

Redesign your mind

As we begin a new year, perhaps the first thing we should consider refreshing is ourselves, says our editor-in-chief Michelle Ogundehin: and she doesn't mean with spa treatments

Illustration NICOLA REW

There is a proverb that says 'Give me a boy until he is seven, and I will give you the man,' the sentiment being that our characters are fully formed in those crucial early years of life: and it's a theory backed up by contemporary psychological research. More specifically, some say our characters are dictated in those formative years by behaviors copied from our parents, or primary caregivers. Why? Because, before the age of seven, we learn intuitively, absorbing that which we observe on an emotional level, imitating without the benefit of a filter to decipher good from bad. As life progresses we accept these characteristics as 'ourselves'. Teachers of the Hoffman Process, a personal discovery and development program (it's also been dubbed a psychological detox) founded by Bob Hoffman in California in 1967, believe that as a result of this, many of our adult emotional struggles are due to the disconnection between those intuitively learned behaviors and our true natures. We are not born impatient, angry, anxious, judgmental, or with an inability to love; they say we are born 'pure' until someone teaches us to behave, or believe, otherwise.

So is this the great get-out clause? An excuse to nonchalantly shrug off all the stuff we don't like about ourselves as adults, blaming our parents instead? Ultimately, few could claim to have had visionary, perfect mothers and fathers. But as Hoffman was often quoted as saying, 'Everyone is guilty and no one is to blame.' After all, they too had their stresses and struggles as well as their own symbiotically adopted behavioral patterns to contend with.

Instead, and especially at this time of year, 'Who am I?' continues to be an eternally proffered question, alongside 'Who do I actually want to be?' And often times it's a crisis in life, or a major turning point such as a relationship breakdown, new job or the birth of a child that provokes, or

prompts, such introspective self-examination.

For myself, the push to sign up for the Hoffman Process was simply a steadily increasing feeling that all was not quite as it could be. Change felt required but the trouble was, I wasn't sure what it was that needed to change. And while I've always been committed to the notion of self-evolution, I can honestly say that this eight-day residential course



(I did it in Seaford, East Sussex, but it's available in 13 countries around the world) was the most intense emotional journey I have ever put myself through. And I sincerely hope I will never feel the need to do it again! From the moment you cross the threshold you hand over your phones, books and electronic devices, progressively letting go of everything you hitherto assumed defined you. In short, the Process seemed to me to be a carefully structured method of forensically cross-examining yourself, your parents and the dynamics within your family, followed by a regression of sorts back through childhood in order to jettison any baggage you no longer wish to carry, thus unlocking negative emotions and releasing potential. The real killer, though, was while all of us have stuff we know about on the surface, say a tendency to get wound up by certain types of people, or hurts that we know we haven't made peace with, we all bury a lot too. Ways of being that are so deeply ingrained in our psyche, we don't even recognize that they are learned behaviors. So, just when you think you're done, with any 'issues' resolved and demons neatly dealt with, you're pushed further in order to truly face up to yourself.

Usually, so anecdotal evidence suggests, it's only on our deathbeds that we finally come face to face with our unvarnished truths. When we have nothing left to lose, the blinkers fall from our eyes and we see clearly how we could have been if we'd got out of the way of ourselves. How much better then to do the work rather earlier and be able to reap the benefits with a life still ahead of you! And it's a unique opportunity to break familial chains that may have shackled whole generations, before they too are passed onto the next. But getting out of the way of yourself is a tricky concept for many to grasp. Surely, they say, we are who we are, and isn't life about learning to accept that? No. We are a sum total of learned patterns of behavior, both negative and positive. And if you can learn to be one way, with consciousness of that pattern, if it's negative, you can learn to behave differently. Let's take an example. You're a pack rat, can't throw anything away, always hoarding, just in case. But it annoys your partner, and your kids are perhaps rebelling

by being unduly messy. Could you 'snap out of it', read a few books on Zen minimalism or have an annual purge to clutter-clear only to amass again? Or could you attempt to get to the root of your attachment to stuff, your fear of letting things go? In all likelihood too, this tendency to hang onto things wiggles its way into other aspects of your life in a sort of ripple effect... Bit possessive? Or needy? The point is, every behavior has a cause. The question is, do you want to challenge yourself to investigate why? Do you want change?

Not that an empty abode would, by corollary, be the epitome of self-contentment. It's more the idea that before rushing to re-do, remove or renovate that which surrounds us, perhaps it's worth taking a moment to consider that which is within us.

After all, do you really need a bigger house, a new handbag, or the latest gadget or gizmo? And if you do need something, are you choosing an item that really reflects your true self, or just something to make a statement to outside observers? Consumerism today is deliberately driven by making us feel lack. If you buy X, then you'll feel Y. We know it's not true and yet at this time of year, following the shopping frenzy that Christmas has increasingly become, possibly strained by debt and suffering a touch of self-recrimination, perhaps this will be the moment that you clear out your inner basement in order to start the new year truly ready to make the most of everything that lies ahead of you.

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For more information on the Hoffman Process, visit www.hoffmaninstitute.org or call 800/506-5253. To read more about the Hoffman techniques, check out Tim Laurence's book, You Can Change Your Life: A Future Different From Your Past with the Hoffman Process, available at www.hoffmaninstitute.org/store.

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