



Why Your Life Sucks: And What You Can Do About It

By Alan Cohen

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The in-your-face, no-hype guide to getting happy...

Your life sucks if...

- You routinely make someone or something more important than you
- The life you are living on the outside doesn't match who you are on the inside
- You say yes when you mean no
- You try to fix other people
- You've forgotten to enjoy the ride

When your life sucks, it's a wake-up call. Now self-help guru and bestselling author Alan Cohen invites you to answer that call, change your course, and enjoy the life you were meant to live. In ten compelling chapters, Cohen shows you how to stop wasting your energy on people and things that deaden you—and use it for things you love.

With great humor, great examples, and exhilarating directness, **Why Your Life Sucks** doesn't just spell out the ways in which you undermine your power, purpose, and creativity—it shows you how to reverse the damage. Here is an encouraging but loud-and-clear reminder that in every moment we generate our own experience by the choices we make, and that today is the best day to begin your new life.

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Editorial Review

From the Publisher

"Alan Cohen has distilled the essence of hundreds of self help and consciousness raising tenets, and in the process created a simple yet powerful antidote to the ailment of the "sucky" life. With a writing style that is humorous and humble, straightforward and non-judgmental, Cohen takes the reader through a journey of self-discovery that reminds us that the ultimate power over our lives lies in our hands alone. He covers ten basic reasons your life may suck, with anecdotes and personal experiences to illuminate each, and then hands you the keys to unlock the door to your own joyful path. A great self help book works simply to remind us of what we already know, deep down inside. This book does not give vague hints or mysterious exercises meant to create the illusion of growth. It strips away the nonsense and reminds us that, despite evidence to the contrary, the only thing standing in our way is us. I loved this book. It was a joy to see myself reflected in its pages. And with its hilarious title, it will be a joy to share it with my family and friends." -- Zanne Marie Gray, BookReview.com

About the Author

Alan H. Cohen is the author of 18 popular inspirational titles, including *The Dragon Doesn't Lives Here Anymore* and *Dare to be Yourself*. A frequent guest on television and radio, he conducts life mastery seminars in Hawaii and on-line, and is an acclaimed keynote speaker for educational, health, church, and corporate groups. He lives on Maui, Hawaii. Visit www.alancohen.com to learn more.

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You Give Your Power Away

Before baseball star Mickey Mantle died, he faced and came to terms with his lifelong alcoholism. As he was withering of liver disease, Mickey held a press conference at the Betty Ford Center. A reporter asked him, "How would you like people to remember Mickey Mantle?" Pale and gaunt, still sporting his Yankee cap, he replied, "I would like them to think that I finally made something of myself." I was shocked. One of the most loved and celebrated sports heroes of all time--my hero--did not respect himself until he took back the power he had given to his addiction.

A few months later, Mickey Mantle died. Soon afterward I saw a touching newspaper cartoon showing Mickey meeting God, depicted as a person. As the two ambled down a long road in heaven, God placed his arm around Mickey's shoulder. Mickey turned to God and wistfully remarked, "I can't believe all the errors I made." God turned to Mickey and answered, "But you gave them a ninth inning they'll never forget."

We have all given our power away to something--many things--and our lives have sucked for it. We have bestowed undue power to lovers, money, bosses, addictive substances, fame, dream homes, religious dogma, parents, children, doctors, lawyers, agents, therapists, psychics, teachers, policemen, politicians, sports heroes, movie stars, gorgeous men and women, business moguls, the news, and occult sciences. The list goes on; you can add more of your own.

You give your power away when you make someone or something outside of you more important than what is inside of you.

If you do not value who and what you are, you will seek to borrow worth from the outer world. You will look for validation from people whom you believe know or have more than you. But since everything you need is inside you and no one can know more about your path and purpose than you do, any power you ascribe to external authorities must eventually explode in your face and leave you feeling worse than when you started. The question is not, "Have you given your power away?" The question is, "How can you get it back?"

Unsucking your life is an inside job. You do not need to import power, for you were born with it; you just need to plug the holes in your bucket through which it is leaking. The quest is about peeling away the lies and illusions you have been told--and went on to tell yourself--that have kept you living smaller than you deserve. When you do, you will be amazed to realize how much you have settled for. Then you will have little patience for halfhearted living and reclaim your right to live from choice rather than default.

Any experience that leaves you feeling empty, less-than, or needy does so for only one reason: You entered into it feeling empty, less-than, or needy. The illusion is that relationships will take away the pain that keeps you feeling small; the reality is that relationships *magnify* the pain that keeps you feeling small. And yet there is a gift in the process: You remember that *the source of your strength is inside you*.

Perhaps the final lines of Woody Allen's classic movie *Annie Hall* sum up how we stay trapped in painful situations: A man says to a psychiatrist, "My wife thinks she's a chicken and she's driving me crazy!" The psychiatrist asks him, "So why don't you leave her?" The man answers, "I can't--I need the eggs."

You don't need the eggs anymore. They are rotten, taste horrible, and don't nourish you. When you elevate others at your expense, nobody wins. When you source your life from inside out, everyone wins. As you strike gold in your own self, you will quit giving the people in your world a carbon copy of the terror that runs their lives, and give them a ninth inning--or a first, or a fifth--they'll never forget.

How You Give Your Power Away and What You Can Do

You Put People on a Pedestal

Former child movie star Shirley Temple Black discovered a flaw in the pedestal game at a young age. She recounts, "I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six. Mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked for my autograph." The savior she sought was also seeking a savior in her.

Idols always fall on those who worship them. The bigger the idol, the harder it crashes. If you think any person has the power, wealth, wisdom, beauty, talent, or strength to rescue you from your deficits, you set yourself up for trouble. Yes, there are people who can help, support, and teach you. No, there is no one out there who can save you. That is something you have to do yourself by recognizing you already own what you seek.

When you have a crush on someone, you will be crushed. That's why they call it a crush. You crush reality out of the other person by seeing them through the eyes of fantasy, while you crush your own self-worth. Face it: Crushes buy you a ticket to a wild emotional roller-coaster ride. For every giddy rush you experience, you will soon be plummeting. Mr. Right smiles at you and you are in heaven; the next day he looks the other way and you are in hell. And you call this *a relationship*? You wrap your soul in a little package, hand it to someone you don't even know, and instruct them, "Here, do with this as you wish."

Crushes stay in force only from a distance. It is easy to make a god out of a movie star, rock idol, sports hero, girl in the class above you, executive across the hall, someone else's spouse, or amorphous cyberspace fantasy lover. But if you spent time on a daily basis with your idol, you would discover they are a real person, just like you. You would find things you like about them and things you don't like. He compares you to his former lovers and picks his toenails at the kitchen table. She has morning breath and unresolved father issues. In a short time your fantasy lover crashes from Mount Olympus to Brooklyn. Ah, now you can have a real relationship, built from the earth up instead of heaven down. And along the way you will discover your own worth, intrinsic in you rather than bestowed by them.

If you indulge someone else putting you on a pedestal, be prepared for an insurrection. When they discover you are not who they thought you were or they cannot have you, out come the spears. It takes just a six-inch fall for a halo to become a noose. Rock star Selena was killed by the former president of her fan club. To avoid such an untimely demise, stand naked in your humanity and refuse to accept goo-goo-eyed adoration, which always comes with a price tag.

In the course of my work I have occasionally received letters from women who believe I am their soul mate. While I feel complimented, there is one problem in the equation: They don't really know me. They read my book or attended my seminar, and decided I am the one for them. (Yes, I have done the same kind of thing.) When this first happened, I didn't know how to handle their expression of affection and gave them ambiguous responses or none. But my nonplan backfired. Sooner or later I would receive an angry letter chastising me for letting them down and not being the person I claimed to be. But I never claimed to be that person. They claimed I was that person, and were upended by their lofty expectations. Then six months later I would receive another letter saying, "Please forgive me. I was insane." Now I am very careful not to put others on a pedestal or encourage anyone to do the same to me. I respond as one perfectly imperfect human being to another, which honors them along with me, and paves the way for true communication. Plato explained, "True friendship can occur only among equals."

Cults are an extreme example of giving power away to a spiritual leader. Rather than projecting romantic fantasies, followers project religious fantasies. But the dynamics are the same; self-effacement always leads to anger, depression, and self-strangling. Religious leaders with integrity do not accept such adoration, but deflect their followers' desire to idolize. They demonstrate by example there is just as much God in the student as the teacher. Buddhists teach, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." If you encounter someone who you believe embodies more divinity than you, get rid of the notion immediately. We are all equal expressions of the Great Spirit, and you only hurt yourself by elevating someone above you. Why become a Buddhist when you can become a Buddha? Carl Jung exclaimed, "Thank God I am not a Jungian." I wonder if Jesus might say something similar. The cult mentality leads to aberrant behavior like mass suicides at Jonestown and Heaven's Gate. Bottom line: If someone tells you what tennis shoes to wear, run like hell.

It's going to be tricky falling in love with yourself if you are fascinated with someone else. You can love someone, respect them, learn from them, have a fabulous time with them, and honor them as a role model. Just don't diminish yourself in the process. We are told that Jesus said, "Even greater things than I, shall you do," indicating he regarded his students as powerful in their own right. Recognize that power within you, and you won't have any pedestals crashing on you. Don't just love the one you're with--be the one you love.

You Imitate Instead of Create

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but self-suffocating if you do not grow beyond it. Ralph Waldo

Emerson declared, "Imitation is suicide." To those who do not recognize their unique worth, imitation looms attractive; to those who know their strength, imitation represents an unacceptable compromise.

In the early stages of skill or character development, imitation is helpful if you choose a good role model. When I first learned to cook, I used recipes and turned out some tasty dishes. But after a while I grew bored. Why follow someone else's formula when I could create my own? After that, I never cooked the same dish twice. Cooking became a great adventure! Imitating role models is like using training wheels on a child's bicycle; they help you get going, but once you find your own rhythm and balance, you fly faster and farther without leaning on them.

In relationships, imitation can hurt us if we subconsciously hold poor role models. If, as a child, you observed people whose lives sucked, you may have accepted their fear and pain as normal and gone on to settle for what they did. Then you espouse your culture's prejudices, re-create your parents' marriage, and become the parent your parents were to you. If you were empowered by the models you observed, you are good to go. But if what you saw delivered heartache, you cannot afford to perpetuate it. If you do not make strong choices for yourself, you will reap the results of the weak choices of others.

In the field of entertainment, our culture glorifies celebrities who are talented in one domain but have not come to terms with the deeper issues of their lives. They look great on-screen, run like lightning on the football field, or boast impressive bottom lines on their financial statements--but when they step offscreen or off the playing field, their personal lives are disastrous. Then you read about them ODing, shooting someone, or mucking through a colossal divorce battle. They are great role models for talent, but terrible models for character. If you are going to emulate someone, focus on their talent, not their aberration. Or just pick someone who is happy.

Imitation also backfires on us in education. As sophisticated as our school system is, it still rewards conformity far more than originality. If you learn how to play the school game, you can regurgitate your way through your doctorate and still live a million miles from joy. Many of my college psychology professors were neurotic, confused, and caught up in a gnarly rat race of performance, competition, and mind games. Meanwhile, the custodian who cleaned their offices whistled, smiled, and had a kind word for everyone he met. Who was closer to winning the game of life?

In many industries you can maintain a livelihood by executing the formula. Mass-market movies have a formula, as do novels and marketing plans. They work, and they work for a reason. But such creations are typically nonmemorable and do not make any significant contribution except to put money in the pockets of the producers. Blessed is the person who is willing to follow their gut impulse to create something unique, beyond the known. Think of the movies, books, teachers, and friends who have affected you most deeply, and you will realize that they did not fit the mold. They touched you because their creations were motivated by inspiration, not desperation. The world is changed not by those who do what has been done before them, but by those who do what has been done inside them.

***Creativity is as much a muscle as the heart,
and no less vital.***

The more creative you are, the more creative you become; deny your visions, and they atrophy. Creative people are tapped into an endless resource of ideas. A creator's dilemma is not running out of material; it is what to do with all the material knocking at the door of imagination. (Bumper sticker: *Reality is for people who can't deal with imagination.*) You will not connect with your muse by following the herd; most of them are rambling over a cliff. A smaller flock will take off when they reach the edge. If you have been

hypnotized to believe you are a lemming, you will plunge with the crowd. If you remember you have wings, you will soar.

***Fortune is not something that happens to you.
It is something you create.***

You can make anything work in your favor. Study your role models, accept the gifts they have bestowed, and leave behind what does not serve you. Then you can say, like Gary de Rodriguez, "I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors' tragedies and declare triumph, and know that they are cheering me on."

You Don't Listen to Your Intuition

Goethe proclaimed, "When you finally trust yourself, you will know how to live." If you look back on mistakes you have made, you can usually identify a little voice inside your head that was nudging you otherwise. "I can't believe I overlooked all the red flags," you may note. We get into trouble not because we do not know what to do, but because we do not pay attention to what we know.

While you might regret not heeding your inner voice, the experience leaves you with an important lesson:

You have access to impeccable wisdom all the time.

Imagine a radio station that we'll call KNOW broadcasting sound advice from somewhere deep inside you 24 hours a day. Then imagine you have a tuner capable of receiving its signal. If you set your tuner to the right frequency, you hear the broadcast and pick up vital information. If your dial is set elsewhere, you miss the message.

You were born with your tuner set to KNOW. Children and animals have their tuners well set; they know who they are and can sense people and situations that match their well-being or threaten it. As you became socialized, you were seduced away from KNOW. You were taught that you are selfish if you do what you really want to do; wrong if you disobey your parents' wish for the kind of mate they would choose for you; or foolish if you pursued a career in the arts that did not net an income as lucrative as computer programming. Eventually externally-generated signals drowned out the voice of KNOW, and you felt lost and confused. But you are not stupid; you just disregarded what you knew in deference to the outer voices shrieking at you.

Ignorance and errors are easily rectified by respecting your inner genius. Several years ago I was planning to meet my musician friend, Charley Thweatt, in Los Angeles for a seminar we were to co-present. Charley's flight was scheduled to arrive at 10 a.m., but in order for me to arrive around that time, I would have had to fly out of Portland around 6 a.m. Although I could have done this, something inside me told me to book a later flight. I judged myself as being lazy and felt guilty for asking Charley to wait hours for me, but I decided to go with my gut and I booked a flight to land around 2 p.m. When I arrived, Charley was not there. I phoned his airline and learned that his connecting flight through Denver had been delayed by snow. He finally arrived at 3 p.m. Listening to my inner voice paid off big time.

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