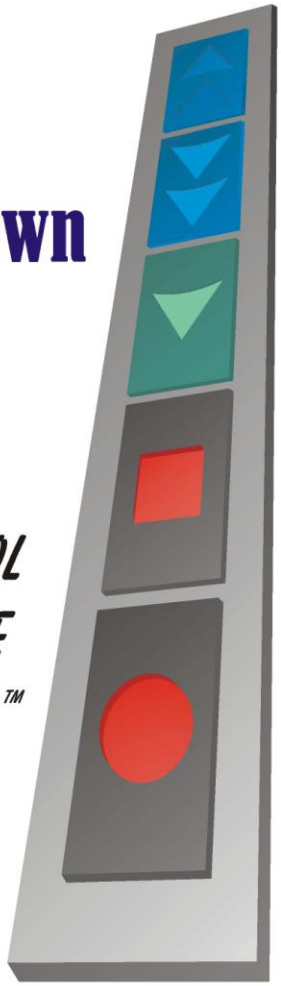
Pressing Your Own Buttons:

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE SO OTHERS DON'T!™



Gary Screaton Page, Ph.D.

Manual Lesson 1

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The author has changed the names and identifying characteristics of people alluded to in this book and he does not intended to refer to specific persons. All situations are simulations of those encountered in practice and the names do not refer to actual persons involved but are composites of people with whom the author may have worked. Any resemblance, then, to an identifiable person is coincidental and unintended.

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Dedication

No book or course is the result of the effort of just one person. Others are always involved. At the top of the list of those who made this book possible is Dr. Clifford Christensen. "Cliff," as most of his students knew him, was Department Chair when I had the good fortune to have him for my Psychology Professor at the Ontario Institute of Education (O.I.S.E.) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He was a caring, insightful, encouraging, and good-natured taskmaster who challenged me to think creatively. When he agreed to be my Thesis Advisor, I could not have been more fortunate. He helped me focus and to believe the work was worth the effort. This course is the direct result of the research of Dr. Christensen and the contributions of those who worked with him[1] as he developed the model presented here.

In a very real way, Cliff Christensen and his team are the lead authors of this course and I its co-author. I will always be grateful to Cliff for giving me permission to take his research and publications and to develop them into the present work and the companion Programed Workbook. Together with the audio/video material, they form a self-instructional system to help every reader become a more effective person. I have built this course and all its component parts upon ***Development and Field-testing of an Interpersonal Coping Skills Program***. In 1974, Dr. Christensen, and others[2] in the Department of Applied Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, published the original work. The foundation of this book is the work done through Research and Development Project Number 812.

Due to Dr. Christensen's encouragement and direction while I was his student, I was able to complete the two volumes that make up the ***Pressing Your Own Buttons: Take Control of Your Life So Others Don't!™*** counseling system. In his honor, a portion of all proceeds from the sale of each of the volumes and related resources will go to a scholarship named in his honor. The scholarship will go to a Psychology Student in the O.I.S.E. Graduate School at the University of Toronto.

Cliff, I thank you for being you and for teaching me that I *can* press my own buttons!

Gary Screaton Page, Ph.D.

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[1]B. Bloch (Research Officer), and I. Briedis, R. Elsie, J. Heath, H. Shannon (Graduate Assistants).
[2] See footnote 1.

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LESSON 1

The Beginning of Wisdom

In Lesson 1 You Will Learn

1. To use linear-programmed learning.
2. The 3 ways people affect us.
3. Our 3 three responses to troublesome people.
4. The 5 most common troublesome behavior of others.
5. The meanings of "social stimulus" and "social stimuli" and why it's important to know.
6. To give examples of social stimuli.

Welcome to ***Pressing Your Own Buttons***™. By undertaking to complete this self-teaching program, you have already shown your desire to grow in your understanding of yourself and others, and in your effectiveness as a responsible, independent person. I believe you will find this course not only interesting, but also informative. What is more important, you'll find it helpful and practical.

At this point, you may be asking, "What have I gotten myself into?" Let me begin by saying, right up front, that some of what I will tell you may not be clear to you at first. Don't be too concerned about that right now. I'll explain things as we go along. I know it's important for you to understand what you're doing.

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There is nothing mysterious about ***Pressing Your Own Buttons*™.** Without question, you are quite capable of understanding the process. In fact, I expect that by the end of the program you'll know just as much as I do. You'll readily be able to use the ideas yourself. What is more, it's quite possible you will use what you learn to help others who are up tight or troubled in some way. Of course, you will not become a qualified counselor just because you have mastered this system. My attorney insists I make that quite clear. You would need years of training to become a therapist of any kind.

Central to everything in this system you are about to learn, is the fact that other people's behavior affects us. For example, if someone shouts angry words at us we might choose to shout back. Alternatively, we might choose to walk away. If they greet us cheerfully, we might feel happy and smile back.

Demonstration

John, a participant in one of our ***Pressing Your Own Buttons Boot Camps*™**, said he was unable to tolerate his girlfriend being sad or crying. Here's what happened during that session. See how the leader—for fun I've called him Sigmund, after Sigmund Freud—handled John's situation.

"Let's consider John's example," he began. "John said that he became very uncomfortable when his girlfriend cried … or even if it just looked like she might cry. John, do you mind telling us what you did when your girlfriend cried? Think back to the last time that she cried. Try to get

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an image or picture of her crying. Tell us what led up to it. Tell us exactly what you said and did."

Hesitating at first, perhaps collecting his thoughts, John spoke softly, "Last time she cried because I said that I was going camping with the guys. I remember I tried not to look at her. Actually, I would have preferred to tell her on the telephone because I knew what would happen. Well, she cried and I tried to make up by promising to take her out every night the next week. We wound up having a terrible evening."

Sigmund reflected on what John had said, then proceeded with his interview, "John, if I understand you correctly, you said that when your girlfriend cries, you either try to get away from her crying … or, at least you try not to see it. Is that right?"

John nodded, "Uhuh."

"You also said you try to cheer her up by saying nice things to her. Is that right?"

"Yes!" John spoke emphatically, leaning forward in his seat. "I hate it when she cries."

Did you see how his girlfriend's crying controls John and restricts his behavior? Did you notice that every time his girlfriend cries John believes he has to do something about it or change it? Either he feels he has to make an effort to try to get away from her crying, or he feels compelled to change it.

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Unfortunately, while John is trying to stop his girlfriend's crying, or trying to get away from it, he can't do other things. However, that's not the only problem. I'll bet John is careful not to do anything that might make his girlfriend cry in the first place.

Another way of looking at this situation is that his girlfriend can control John. She knows how to press his "hot buttons." By crying, or indicating that she might cry, John's girlfriend can stop him from doing certain things. This reaction has quite an effect on John's behavior. In this regard, John is not unusual. In fact, he is quite typical. Everything others say, do, or even how they look, affects almost all of us in some way.

Crying, however, doesn't control everyone. Other things that people say, do, or even how they look, may affect us. While there may be an unlimited number of ways people can act,

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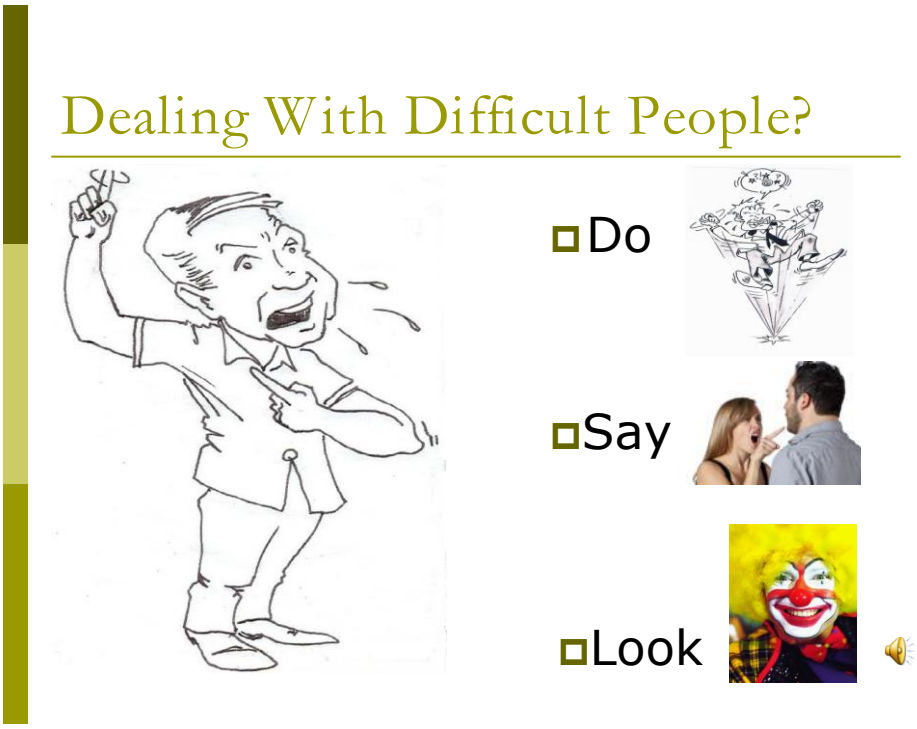
research shows that in reality only a small number of actions in others over control or restricts us: sadness, criticism, anger, affection, ignoring, and commanding (being told what to do).

At this point, let me digress for a moment, "The beginning of wisdom," said Chinese philosopher Confucius over 2500 years ago "is to call things by their correct names." Learning to use the language of ***Pressing Your Own Buttons*™** is one of the first important steps on your road to personal freedom. By the end of the course, you—not others—will be in control of your life.

Since using the correct language is so important, from now on I'll call what others say, do, or how they look, "social stimuli."[3]



[3]I suggest that we could call social stimuli "button pressers." Each troublesome social stimulus acts as a button presser that causes us to compulsively tense in the presence of, try to avoid, or try to change, that stimulus. It's as though the source person had pressed a button to make us react.

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That other people's behavior, their social stimuli, affects us may come as no surprise to you. We have all experienced this. However, as with John, some things people say, do, or even how they look can impact us too much. They can affect us so much that we no longer act freely in their presence. I think you'll agree that when his girlfriend started to cry, or even looked like she might cry, John didn't feel free to do what he wanted to do.

Take a minute or two now to think of some social stimulus you can't stand. For example, when I began teaching, I used to find a student's ignoring me quite frustrating. You may find another stimulus affects you. You might want to jot some of these down now to refer to later.

Did you make your list? Good. Now, let's go back to John's situation. It's reasonable to guess that John would be freer to respond more rationally if he got used to his girlfriend's crying and he could think of more and better ways to deal with her tears. Wouldn't you agree?

In fact, all of us becoming freer with our behavior is a very worthwhile goal. That is one of the benefits of ***Pressing Your Own Buttons*™**; you'll have more freedom in your own behavior.

At this point, let me assure you that in mastering the strategies in ***Pressing Your Own Buttons*™**, there is no danger that you'll become a cold, mean, nasty, or otherwise horrid individual. Just the opposite will happen. By the time you've completed this course, I am confident you will have become a kinder, more compassionate person.

The Goal

One of the main goals of this learning system, is to help you identify other people's behavior—their social stimuli—which interfere with you acting freely and effectively around them. In short, you'll learn to manage you before others do.

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We'll begin by helping you change your feelings about other people's reactions or social stimuli. I'll help you change your evaluations of those reactions, and teach you how to reinterpret those social stimuli. When you change your feelings about reactions such as crying, anger, ignoring, commanding, criticizing or being affectionate, you will be freer to act and more able to deal with others.

This course shows you techniques for reinterpreting, and getting used to, social stimuli that bother you now. I'll explain the various strategies and techniques as we go along.

Before going on to Lesson Two, take a few minutes to write down any questions you have about what I have said so far. Jot down any concerns you may have as well. Doing so will help you focus on different parts of the process that you'll learn as we go along. I assure you, as we work together through ***Pressing Your Own Buttons*™** I will address all your questions and concerns. For now, before we go on to Lesson Two, take time to jot them down now while they are still fresh in your mind. As we go along I will answer them. That way you'll get the maximum benefit from the course.

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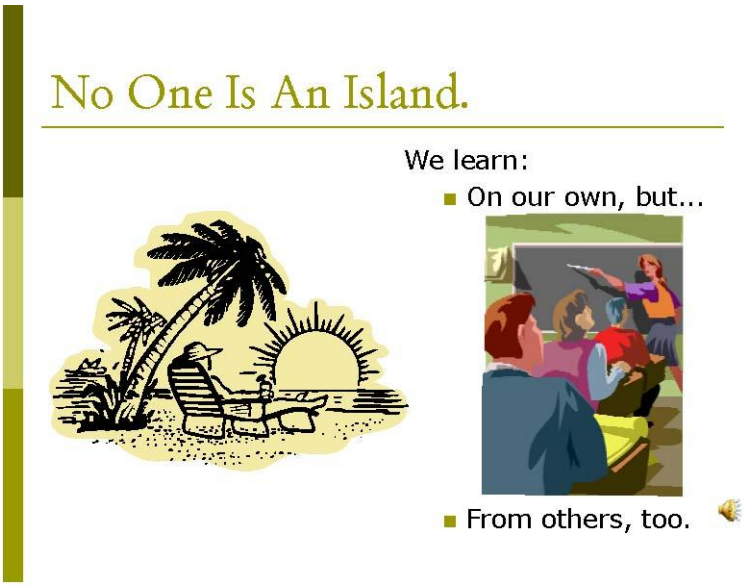
Okay, we have come to the end of Lesson One? Did you view the video and read the Programed Workbook? Yes? Excellent. If not, then take the time now to consolidate your learning. Complete the Programmed Learning for this lesson before doing the Quiz.

Preface to Linear-Programed-Learning Material

I have designed the Programed learning material to be a companion to this Manual: to reinforce your learning of the core lesson material in ***Pressing Your Own Buttons: Take Control of Your Life So Others Don't!™.*** Research is very clear! Programed learning is both a powerful and an efficient way to get a firm understanding of new ideas. By reading and responding to the various learning frames that follow, you will more quickly and easily learn the concepts and terms so important to your taking control of your life. In responding you can either choose to write your answers in a notebook or on other paper, or download the FREE Programed-Learning Workbook and complete your answer there. The choice is yours.

Lesson Review



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No one is an island. You and I, indeed all humans, need to interact with other people. Who and what we are at any given point in our lives, is a result of what we learn, directly or indirectly, from other people. That is because our brains are like digital recorders. Every one of our life experiences passes through our brains. Some of those experiences stay in our short-term memories for, well, a short time. Others, our brains record and they stay there for our lifetimes. Some of those experiences are positive and helpful; they can even be life saving. Other experiences are negative. Over time, they may prove to be unhelpful, even damaging.

The significant people in our lives affect us considerably, often for good, but not always. By what they say, do, and by how they look, they make impressions on the digital recorders that are our brains. It's as if the behavior of others presses our "Record"

buttons and what they say, do, and how they look gets stored in our heads. Later, when similar people remind us of what we heard and saw our significant others do, say, or even look like, they press our "Play" buttons and we play back those recordings. If the experiences recorded earlier are positive, we will usually continue to "play" the recording.

At other times, however, the recordings that we made were negative. The people that remind us of them seem to press our "Stop" buttons. They make us hesitant and cautious and may even make us so *tense* we seem unable to function at all in their presence. There are also times when the behavior of other people presses our "Rewind" or "Fast Forward" buttons. Then, we may want to *avoid* them altogether, and record over the memories and feelings these people generate in us.

In each of these situations, we are reacting impulsively, and automatically, even irrationally to the messages already recorded in our brains. We are responding to those things

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that our significant others—parents, friends, bosses, teachers, siblings, among others—did or said, or to how they looked that at some time earlier affected us so powerfully and "recorded" itself on our brains. We may not now even be conscious of it.

Sound familiar? Of course it does. Like the rest of us, you have had experiences like that. Think how much better you would feel if you could take control and make a reasoned and rational response. Then you—not they—would be pressing your buttons: the buttons you choose.

You could rationally choose to rewind the old recording, press your "Record" button, and lay down a whole new track by recording new thoughts over the old memories. You would then be able to "T**ake control of your life so others don't!"™**

You see, whenever we impulsively and irrationally *tense* in the presence of, *avoid*, or try to *change* the troubling behavior of others—specifically those whose behavior can be very troubling at times—we put them in control. In effect, we give them permission to press our buttons! We let them control us. We allow them to press our "hot buttons."[4] As long as the speech, actions, and/or appearance of others control our behavior, we are no longer free to be the people we could be.

The more familiar you are with the ***Pressing Your Own Buttons*** system, the more proficient you will become. Before long, I believe you will understand the program as well as I.

Although the later lessons build on the concepts and skills taught in earlier ones, some material does overlap and is repeated from one lesson to another. This repetition is intentional and will help fix the concepts in your mind as you master them.

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[4] The things that people say, do, or how they look that compel us to want to avoid or change them, or which cause us to tense in their presence.

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From time to time, as you read the material in the various lessons, I will ask you to complete some brief activities. These are very important! They reinforce the concepts you will be learning and give you some direct experience with the important ideas trained in the ***Pressing Your Own Buttons***™ learning system. These ideas and concepts will enable you to act more freely at home or at work, in fact anywhere you might find yourself in the company of others.

Think of these activities as miniature experiments in which you can try out the techniques you'll be learning. Doing these activities, as and when you are asked to do so, will help you discover for yourself many effective and ineffective ways of behaving. Each exercise is the result of much careful research and is an integral part of ***Pressing Your Own Buttons***™. That you have a clear and detailed understanding of what you are to do before you do any of the exercises is essential. Therefore, read the instructions carefully. They will explain the activities to you. Then, and only then, carry out the assignments. Be sure to do each of them in turn. They'll help to insure your success.

Good job! Stop here.

When you have also read the ***PROGRAMED WORKBOOK***, viewed the **VIDEO**, and completed the **QUIZ** for this lesson, please, go on to **LESSON 2**.

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