



# What You Can Change . . . and What You Can't\*: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement

By *Martin E.P. Seligman*



## What You Can Change . . . and What You Can't\*: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement By Martin E.P. Seligman

In the climate of self-improvement that pervades our culture, there is an overwhelming amount of information about treatments for everything from alcohol abuse to sexual dysfunction. Much of this information is exaggerated if not wholly inaccurate. As a result, people who try to change their own troubling conditions often experience the frustration of mixed success, success followed by a relapse, or outright failure.

To address this confusion, Martin Seligman has meticulously analyzed the most authoritative scientific research on treatments for alcoholism, anxiety, weight loss, anger, depression, and a range of phobias and obsessions to discover what is the most effective way to address each condition. He frankly reports what does not work, and pinpoints the techniques and therapies that work best for each condition, discussing why they work and how you can use them to make long lasting change. Inside you'll discover the four natural healing factors for recovering from alcoholism; the vital difference between overeating and being overweight; the four therapies that work for depression, the pros and cons of anger—and much more.

Wise, direct, and very useful, *What You Can Change and What You Can't* will help anyone who seeks to change.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Psychologist Seligman ( *Learned Optimism* ) here examines common psychological disorders according to their biological and societal, or learned, components. Most enlightening are his analyses of the effectiveness of relaxation, meditation, psychoanalysis and cognitive therapies in the treatment of anxiety, which, along with depression and anger, he claims, can largely be controlled by disciplined effort. Tables demonstrating the success rates of various approaches to given problems, evaluative questionnaires and mostly jargon-free prose complement Seligman's comprehensive, unformulaic discussion. Maintaining that dieting will not help people who are overweight ("Weight is in large part genetic"), the author urges a focus on fitness and health; asserting that a child's psyche heals faster than an adult's, he observes that childhood trauma does not necessarily shape one's adult life: "the rest of the tapestry is not determined by what has been woven before." Direct, instructive and nonreductive, Seligman's observations and theories are positive, realistic and sound. 75,000 first printing; BOMC alternate.

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From Library Journal

Seligman (psychology, Univ. of Pennsylvania) has written a number of earlier books, including *Learned Optimism* ( LJ 11/91). In this latest, he examines the psychology of individual change. He begins by reviewing the history of psychological change and the role of psychiatric biology; he then examines the emotional changes that can alleviate everyday stress, panic, phobias, obsession, anger, and depression. Throughout, Seligman uses outcome studies to identify what works in making change. In the third section, he addresses physical change involving sex, diet, and alcohol. The author concludes by summarizing his beliefs that what you can change depends on the depth of the problem and that childhood trauma need not define an adult indefinitely. This extremely well-written book, while aimed at the lay reader, is appropriate for students and professionals as well. Highly recommended for both academic and public libraries.

- *Kay Brodie, Chesapeake Coll., Wye Mills, Md.*

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From [Booklist](#)

The subtitle of this psychological self-help adviser seems to promise impossibly more than could be delivered. But Seligman is so much more sensible and lucid than most self-help gurus that he encourages thinking that, yes, this is all we can say--and do--right now about changing undesirable behaviors. "Two worlds views are in collision," Seligman says, over the prospects of behavioral change. Those products of the Western concept of free will--psychotherapy and self-improvement--maintain that behavior is malleable through a variety of conscious techniques. Biological psychiatry asserts that mental illness is physically caused, personality is genetically fixed, and brain chemistry determines emotions; change is possible only by physical interventions, primarily pharmaceutical but also surgical. Seligman comes down between those two extremes in recommending what to do about anxiety, phobias, depression, sexual problems, weight, alcohol use, etc. He advocates techniques that have demonstrably achieved lasting change or--what is far more likely--reduction in the frequency of undesired behavior. He bases his advice in sound research and highly educated inference, which means that his book constantly rewards anyone interested in individual psychology. In the last two chapters, Seligman offers first a devastating critique of the notion that childhood traumas shape adult behavior, particularly as that belief is exploited by the recovery movement, and then his own theory of behavioral change, in which change is possible according to the depth of the behavior--e.g., sexual orientation is very deeply entrenched, hence very difficult to alter, but panic attacks are very shallow

and fairly easily eradicated. Absolutely splendid. *Ray Olson*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Geraldine Schrader:**

Do you considered one of people who can't read satisfying if the sentence chained inside the straightway, hold on guys this particular aren't like that. This *What You Can Change . . . and What You Can't\*: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement* book is readable simply by you who hate the straight word style. You will find the facts here are arrange for enjoyable reading experience without leaving possibly decrease the knowledge that want to supply to you. The writer associated with *What You Can Change . . . and What You Can't\*: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement* content conveys prospect easily to understand by most people. The printed and e-book are not different in the content but it just different as it. So , do you nonetheless thinking *What You Can Change . . . and What You Can't\*: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement* is not loveable to be your top record reading book?

#### **Anthony Callahan:**

The book *What You Can Change . . . and What You Can't\*: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement* has a lot info on it. So when you check out this book you can get a lot of help. The book was published by the very famous author. Tom makes some research prior to write this book. That book very easy to read you will get the point easily after reading this article book.

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