

Transcend the tyranny of the pecking order and have a better life today! This is done by replacing the pecking order Ego-Defensive view of the world and yourself with the freedom available through an Ego-Neutral perspective.

BEING YOUR BEST! If It Weren't for Your Ego:
Transcend the Tyranny of the Pecking Order and Have a Better Life Today!
By N. J. Mayfield

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**Transcend the Tyranny of the Pecking Order
and Have a Better Life**

TODAY!

N. J. MAYFIELD

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What is Ego-Defensive and Why Are So Many People That Way?

Let us define ego as the conscious part of the personality. It perceives and reacts to the external environment to increase the chance of individual survival. It evaluates itself as surviving or not surviving, prevailing or failing. Excessive concern with pecking order issues results in a chronic state of Ego-Defense.

The term “pecking order” was derived from the naturally occurring social hierarchies in herds, packs, flocks or other groupings. For example, in a flock of chickens there is only one who is dominant over the entire flock. It can peck any other bird in the flock without fear of retaliation or defeat. The second from the top can safely peck any bird in the flock other than the acknowledged leader. The third from the top can safely peck any bird other than the two who are above it in the pecking order. Eventually you reach the last bird in the pecking order. Any other bird belonging to that flock can peck this unfortunate creature. It cannot peck any other bird and in very short order doesn't even try. It succumbs to its social position. It does not leave the flock because it is biologically programmed to exist with other members of its species. It doesn't know of any alternative flocks. This is the way nature has designed a biological basis for the Ego-Defensive pattern of emotional response and subsequent behavior.

Pecking order behavior has biological advantages for the species. There is less advantage for the individual unless that individual is highly ranked in his group.

- First, it guarantees that only the physically strongest will reproduce in significant numbers. This is essential when living in the wild. Every creature is potentially some other creature's meal. The head of the pecking order is the strongest, most physically fit and most aggressive individual in the social group. The head of the pecking order gets the first choice of food, sexual partners, etc. Strong offspring descend from the strongest, most survival-prone members of the group.
- Second, it imposes order upon the social group. The absence of chaos and the assignment of roles allows attention to be focused on activities that enhance survival of the group. Among these activities are hunting or watching for predators. For example, female lions do the hunting and the best hunter leading the hunt.

The biologically based pecking order is expressed in humans through the following two points of view:

- What we think others think of us (stronger or weaker).
- How we see ourselves in relation to others (stronger or weaker).

The tendency is to see yourself as you think others see you. To perceive yourself as higher in the pecking order produces a feeling of pride and power. To perceive yourself as lower in the pecking order produces a feeling of shame. Shame is quickly followed by anger (directed either toward others or toward yourself) or despair.

In the rest of this book we will sometimes use the term, ED (each letter pronounced separately) to mean Ego-Defensive.

Ego-Defense can take two forms: Victor or Victim. This is derived from the person's self-perceived position in the pecking order. Sometimes the same person will alternate roles, depending on the circumstances. ED will be a victor/dominator/abuser when he/she can get away with it, and ED will be a helpless, unaccountable victim when he/she cannot be a victor. It all boils down to controlling or being controlled. We are defined as victor or victim by the form of behavior that we most frequently exhibit.

You tend to carry your habitual position in the pecking order from group to group, sometimes for the rest of your life. It doesn't matter how many fresh starts you make or how many new groups you access. A small inner voice is there, every waking minute, to remind you of what you really think you are – a loser. The new group may not know who you are, but **you** know who you are! Eventually the new group will take you at your own self-evaluation.

People are Ego-Defensive because sometimes (especially initially!) it can feel very, very good! There is the warm empowering glow arising from group acceptance after you thought that you might be excluded. There is delight in being the center of attention. There is the feeling of energy and power that you experience after overcoming an opponent. There is the exuberance of victory. From all of this is the sense of becoming bigger.

If you are an Ego-Defensive Victim, after enduring an existence of feeling judged and humiliated, it is an enormous relief to find people who **seem** to not judge you, who **seem** to accept you and maybe even **seem** to approve of you. You have found another, friendlier group! It is warm! It is safe! It is happy! You just

cannot get enough of it! This warm-fuzzy experience occurs because you finally feel accepted. You no longer feel like an outsider. When you are with these accepting people you feel able to accept yourself.

This experience is like being on drugs. At first you love it because you feel high. Later you need the companionship of these people in order to feel normal. You are able to feel right about yourself only when people seem to accept you. You feel lost and diminished without the acceptance of others.

Frequently group members that have accepted you have the same self-esteem issues that you have. Outsiders don't want to remain outside. They are attracted to others who also feel excluded. When enough of these people join together, they are no longer outsiders. You and they are now insiders, members of a supportive group. This type of group frequently is not engaged in productive activities. Members of such groups tend to spend a lot of time together drinking, stoned, partying, ridiculing or resenting or harming selected outsiders and killing time. It is less painful to be bored or unhappy in the company of other people who seem to be accepting than to be bored or unhappy alone. They are using you, just as you are using them. They are increasing their own feelings of self-acceptance. Their approval is a drug for you and your approval is a drug for them - nothing more and nothing less.

Over time this other-dependent self-acceptance will block your personal growth. You will spend a great deal of unproductive time with people who are using you like a drug. Instead, you could be using that time to improve your skills. You could establish contact with other people who might introduce you to more constructive activities and circumstances. You will find

yourself limiting your interests to those of the people who appear to accept you. You will attempt to think and behave more and more as the others appear to think and behave. You will do this to reduce the possibility of incurring disapproval of the group. You will do it eagerly and compulsively to get higher and higher on the warmth and excitement of belonging.

Congratulations!

You've just sold your soul for a pat on the head!

- You have abandoned pursuing your own interests.
- You have ceased thinking for yourself.
- You have replaced your own thoughts, feelings, goals and sense of right and wrong with values you *think* are held by the people who *appear* to accept you.
- Even though you finally have been accepted into a group, you may begin to wonder why your life seems so stale and unfulfilling— but you won't know what to do. ***If you have reached this point, following the program in this book can help you become Ego-Neutral.***

The condition of Ego-Defensive Victor is more correctly expressed as ED Victor Wannabe. This is because there is room for only one at the top. Rarely does a person reach this elevated state. The position must constantly be defended once it is attained. The Wannabes will continue to strive for it. For the sake of brevity, the word Wannabe will not be used frequently. Keep in mind that ED Victors are in a constant stressful state of aggression or defense. They are driven, not so much by desire to win as they are by fear of failure. The motto is, "Offense is the best defense."

If you are in Ego-Defensive Victor mode, you habitually engage in controlling, manipulative or bullying behavior. When you

succeed in this strategy, you feel much stronger and safer. Your constant goal is to make others fear you or need you and, most of all, obey you. This behavior arises from the need to feel safe. Eventually it becomes a habit. You have concluded (and now believe) that if you can control enough, maybe someday you will be and feel safe enough. You also feel that the more you possess the stronger you are. You spend your life collecting tokens of your strength. It is much more difficult to persuade an Ego-Defensive Victor than to persuade Ego-Defensive Victim that detaching from the pecking order is satisfying. Every time you have successfully controlled or harmed another human being, without negative consequences to yourself, you feel that you have won. What have you won? Safety? Peace of mind? Respect? No. You have merely scored another point in the pecking order game, which **you believe is the only game in town**. Naturally, you do not recognize this as a belief. You “**know**” it is a fact.

How much do you need to control in order to feel safe? There is **never** a feeling of enough safety. There will **always** be the compulsion to control more. You will **always** need to prove to yourself and others just how much you can get away with. This is based on the hope that when you are above the rules of law that you cannot be controlled or judged by others. Each time you control an outcome, you are reassured that you are still winning.

You are totally oblivious to the notion that you can achieve your goals through civility, sharing, fair exchange and negotiation, rather than through domination and theft. The thing you steal is not necessarily money. You have stolen someone’s freedom of choice by forcing or manipulating others. You have stolen someone’s self-respect by making another feel inadequate. You

have stolen someone's integrity by coercing another into supporting an issue with which he/she disagrees.

Ego-Defensive Victors live only to accumulate money or power or both. They have basically become cheats and thieves. They are constantly attempting to control people or take things that are not truly theirs to control or own. The person who benefits from a situation is not the person who pays the price. They count their successes only by what they are able to amass or by what they are able (with impunity) to damage. When they are young, they are gang members or school bullies. They demand respect they have not earned. When they are older, they may become tyrants whenever they can get away with it. You see this in the abusive spouse and abusive parent. You see this in corrupt politicians. You see this in rogue CEOs who, without a second thought, in their quest for ego-embellishment, have destroyed companies and thousands of lives and are now engaged in destroying our country by sending our jobs offshore. People like these have caused more damage to the citizens of this country than terrorists have a chance of doing. And still, it is not enough to satisfy them. ED Victors are consumed with resentment when unable to attain their goals. ED Victors view the suffering they have caused with complete indifference, or with pride – using the destruction of others as evidence of the strength and safety they want to always have. “I don't get ulcers, I give them!”

ED Victors are obsessed with acquiring power and tokens of power. This addictive behavior is an attempt to fill a gaping, bottomless hole. This hole can never be filled. The more they put into it, the larger it becomes. There is not enough money, physical attractiveness, popularity or alcohol to fill it. There are not enough drugs, houses, expensive clothes, boats, airplanes,

and trophy wives, successful husbands, prestigious jobs or influential friends to fill that hole. There will always be someone who has more of what they want. If power-addicted people are ever to attain a state of personal comfort, ***the hole must shrink***. Detaching from the pecking order can cause this hole to become smaller and then vanish.

They are embroiled in a game that no one can truly win. A few ED Victors eventually reach the top of the mountain. You may be one of them. You will have accumulated all of the power and control you have spent a lifetime coveting and pursuing. You will have achieved your heart's desire, only to discover the reality is hollow, unfulfilling, disappointing. Then the question confronts you: "Is this all there is?"

At this point there are five possible directions for the remainder of your life:

- Compulsively continue to control and accumulate. You feel unable to do otherwise because you have made a lot of enemies. There is usually someone in the wings waiting for a chance to steal from you or bring you down. Also, you don't know how to do anything else. Something must be conquered daily, or you fear you are losing. You need to realize that you are in a game that you can never win.
- Abuse drugs and alcohol in an attempt to feel good for the moment. Winning the pecking-order game has not generated a stable sense of well being. Chemicals offer a shortcut to a more enjoyable emotional state – at least temporarily. The downside is that when the chemically induced good feeling fades, you frequently feel worse than you did before. Over time, excessive use of these substances can degrade your

ability to function in the everyday world. You are flirting with permanent brain alterations.

- In a controlling role, engage in less selfish (e.g., volunteer) activities. You still need to be the head of the committee, the president of the club, the chief event organizer or the star of the theater production.
- Pursue activities that you enjoy for the sake of the activity. This is a move toward becoming Ego-Neutral.
- Transform to Ego-Neutral.

Within the past decade I encountered a man who, to the point of being a caricature, embodied the qualities of ED Victor. He was a retired senior officer of an international energy-related company. He went through life grabbing and snatching and taking and never saying *please* or *thank you*. He would not be able to recognize a genuine relationship if it walked up and shook hands with him. His courtship strategy was to attempt to grope me and then inquire if I had a vibrator or did videos of intimate acts. I never felt so close to date rape in my life. While eating in a restaurant that had no bar, he made a trip to the trunk of his car for his emergency stash of margaritas. His breakfast was two Bloody Marys. When he wasn't making sexually suggestive remarks, he was complaining that his first wife turned his children against him. His second wife was an adulterous tramp. All of his children were alcoholics, drug addicts and unfit parents. His siblings were worthless parasites. Someone owed him \$40,000. All he had going in his life was money. I'm not saying money is unimportant. Money is very important. Money increases your alternatives. However, money is not everything. The sad part is that this executive will never

see his role in all of this. He will always blame someone else for his discontent. He is dissatisfied with his life because he has emotionally poisoned himself and everything and everyone around him. He will continue to do this because he thinks it is necessary in order to “win”. Too bad! He loses! And with all that money, he could have been living a really good life!

Regardless of the type of expression of Ego-Defense (Victor or Victim), the solution is the same. Address the beliefs that are dominating you and transform your focus to Ego-Neutrality, which will be covered in the next chapter.

Ego-Neutrality and Ego-Defense each consist of three components:

- ***Perception (what you think others think of you). ED Victors and Victims alike think that others find them personally lacking in some important way.***
- ***Emotion (what you feel in response when you think others have found you lacking). Both Victors and Victims constantly feel concern, shame or fear when others find them lacking. When disapproval toward an ED has been expressed, Victors feel anger toward the disapproving person. Victims feel similar anger toward others and/or despair over their own failure to win approval.***
- ***Behavior (how you act in response when you feel others have found you lacking). ED Victors strike out with whatever means is available. They attack first. They use brute force, financial reprisal and insults. They damage you and people and things you hold dear. Their responses to perceived slights are all out of proportion to the magnitude of actual events. They get even! ED Victims will either continue attempting to ingratiate themselves or***

will withdraw from the people who found them lacking or from the social world in general. Passive-aggressive behavior is also a frequent activity for ED Victims and for ED Victors who have temporarily donned the Victim's hat. This means they will try to sabotage others while pretending to help. Additionally, the ED Victor may damage or invalidate people and things just because he can.

What is Ego-Neutral and Why is That Better?

Let us define Ego-Neutral, also referred to as EN. This is the condition in which an individual is *not* excessively concerned with the two major pecking order issues. In order to become Ego-Neutral you *must* eliminate these two Ego-Defensive tendencies from your mindset:

- Comparing yourself to others (more powerful or weaker, smarter or dumber, popular or unpopular, richer or poorer, better or worse, winner or loser)
- Worrying about how others are evaluating you (stronger or weaker, winner or loser, significant or insignificant, important or unimportant, someone or nobody)

This does not mean that Ego-Neutral people are completely unaware of these issues. It does mean that ENs are not excessively concerned with them. ENs are more objective about themselves. ENs look within themselves to determine their interests. ENs feel that the only person they need to be better than is themselves. In a subsequent chapter you will learn how to recognize and expand this mindset.

You may wonder why others seem so successful and happy while the world seems determined to proclaim what a loser you are. Many of these people, either through accident or cleverness, have acquired an Ego-Neutral approach to life and a genuine indifference toward being popular, admired, envied, and accepted by the group. Paradoxically, this has given them

an authentic self-confidence, an absence of self-consciousness and an honesty that others frequently find attractive. It is this outward, objective, Ego-Neutral focus that we are going to capture later in this book. Maintaining this objective focus will give you knowledge and ability that will serve you well, both now and for the rest of your life.

In many cultures, *physical* superiority is not always essential for the survival of the human individual. Our abilities to think abstractly and to speak serve to separate us from animals. They can enable us to extricate ourselves from the trap of the pecking order. **Intelligence can now be a stronger survival tool than brute force.**

The *tendency* toward pecking order behavior is so biologically ingrained that individuals do not even recognize it. It influences their self-images, perceptions of the world and life choices. A tendency is just that. It is a tendency! It is not a reflex. It is not an insurmountable instinct. **You do not have to succumb to the pecking-order mentality.** This is the entire focus of this book! People remain Ego-Defensive because they are unaware of this ingrained *tendency*. Through ignorance, they continue to be immersed in the pecking order.

What are the advantages of being Ego-Neutral?

Ego-Neutrality allows you to more accurately identify what is actually a threat. Instead of routinely treating all people as threats to be attacked or charmed or controlled, you can more clearly see what you feel, why you feel that way and what to do to resolve the discomfort. In other words, being Ego-Neutral enhances your chances of identifying the correct target and then successfully dealing with it in an appropriate way. You avoid

needlessly offending or hurting others who are not true sources of danger. It's like the difference between using a high-powered rifle versus a sawed-off shotgun to eliminate a threat in a room filled with people.

Ego-Neutrality reduces the stress in your life by allowing you to focus on real threats and dismiss imaginary threats. Once you have stopped seeing a potential enemy in every person you meet, your general stress level will drop. The physiological components of stress will then subside and you will be healthier.

Ego-Neutrality enhances the probability that others will cooperate with you. When people sense that an Ego-Defensive person is trying to control them, the tendency is to resist, openly rebel against or impede the agenda of the ED. When others are approached by an EN for help, the tendency is to be more issue oriented and the possibility of cooperation is improved.

Ego-Neutrality improves your chance of success. Before acting, you habitually try to get full knowledge of a situation. You avoid proceeding on partial, biased or incorrect data. Your focus is upon gathering information in order to move toward complete truth. This is a great advantage when navigating through life.

Ego-Neutrality greatly improves your chances of having friends and associates who are also Ego-Neutral. Your life will be much easier with Ego-Neutral people in it. Why is this? ED-Victors potentially bring huge amounts of opposition, attempts at control and abuse into your life. You cannot completely trust them since they will always have a hidden (or not-so-hidden) agenda of self-aggrandizement. ED-Victims

require large amounts of sensitivity, stroking and accommodation. You will have unnecessary difficulty in defining, focusing upon and attaining your own goals if these people are in your life. They will constantly drain your attention and energy away from things that are important to you.

By contrast, EN people are issue and activity oriented rather than ego-enhancement focused. Ego-Neutral disagreements will tend to be debates rather than disputes. It will be an exchange of information with each party learning more of the point of view of the other. Their focus is cooperation and mutual respect even when there is a difference of opinion. For these reasons, Ego-Neutral people tend to seek the company of other ENs. They avoid prolonged association with Ego-Defensive people whether Victim or Victor.

Ego-neutrality greatly improves your ability to tolerate the presence of confirmed EDs. Sometimes it is not practical to immediately leave or change a situation (home, job, marriage, etc.) which is contaminated by ED manipulation. An EN orientation on your part will be of enormous benefit in dealing with ED shenanigans. *Since the major ED strategy is controlling you by controlling your feelings about yourself, you are already inoculated. This is because your feelings about yourself no longer involve the approval or disapproval of others.*

Keep in mind that attacking EDs may mistake your indifference for being intimidated. This can cause them to feel empowered by the thought that they are “winning”. Then they might continue, or even escalate their attacks. When this happens, *after other EN strategies have failed, respond more*

assertively. To leave the EDs feeling victorious merely encourages their unpleasant behavior.

What about that sense of victory that occurs when you have prevailed over others? Will that be lost to you forever? No. You can experience the same rush of triumph when you have improved yourself. Don't measure yourself against others. That is distracting and keeps you mired in Ego-Defense. Always do your very best and measure yourself against the earlier you.

I may have left the impression that ED Victors, because of their determination to prevail at any cost, are the only ones who get to the top of corporations, win important political contests and become community leaders. I would like to emphasize that Ego-Neutral people are also found in these elevated positions. You don't hear about them because they are more interested in overseeing the success of their projects than in pursuing self-promoting photo-ops and public appearances.

In the previous chapter I briefly profiled the ED-Victor who superficially appeared to be a winner, but who really had nothing but money. Now I would like to profile an executive in a major Fortune 500 company. He is an Ego-Neutral Type-A personality who succeeded in a major way in corporate America. He had the drive to improve his lot in life and was able to do it in an Ego-Neutral way.

His childhood was one of poverty. His clothes were old and worn and personal hygiene left much to be desired. The emphasis on self-improvement and education did not exist in his home. One day he heard music from a nearby church and curiously wandered in. He was made to feel welcome and encouraged to participate in church activities. From the people

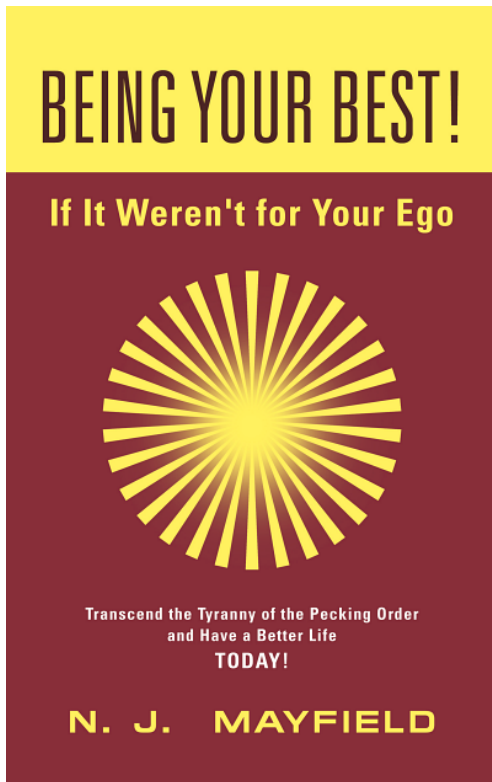
he met there he learned about the importance of neatness and cleanliness. He was encouraged to apply himself in school. He learned about youth groups and joined. A few years later, one of the groups in which he was involved attended an event at the local country club. He said, "I want this!"

He was able to get a college scholarship and eventually completed a doctorate in one of the sciences. His involvement with scientific work led to project management and project management led to executive positions. His strategy was always to know as much as possible about processes and situations that were his responsibility. To improve the performance of his subordinates, he focused on issues, rather than engaging in personal attacks. He was willing to assume full responsibility for his decisions and the outcomes. He had a good family life and was respected in the community. He did well in all aspects of his existence by being civil and fair and working toward win-win outcomes. This is truly a life successfully lived.

As stated in an earlier chapter, Ego-Neutrality and Ego-Defense each consist of three components:

- *Perception (what you think others think of you). Ego-Neutral people are aware that people may or may not like them. Rather than assuming that no one likes them, or that everyone is a threat, they take this on a case-by-case basis. They do not orient their entire lives around the possibility of being liked or disliked.*
- *Emotion (what you feel when you think others have found you lacking). Ego-Neutral people respond to being disliked not with rage or fear, but with indifference or with curiosity and an interest in resolving misunderstandings.*

- *Behavior (how you act when you think others have found you lacking). If Ego-Neutral people have caused someone loss or distress, they attempt to make it right. They may seek greater knowledge of the opponent's point of view. This could involve looking to see if some misunderstanding has occurred or attempting to discover if they have inadvertently upset someone. This is done because it is easier to be around people who aren't mistakenly upset with you. On the other hand, since Ego-Neutrals do not need the good opinion of others in order to feel good about themselves, they may choose to ignore the matter. Ego-Neutral people address issues, rather than resorting to personal attacks. They do not engage in idle negative gossip. While they may need to deal with a troublemaker, they do not seek revenge. They look for ways to reduce negative influence. In dealing with others, they strive for fair exchange. Their goal is a win-win outcome, rather than winner-take-all. ENs avoid needlessly invalidating and damaging people and things. This is because such actions would degrade their integrity and would ultimately poison the world around them and diminish the total quality of the culture.*



Transcend the tyranny of the pecking order and have a better life today! This is done by replacing the pecking order Ego-Defensive view of the world and yourself with the freedom available through an Ego-Neutral perspective.

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