

Guidelines for Using *I Never Knew I Had a Choice*

USING CHAPTER FEATURES

In Chapter 1 of the text, there are some guidelines for getting the most from the book. We hope that students will make full use of the features in each chapter that are designed to enhance active and personal learning. Each chapter has a number of consistent features including: Where Am I Now?; Take Time to Reflect; Personal Stories; Where Can I Go From Here?; and Website Resources. In addition to those listed at the end of Chapter 1, following are some further suggestions regarding several key features of each chapter.

WHERE AM I NOW?

One of the features of *Choice* is the inclusion of pre-chapter self-inventories, entitled “Where Am I Now?” These brief inventories start each chapter and are designed to stimulate critical thinking about the topics in the chapter. They generally consist of personal statements to involve the students, help them identify their attitudes and beliefs, and think about what they want to change. There are no absolutely right answers that fit for all.

We suggest you encourage students to take each chapter’s self-inventory *before* they read and study the chapter. This assessment gets students focused on key elements of each chapter. It can be useful to begin a class by asking students to pick out some items they strongly disagreed with. This can be a good lead-in to a short talk or lecture on the topic of the chapter. You might also encourage your students to have someone they are close to take the inventory. In this way, they may discuss the topic and get involved before they begin reading. Another suggestion is to have the class break into small groups and ask them to select three of the items on the Where Am I Now? sections and discuss these issues in their groups. These small-group sessions may last 15 or 20 minutes, and can serve to introduce the topic and to get the students actively engaged in it.

Since the students’ views may change as the material is discussed in class, consider having students re-read their responses after reading the chapter and make changes if appropriate. These self-inventories can be useful as reviews of the entire course if students retake them at the end of the term. In this way, they can determine what changes, if any, have occurred in their attitudes and beliefs.

Scoring. Because these assessments are to stimulate students’ honest thinking, we prefer not to impose any statement of right or wrong answers or to ask students to score themselves. Thus the directions in the text do not contain any objective scoring method, other than deciding on a five-point scale their degree of agreement or disagreement with each item.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

The goal of the “Take Time to Reflect” sections of the text is to help students become active learners who apply what they read to themselves. These sections and the responses they elicit are an integral part of the textbook. You might remind your student from time to time that completing these activities is an essential part of their learning experience. You can refer to these “Take Time to Reflect” exercises often during class lectures, and you set aside class time for small group sessions in which students can share their responses with one another. This encouragement can increase students’ involvement in the class sessions.

PERSONAL STORIES

The book contains many first-person accounts, or Personal Stories, that are interspersed in the chapters. Encourage your students to single out the stories that they most identify with and that teach them the most about themselves.

The stories can be catalysts to get students thinking and talking about personal topics. You can have students discuss in small groups the Personal Story in each chapter that most spoke to them and to talk about lessons they can learn from these first-person accounts.

Have students write their own personal stories, not only to share an experience, but also to get perspective on it. Stories can be written in their journals for private reference or as brief optional assignments. We think it is a good idea to give students flexibility about the topics they write about and avoid causing students to disclose more personal information than they feel comfortable doing. Screen written personal stories and get the writer's permission before sharing them with the class.

JOURNALS

Many instructors who use this book and who teach personal growth courses encourage students to keep journals. From our perspective, the journals are the students' private records of the thoughts and feelings that may be stimulated by the course. In the text, we suggest that students take certain the "Take Time to Reflect" sections or end-of-chapter activities (Where Can I Go From Here?) that have the most meaning for them and write more fully about the relevant issues in their journals. The end-of-chapter activities suggest things students can do on their own to make the concepts in the book come alive for them. Again, consider giving time in class for students to work in small groups to discuss their reactions to these out-of-class exercises. It is important to stress to students the value of attempting to apply to their everyday lives what they discuss in class and what they read in the text. If the aim is for students to think about the topics in the chapters and then to translate what they learn about their behavior into daily life, the journal is an excellent tool for personal reflection and for monitoring oneself.

You might want to include regular journal writing as a requirement of your course. It is important to state your policy at the beginning about whether the journals will be completely confidential, or better, whether you will request to see the journals either weekly or less frequently during the course. We believe it is a good policy to reassure students that they will not be forced to show any writing that they deem too personal to share.

Encourage students to purchase a separate notebook in which to write their responses. By using a loose-leaf notebook for their journal, they can add pages from other sources and move materials around. This will allow students to create their own textbook. Encourage students to personalize this book --- in doing so; they become co-authors by finishing the book as it applies to them. At the end of each chapter is a page or so of lined paper for students to do some journal writing for each of the chapters. We are hoping that putting these blank pages for journal writing will encourage students to do some writing for each chapter.

We encourage our readers and students to take part in writing and revising this book. After they read the Personal Stories, encourage them to think about their reactions and write briefly in their journals about the one story that had the most impact upon them. Ask them to write about ways that they see themselves in selected stories in the chapters.

Some broad journal topics you may want to assign occasionally:

- What I learned about others and myself in a particular class meeting.
- Topics I want to talk about or have avoided talking about.
- Some of the things I am learning about myself in this course.
- Some concrete changes in my attitudes, values, or behaviors that I want to make.

It is probably a good practice to encourage students to write in their journals in a free-flowing and unedited style, rather than attempt to analyze or edit what they write. They might find it valuable to write what first comes to their consciousness. Encourage them to be honest and to use journal writings as an opportunity to get to know themselves better and explore their thoughts and feelings in more depth.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT, DISCUSSION, AND EVALUATION

We have included plenty of questions for thought and discussion in the body of the text and in the “Take Time to Reflect” sections. In addition to these, we have listed other questions for each chapter in this resource manual. Some or all of these questions can be used to prompt discussions, or they can be duplicated and distributed to the students for use as a study guide. The questions are also suitable for quizzes, short-answer essays, take-home essay exams, reaction papers, or in-class essay exams.

In some personal-growth courses, instructors tend not to give quizzes and examinations, either in class or out of class. Instead, they use the reaction-paper idea. Students might be asked to type two-page reaction papers in which they discuss how the required readings on a given topic apply to them. For example, if the topic is intimate relationships, ask them to read the chapter and then give *their* thoughts and reactions on some aspect of intimate relationships. It is a good idea to ask them to avoid merely summarizing what they read or writing in a detached and overly intellectual manner. The questions provided in this manual are ones that can be given to students to help them narrow down a given topic.

In this manual are multiple-choice test items, which are found in each of the chapters. A number of instructors requested that we add these objective-type items, since they like to use tests as well as papers and discussion.

WHERE CAN I GO FROM HERE?

Most of the exercises for group activity and experiential learning included in this manual were originally part of the textbook. Several instructors that we have spoken with recommended that we put most of the exercises designed strictly for in-class group participation into a separate instructor’s manual. This gives you the freedom to use or not to use any of the exercises you wish. You may not want to use many exercises in class, or you may want to modify those you do use. We realize that we have presented many more exercises than anyone could ever do in a semester-long course, but we’d rather give you more exercises to select from than too few.

The exercises are simply additional tools that can help students get personally and experientially involved with the concepts in the textbook. We see them as means to an end, not ends in themselves. Before attempting to use an exercise in class, it is good to ask yourself why you are using it, what you want to accomplish, and whether the students are ready to handle it. In addition, we believe it’s important to be thoroughly familiar with an exercise and ideally, to have experienced it yourself before you try to present it in class.

CAUTION: Some of the exercises described in this manual can lead to intense emotional experiencing. We’ve used some of them in small groups where the students knew in advance that the course would be conducted along the lines of a personal group. In those cases, we’ve interviewed each student beforehand, and a prerequisite for the class was that each student had had prior group or personal counseling. We would *not* use in an introductory class on personal growth many of the techniques or exercises that we use in a small-group advanced class.

SOME ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN USING EXERCISES

There is sometimes a fine line between what is therapeutic and what therapy is. We do *not* believe that the classroom is an appropriate place for therapy, which includes dealing with unconscious material and working toward major personality change. We *do* believe that a class can combine educational aims (learning content) with therapeutic aims (becoming more aware of self and others and making choices based on this increased awareness). Thus, in one-exercise students write down some major turning points in their lives and think about how decisions they’ve made affect them now. This kind of exercise can combine thinking about one’s experiences with a good deal of emotionality, and it can be a therapeutic or growth-producing experience. Students can achieve insights into their patterns, see how they limit their growth and effective functioning, and think about ways they might want to

change current behavior. In class, they can experiment with new behavior, and they may practice their new behavior in their daily living. We'd call this kind of experience therapeutic. Simply becoming more aware of their attitudes and feelings may be growth producing in itself and can lead to significant changes. Such therapeutic gains are to be distinguished from working through deep personality conflicts in the classroom. It's essential that we assess our own level of competency and that we avoid going beyond the level of our training and professional experience.

A further consideration involves the reluctance some students may feel in regard to certain activities and exercises. It is crucial to stress to students that *they have the right to decline to participate at any time*. The freedom to participate or not to participate in-group exercises is critical. This freedom can be diminished by group pressure or a person's fear of saying "no" and being different from the others, and it is incumbent upon the instructor to create a climate in which these hindrances are minimized. The right to say "I pass" also extends to a student who does not wish to talk about certain topics or issues or who has already become involved in an exercise and doesn't want to go any further. As instructors, it is important that we are sensitive to students' readiness and willingness to become emotionally involved. It is important to respect their judgment concerning how far they want to pursue an issue.