

Paradigms and Principles

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

The following is a list of statements made many years ago by experts in their fields. At the time they were said they sounded intelligent. With the passing of time, they sound idiotic.

Top 10 All-Time Stupid Quotes:

10 "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home."

KENNETH OLSEN, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF DIGITAL EQUIPMENT CORPORATION, IN 1977

9 "Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value."

MARSHAL FERDINAND FOCH, FRENCH MILITARY STRATEGIST AND FUTURE WORLD WAR I COMMANDER, IN 1911

8 "[Man will never reach the moon] regardless of all future scientific advances."

DR. LEE DE FOREST, INVENTOR OF THE AUDION TUBE AND FATHER OF RADIO, ON FEBRUARY 25, 1967

7 "[Television] won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."

DARRYL F. ZANUCK, HEAD OF 20TH CENTURY-FOX, IN 1946

Better keep yourself clean and bright; you are the window through which you see the whole world.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
ENGLISH PLAYWRIGHT

6 "We don't like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out."
DECCA RECORDS REJECTING THE BEATLES, IN 1962

5 "For the majority of people, the use of tobacco has a beneficial effect."
DR. IAN G. MACDONALD, LOS ANGELES SURGEON, AS QUOTED IN NEWSWEEK, NOVEMBER 18, 1969

4 "This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us."
WESTERN UNION INTERNAL MEMO, IN 1876

3 "The earth is the center of the universe."
PTOLEMY, THE GREAT EGYPTIAN ASTRONOMER, IN THE SECOND CENTURY

2 "Nothing of importance happened today."
WRITTEN BY KING GEORGE III OF ENGLAND ON JULY 4, 1776

"Everything that can be invented has been invented."
CHARLES H. DUELL, U.S. COMMISSIONER OF PATENTS, IN 1899

Having read these, let me share with you another list of statements made by real teens just like you. You've heard them before, and they are just as ridiculous as the list above.

"No one in my family has ever gone to college. I'd be crazy to think I could make it."

"It's no use. My stepdad and I will never get along. We're just too different."

"Being smart is a 'white' thing."

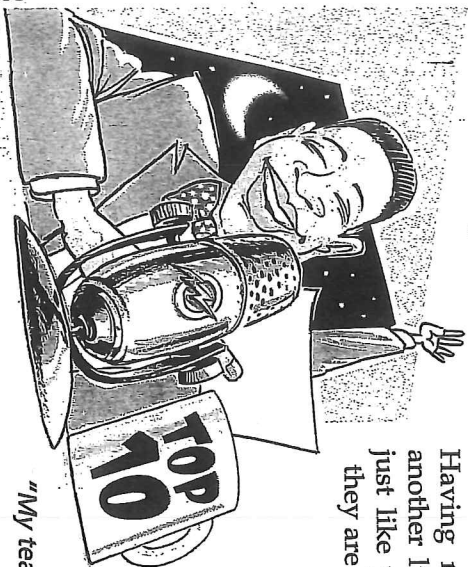
"My teacher is out to get me."

"She's so pretty—I'll bet she's a jerk."

"You can't get ahead in life unless you know the right people."

"Me? Thin? Are you kidding? My whole family is full of fat people."

"It's impossible to get a good job around here 'cause nobody wants to hire a teen."



So What's a Paradigm? What do these two lists of statements have in common? First, they are all *perceptions* about the way things are. Second, they are all inaccurate or incomplete, even though the people who said them are convinced they're true.

Another word for perceptions is *paradigms* [pair-a-dimes]. A paradigm is the way you see something, your point of view, frame of reference, or belief. As you may have noticed, our paradigms are often way off the mark, and, as a result, they create limitations. For instance, you may be convinced that you don't have what it takes to get into college. But, remember, Ptolemy was just as convinced that the earth was the center of the universe.

And think about the teen who believes she can't get along with her stepdad. If that is her paradigm, is she likely to ever get along? Probably not, because that belief will hold her back.

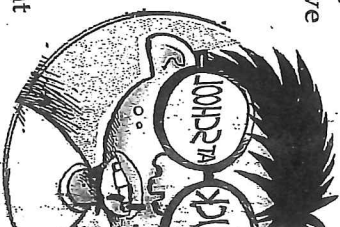
Paradigms are like glasses. When you have incomplete paradigms about yourself or life in general, it's like wearing glasses with the wrong prescription. That lens affects how you see everything else. As a result, what you see is what you get. If you believe you're dumb, that very belief will make you dumb. If you believe your sister is dumb, you'll look for evidence to support your belief, find it, and she'll remain dumb in your eyes. On the other hand, if you believe you're smart, that belief will cast a rosy hue on everything you do.

A teen named Kristi once shared with me how much she loved the beauty of the mountains. One day she went to visit her eye doctor and, to her surprise, discovered that her sight was much worse than she had thought. After putting in her new contacts, she was astonished at how well she could see. As she put it, "I realized that the mountains and trees and even the signs on the side of the road have more detail than I had ever imagined. It was the strangest thing. I didn't know how bad my eyes were until I experienced how good they could be." That's often the way it is. We don't know how much we're missing because we have messed-up paradigms.

We have paradigms about ourselves, about other people, and about life in general. Let's take a look at each.

● PARADIGMS OF SELF

Stop right now and consider this question: Are your paradigms of yourself helping or hindering you?



When my wife, Rebecca, was a junior at Madison High School in Idaho, a sign-up sheet for the Miss Madison pageant was passed around in class. Rebecca, along with many other girls, signed up. Linda, who sat next to Rebecca, passed without signing.

"Sign up, Linda," insisted Rebecca.

"Oh, no. I couldn't do that."

"Come on. It will be fun."

"No, really. I'm not the type."

"Sure you are. I think you'd be great!" chimed Rebecca.

Rebecca and others continued to encourage Linda until she finally signed.

Rebecca didn't think anything of the situation at the time. However, seven years later, she received a letter from Linda describing the inner struggle she had gone through that day and thanking Rebecca for being the spark that helped her change her life. Linda related how she suffered from a poor self-image in high school and was shocked that Rebecca would consider her a candidate for a talent pageant. She had finally agreed to sign up just to get Rebecca and the others off her back.

Linda said she was so uncomfortable about being in the pageant that she contacted the pageant director the following day and demanded her name be removed from the list. But, like Rebecca, the director insisted that Linda participate.

Reluctantly, Linda agreed.

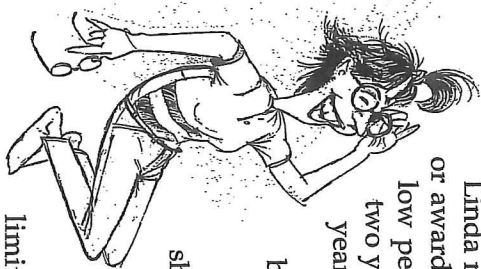
But that was all it took. By daring to participate in an event that demanded the best in her, Linda began to see herself in a new light. In her letter, Linda thanked Rebecca from deep within for, in essence, taking off her warped glasses, shattering them against the floor, and insisting she try on a new pair.

Linda noted that although she hadn't won a single title or award, she had overcome an even bigger obstacle: her low perception of herself. Because of her example, her two younger sisters participated in the pageant in later years. It became a big thing in her family.

The following year Linda became a student body officer, and, as Rebecca relates, developed a vivacious and outgoing personality.

Linda experienced what is called a "paradigm shift." It means that you suddenly see things in a new way, as if you just tried on a new pair of glasses.

Just as negative self-paradigms can put limitations on us, positive self-paradigms can bring



out the best in us, as the following story about the son of King Louis XVI of France illustrates:

King Louis had been taken from his throne and imprisoned. His young son, the prince, was taken by those who dethroned the king. They thought that inasmuch as the king's son was heir to the throne, if they could destroy him morally, he would never realize the great and grand destiny that life had bestowed upon him.



They took him to a community far away, and there they exposed the lad to every filthy and vile thing that life could offer. They exposed him to foods the richness of which would quickly make him a slave to appetite. They used vile language around him constantly. They exposed him to lewd and lusty women. They exposed him to dishonor and distrust. He was surrounded twenty-four hours a day by everything that could drag the soul of a man as low as one could slip. For over six months he had this treatment—but not once did the young lad buckle under pressure. Finally, after intensive temptation, they questioned him. Why had he not submitted himself to these things—why had he not partaken? These things would provide pleasure, satisfy his lusts, and were desirable; they were all his. The boy said, "I cannot do what you ask for I was born to be a king."

Prince Louis held that paradigm of himself so tightly that nothing could shake him. In like manner, if you walk through life wearing glasses that say "I can do it" or "I matter," that belief will put a positive spin on everything else.

At this point you may be wondering, "If my paradigm of myself is all contorted, what can I do to fix it?" One way is to spend time with someone who believes in you and builds you up. My mother was such a person to me. When I was growing up, my mom always believed in me, especially when I doubted myself. She was always saying stuff like "Sean, of course you should run for class president," and "Ask her out. I'm sure she would just die to go out with you." Whenever I needed to be affirmed I'd talk to my mom and she'd clean my glasses.

Ask any successful person and most will tell you that they had a person who believed in them ... a teacher, a friend, a parent, a guardian, a sister, a grandmother. It only takes one person, and it doesn't really matter who it is. Don't be afraid to lean on this person and to get nourished by them. Go to them for advice. Try to see yourself the way they see you. Oh, what a difference a new pair of glasses can make! As someone once said, "If you could envision the type of person God intended you to be, you would rise up and never be the same again."

At times, you may not have anyone to lean on and may need to go solo. If this is the case with you, pay special attention to the next chapter, which will give you some handy tools to help build your self-image.

PARADIGMS OF OTHERS

We have paradigms not only about ourselves, but also about other people. And they can be way out of whack too. Seeing things from a different point of view can help us understand why other people act the way they do.

Becky told me about her paradigm shift:

As a junior in high school, I had a friend named Kim. She was essentially a nice person, but as the year progressed, it became more and more difficult to get along with her. She was easily offended and often felt left out. She was moody and difficult to be around. It got to the point where my friends and I started calling her less and less. Eventually we stopped inviting her to things.

I was gone for a good part of the summer after that year, and when I returned I was talking to a good friend of mine, catching up on all the news. She was telling me about all the gossip, the different romances, who was dating who, and so on, when suddenly she said, "Oh! Did I tell you about Kim? She's been having a hard time lately because her parents are going through a really messy divorce. She's taking it really hard."

When I heard this, my whole perspective changed. Rather than being annoyed by Kim's behavior, I felt terrible about my own. I felt I had deserted her in her time of need. Just by knowing that one little bit of information, my whole attitude toward her changed. It was really an eye-opening experience.

And to think that all it took to change Becky's paradigm was a smidgen of new information. We too often judge people without having all the facts.

Monica had a similar experience:

I used to live in California, where I had a lot of good friends. I didn't care about anybody new because I already had my friends and I thought that new people should deal with it in their own way. Then, when I moved, I was the new kid and wished that someone would care about me and make me part of their group of friends. I see things in a very different way now. I know what it feels like to not have any friends.

From now on, Monica will treat new kids on the block very differently, don't you think? Seeing things from another point of view can make such a difference in our attitude toward others.

FRANK & ERNEST © by Bob Thaves



The following anecdote from *Reader's Digest* (contributed by Dan P. Greyling) is a classic example of a paradigm shift:

A friend of mine, returning to South Africa from a long stay in Europe, found herself with some time to spare at London's Heathrow Airport. Buying a cup of coffee and a small package of cookies, she staggered, laden with luggage, to an unoccupied table. She was reading the morning paper when she became aware of someone rustling at her table. From behind her paper, she was flabbergasted to see a neatly dressed young man helping himself to her cookies. She did not want to make a scene, so she leaned across and took a cookie herself. A minute or so passed. More rustling. He was helping himself to another cookie. By the time they were down to the last cookie in the package, she was very angry but still could not bring herself to say anything. Then the young man broke the cookie in two, pushed half across to her, ate the other half and left.

Some time later, when the public-address system called for her to present her ticket, she was still fuming. Imagine her embarrassment when she opened her handbag and was confronted by her package of cookies. She had been eating his.

Consider this lady's feelings toward the neatly dressed young man before the turn of events: "What a rude, presumptive young man."

Imagine her feelings after: "How embarrassing! How kind of him to share his last cookie with me!"

So what's the point? It's simply this. Our paradigms are often incomplete, inaccurate, or completely messed up. Therefore, we shouldn't be so quick to judge, label, or form rigid opinions of others, or ourselves, for that matter. From our limited points of view, we seldom see the whole picture, or have all the facts.

In addition, we should open our minds and hearts to new information, ideas, and points of view, and be willing to change our paradigms when it becomes clear that they're wrong.

Most important, it is obvious that if we want to make big changes in our lives, the key is to change our paradigms, or the glasses through which we see the world. Change the lens and everything else follows.

If you'll look closely, you'll find that most of your problems (with relationships, self-image, attitude) are the result of a messed-up paradigm or two. For instance, if you have a poor relationship with, say, your dad, it's likely that both of you have a warped paradigm of each other. You may see him as being totally out of touch with the modern world, and he may see you as a spoiled, ungrateful brat. In reality, both of your paradigms are probably incomplete and are holding you back from real communication.

As you'll see, this book will challenge many of your paradigms and, hopefully, will help you create more accurate and complete ones. So get ready.

● PARADIGMS OF LIFE

Besides having paradigms about ourselves and others, we also have paradigms about the world in general. You can usually tell what your paradigm is by asking yourself, "What is the driving force of my life?" "What do I spend my time thinking about?" "Who or what is my obsession?" Whatever is most important to you will become your paradigm, your glasses, or, as I like to call it, your life-center. Some of the more popular life-centers for teens include Friends, Stuff, Boyfriend/Girlfriend, School, Parents, Sports/Hobbies, Heroes, Enemies, Self, and Work. They each have their good points, but they are all incomplete in one way or another, and, as I'm about to show you, they'll mess you up if you center your life on them. Luckily, there is one center that you can always count on. We'll save it for last.

Friend-Centered

There's nothing better than belonging to a great group of friends and nothing worse than feeling like an outcast. Friends are important but should never become your center. Why? Well, occasionally they're fickle. Now and then they're fake. Sometimes they talk behind your back or develop new friendships and forget yours. They have mood swings. They move.

In addition, if you base your identity on having friends, being accepted, and being popular, you may find yourself compromising your standards or changing them every weekend to accommodate your friends.

Believe it or not, the day will come when friends will not be the biggest thing in your life. During high school I had a fabulous group of friends. We did everything together—swam in illegal canals, gorged at all-you-can-eat buffets, water-skied in the dark, dated each other's girlfriends ... you name it. I loved these guys. I felt that we'd be friends forever.

After graduating from high school and moving away, however, I've been amazed at how seldom we see each other. We live far apart, and new relationships, jobs, and family take up our time. As a teen, I never could have fathomed this.

Make as many friends as you can, but don't build your life on them. It's an unstable foundation.

Stuff-Centered

Sometimes we see the world through the lens of possessions or "stuff." We live in a material world that teaches us that "He who dies with the most toys wins." We have to have the fastest car, the nicest clothes, the latest stereo, the best hairstyle, and the many other *things* that are supposed to bring us happiness. Possessions also come in the form of titles and accomplishments, such as head cheerleader, lead in the play, valedictorian, student body officer, chief editor, or MVP.

There is nothing wrong with accomplishing and enjoying our stuff, but we should never center our lives on *things*, which in the end have no lasting value. Our confidence needs to come from within, not from



without, from the *quality of our hearts*, not the *quantity of things* we own. After all, he who dies with the most toys ... still dies.

I once knew a girl who had the most beautiful and expensive wardrobe I'd ever seen. She seldom wore the same outfit twice. After getting to know her better, I began to notice that she got much of her self-confidence from her clothes and had a bad case of "elevator eyes." It seemed that whenever she talked with another girl, she'd eye her from head to foot to see if her outfit was as nice as her own, which usually gave her a superiority complex. She was stuff-centered, which was a real turnoff to me.

I read a saying once that says it better than I can: "If who I am is what I have and what I have is lost, then who am I?"

Boyfriend/Girlfriend-Centered

This may be the easiest trap of all to fall into. I mean, who hasn't been centered on a boyfriend or girlfriend at one point?

Let's pretend Brady centers his life on his girlfriend, Tasha. Now, watch the instability it creates in Brady.

TASHA'S ACTIONS

BRADY'S REACTIONS

Makes a rude comment:

"My day is ruined."

Flirts with Brady's best friend:

"I've been betrayed. I hate my friend."

"I think we should date other people":

"My life is over. You don't love me anymore."

The ironic thing is that the more you center your life on someone, the more unattractive you become to that person. How's that? Well, first of all, if you're centered on someone, you're no longer hard to get. Second, it's irritating when someone builds their entire emotional life around you. Since their security comes from you and not from within themselves, they always need to have those sickening "where do we stand" talks.

When I began dating my wife, one of the things that attracted me most was that she didn't center her life on me. I'll never forget the time she turned me down (with a smile and no apology) for a very important date. I loved it! She was her own person and had her own inner strength. Her moods were independent of mine.

You can usually tell when a couple becomes centered on each other because they are forever breaking up and getting back together. Although their relationship has deteriorated, their emotional lives and identities are so intertwined that they can never fully let go of each other.

Believe me, you'll be a better boyfriend or girlfriend if you're not centered on your partner. Independence is more attractive than dependence. Besides, centering your life on another doesn't show that you love them, only that you're dependent on them.

Have as many girlfriends or boyfriends as you'd like, just don't get obsessed with or centered on them, because, although there are exceptions, these relationships are usually about as stable as a yo-yo.

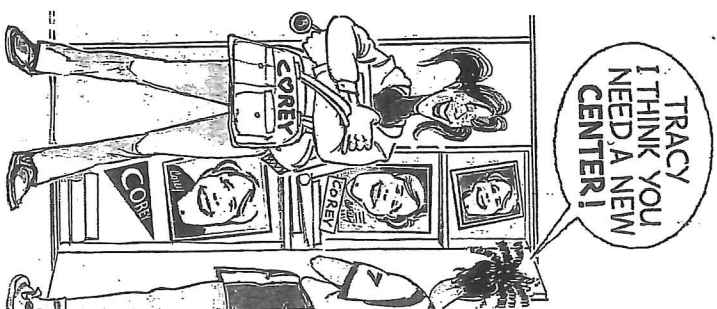
School-Centered

Among teens, centering one's life on school is more common than you might think. Lisa, from Canada, regrets being school-centered for so long:

I have been so ambitious and so school-centered that I haven't enjoyed my youth. It has not only been unhealthy for myself—but it's been selfish, because all I cared about was me and my achievements. As a seventh grader I was already working as hard as a college student. I wanted to be a brain surgeon, just because it was the hardest thing I could think of. I would get up at six every morning all through school and not go to bed before two A.M. in order to achieve.

I felt teachers and peers expected it of me. They would always be surprised if I didn't get perfect grades. My parents tried to loosen me up, but my own expectations were as great as that of teachers and peers. I realize now that I could have accomplished what I wanted with out trying so hard, and I could have had a good time doing it.

Our education is vital to our future and should be a top priority. But we must be careful not to let dean's lists, GPA's, and AP classes take over our lives. School-centered teens often become so obsessed with getting good grades that they forget that the real purpose o



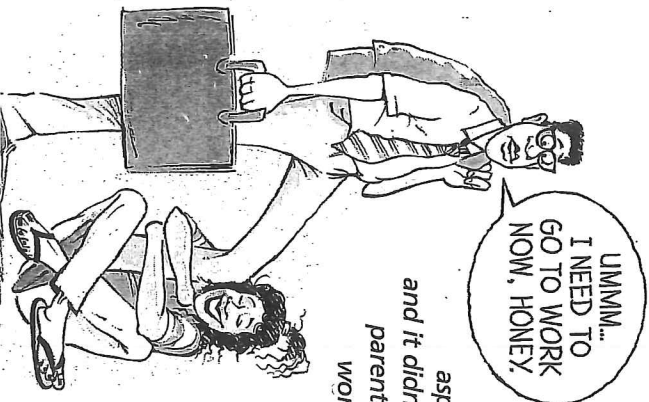
school is to learn. As thousands of teens have proved, you can do extremely well in school and still maintain a healthy balance in life. Thank goodness our worth isn't measured by our GPA.

Parent-Centered

Your parents can be your greatest source of love and guidance and you should respect and honor them, but centering your life on your parents and living to please them above everything else can become a real nightmare. (Don't tell your parents I said that or they might take away your book ... just kiddin'.) Read what happened to this young girl from Louisiana:

I worked so hard all semester. I just knew that my parents would be pleased—six A's and one B+. But all I could see in their eyes was disappointment. All they wanted to know was why the B+ wasn't an A. It was all I could do not to cry. What did they want from me?

That was my sophomore year of high school, and I spent the next two years trying to make my parents proud of me. I played basketball and I hoped that they would be proud—they never came to see me play. I made the honor roll every semester—but after a while straight A's were just expected. I was going to go to college to be a teacher, but there was no money in that, and my parents felt that I would be better off studying something else—so I did.



Every decision I made was prefaced with the questions—What would Mom and Dad want me to do? Would they be proud? Would they love me? But no matter what I did, it was never good enough. I had based my whole life on the goals and aspirations my parents thought were good, and it didn't make me happy. I had lived to please my parents for so long that I felt out of control. I felt worthless, useless, and unimportant.

Eventually I realized that my parents' approval wasn't coming, and if I didn't get my act together, I would destroy myself. I needed to find a center that was timeless, unchanging, and real—a center that couldn't shout, disapprove, or criticize. So I started to live my own life, by the principles that I thought would bring me happiness—like honesty (with myself and my parents), faith in

a happier life, hope for the future, and belief in my own goodness. In the beginning I sort of had to pretend that I was strong, but, over a period of time, I became strong.

Finally I struck out on my own and had a falling out with my folks, but it made them see me for who I was, and they loved me. They apologized for all the pressure they put on me and expressed their love. I was eighteen years old before I ever remember my dad saying "I love you," but they were the sweetest words I have ever heard, and well worth the wait. I still care about what my parents think, and I am still influenced by their opinions, but, ultimately, I have become responsible for my life and my actions, and I try to please myself before anybody else.

Other Possible Centers

The list of possible centers could go on and on. *Sports/hobbies-centered* is a big one. How many times have we seen a sports-centered jock build his identity around being a great athlete only to suffer a career-ending injury? It happens all the time. And the poor guy is left to rebuild his life from scratch. The same goes for hobbies and interests, such as dance, debate, drama, music, or clubs.

And what about being *hero-centered*? If you build your life around a movie or rock star, famous athlete, or powerful politician, what happens if they die, do something really stupid, or end up in jail? Where are you then?

Sometimes we can even become *enemy-centered*, and build our lives around hating a group, a person, or an idea, like Captain Hook whose entire existence revolved around hating Peter Pan. This is often the case with gangs and with bitter divorces. What a warped center this one is!

Becoming *work-centered* is a sickness that usually afflicts older people but can also reach teens. Workaholicism is usually driven by a compulsive need to have more stuff, like money, cars, status, or recognition, which feeds us for a season but doesn't ever fully satisfy.

Another common center is being *self-centered*, or thinking the world revolves around you and your problems. This often results in being so worried about your own condition that you're oblivious to the walking wounded all around you.

As you can see, all these and many more life-centers do not provide the stability that you and I need in life. I'm not saying we shouldn't strive to become excellent in something like dance or debate, or strive to develop outstanding relationships with our friends and parents. We should. But there's a fine line between having a passion for something and basing your entire existence on it. And that's the line we shouldn't cross.