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Chapter 1: NEUTRALIZING MANIPULATION

Your family is on their way home from camping. You've timed your travel through a popular coastal town so that you arrive at 4:00 P.M., at the beginning of The Tenth Annual Fish Fry, a Chamber of Commerce fundraiser, featuring all the fresh fish that you can eat. By being first in line, you can eat an early dinner and be on your way before dark. Or so you thought. You've been in line for over half an hour: it's now 4:45 P.M. The fish have been frying forever and the corn has boiled past pulp. The salad and beans are tired, and volunteers are milling around. About one hundred people are in line behind you.

You go up to a nicely dressed woman who is spooning tartar sauce into what appears to be her two-hundredth tiny paper cup and ask politely, "Do you know how much longer it will be?" She replies, "The bread hasn't arrived yet." Trying to be helpful, you suggest that maybe they could go on ahead and serve everything but the bread, so out-of-towners could be on their way. She blasts you with, "And *who* died and put you in charge of this show?" You ask nicely, "Well, who is the person in charge here?" She responds with, "*Everyone's* in charge here-just a whole bunch of chiefs."

At this point, you are sorely tempted to do something clever and unique with the tartar sauce, or at least have the last word. But instead you choose to neutralize the remarks to avoid a confrontation. By neutralizing this encounter at the time it occurs, you will be left with a minimum of crummy feelings.

And how to avoid feeling crummy in manipulative situations is what this book is all about. Neutralizing manipulation. Throughout the book we will use the word "manipulation" to mean: an encounter in which someone else attempts to control *how* you feel, or *how* you behave, or *how* you think, without your permission, and it causes you discomfort as a result. Ruse, insulting, and insensitive comments directed toward you also make you feel crummy, and they, too, are included in our definition of manipulation. We are not talking about teaching your children good manners by rewarding them appropriately. This is not a book about positive reinforcement for positive behavior, inspiration, patterning, teaching and loving guidance. This

book hopefully will not be a struggle in semantics. We will deal only with neutralizing the negative aspects of manipulation: if an encounter leaves you feeling crummy, it probably involves manipulation of some sort. We'll use our Quick Rule: "If it looks like a goat, acts like a goat, and sounds like a goat, it probably is a goat."

Why do people try to manipulate you? Believe it or not, people do this so they can feel better about themselves. Herein lies an irony: the person who is trying to manipulate you views *you* as having greater strength or power than he or she does.

If we stop and think about this for a moment, we can ask ourselves how many people, unless they are truly malicious or very sick, attempt to manipulate a powerless person. They simply don't spend their energy doing that. *The manipulators attempt to control someone whom they admire, like, or are afraid of; or who, they perceive to has more control over his or her own life than the manipulators have over theirs.*

In most successful manipulations, a direct relationship exists between the severity of the manipulations and the degree to which the target of the manipulation feels guilty, fearful, ashamed, or humiliated. We will use the descriptive word "slimed" to convey the negative feelings in these instances. You can almost see the transference of energy. The manipulator pulls a real coup and leaves the victim speechless. The manipulator becomes almost giddy with power and energy, while the victim becomes depressed and uncomfortable. This reaction, one laughing, one almost in tears, gives a Dracula-type reality to manipulation. The manipulator seems to feed off the energy of the victim of the manipulation. The next time you observe, or are the unwilling participant in a manipulation, notice the body language and the personality changes in everyone involved. The manipulator becomes the aggressor, and the manipulated becomes apologetic. Despite the words that may be spoken by the parties involved, the energy is one of creating control where none existed or was needed except in the mind of the manipulator. For example:

SPOKEN MESSAGE, PLEASANT VOICE: "You know I'd *really* appreciate it if all this work could be done before you go home."

UNSPOKEN MESSAGE: "*I'm* the boss, and you'd better do it or else!"

DEEPER MESSAGE: "You're always so efficient that I feel lazy compared to you!"

You probably won't be able to witness these encounters in quite the same way again. Yet, it's helpful to remember that the manipulator acts out fear and insecurity, thriving on other people's power. So, in reality, *the manipulators are actually paying you a very high compliment*. At the least they perceive that *you have more power* than they have and they want some of it. At most, *they are envious*, they try to admire you, they like you, and thus feel compelled to try to control you. If they just came up to you and said, "Hey, I really admire you, and I'd like to control you so I can feel better. . . . Let's do lunch!" you'd check in with your nearest reality connection. But it doesn't work that way. Manipulators *need* to control you and will generally use one or two weapons to achieve that end.

What are the not-so-subtle weapons of the garden-variety manipulator? Guilt and fear! You don't need an advanced degree in psychology to define and distinguish between the two. Nor to recognize the discomfort caused by each. However, the *successful use* of guilt and fear as weapons of the manipulator is dependent, to some degree, on how each of us *reacts* to those weapons. We will explore guilt and fear further in the next two chapters.

After that, we will introduce the five levels to stop manipulation. The techniques are simple, but they do require a bit of thought, practice, and discussion. If you do that small amount of work, the techniques will become incorporated into your very being, and will become automatic. You will recognize every manipulative attempt for what it is and be able to neutralize it automatically.

The word "manipulation" is derived from the Latin word *manus*, meaning "hand." When people try to manipulate you, they try to "handle" you, don't they? Therefore, you need a self-defensive, noncombative, but powerful system to avoid being handled against your wishes. The martial arts meet this requirement. The five-level system presented in this book draws from the philosophy and principles of the soft (unarmed) martial arts.

If we were to summarize the basic concept of the martial arts, it is to protect yourself while doing minimal damage to your opponent. This can be a hard concept for a person with a win-lose mentality. This is a hard concept in the shark-infested waters of today. This is a hard concept for most people in Western culture. We will suggest a strategy, however, to neutralize manipulation and avoid counterattack.

In the West, not much was known until fairly recently about the martial arts techniques because this knowledge was imparted through training and was not written down. A large part of its value lay in secrecy.

The martial arts began their development several thousand years ago in the Far East. The basic reason for their existence was the necessity for self-defense in a place that didn't allow the common man or peasant to have standard weapons. Several schools of martial arts appeared. Some used common farm implements and turned them into lethal weapons through practice. Others stressed using hands and feet as weapons. Some combined both.

There are basically two types of martial arts: the hard martial arts and the soft martial arts. Some of the hard arts use weapons (self-devised, as with the Phillipine stick fighters), and others rely on the hands and feet as weapons, (like Karate). The soft martial arts primarily use evasive tactics and joint locks and holds to immobilize the attacker. The soft martial arts also rely heavily on using the force of the attacker to defeat the attacker.

The five levels presented in this book utilize the soft (unarmed) martial arts: "A martial art that has two main principles: First, the mind dictates the action; second, the opponent's own force is used to defeat him or her." (Howard Reid and Michael Croucher, *The Fighting Arts*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983, p. 229.)

Yielding, flow, mental control: all can be used to your advantage when countering a verbal attack. When you come under attack by a manipulator, you need to view the attack as a martial arts expert would. You don't want to fall apart and get all emotional. If you lie coldcocked on the floor, you aren't any help to yourself or anyone else. The name of the game is to get your emotions out of the way and let your mind automatically and instantaneously take charge— let your mind use the five-level system that you'll learn here.

The soft martial artist deals in *real time*, that is, "the now." Worry about the future and regretting our past prevents us from being alert, receptive, and relaxed. Neutralization cannot occur when we get in our own way.

The soft martial artist is always receptive. This includes being open, aware, and relaxed. It is only by being relaxed that we are able to receive, the deflect, then defuse, then neutralize. (Father Bryce McProud, Episcopal priest and soft martial artist, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Eugene, Oregon.)

When you suspect you are the target of a manipulation, just ask yourself, "Who is in control? Who has the greater power? The bully beating everyone up? Or the person whose power rests on giving freedom of choice to another?"

An important thing to remember, but hard for any of us to do, is to realize that manipulation, like attack on the martial arts, is *not personal*. It is personal only in the sense that your opponent considers you important enough or strong enough to attack in the first place.

The martial arts skills stayed mostly in the Far East until this century. Now self-defense classes are taught everywhere. Some are pure, teaching the principles that accompany a specific art, that is, karate, judo, jujitsu, aikido, kung fu, etc.

Others teach you to defend yourself, period. Watch some classes where women are taught to defend themselves (they look like fighting bobcats). Women are literally taught to go for the assailant's eyes, ears, and groin. Using the tiger's claw, they learn to rip the muscles; using white snake eyes, they punch at the eyes; a groin kick does the rest. We, the authors, feel that these aggressive techniques are more like lessons on how to counterattack than on how to neutralize. They may work well in a life-or-death situation, but verbal attack is not usually so extreme. (However, a few examples do come to mind.)

The soft (unarmed) martial arts therefore serve as the basis for the five-level system presented here: ju-jitsu, aikido, and t'ai chi ch'uan.

"The difference between power that runs in a straight line and that which curves in toward the opponent, is the difference between the hard and soft versions of the martial arts. The straight away power has an end: it terminates when impact is made. In T'ai Chi Ch'uan, which uses circular force, the movement is never done, it moves right through the opponent and as it moves gathers strength for the next action. . . .

The player becomes selfless and utilizes the opponent's strength. . . . The opponent's strength is neutralized, putting him at a disadvantage. Extreme softness always prevails over extreme hardness." (William Logan and Herman Petras, *Handbook of the Martial Arts and Self-Defense*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1975).

The soft martial arts are a philosophy as well as a set of self-defense techniques. You actually change the rules. You are not limited to your past bag of tricks. The rules are changed when someone is up against a different force in fighting, aren't they? If everyone knows the rules, the elements of surprise and suspense are missing.

You *can* defend yourself. You can use the manipulator's own force to neutralize them in your life. As you work with these self-defense techniques, they will become second nature and kick in automatically.

That day will come when you can spot a manipulation a mile away, recognize it as a compliment, and automatically implement the appropriate level to neutralize it and walk away unharmed. Then you can say, "Today, I earned my verbal black belt!"

THE MANY FACES OF MANIPULATION

Manipulation is almost everywhere, and it comes in all sizes and shapes. It shows no mercy concerning age, sex, or race. While manipulation is executed largely on the *subconscious* level, the manipulator is, quite simply, trying to get some strength and power of another person who is viewed as having the greater strength to start with. The person being targeted ends up feeling slimed and falling prey to guilt, anger, or fear.

Perhaps at this point you're wondering if it's possible that you have no manipulation in your life. This may be possible, but you might want to try taking the following little quiz.

HOW MANIPULATED ARE YOU?

1. Do you find yourself often doing things for others that you don't want to do?
2. Do you find yourself buying things that you later find you don't really

need or even want?

3. When someone talks about their parents, do you immediately feel guilty because you haven't phoned yours the past month, week, day, or hour?
4. Does someone in your environment act like you are crazy?
5. Do you find yourself buying unnecessarily expensive shoes, clothes, computers and sports cars for your teenager?
6. Do you feel guilty because you don't go regularly to a place of worship? Does going to your place of worship leave you feeling worse than before?
7. Your boss screams, "The Good Lord must love stupid people, he sure made a bunch of them!" Do you know for a fact that he means you?
8. When you receive a telephone call from the principal of your son's school, do you feel like disavowing all knowledge and telling her that she has the wrong Mrs. _____?
9. Do you feel compelled to hang Aunt Martha's painting (the one of the cross-eyed camel) over your living room sofa even though Aunt Martha has been dead for six years now?
10. Did you just discover that PMS is a medical condition, not short for "persistent mean sarcasm?"

If you answered yes to any of the above, manipulation has seeped into your life. You're not alone.