feel you will need to remember the logical idea I outlined earlier about there being no laws of the universe to guarantee you an easy life. But the new problem that is central to this is embarrassment.

Embarrassment is, of course, a huge cause of human misery and deserves our full attention. When young men sit silently alongside desirable members of the opposite sex or when they chat away in a nervous and not very interesting way, it is because they fear embarrassment. After attempting to invite out 'a pretty young thing', a young man's morale may collapse because she has turned him down. Again, he feels that the whole affair has ended in public embarrassment and humiliation.

A key logical idea to remember about embarrassment is as follows: 'Anything embarrassing that happens to you is only a ten-day wonder. Yes, this means it will be forgotten about by all and sundry in just ten days! That's right, exactly ten days - no more, no less; according to the old saying!'

If a logical idea like that helps you to be a 'shame attacker', i.e. a person who forcefully and vigorously tries to refuse to be embarrassed when struck by the blows of life, then you will find that you are practising utilising skills that will enable you to be more relaxed when with friends, more fun to be with and more open to trying out new and interesting activities in your life.

Lastly, your increased awareness about how all of us can suffer from blows to morale and embarrassment can make you a more considerate, respecting kind of person.

Once again, we can see that the writers of the rational emotive and cognitive theories did have an interesting angle on life. If we can work on the thoughts that underlie our feelings and make ourselves more logical, we can cope better with life and do better. These two therapies do combine well to help us to work on depressed tendencies. In chapters 8-10 I will examine how rational emotive therapies help people to work on the global, definitive, self-labels that undermine confidence and therefore contribute to discouragement.