



# Choose Not to Be a Victim

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## Awareness of Your Victimhood

Once you become aware of your anger and its impact on your life, you have a choice. You can continue in that role – and people often do.

Anger is powerful and many, if not most, people don't want to give it up. They don't like being in pain, but they can't let go of the power. They are not prepared to feel vulnerable. It is the greatest obstacle to healing.

In fact, most people **never** want to let it go. It is too strong. This is the one part of the journey that you have to keep making simple, clear choices of, "I am not going to be a victim."

I often would ask a patient to make that choice right there in my clinic. I would leave the exam room and suggest that they not get up until they made that choice to acknowledge the victim pattern let it go. Walking out the door was symbolic of leaving that role behind.



## The Choice is Yours

Once you have a clear idea of the depth of your anger and your role of being a victim, make the simple decision to not be a victim anymore.

- Write down, “I choose not to be a victim.” Date it and put it in a place you will see it on a daily basis.
- It is an intellectual choice.
- Be kind to yourself. Know that you will repeatedly fail.
- Commit to being honest with yourself.
- Using reprogramming tools are mandatory—your intellect cannot contain your level of frustration associated with being in chronic pain.

### Quit “Trying”

- “I will try” is the ultimate victim phrase.
- Write “try” on a piece of paper, “X” it out, and hang it on your refrigerator.
- Write the word “Do” on another piece of paper and hang it on your bathroom mirror. (Concept from the Hoffman Process)

Even after many years of being out of chronic pain, I still dive into the victim role many times per day. I finally gave up trying to get rid of it. It is a core part of who I am. However, by being aware of it and repeatedly committing to not being in it, anger no longer rules my life. It is a daily process and choice.

I made the choice to stop being a victim on Mother’s Day 2002. It’s still a daily challenge, but my life took a dramatic turn out of The Abyss that day.

### My Decision to Move On

My history of abuse had a powerful effect on my life and by 2001, I was in a terrible emotional state. I could barely make it through the day. Although I remained a technically excellent surgeon, I was miserable. I was in severe burnout and had pursued every possible avenue of help with a vengeance, but nothing seemed to work. In fact, I was getting progressively worse.

A life-changing moment for me occurred in May 2002. I was outside with my future wife and daughter, washing their car on a beautiful Mother’s Day. I had every reason to feel happy. But instead of being happy, I was in mental agony, enveloped in crippling anxiety.



This juxtaposition of the lovely day and my misery made no sense. I started thinking about how tired I was of all my internal unrest. Suddenly, I realized how I'd placed myself in the victim role. It hit me like a lightning bolt. That moment led me to a deep decision, one that would eventually pull me out of my despair: I would stop playing the victim. The sequence of events that brought me to that decision was complex, but the decision itself was simple. Within six weeks my anger began to abate. Three months later, I'd made major changes in my life.

It took another year before I really pulled out of my tailspin, but my life took a crucial turn that weekend. One of my realizations was that I'd been on an endless pilgrimage to find the one solution that would relieve my suffering. I'd been searching for an outside source to solve my problems, continually looking to be "fixed" or find a way to fix myself, for good. That day, I realized that there was not one single solution that would fix me. Instead, I needed to adopt a multi-faced approach in an ongoing process. There would be no endpoint.

Then I returned to David Burns' book, *Feeling Good*. (1) At that point I wasn't aware of how to develop alternative neurological pathways – all I knew was that the book's exercises worked for me. Plus, I noted that the author said the book's cognitive restructuring was effective in relieving anxiety 85 percent of the time. I re-committed to Burns' writing and repetition techniques.

Years after I started the *Feeling Good* exercises, the in-house Hoffman Process headquartered in San Rafael, CA, added several dimensions regarding the role that anger played in my life.

#### References:

1. Burns, David. *Feeling Good*. Avon Books, 1999.