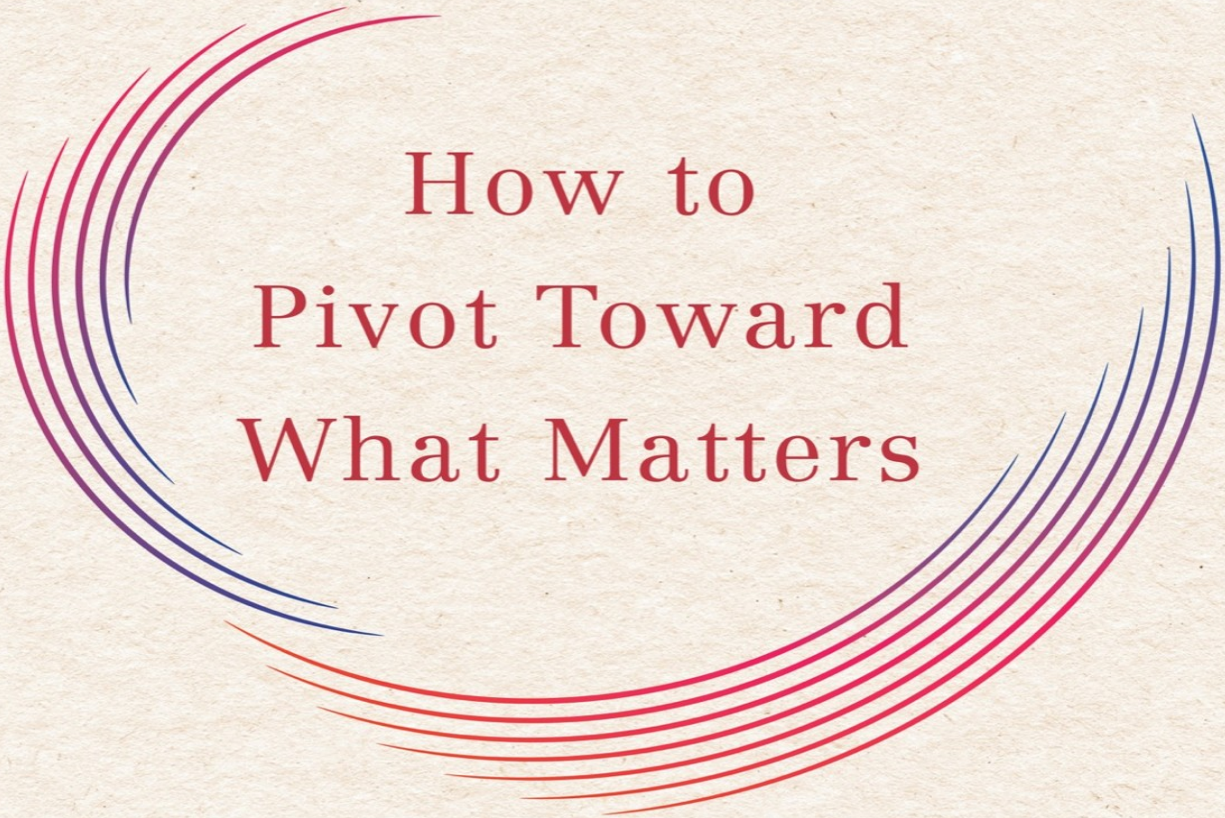


A Liberated Mind



How to
Pivot Toward
What Matters

Steven C. Hayes, PhD

Originator of
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

PRAISE FOR *A LIBERATED MIND*

“In all my years studying personal growth, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is one of the most useful tools I’ve ever come across, and in this book, Dr. Hayes describes it with more depth and clarity than ever before.”

—**Mark Manson, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck***

“In our crisis-ridden society psychological flexibility is more needed than ever. Transcending shallow and ineffective behavioral approaches, Dr. Steven Hayes here presents a methodology, a skill-set, for emotional liberation that enables us to pivot from self-limitation to self-awareness and self-affirmative action.”

—**Gabor Maté, MD, author of *When the Body Says No: Exploring the Stress-Disease Connection***

“We can spend our lives avoiding the thoughts and feelings that cause us pain. But Steve Hayes has become a leader in his field by understanding that things that cause us pain are things about which we care. By learning to use psychological flexibility we can turn toward the difficult places to live with richness and meaning. Compassionate, helpful, and authoritative, *A Liberated Mind* shows us a powerful way to a fulfilling life.”

—**Susan David, PhD, author of *Emotional Agility***

“The key to evolving consciousness is cultivating a flexible mind—open, present, empowered and aligned with deep values—and Steven Hayes does a brilliant job showing us how. This book is organized around developing six psychological skills that clinical research shows, beyond all other factors, promote flexibility and translate into a happier and healthier life. As you read this illuminating book, you’ll see how these skills are learnable, that you can start right now, and how when woven together, they offer a path to inner freedom.”

—**Tara Brach, PhD, author of *Radical Acceptance* and *True Refuge***

“A Liberated Mind provides an outstanding introduction to a psychological approach that has changed many lives by turning us toward focusing on our values. The ideas and advice presented here help us truly understand what matters so that we can live with greater freedom, courage, and joy.”

—Kelly McGonigal, PhD, author of *The Willpower Instinct* and *The Upside of Stress*

*“Steven Hayes possesses an extraordinary trifecta of skills: A brilliant theoretical and research psychologist, he’s also a compassionate clinician and a wonderfully engaging writer. *A Liberated Mind* is packed with jewels of insight and information that could change the way we deal with suffering as individuals and as a society. A compelling, revelatory read.”*

—Martha Beck, PhD, author of *Finding Your Own North Star*

*“Dr. Steven C. Hayes is one of the greatest thinkers, psychological theorists, and clinicians alive. He has contributed an enormous amount to the field of psychology and is well-known for being the creator of ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy), a treatment that has now become the first-line approach for many psychological problems. The book, *A Liberated Mind: How to Pivot Toward What Matters*, tells a very personal story about the origin and development of this treatment. Written for a very broad audience, Dr. Hayes is able to clearly translate the science and clinical complexity of this treatment into concrete guiding principles for people’s lives. These principles not only apply to psychological suffering, but also to physical illnesses, relationships, corporations, societies, and cultures. The book is honest, compassionate, and profoundly insightful. It will transform your life by liberating your mind.”*

—Stefan G. Hofmann, PhD, professor of psychology at Boston University

*“In this highly accessible book, Steven Hayes identifies pathways to connecting with our deepest values and pursuing what really matters. Filled with compassion, wisdom, and down-to-earth methods for change, *A Liberated Mind* is a refreshing ‘how to’ manual for overcoming the obstacles, judgments, habits, and prejudices that so often stand in the way of a life worth living.”*

**—Richard M. Ryan, professor at the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education,
Australian Catholic University, and co-developer of Self-Determination Theory**

“Many of our inborn behavioral tendencies were wonderfully well adapted to the world they evolved in fifty thousand years ago. But disaster ensues when our primitive and automatic impulses inflexibly control us, rather than us flexibly controlling them. Hayes combines a scientist’s precision with a poet’s sensitivity in freeing us to be more loving and fully human. This is a great self-help book for people who would never dream of reading a self-help book.”

**—Allen Frances, professor emeritus and former chair at the Duke Department of
Psychiatry, chair of the DSM-IV Task Force, and author of *Saving Normal***

“Steve Hayes is a brilliant thinker and doer, and nowhere is this more evident than in this book. It weaves together research and a lifetime of practical experience into an accessible, personal, and positive guide to thinking about our lives in a fundamentally more helpful way.”

**—Kelly D. Brownell, PhD, director of World Food Policy Center and Robert L. Flowers
Professor of Public Policy at Duke University**

“Steven C. Hayes is today’s B. F. Skinner—a great intellect, equally passionate about basic knowledge and practical applications. In *A Liberated Mind*, you can get to know him as a person and apply his wisdom to your own life.”

**—David Sloan Wilson, president at The Evolution Institute and author of *This View of
Life: Completing the Darwinian Revolution***

“Based on a broad and deep knowledge of cutting-edge psychological science and a wide-ranging appreciation of philosophical and religious wisdoms, one of the leading psychologists in the world, Steven C. Hayes, provides an antidote to the conundrum of human struggle and despair. Everyone experiencing anxiety, depression, or pain in their life and striving for emotional well-being should be aware of the surprising revelations in this well-written and easy-to-read book.”

—David H. Barlow, professor of psychology and psychiatry emeritus, founder and director emeritus at the Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders, Boston University

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LIBERATED
MIND

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*How to Pivot Toward
What Matters*

STEVEN C. HAYES, PHD

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Version_2

**This book is dedicated to the memory of John Cloud:
reporter, rascal, raconteur, friend. You believed in me and
in this book, which has lifted me up every single day I've
worked on it. The world asks reporters to do such hard
things, without understanding the cost. Be at peace, my
friend. Be at peace.**

CONTENTS

[Praise for *A Liberated Mind*](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[*Part One*](#)

[CHAPTER ONE: The Need to Pivot](#)

[CHAPTER TWO: The Dictator Within](#)

[CHAPTER THREE: Finding a Way Forward](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR: Why Our Thoughts Are So Automatic and Convincing](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE: The Problem with Problem Solving](#)

CHAPTER SIX: Turning Toward the Dinosaur

CHAPTER SEVEN: Committing to a New Course

CHAPTER EIGHT: We All Have the Ability to Pivot

Part Two

INTRODUCTION: STARTING YOUR ACT JOURNEY

CHAPTER NINE: The First Pivot

Defusion—Putting the Mind on a Leash

CHAPTER TEN: The Second Pivot

Self—The Art of Perspective-Taking

CHAPTER ELEVEN: The Third Pivot

Acceptance—Learning from Pain

CHAPTER TWELVE: The Fourth Pivot

Presence—Living in the Now

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: The Fifth Pivot

Values—Caring by Choice

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: The Sixth Pivot

Action—Committing to Change

Part Three

INTRODUCTION: USING YOUR ACT TOOLKIT TO EVOLVE YOUR LIFE

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Adopting Healthy Behaviors

Dieting and Exercise

Coping with Stress

Sleep

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: Mental Health

Depression

Anxiety

Substance Abuse

Eating Disorders

Psychosis

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: Nurturing Relationships

Helping Others Nurture Flexibility

Parenting

Relationships with Romantic Partners

Combating Abuse

Overcoming Prejudice

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: Bringing Flexibility to Performance

Tackling Procrastination

Learning and Creativity

Dealing with Constraints at Work

Sports Performance

CHAPTER NINETEEN: Cultivating Spiritual Well-Being

[*Practicing Perspective-Taking*](#)

[*Cultivating Forgiveness*](#)

[*ACT and Religion*](#)

[**CHAPTER TWENTY: Coping with Illness and Disability**](#)

[*Chronic Pain*](#)

[*Diabetes*](#)

[*Cancer*](#)

[*Tinnitus*](#)

[*Terminal Illness*](#)

[**CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: Social Transformation**](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Notes](#)

[Index](#)

[About the Author](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began to think about this book shortly after my first self-help book, *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*, became popular in 2006. I drafted a crude proposal but it was odd and it languished. I'm a geek by training and personality, and even among psychologists it is a bit of a joke that I can be incomprehensible. It was not until Linda Loewenthal reached out a few years later and became my agent that the project began to move. Linda brought that needed mixture of support, pushing, wisdom, skill, patience, and caring that by 2011 had turned the project into something real. Her trust in me, and her unwaveringly honest feedback over the years, lifted me up and pushed me forward.

The late John Cloud, the *Time* magazine reporter who plucked me out of obscurity in 2006 when he wrote the story that launched the success of *Get Out of Your Mind*, helped produce the first well-crafted proposal and sample chapter drafts. I have dedicated this book to him because in an alternate universe, he and I would have written the entire volume together as I had originally hoped. He was a brilliant writer and a deep soul, and I so hope the spirit of John is reflected in this book.

Spencer Smith, a professional writer and co-author of *Get Out of Your Mind*, also helped with the proposal. Spencer is what my Jewish relatives would call a mensch—he is an honorable, kind, reliable, ethical straight shooter. I am blessed to call him a friend and colleague.

Emily Loose was my development editor for this book. Amazingly able, wise, and persistent, she deliberately allowed the ideas in the book to enter into her life so she could bring her gut feel to the development process. I was honored, moved, and impressed by that approach—she is simply the best.

Caroline Sutton at Penguin/Avery gave very helpful input on the text at critical points of the development processes.

All of my adult children (Camille, Charlie, and Esther) were sounding boards and gave specific input, from Esther's drawings to Camille's title ideas.

My wife, Jacque, stood by me for the many years and endless rewrites it took to get these words produced. Trips, interviews, writing binges, research—all shifted obligations onto her shoulders. I can't ever repay that debt, but it brings tears to my eyes to acknowledge and remember it. Jacque also provided key input regarding the new ideas in this book as they were vetted one at a time in long discussions that delayed our sleep. She especially pushed me to look more closely at social context and privilege issues, which are critical to the arc of this work. Thank you, my love.

My doctoral graduate students of the last few years helped with discussions of nuances of ACT theory, including Brandon Sanford, Fred Chin, Cory Stanton, and Patrick Smith. Almost all of the forty-eight doctoral students of mine who already have their PhDs are in the backstory of specific parts of this book. I mentioned just a few of them in the text and endnotes but they are there anyway, in ways that only they and I will know specifically but that the reader will benefit from. Thank you, gang. (No, this does not mean you can tell people the secret behavioral handshake.)

I was helped in considering various titling options by Greg Stikeleather and Till Gross. Hank Robb and Inge Skeans kindly helped with proofing and calling out confusing sentences.

The section on lying in Chapter Four was originally written for a book that Guy Ritchie and I were considering writing, to go along with a film he was working on regarding the impact of the ego. The book project did not move forward (I hope someday the film will appear—it is a powerful piece), but it was Guy who first made me aware of the deep connection between the conceptualized self and lying, and the clarity of his vision made a lasting impact. I would like to thank him for his insights.

I would also like to acknowledge the clients who have changed ACT work with their very lives. Some of their stories are in this book, anonymized, but others are here indirectly because of the ways their pain and courage informed the work. For example, a substantial portion of the metaphors used to explain ACT came from clients, not me or any other professional. We will all be forgotten, but maybe, just maybe, your courage has put things into the culture that will reverberate for a long time. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.

I want to give a deep bow of appreciation to the entire contextual behavioral science community. It is an amazing group of clinicians, teachers, basic researchers, philosophers, applied researchers, policy experts, evolutionists, behaviorists, cognitivists, prevention scientists, nurses, physicians, coaches, psychologists, and social workers (I could go on like that for a while) spread across the globe. I've told some of their individual stories in this book, but the reader should know that behind every name in every endnote relevant to ACT, RFT, and CBS is a committed human being. I know many of them, perhaps the majority of them, and they deeply care about working together to create a psychology more worthy of the challenge of the human condition. I have tried to give their ideas and aspirations voice in this book. I may have instigated this work, but I am only a co-founder or co-developer because by the time it came together in book form in 1999, it needed the able hands of Kirk Strosahl and Kelly Wilson, and to be refined for research and practice it needed hundreds of caring professionals and researchers. That continues to be even truer as it has entered the world community. We are all better human beings when we are groups, and my colleagues have lifted me up with their values, vision, and friendship every step of this journey.

As I will repeat in the very end of this book, life is a choice between love and fear. Those human beings who have loved me—friends, family, and colleagues—have helped me choose love. There is no better gift. Thank you.

Steven C. Hayes, Reno, Nevada

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is fairly heavily referenced, but in order not to distract the reader almost all of the documentation is in the endnotes. If you see me writing about a study, stating facts, or suggesting that books are available and so on, and you want to follow up, check in the back. The endnotes are “blind,” meaning there is no indication in the text that I’ve provided references, comments, or resources, but I’ve tried to do so whenever I detected a possible need, so look there first whenever you need further information. In order not to slow down the volume by mentioning names of people the normal reader will not have a reason to learn, I sometimes cite and credit people in the endnotes rather than the text, even using words like “my colleagues” or “my team” to speak of people in my lab tradition or the contextual behavioral science community writ large. To normal academic readers that will at times seem self-focused, but it is in the service of the reader and seems to be necessary in books of this kind. All I can do is to beg for tolerance of that decision and ask people to look in the endnotes.

I also mention my website with some regularity (<http://www.stevenchayes.com>) for tests you can take or lists of resources you can access and the like, but that too can get tiresome, so in the final edit I cut that down a fair amount. In some of those cases I wrote an endnote instead.

There is also a lot of useful information about this work on the website for the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science (ACBS), which is the group most focused on the development of the work I write about in this book: <http://www.contextualscience.org>. Some of the information on that

site requires that you log in as a member in order to see it, but public members are welcome and it is inexpensive.

Finally, vast resources are also available for free online, such as an ACT YouTube channel, ACT-based TED talks (you can see my two TEDx talks at <http://bit.ly/StevesFirstTED> and <http://bit.ly/StevesSecondTED>), Facebook groups, an ACT discussion list for the public (in Yahoo Groups—https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ACT_for_the_Public/info), and so on—a careful online search will turn up such things.

Part One