

## Introduction

*Make no little plans.  
Make the biggest plans you can think of,  
and spend the rest of your life carrying them out.*  
— Harry S. Truman

It's been nearly 150 years since Charles Darwin wrote *On the Origin of Species*, and we are still seeking a key to unlock the secrets of the evolution of the human species. To fulfill our potential as a species, it is essential to come to a deeper understanding of the concept of evolution.

One definition of *evolution* is simply “change over time toward a more highly developed state.” Things do change over time; no one can dispute that! Think of how children evolve in a few years from helpless little beings to people who can do things for themselves. Think of how electronics – cell phones, TV's, cameras and computers – have evolved within a short time frame. Such changes are examples of evolution. Evolution is a natural fact; it is nothing to be afraid of. Despite the recurrence of old controversies, accepting the reality of evolution doesn't rule out the existence of a Supreme Being. Belief or nonbelief in God can coexist with the concept of evolution. Whatever our religious beliefs, or lack thereof, it makes sense to understand how the human species has evolved until now — and how, and equally important, *where* it can evolve as we move forward.

## Pieces of the Puzzle

My interest in the evolution of our species arose as I grappled with several key events that took place while growing up in the 1960s. The most important of these were the Civil Rights and women's movements; the assassinations of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy; the blossoming and decline of the hippie movement; and the horrors of the Vietnam War. Watching these events unfold awakened in me a desire to help make the world a better, more peaceful place to live. I don't view this as a noble motive. I just didn't want to live in a world where violence and injustice were a norm that could potentially negatively impact my life. Of course good things were also happening, but the negatives made it hard for me to fully enjoy my life. I simply couldn't look the other way.

Since then, my life's goal has been to help make the world, and my own life, *significantly* better by working to transform destructive behaviors that have defined our species for thousands of years. Unfortunately, the world situation in regards to levels of violence and aggression is not that much different today. Some might say it's worse. Technologically, we have advanced exponentially in the last two hundred years. But instinctively, our primal responses are not much different from those of our ancestors who roamed the savannas of Africa thousands of years ago.

Although at times I have been discouraged, somehow I've managed to keep my idealism alive and make it through my moments of doubt. We live on an incredible planet. We humans are amazing beings. Our

accomplishments over the centuries are awe-inspiring. No one living a thousand years ago could have imagined *any* of what we take as commonplace today. As a species, our potential is virtually unlimited. But in order to achieve our potential, we need to answer a few questions:

- With so many accomplishments to our credit, why is there still so much suffering in the world?
- With all of the extraordinary insights achieved from ancient spiritual traditions, philosophy and modern psychology, why does man's inhumanity prevail and produce so much stress, turmoil, despair, and sadness in so many people's lives?
- Are these realities unavoidable aspects of human nature? Is it simply our fate to possess virtually unlimited potential, yet forever limit that potential by behaving in ways that are petty, cruel, unconscious and self-destructive? Or do we have the ability to change?

I have spent nearly four decades pondering such questions, wondering what I can do – what all of us can do – to help move the evolution of our species forward, and move the world in a more positive direction. My longtime friends have called me a seeker. At some point, I started seeing life as a puzzle, and began looking to see how all the pieces might fit together into a harmonious whole.

Always searching for answers, I have read books, listened to speakers, and shared ideas with those who were willing to engage with me, or guide me. With each book, each speaker, and each intuition, another piece of that puzzle has fallen into place for me. As the pieces came together, it occurred to me that a core issue might underlie the negative aspects of human behavior, and a common thread might link the many manifestations of our suffering.

### **A Common Thread**

The problems we face are diverse and complex. Some say they all stem from human laziness, greed, or evil: from inherently flawed human nature. But I have seen too many people display kindness, compassion, and courage to agree with that assessment.

As I examined the negative aspects of human behavior — over aggressiveness, anger, jealousy, fear, intimidation, violence, coveting, cheating, lying, stealing — I kept noticing a common thread tying them together. That thread lies in competitive, aggressive behavior patterns, exacerbated by an innate survival instinct.

Currently, we live in a system predicated on a competitive model of behavior. We are raised to compete against one another from an early age. Unfortunately, this approach takes a serious toll on our psychological health and development, and thereby on our humanity. Competition is the norm for individuals, families, teams, tribes, communities, businesses, states, religions, and nations. In a way, life is one big contest, or a series of contests, marked by a constant jockeying for position in the pecking order. I'm

better (smarter, stronger, faster, richer) than you are. My family is better than your family. Our community is better than your community. My school is better than your school. Our business, state, political party, country, or multi-national corporation is better than yours. My God is more powerful than your God. We are the chosen people and you are not!

We have been a competitive species for tens of thousands of years. And while that energy has motivated humanity to great accomplishments, it has also produced many of our darkest moments. Does having been a competitive species for so long mean we will be forever at war? Is this how it's supposed to be? This seems like a pretty bleak picture to me. I believe we have a choice; that we don't have to settle for this outcome.

In my search for answers, I have come to see competitive behavior as something we humans have learned over the course of our evolutionary history. Yes, in early times dangerous conditions forced humans to be competitive to survive. But as societies developed, we transferred this competitive mentality into religion, commerce, relationships, politics, academics, and sports. Today, certain aspects of this mentality prevent us from fulfilling our greatest aspirations, and literally threaten our world.

### **Limitations of a Competitive Mindset**

I do not advocate the elimination of competition. I do recommend that we examine where, when, and how competition creates problems, and seek healthy alternatives and solutions. Many people who call themselves highly competitive are simply people who have high expectations and a strong desire to succeed. The desire to be successful isn't, in and of itself, competitive. You can possess high expectations and a strong desire for success, yet not be competitive. We conflate the desire for excellence with the trait of competitiveness, when in truth they are very different.

A competitive mindset has led to great advances for our species, and provided a powerful motivating force for individuals, communities, nations and civilizations, but it is not the be-all and end-all of existence. From my youth, sports have been an integral part of my life. I have participated in, enjoyed (some of the time), and done well (a majority of the time) in thousands of contests. These competitive experiences have taught me many valuable lessons. Whether in sports, academics, business, or the arts, it is exciting and motivating to see people perform at a high level. I have no desire to take that away from anyone.

The problem is that only a small percentage of people succeed in this system. Most function at a fraction of their potential. Is that because most people are not that bright or talented or motivated? Are they just mediocre, or lazy? In my experience, this is simply not the case. I have seen first hand how the competitive system itself inhibits development, and thus performance.

I am convinced that the problem is systemic and results in most of us functioning well below our potential. I believe our competitive system, by repeatedly pitting us against each other in often premature and needlessly adversarial contests, destabilizes our confidence and motivation, and limits our ability, our

enjoyment, and our overall development. I will show the evidence for these assertions in the following chapters.

### **Time for a Course Correction**

Over the centuries, the competitive mindset has become the dominant model of behavior for a majority of people. I believe it is time to make some healthy changes in this model, which I will discuss later. I am basically an optimist. But as a longtime student of history and current events, I am aware that if we don't change course soon, life may get ugly, not for just a few, but for most. The crux of the problem inherent in a competitive paradigm is that *each generation must be more competitive than the last, not to achieve an absolute standard of excellence, but just to keep up. Each generation must be more competitive!* The big question is, how much more competitive can we be? When does the stress of this unrealistic expectation begin producing more negative than positive results? And have we already reached that point?

Many people are uncertain and anxious about their future, and are doing all they can to keep up. Millions don't get enough to eat on a daily basis. Greed and fear are present at every level from politics to business, to social institutions. Destruction and contamination of vital ecosystems is a planet-wide problem. Ethnic violence and prejudice are rampant around the globe. Our weapons of mass destruction make it possible for us to obliterate ourselves at any moment. I could provide many more such examples of the competitive mindset being out of control, but I am sure you get the point. This is no way to live — *for anyone*. And yet, it's the way *almost everyone* lives.

We need to make major changes. I'm not talking about *revolution*, but *higher evolution*. Revolution entails an "us versus them" dynamic – a competitive mindset. In a revolution, one group works to overthrow those in power and take charge themselves. Most revolutions are rooted in anger and turn ugly and violent. Revolutions are examples of how the Darwinian law of the jungle has fueled our evolutionary process as a species. But eventually, our higher evolution will allow us to see that everyone is on the same side, working toward the same goal, and that making life better for everyone makes it better for ourselves.

Again, this book does not propose to banish competition. Rather, it examines the dynamics of competition and the many societal and inter-personal problems it causes. It looks to see if competition in fact produces the best attainable results; to see where and when competition is appropriate and effective, and where it isn't.

Modern advances in technology have made Earth a very small planet. Whether we like it or not, we are all in this together. And we can all be part of the solutions to our collective problems. As Charles Darwin noted, "The survival or extinction of each organism is determined by that organism's ability to adapt to its environment." The same is true for a species. This book is a call for a new adaptation of human behavior in our increasingly changing and challenging environment. Our survival may depend upon it!