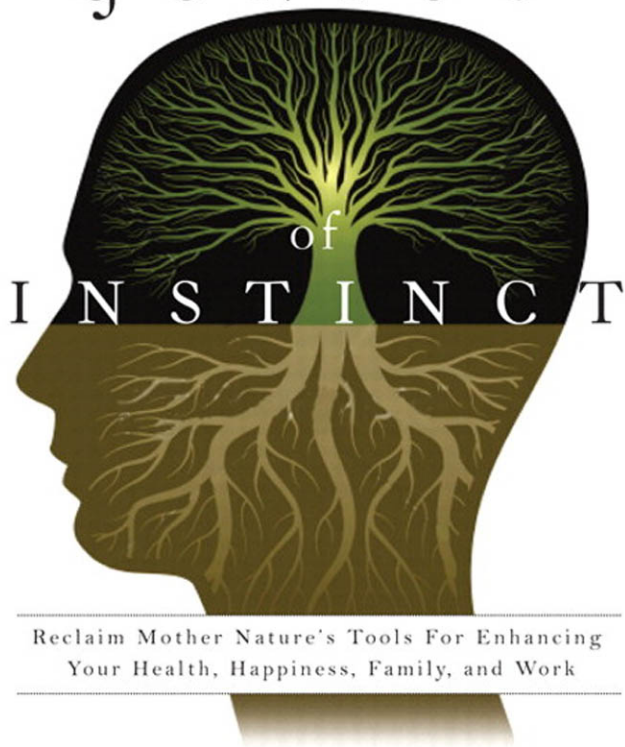


The  
G E N I U S



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Reclaim Mother Nature's Tools For Enhancing  
Your Health, Happiness, Family, and Work

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DR. HENDRIE WEISINGER

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# Introduction

## Back to Basics

I bet you've heard and maybe even believe the familiar saying that animals are "ruled by instinct" and man is "ruled by reason," and that is why we are more "evolved" than other animals. Well, forget it!

I've discovered exactly the *opposite* to be true, and this discovery and accompanying revelations are the basis for the three powerful themes presented in this book. They are powerful because each one significantly impacts the daily quality of your life.

The first theme is that human behavior is more flexibly intelligent than that of other animals because *we have—not fewer—but more instinctual tools*. The message for you here is that *you already have* what it takes to enhance all aspects of your life. In fact, you are hard-wired to be successful!

The second theme is that man has "lost contact" with his instincts, and as a result, more often than not, we act *counterinstinctually*. People get themselves in trouble when they are *instinctually disconnected*. I'm sure you've said many times, "I should have listened to my instincts."

The third and most powerful theme is that you can enhance all aspects of your life—your marriage, family, parenting, work, and business—by *reconnecting with your instincts and strategically using the instinctual tools* that Mother Nature evolved in you.

Indeed, when you reflect on the content to be presented and apply it to your observations of the world, you will see that the most broadly successful individuals and organizations are those that utilize the genius of their instincts.

Each of these themes is progressively developed and illustrated. A brief introduction to each theme gets you started in taking advantage of the genius of *your* instincts.

## You're Hardwired for Success

*You're hardwired for success*—that's a bold statement but one that is amply supported by the sciences, specifically evolutionary psychology, which is rapidly becoming the most important of the human sciences and is the theoretical foundation for this book.

Let me be clear that this is *not* a book about evolutionary psychology—many of those books have been written. Rather, it is about how you can use evolutionary concepts to enhance all realms of your life. Indeed, in my quest to study, observe, understand, explain, and predict human behavior, I've found numerous concepts and findings to draw on in evolutionary psychology that present a provocative and new scientific perspective for understanding human behavior, one that contradicts many of the traditional schools of psychological thought.

What makes evolutionary psychology—nicknamed *the new science of the mind*—so revolutionary is that it applies the process of *natural selection* to the development of the brain/mind/intelligence.

Natural selection is simple but decisive. Creatures within a species that possess an advantageous trait that helps them survive live to reproduce, and this trait gets passed down. Over successive generations, species' abilities specialize to succeed in their specific habitat. For example, nocturnal hunters possess acute hearing and specialized night vision. Predators develop speed, power, and weaponry: sharp teeth, beaks, and claws. Some creatures become highly refined specialists adapted to a localized niche, such as the giant panda, which can survive only in bamboo groves. Others become generalists, such as scavenging rodents that can prosper under many conditions.

Instead of viewing the mind as a blank slate at birth that is developed by a bombardment of information, or that our mind consists of

a few general learning mechanisms that let us acquire a nearly infinite range of response to different environmental conditions, evolutionary psychology via natural selection enlightens us by revealing that the mind is actually an *evolved collection of mechanisms—instincts*—designed to solve problems of survival.

Generation after generation, for ten million years, natural selection slowly sculpted, or hardwired, into the human brain and the brains of other creatures specific strategies vital to survival and reproduction. The skills that proved successful over time endured because they enabled early man—and modern humankind today—to solve *adaptive problems*, whether it was finding a good cave to live in or a good company to work for, organizing a hunting party or getting your team to work together, teaching the young to survive or developing leaders. Those who were successful at solving these adaptive problems solidified their “ecological niche,” their place in the world.

You have an enormous number of instincts that help you survive. This book, though, is not about surviving; it is about thriving. I have chosen to focus on six broad instincts. Becoming aware of them, and using them, will teach you to use your natural genius to truly thrive and prosper.

In subsequent chapters, you explore each of these instinctual tools and the numerous ways in which they can help you enhance your life. As you read through the book, you learn that they are all interrelated—each one supports the next:

- Shelter seeking—Helps you get into an empowering environment
- Care soliciting—Helps you protect your vulnerabilities
- Care giving—Helps you develop others
- Beauty—Helps you get others to desire you
- Cooperation—Helps you stimulate and develop fair and productive relationships
- Curiosity—Helps you stay ahead of the pack

Mother Nature boldly tells us that these six instinctual processes are your evolved tools for continually enhancing your health, happiness, creativity, family, and community. And the fact is, they have worked for hundreds of thousands of years—otherwise, according to natural selection, you would not have this natural genius today.

What, exactly, do we mean by *instinct*? It's a debated concept in the sciences. As you would expect, numerous “experts” have their own definitions for instinct, but most researchers agree on four *instinctual properties* mandatory for a behavior to qualify as a true instinct:

- It is structured for solving a specific survival (adaptive) problem.
- It develops in all normal human beings.
- It develops without any conscious effort and in the absence of any formal teaching.
- It is applied without conscious awareness of its underlying logic.

I will use the concept of instinct in the broader concept of human nature. *Human nature* refers to the daily behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and emotions you have that are instinctually rooted. Thus, the genius of your instincts is the best of human nature.

## **Instinctual Disconnection**

My consulting and clinical experiences over the past four decades have led me to the conclusion that most people are instinctually disconnected. They have “lost contact” with their instincts, and more often than not, being “ruled by reason” often leads to failure, not success.

Numerous times executives have told me they ignored their instincts and made decisions based instead on spreadsheet data—with disastrous results. Dozens of individuals have told me they chose

a course of action even though “It didn’t feel right.” I’ve heard countless students say, “I should have known this was the wrong school for me.” Many managers have told me, “I went against my instincts and hired him.” Of course, we have all heard a variation on that: “I knew I never should have married her.”

I’ve uncovered many reasons for instinctual disconnection, but what is most shocking to me as a psychologist are the countless experiences that show so many people in the working world are *completely clueless* to their detachment from their instincts of success, even when their poor results smack them in the face. It is mind-boggling how many people present themselves in an unkempt, slovenly manner and are then surprised when they don’t get the sales rep job that mandates a professional appearance. It is startling to think of the dozens of executives who have derailed promising careers and are stunned to discover that it’s because they are abrasive or cold to their staff. I am stunned at the number of people who find their job or a task difficult but never ask others for help or mentoring. This is more than instinctual disconnection, it is *instinctual blindness*.

Because we are all unique, we all have different reasons—some more universal than others—why we are instinctually disconnected. Throughout the book, I present some of the common reasons—gathered from corporate coaching, consulting, teaching, seminar experiences, and clinical practice with individuals and couples—why people in work, family, and marriage environments disconnect from their natural instincts. As we go on this journey together, I implore you to stop reading now and then to think about the concepts, to reflect on the factors that might be causing you to be disconnected from your primal instincts.

Regardless of the reason, instinctual disconnection results in you losing the guidance of your instincts and, therefore, handicaps your chances for success, vibrant health, authenticity, and happiness.

## Life Enhancement

From my studies and work experiences during the last ten years, I've come to realize that the evolutionary psychology-shaded concepts have great value when strategically applied to the everyday scenarios we encounter, at home and at work. They help us solve a multitude of problems that often stymie us and help us achieve results that impact our life for the better.

I've learned (and so will you, the reader), many specifics, such as how to use your evolved instinctual tools to resolve marital discord, enhance your marriage, including the sex, and become a more attractive mate. I've also learned how evolutionary psychology concepts can help you leave the relationship and job in which you have felt trapped for years.

I've learned how your instinctual tools can help you have better health, lose weight, and bring the family budget under control. I've learned how parents can use evolutionary psychology concepts to advance their child's creativity, stimulate their interests, transform sibling rivalry into sibling support, and create more family fun. Also, evolutionary psychology can teach you how to help your college-bound son or daughter select the right school, and how to get them to help with family chores.

My corporate consulting and teaching experiences have enabled me to understand and learn how companies and individuals can use evolutionary psychology concepts to attract new clients, manage interdepartmental conflict, give an effective presentation, select the right job, and become a more effective executive. It will become obvious to you as you read that the advice gleaned from evolutionary psychology offers the world real solutions for real problems.

What I find most exciting is that this perspective will help you enlighten yourself to the *revelation of what the natural tools for success are in work and at home—with your family, with your partner.*



My goal, then, is to teach you how *to instinctually reconnect* so that you can apply your instinctual tools in innovative ways that enhance your life in all aspects and thus realize the genius of your instincts.

# 2

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## The Face of Emotions

The evolutionary function of emotions is a chief strategic concept, and its implications and applications surface throughout this book, so some details here will also be of value later. It is particularly important, for instance in the context of shelter seeking, to know when it's best for you to *leave* a particular environment, to know when you are in an environment that is the *right match* for you, and to know how to use that environment so you can leave a job or relationship that has you trapped.

### **Emotional Functioning**

Why do humans have emotions? According to the principles of natural selection, they must give some advantage in helping humans survive. What is it?

Unlike the majority of the scientists who study the brain as the hardwiring apparatus for emotions, those who consider your evolutionary heritage use a different part of the body, a different hardwiring apparatus that helps them explain the primary functions of emotions. This hardwiring apparatus is known as your *face*.

The face is the supreme center for sending and receiving social signals crucial for the development of an individual's interpersonal communication and that individual's cohesiveness with family and society.

There is no doubt that facial expressions of emotions have evolutionary-biological significance as a prelude to their psychological and social significance. Contemporary theorists in the field support the belief that facial expressions evolved primarily from *serviceable associated habits* or *intention movements*—the incomplete or preparatory phases of activities, such as attack, locomotion, defense, and movements associated with respiration and vision.

During the course of evolution, facial expression developed into a system of social communication that conveys information about the internal states (intentions) of the expresser and alerts fellow creatures to certain aspects of the environment. For example, a fearful face signals the perception of danger and the intention of the organism to flee or submit.

The importance of facial expressions and facial movements in social communication among primates has been noted by almost every student of primate behavior and, if you were to review the theory and research on the evolution of facial expressions, you would arrive at similar conclusions that help make the case for why you have emotions, and thus, how to best use them for shelter seeking, or for that matter, how to get out of the proverbial self-destructive relationship, that has been going on for years.

First, the facial neuromuscular mechanisms—the muscles, for example, that are necessary to smile or frown and share other basic expressions—show continuity from the higher primates to man. Logically, if human facial expressions are more complex and show greater range and number than the facial displays of lower primates, and yet encompass the facial expressions of lower primates, then evolutionary selection must have played an important role in the differentiation of the emotions and the facial expressions that communicate them.

This being the case, then, different emotions should have different adaptive functions. Studies show this to be true, for example, by showing strong evidence for the existence of genetically determined universal behavior patterns that represent several fundamental

emotions. Importantly, findings show that significant aspects of emotion communication are based on genetically programmed and species-common behavior patterns—the facial expressions of the fundamental emotions.

All human social bonds or interpersonal relationships are based on emotions, and the emotions are communicated primarily by means of facial expressions.

Thus, evolutionary sciences tell us that the function of an emotion is to *communicate information*. Strategic evolutionary psychology would instruct you to leverage this function by recognizing and responding to the *message* of your emotion.

*When* is it time to shelter seek? When your emotions tell you to.

## Functional Distress

How do your emotions tell you that your environment is serving you well, or that you are satisfied? If you feel engaged, productive, interested, and do not have the urge to seek out a new environment nor the inclination to escape your present one, then your feelings are telling you that you're in a good place.

On the other hand, if you feel sad, downhearted, and discouraged at work, or lonely, isolated, and miserable in your marriage, then your feelings are telling you that it might be time to *seek out new shelter or adjust*.

Distress is a fundamental emotion that has an important evolutionary function—it communicates to the self and others that *all is not well*, and, as such, sparks your urge to either change your habitat or leave it. People experience the urge to seek new shelter when they feel distress, whether caused by a dead-end job or a loveless marriage; distress is the motivator to find a new environment. It might appear that the urge is instigated by the incentive of something better, but, in fact, the seeking instincts are more often aroused by dissatisfaction with the status quo.

## Distress Awareness

To put a face on the emotion, visualize: Eyebrows arched upward and inward, sometimes forming a pie-shaped arch in the lower middle forehead. The inner corners of the upper eyelids are drawn up, and the lower eyelid is pushed upward. The corners of the mouth are drawn downward and the chin muscle is pushed upward and raises the center of the lower lip. To really see it, sit in front of a mirror and put on a “distressed face.”

Think of your dominant Environments of Evolutionary Adaptedness—your work environment and relationships. What are the pervasive emotional moods that characterize them, and what do they communicate about each environment? By pervasive, I mean the typical feelings you continually experience in the course of your day.

For example, some people leave home in a great mood and spend all day at work in a state of frustration and anxiety. Others leave home feeling perturbed and become enthused once their team meeting has started, only to become dejected again shortly after dinner.

Everyone experiences distress at work and at home; that’s a norm. However, when the pervasive mood you experience in these environments is distress, the emotional communication is saying you are not well off.

Reflect on the different emotions and moods that you experience in different environments and compare and contrast—you’ll get some quick awareness into how some of your environments elicit different feelings in yourself—some positive, some not so positive.

In particular, in which environment, if any, do you *feel* distressed? How distressed? Mother Nature says your *high intensity* state of distress is urging you to move, or at the very least, to make adjustments.

Besides intensity, *length* of distressed time is important, too. When the distress message is calling you every day in a particular environment, it would be wise to make a move.

Everyday distress is a chronic condition, and, if it has been long term, you have spent a great deal of time already trying to adapt to the situation. Perhaps you are adapting and want to continue doing so. That is an individual choice. But be forewarned that people who choose to expose themselves to long-term distress, whether it is a marriage or a job, are never ones to thrive and feel as though they are living an enhanced life. How could they? There's too much distress.

Sometimes, the distress attributed to a particular environment is short-lived. Your partner's recovery from an illness might distress the whole family for weeks, but it inevitably passes. A company's physical renovation inconveniences everyone. But inevitably, the job is finished. An inexperienced manager is at the helm, but only for a month. A company suffers temporary difficulties because of temporary global events. In situations like this, it would be absurd to "shelter seek," because distress is known to be short-lived, so it is best to adapt to the temporariness of the situation, perhaps with the mental alternation: "It will soon be over."

On the other hand, if distress is intense and long term, your evolved natural instincts are telling you: *If you want to thrive, you have to leave a situation that you can only survive.* Chronic distress in an environment means move!

These two factors, *intensity* of distress and *length* of distress are vital communications. The degree of intensity tells you, "In this environment, you are really not doing well." The length of distress adds: "You've been feeling distressed for a while."

Put the distress messages together: "In this environment, you are not doing well, and it has been for a long time, so you better make a move if you want to do better."

## Follow Your Emotions, Manage Them Not

When a lower creature is given the message of distress, it listens and makes the appropriate maneuver. It practices self-preservation.

The message for humans is that when you are given the long-term, chronic distress message; *do not* adhere to the conventional wisdom, to manage your emotions. Use strategic evolutionary psychology wisdom: *follow* your emotions.

Over the years, I've written several books on managing emotions and have counseled and taught thousands of people how to do just that. But I've come to question the enhancement value of managing emotions.

In effect, the conventional psychological wisdom behind managing emotions is that to do so will help you be more effective in all aspects of your life. Is this really true? A good case can be made that helping people manage their emotions is simply a way of helping them *adapt* to their situation, but paradoxically, it keeps them in the situation that inevitably was the source of their distress.

I've helped couples work out problems, so they could keep their marriage—for what purpose? So they could continue to work out their problems every week for the rest of their lives? I've helped top executives, seasoned managers, and line employees manage their emotions so that they could advance and stay in an organization that, for them, is the source of their frustration, anger, and anxiety. For these people, managing emotions in the conventional sense does not help them thrive; it only helps them survive by adapting.

I have reason to support this point. Studies investigating the responses to distressful events and environments show dominant responses that Mother Nature would classify as adaptive. A sample of responses would be making changes within yourself, so you can adapt such as lowering your expectations, trying to get over a problem, retreating from others, and even doing nothing. These responses simply help a person cope with the situation encountered.

Sure, there are times when managing your emotions is going to enhance the delivery of your presentation, your golf game, or your ability to help your children with their math problems when that does not come easy.

However, in chronic distressful environments, managing your emotions becomes paradoxical: It helps you stay in the situation by helping you adapt to it, to survive. You will *never* thrive because the environment does not provide you with what you need; the distress is the result of a *bad match* between you and the environment, be it your partner or your job.

Many animals have no choice but to adapt. But humans do have a choice. They can *adjust* and *seek out*. Switching jobs often enhances an individual's performance—the job environment is a better match, which is also true for the student who transfers to a different school and excels. Telling the student to remain in the same school and study harder, or to take a stress management class, is simply telling the student to adapt for the next four years when she could be thriving during that time.

“Follow through on your emotions!” is advice here. I've often wondered how many people would be in better marriages if I had encouraged them to listen to their distress and split up. Maybe a lot of them would be in marriages where the distress was once a month instead of every day. I wonder how many executives and employees would be thriving if I had guided them into exiting their job so they could get themselves into a work environment where their ideas are listened to with appreciation. I'd have to conclude that I've helped a lot of people stay in situations just so they could survive, not thrive.

I think the natural genius of your instincts could reverse the process so that more people could thrive. Instead of using your reasoning to help you adapt and survive, *use your innate hardwiring—your emotional distress—to guide your reasoning*. You might say: “This is a bad place for me, so it is smart for me to exercise my option



to move on or make some adjustments.” In fact, moving on or making adjustments is also part of the evolutionary function of distress: It motivates you to do something that reduces the distress and makes you feel better, to shelter seek.

As a clinician, I’ve found that acknowledging that a marriage or a job environment is not what you truly desire is a difficult reality for many people to confront. Why would this be so? Because an honest assessment might evoke shelter-seeking instincts, and because we are hardwired to be loss averse, anxieties and fears are aroused. Being dishonest to yourself keeps these anxieties and fears under control, but at the same time keeps you stuck in unhealthy environments and fosters instinctual disconnection.

Confronting the fact that your marriage and/or your job conditions are distressful does not mean that you have to leave them. You can make adjustments. But this is impossible to do if you are not honest in assessing the state of your environmental affairs.

Only you know how you really feel inside. Only you know if you are honestly answering questions such as these: *Do I feel good* about myself when I am with my husband, wife, or partner? Am I experiencing emotional growth in my relationship? Does my partner understand and respond to my needs? Does my partner encourage me to develop myself?

In my work environment, am I surrounded by people who encourage me? Does my job/work environment develop me? Do I feel secure in my work environment? Do I feel good when I am at work?

As I said, the key is to answer these questions with brutal honesty.

## Home Sweet Home

Just as chronic distress tells you it's time to shelter seek, feelings of *joy*, *interest*, and *engagement* are the evolutionary barometers that tell you when you are in an environment that is empowering you to develop yourself, to be your best. When these feelings are the pervasive moods of the particular “environment,” you know that you are in “Home, Sweet Home.”

How you find your home is the subject of the next chapter.

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