

## **Be Your Own Bailout! Action vs. Entitlement**

By Mike McCurley and Lindsay Barbee

### **Introduction**

In 1978, M. Scott Peck published his groundbreaking book *The Road Less Traveled*.<sup>1</sup> He began this commentary on life, love, and everything in between with three simple words:

“Life is difficult.”

Dr. Peck was not telling his readers anything they did not already know, but his words resonated profoundly and launched a multimillion dollar career in publishing books and touring the world giving lectures about his views on finding true happiness.

Thirty years later, no person would argue that life today is any less difficult than it was when Dr. Peck wrote those deceptively simple words. Our country is on the brink of a recession. Our military is fighting a war like none other against an enemy whom we cannot always identify. We are the wealthiest country in the world, a land of limitless opportunity and resources, but the fact that consumers spend over twenty billion dollars a year purchasing anti-depressants suggests that we have never been more unhappy and unable to temper our discontent.<sup>2</sup>

As scientists continue to gain insight into how the human brain works, methods of treatment for diseases such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia have evolved and most patients can manage symptoms such as anxiety and depression with medication and psychotherapy. They can live their lives as normal, productive human beings—a stark contrast to the antiquated solution of locking them up in the “loony bin” to keep them from hurting themselves and others.

But while such advances in medicine and psychotherapy can help those with a diagnosed medical condition, it seems statistically impossible that every unhappy person has some form of mental illness that can be cured by taking medication and participating in psychotherapy.

Still, in some way or another, the growing belief in our country is that almost any

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<sup>1</sup>M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (Simon & Schuster 1978).

<sup>2</sup> David Armstrong and Keith Winstein, “Anti Depressants Under Scrutiny Over Efficacy: Sweeping Overview Suggests Suppression of Negative Data Has Distorted View of Drugs,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2008, at D1 (accessed online October 29, 2008 at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120051950205895415.html>)

emotional issue can be fixed by taking a pill—or maybe just grabbing a beer or lighting a joint. Why is that Americans are medicating and self-medicating to such an extent? Why is it that by the world's standards we are so rich yet feel so poor?

### **Entitlement**

One of the best and worst qualities of human nature is our ability to adapt to our circumstances. In times of crisis, this ability makes it possible for us to endure great stress and rise above circumstances beyond our control in order to continue functioning. On the other hand, in times of plenty, we begin to take our circumstances for granted, easily forgetting that the level of success we enjoy in the moment was not always there:

We take our freedoms for granted and forget that most people in the world have to struggle on a daily basis to meet their most fundamental needs. It is this sense of entitlement that makes many Americans unhappy. Because our needs are so easily attained in this country, most of us believe that our every desire should be just as easily gained. Consequently, we focus on the reward we believe we should get for our efforts instead of the actual effort itself.<sup>3</sup>

Entitlement leads to an attitude that we should be rescued from our problems, and this attitude keeps people from taking responsibility for their own lives:

But, crying out for rescue instead of addressing and fixing your problems with your own personal power will never increase your level of happiness, even if you are ultimately rescued. When you are rescued from a problem by someone or something, you lose faith in your own ability to solve your problems. Consequently, your subjective competence decreases and you become unable to meet your own needs.<sup>4</sup>

### **Economic Crisis/Bailout**

Americans are suffering from emotional poverty on a staggering level, and in many ways, the current economic crisis is a macrocosmic/macroeconomic example of

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<sup>3</sup>Mike McCurley and Kelly L. Burris, *Improving Quality of Life While Practicing Law: The Ultimate Balancing Act*, 30th Annual Advanced Family Law Course (2004) (citing W. E. Trice, *You Are What You Think*, Sermon at Walnut Hill United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas (Aug. 31, 1980).

<sup>4</sup>*Id.* (citing Dan Baker, PhD. and Cameron Stauth, *What Happy People Know: How the New Science of Happiness Can Change Your Life for the Better* (2003).

entitlement gone awry. Those responsible for the current crisis acted irresponsibly, were unable to fix the problems they themselves created, and then cried out to the government for rescue. Their sense of entitlement overshadowed the need for prudent investing and accountability to the millions of shareholders dependant upon solid investment strategies. For now, the government has come to the rescue, but there will come a time when tax dollars run out and there is nothing left for lawmakers to do but let businesses sink or swim.

### **Take Action!**

So what can we learn from the big picture/macroeconomic model of financial crisis to apply to the human level of individual happiness and personal success? To begin with, just as there are only so many tax dollars available to save the economy, there is also a limit to how many times we can rely upon others to rescue us in times of need when we seem helpless to do anything for ourselves. Most of us will never get the luxury of “bailout” after “bailout” for every personal crisis we have and cannot handle.

Now is the time for those who want their lives to improve to make the ultimate investment—in themselves. Through a life coaching program, an individual can avoid having his or her “life stock” plummet in times of crisis. The coach works with the client to determine individual strengths and weaknesses. Entitlement has no place in a coaching plan because the goal of life coaching is to give the client the necessary tools to actively participate in shaping the future by setting goals and creating strategies to achieve them.

Life coaching is not a passive personality evaluation or survey of philosophical roads to happiness. On the contrary, a client will only benefit from life coaching sessions if he or she actively engages in the assigned activities. Life coaching is for people who want change and are willing to make it happen. What better way to defeat the forces of negativity caused by entitlement than to take charge of life and be your own bailout!