

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 over 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 dictionary 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 kids who can do things for themselves. That's evolution! Evolution is part of nature; it is nothing to fear.

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 events 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 before my eyes on television 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 the norm that could potentially negatively impact my life. Of course good things were happening too, but the negative aspects 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 different today—it might be even worse. Technologically, we have advanced exponentially in the last two hundred years. But psychologically, 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've been discouraged, somehow I've managed to keep my idealism somewhat intact 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 ask and 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've spent five 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've 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. 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 an inherently flawed human nature. But I've seen too many people display kindness, compassion, and courage to agree with that assessment.

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

It is clear that we live in a system predicated on a competitive model of behavior. We are reared to compete against one another from an early age. Unfortunately, this approach takes a serious toll on our psychological and spiritual health, 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, more beautiful, 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 technological 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. We have a choice; we don't have to settle for this outcome.

In my search for answers, I've 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 more competitive to survive. But as societies developed, we transferred this competitive mentality into religion, commerce, relationships, politics, education, 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, but rather that we examine where, when, and how competition creates problems, and seek healthy alternatives and solutions. I believe it is important to understand and acknowledge that Peak Performance cannot occur in a competitive environment, a topic explored later in the book. Many people who label 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.

In a competitive system *only a small percentage of people succeed while most function at a fraction of their potential*. Is this the result of most people not being that bright or talented or motivated? Are most of us, just mediocre, or lazy? Or is it that when winning is all that matters, the competitive system itself is the problem?

Our competitive system, by repeatedly pitting us against each other in premature and needlessly adversarial contests destabilizes our confidence and motivation, and limits our ability, enjoyment, and overall development. In the following chapters these assertions will be documented by evidence based on

Each generation has to be more competitive than the last, not to excel, but just to keep up.

academic studies, my many years playing and watching competitive sports, and my forty-six years of teaching and observing of my students. 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?

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.” We are one of those organisms. This book is a call for a new adaptation of human behavior in our increasingly changing and challenging environment. Our survival depends on it! In our highly competitive society, reducing competition will be one way to lessen stress and anxiety, which are so much a part of our postmodern world.

Evolutionary Education examines the dynamics of competition and the many societal and inter-personal problems it causes. My conclusion is that competition doesn’t produce the best attainable results. We need to see where and when competition is appropriate and effective, and where it is not.