

# How to Become Emotionally Mature

By Roger Allen

*Hal hated Charlie, everything about him, from his knowing sneer to his rolling swagger. When he saw him enter the restaurant with Keith, he wished fervently he could get away and considered getting up and walking out of the breakfast meeting, without a word to either of his two former partners. But then he garnered his faculties and decided to accept this reality. He would choose how to respond, and his choice would be to be cordial and cooperative. He felt a surge of strength as he realized that handling himself in a dignified manner with both these men would be a bigger personal victory than if he met with Keith alone.*

– Excerpt from [The Hero's Choice: Living from the Inside Out](#)

This passage gives you a little insight into emotional maturity. Hal's immediate reaction was to simply act out his negative emotions. Instead, he made a decision to respond in a more positive (emotionally mature) way. Notice how that decision resulted in a shift in his emotional energy.

I define emotional maturity as the ability to make good, positive, healthy choices during the challenges of life. The following chart illustrates some of the differences in the mindset of someone who is acting emotionally immature vs. mature.

<b>Emotional Immaturity</b>	<b>Emotional Maturity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Reactive (Life happens to me)</li><li>● Act out emotions</li><li>● Governed by habit</li><li>● Come from fear/scarcity</li><li>● "Have to" motivation</li><li>● Getting (self-centered)</li><li>● Seek security and self-protection</li><li>● Avoid failure, rejection, discomfort</li><li>● Separation/alienation from others</li><li>● Live in the past/future</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Proactive (I make choices)</li><li>● Act on emotions</li><li>● Governed by vision/purpose</li><li>● Come from love/abundance</li><li>● "Choose to" motivation</li><li>● Giving (other-centered)</li><li>● Step outside comfort zone</li><li>● Seek growth</li><li>● Unity/goodwill with others</li><li>● Live in the present</li></ul>

I label difficult, upsetting events "key moments." These are events that trigger strong emotions and so it is easy to become defensive or reactive.

We experience key moments every day. Some are relatively minor (a child knocking over a glass of milk) or others quite threatening (watching a child flounder or losing a job).

# How to Become Emotionally Mature

By Roger Allen

Consciously or unconsciously, we make choices during our key moments, and the quality of our lives is determined by these choices. If we make good choices we grow in confidence, personal effectiveness, and enjoyable relationships (emotional maturity). When we make poor choices we become less effective, eventually feeling like nothing more than a pawn of life circumstances (emotional immaturity).

However, making good choices is not easy. In fact, Hal (from the incident above) could not sustain his intent to be cordial and cooperative. He totally lost his composure when his former partners threatened him with a lawsuit. Hal eventually regained his bearings and learned to respond positively to such key moments, but not before sinking into a morass of self-pity and vengeance.

I'm going to suggest that our *key moments are how we develop emotional maturity*. We don't become more mature when the waters of life are calm and placid and everything is going our way. We grow in maturity when in turbulent, choppy waters. When tempted to act out our fears, hurts, or resentments.

So the question is, how do we develop emotional maturity? Here are five steps to go through when you face the key moments of your life. Think about a recent key moment. Then read the five steps and apply them to your situation. It's not easy, at first, like learning any new skill. But as you practice, you'll get better. You'll gradually become more emotionally mature, living on the right rather than left side of the chart up above.

**Step 1: Be present.** You can't choose better responses to your key moments if you're asleep at the wheel. You have to wake up and become fully conscious and present to what is happening both within and around you. If not alert and aware, you'll quickly slip into old, habitual, negative ways of reacting. Being present does not make responding easy. But it does put you in the driver's seat. It makes it possible. So, thinking about your key moment, what was the triggering event? What, specifically, about the event triggered your reaction? What were your thoughts? Feelings? What did you do? What were the consequences?

By being present you begin to take your power back. In fact, do you realize that this moment is all you have? When can you be happy (or miserable)? When can you be confident? When can you

# How to Become Emotionally Mature

By Roger Allen

make choices? It all happens in this moment, not the past or future. Being present to this moment is the gateway to change and emotional maturity.

**Step 2: Embrace Reality.** Reality is “what is” or “the way things are.” It exists independently of your opinions about it. Embrace it and find peace. Resist it and experience pain and frustration. Some of your realities you chose (career, who you married) and others were thrust upon you by your heritage (your stature, age) or other factors outside your control. Nevertheless, they form the boundaries or parameters within which you live and make choices daily. This is not to say that you can’t change some realities. Some you can. Some you can’t. But at this moment (which is the only moment that is real), what is, is. To be happy and effective, you must acknowledge and respect rather than fight against the realities of your life.

Denying, avoiding, complaining, or refusing to think about uncomfortable realities gives those very things incredible power over your life. If you are worried about your finances, sit down and take stock of exactly where you are — how much you owe, for example, and exactly how you will pay it off. Fun? No. Wildly uncomfortable? Words can’t express it! But by taking ownership of the reality, you’ve now equipped yourself to change it.

**Step 3: Exercise Responsibility.** Responsibility has to do with the choices you make about how to think, feel and act about reality. The quality of your life depends on your ability to make good choices—choices consistent with your best self and long-term best-interest—in spite of what happens to you. Your personal experience and the results you get in life are influenced, not determined, by circumstances, events, and other people. Between an event and your response is a moment, however fleeting, when you decide whether to surrender control and react automatically, or to interrupt a negative pattern and search out responses more in alignment with your long-term self-interest.

So again, think about your key moment. What choices did you make? What were the consequences? What other choices might you have made? How would they have led to a different outcome?

# How to Become Emotionally Mature

By Roger Allen

**Step 4: Clarify Your Vision.** What do you really want? What is most important to you? Being clear about your vision gives you the motivation or incentive to make good choices when in a key moment. It is easy to follow the path of least resistance or act out negative emotions. But, if you've thought about what you want, if you have a clear vision of the outcomes you desire for yourself and others, then it becomes easier to delay immediate gratification and exercise the discipline to make a positive and strengthening choice. A clear vision allows you to be ruled by something other than impulse and circumstance. Define what you want. Deepen it so that it becomes more important than what you're currently getting.

**Step 5: Act from Integrity.** This is where the rubber meets the road. No excuses. No whining. Acting from integrity is bringing what you say and do into alignment with what you really want. It is acting consistently with your higher vision. It is living by commitment rather than ease, discipline rather than convenience. Acting from integrity requires that you give up short-term payoffs (immediate gratification, escape, avoidance, self-indulgence, revenge, etc.) for something that is bigger or more fulfilling in the long-run. It requires that you pay a price (delay of gratification, quieting your tongue, facing a problem, entering into a difficult conversation, etc.). The price you pay is like your admission into the world of emotional maturity. You've earned it.

So, consider your key moment. What new actions are you willing to take? Things won't magically change. You change them by making new choices and behaving in a new way.

Hal faced one key moment after another. Kind of like all of us. Initially, he didn't handle them well. He wanted to defend himself. He wanted others to change. But gradually, he learned better ways of responding. He grew up. He became emotionally mature.