

Clean Out the “Junk Drawer”... in Your Head



Jean Gatz

Published by Jean Gatz Media

Copyright © 2018 Jean Gatz

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including but not limited to: photocopying, recording, or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review or brief excerpts shared through social media.

Jean Gatz

Wit with Wisdom...

Humor with Heart®

Keynote Speaker

Award-Winning Author

www.jeangatz.com

jean@jeangatz.com

Introduction

Most of us would admit to having *at least* one junk drawer somewhere, at work or at home, crowded with stuff we don't need any more. So why is it hard to get rid of it? Why do we keep it around, knowing it's taking up valuable space for something else that could be more useful, more fun, more rewarding or more satisfying?

We hang on to "junk drawer thinking" too – those attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that keep us from being our best, that compound our stress as we struggle to improve our careers, our relationships and our lives.

If we really want to get serious about cleaning out the "junk drawer thinking" in our lives, we first have to admit that we own *the junk* (idea, attitude, or behavior) by uncovering it. Only then we can start figuring out what to do about it. This means that some "attitudinal spring

cleaning” may be in order, no matter what time of year it happens to be.

You can start the process by first taking a look at your past. While your past doesn't – and shouldn't – define you, it can certainly play a big part in the formation of your attitudes, thoughts, beliefs and behaviors as an adult.

Think about the people who surrounded you as a child: your parents, grandparents (or whoever raised you), your family members, teachers, religious and community leaders and other adults. These are the people who contributed to your becoming the person you are today. If you respected them as role models and learned from them, you probably have tried to emulate the values they taught you and carry on the traditions they instilled in you.

But if you didn't respect the people who raised you, you probably have no desire to be like them and you have had to work hard to break old patterns and create a new life for yourself and

your family based on the values and traditions that you do admire and respect. That's often difficult because the feelings associated with past experiences can come to the surface without warning.

And unfortunately, there is always the tendency to assimilate some of the attitudes and prejudices of the people who raised us. Yet regardless of the past, each of us can choose the kind of life we want to build for ourselves and our families. We can allow past experiences, negative feelings, prejudices, put-downs, and myths to affect our present-day behavior, or we can decide to reprogram ourselves with new, more positive directives.

If changes are necessary and we are willing to make them, then we have taken the first step toward taking charge of our lives. Without a doubt, our present personal experiences and relationships are just as important as our childhood ones.

So here are a few questions to keep in mind as you read this book.

How is your current personal life situation?

Are you in relationships where you feel safe?

Do family and close friends support you?

Are your relationships addiction-free?

Are you encouraged to do your best?

Do others let you know they are proud of you?

How do you feel about yourself?

It's important to remember that we will be treated exactly as we believe we deserve to be treated. Why? Because people read the signals we send out and get the messages we send about our level of confidence, how we feel about ourselves, and our sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Self-esteem is one of the most important signals we can send. It's the radiating force

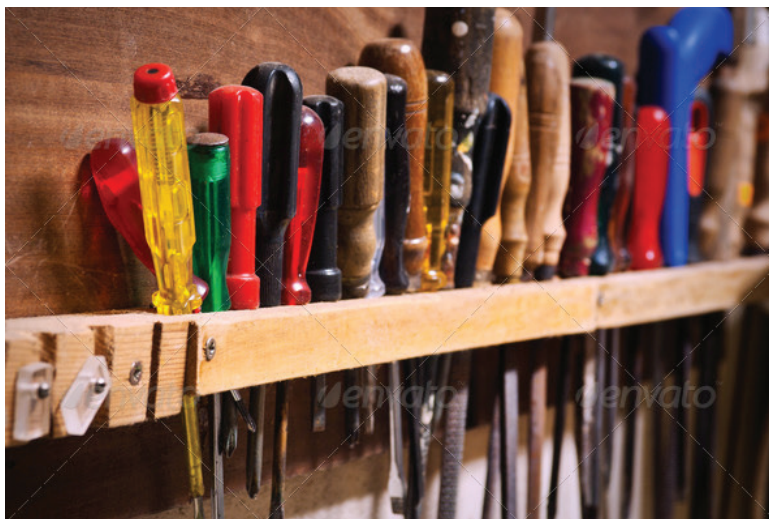
that allows us to experience events, people, and situations as participators rather than as victims. Self-esteem is the key to a life full of choices. Confident people believe that through their words and actions they can choose how they will respond to the people and events in their lives.

To make room for higher self-esteem and increased confidence, in addition to reducing your stress levels and improving your relationships and your life in general, you first need to get rid of whatever is taking up space in your "attitudinal junk drawer" and keeping you from moving forward. So let's get started.

And to do that, I must first introduce you to my Uncle Marcel and Aunt Louise.



**"A Place for Everything...
and Everything in its Place."**



My Uncle Marcel was one of the neatest men I've ever known. I don't mean *neat* in the sense of *cool*. I mean *neat* in the sense of *tidy, orderly, organized* and *precise*. Parrain (French for "Uncle") firmly believed in the theory of "a place for everything and everything in its place." In fact, I think he might even have invented the phrase!

On the walls of his garage, each tool was hung precisely and evenly spaced from the next one.

Screwdrivers and wrenches were neatly hung on specially made racks. Nuts, bolts, screws and nails were stored in clear glass jars. No two sizes were ever mixed together, not even for the sake of convenience if there were only two nails in each jar.

The floor of his workshop was always spotless and there was never a rake or a shovel out of place. His office was equally as immaculate, organized and well kept.

One Sunday while my husband Les and I were visiting, he asked Les to go up into the attic to retrieve an item he needed. At ninety years of age, he was no longer able to manage the attic stairs. "Do you know where I can find that box once I get up there?" Les innocently asked.

Parrain smiled and pulled out a thick leather bound notebook. It had a diagram of the attic (drawn to scale, or course) with the location of every box – each of which had a number on

it. On the following pages of his notebook was the complete inventory of the contents of every single box. To say I was impressed with his organizational skills is an understatement.

Later that day I followed Parrain out to the garage and asked him how he had managed to find a place for every single one of his earthly possessions. He smiled again, leaned across his workbench, and pulled open a drawer. "Well, I'm not perfect."

"I try to keep everything organized as best I can, but there are some things I just don't know where to put. I don't want to throw them away because I might need them one day. So I just stash them in here. This is my special junk drawer." Then he looked over his shoulder and added in a whisper, "But please don't tell Aunt Louise!"

What a relief! If the neatest, most organized person in our entire family had his own personal junk drawer, there was definitely still hope for

me! I've got one in every room of our house – kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, home office – you name the room and I'll show you a drawer where I put stuff I just don't know what to do with and don't have time to think about. Does any of this sound remotely familiar? How about you?

How many junk drawers would you honestly admit to having in your home or office? Hey, don't worry. It's just us. Your secret is safe with me! But don't be embarrassed. An audience member once confided that she has an entire junk *room* that she considers as her junk *drawer*... on steroids!

If your home is still filled with growing children or other people in your care, you may not have a spare room to call your own. Or perhaps you're like Les and me at this time in our lives. All of our children are grown and gone from the nest and we have the entire house to ourselves. So we now enjoy the luxury of having a *guest room*. The door to that room, however, remains

closed at all times. When a guest does come to visit, I need at least two days' notice to make it presentable... and you can actually hide a lot of stuff under a bed!

As I mentioned earlier, most of us would admit to having at least one junk drawer somewhere, at work or at home, crowded with stuff we don't need any more. Here's a question I've found difficult to answer. Maybe you have, too. If we don't need it any more, why is it so hard to get rid of it? Why do we keep it around, knowing it's taking up valuable space for something else that could be more useful, more fun, more rewarding or more satisfying? You get the picture.

How do we accumulate all this stuff? Where does it come from? Well, here's one answer – and a question. Ever been to a garage sale?

Now let's be fair and give garage sales their due. Some of them are packed with bargains and items that are practically brand new and



can be purchased for pennies on the dollar. In fact, garage sales can be smart shopping options for folks on a tight budget who may need furniture, appliances, clothes, toys, dishes, lamps, linens and other items. Many a college student has furnished an apartment with garage sale bargains.

If you're watching your pennies but love to shop, you can spend a couple of dollars at a garage sale and satisfy your "urge to splurge" instead of going to the mall and spending a lot more money- often when you can least afford to do so. I'm a big fan of garage sales, but I much prefer to visit one than to host one!

Have you ever *participated* in a garage sale? If you have, then you know that *staging* a garage sale is a totally different experience than *going* to a garage sale as a potential buyer. I've hosted my share of them over the years and I've learned that they can be a whole lot of fun – and a tremendous amount of work. If you're trying to reduce clutter, garage sales are definitely a smart solution. Think about how they work and put yourself in this picture.

You get tired of looking at all the clutter in your humble abode and so you decide it's time to have a garage sale. You invite a few friends or neighbors to join in, as we all know that the

bigger the sale and the more families involved, the more customers you will attract.

You begin by cleaning out your house or apartment and gathering up all the stuff you no longer want. If you're really serious you go through every drawer, bookcase, closet and cabinet. Don't forget to look under the bed, as no space is sacred! No item is off limits for consideration! Well, some items definitely are, but you get my drift.

Now it's time to load things into boxes. (If you've done your job well, you have *many* boxes.) Then you haul all this stuff out to your garage or carport, driveway and front yard. (If you're wise enough to *host* the garage sale at your house, you don't have to haul your stuff to somebody else's yard.) You put price stickers on all of it, and people come and *buy* stuff you never dreamed you'd be able to *give* away.

Starting out with high hopes on the first day, by

Day Two you're marking things down just so you don't have to carry them back into your house. A worthwhile charitable organization is always willing to come with a truck to pick up whatever doesn't sell, and you end up with a less cluttered dwelling and some cash in your pocket.



If you plan and stage it well, you can actually have a very profitable garage sale. I've made good money at several of them. I'll have to

admit, however, that I never took that money and went straight to the bank to deposit it into our children's college fund account. Nope. I had worked hard to earn it, so I tucked it away until I was ready to go shopping with my "garage sale money." When our kids were young and I was always on the lookout for bargains, I often went to other garage sales and bought stuff that was just too good a deal to pass up.

Sometimes, however, once I got home and really *looked* at it I thought, "Why do I now own this thing?" Within a year or two "this thing" would be included in **my** next garage sale.

But let's get back to my junk drawers, the resting places for items I don't use very often, don't want to discard, and don't know where else to put them.

Where is your favorite junk drawer located? Mine is in the kitchen. When I tried to open it recently, I was surprised to see that it simply would not budge. But I did not despair, as I soon

discovered that a spatula works very well as a handy tool in this situation! And I've used it more than once.

I wedge the spatula into the tiny opening, mash everything down inside, and give the drawer a good, firm pull. Like magic, it opens every time. Then I can begin searching for the item I can't seem to find anywhere else.

And what do I find? Usually not what I was looking for. Instead I find coupons that have long since expired, partially burned birthday candles, and recipe cards with dishes I haven't prepared in years. Because I might decide to serve these dishes once more before I die, I decide to hold on to those cards.

I also uncover a wide assortment of cocktail napkins with clever sayings on them, most of which are so badly wrinkled that they need to be thrown away. What else? Christmas cards from family and friends that I want to read and

enjoy one more time before recycling them. Oh, and old candy bars. *Really* old candy bars.

Look at all this clutter – this stuff I no longer need that is taking up space I really could use in this kitchen! Wouldn't it make perfect sense to stop what I was doing, right then and there, to clean out and organize that drawer? Of course it would. But will I do that right now? Of course not! It's easy to rationalize that there are too many other more important (and much more interesting and fun) things to do.

We all tend to hang onto some of our junk, even though we know it needs to go. Sometimes it gives us a feeling of security when we're feeling stressed, although if we're really honest, we have to admit that the disorder actually adds to our stress levels.

We hang on to "junk drawer thinking" too – those attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that we think are making us feel secure but are actually keeping

us from being our best, and compounding our stress as we struggle to improve our careers, our relationships and our lives.

“Junk drawer thinking” may include a negative idea that we’ve been carrying around that’s keeping us from becoming better, facing our fears, becoming the person we want to be (or used to be) and reclaiming our personal power.

Which sign looks more appealing at this point in your life? You have the power to change it!



“Junk drawer thinking” may also include feelings of anxiety, fear, frustration, discouragement or disappointment. It may embody the challenges of parenting along with marriage and career decisions, or it may include issues that deal with procrastination, life balance, care of self, or fear of the unknown. And it can encompass feelings of grief and loss, holding a grudge, or being unable to let go of anger.

I am in no way judging or demeaning any of those thoughts, feelings or emotions. They can be real, they are often valid, and they are certainly ones that many of us have struggled with over the course of our lives. But they also may be keeping us from moving ahead because we are being held back by the sheer weight and magnitude of our negative feelings. We can only move forward when we are willing to finally let go.

Sometimes when I'm cleaning out a junk drawer I experience the unexpected and delightful surprise of finding buried treasure among my junk. Knowing myself well enough to know I won't remember to deal with it later, I do something about it immediately upon discovery.

If I find a random photo of one of the children I put it into one of my photo boxes. I drop an old but sentimental bracelet with a broken clasp into my purse so I can have it repaired and begin to enjoy wearing it again. The birthday card from my grandfather, probably the last one he sent

me before he passed away, goes into my box of favorite birthday cards from years past.

When I find such a treasure I ask myself, "How did this end up in here?" Then I make sure I don't let it get away from me again. Thoughts that have crossed my mind with a new discovery include:

"I forgot how special this was to me."

"I thought this was lost forever."

"This brings back such happy memories. I'm going to put it in a place where I will see it daily and remember those good times."

As you're sorting through your "attitudinal junk" don't forget to make a list of the "treasures" in your life right now. We are all blessed with someone or something in our lives that we might be taking for granted. Or maybe we're going through a difficult time and we're so focused on the negative that we fail to see the small but

important blessings that appear along our path.

These could include rekindling a valuable friendship, forgiving someone, re-establishing a relationship that was lost because of something someone said or did (you or another person) or trying something new and different that you've been meaning to do but haven't gotten around to yet.

Your list will be very personal to you, and different from anyone else's list, based on your life and the people in it. How will you sort your *treasures* from your *junk*?

You have lots of options. You can choose to:

- Identify who or what is taking up valuable space in your life – for little or no “return on investment.”
- Admit to what's not working and let go.
- Figure out why you're still hanging on.
- Give thanks for what's working for you.

- Ask how you could make it even better.
- Deal with an issue you've been avoiding.
- Rekindle a relationship worth saving.
- Refocus your priorities.
- Become more resilient to bounce back.
- Redirect your energy.
- Get more satisfaction out of life.
- Build healthy relationships.
- Focus on the issues that really matter.
- Focus on the people who really count.

Cleaning out your personal junk drawer may demand hard work, time, and perhaps even some pain. As you analyze your life and your relationships and decide what to keep and what to discard, it's perfectly OK to talk to yourself. When you do, pay attention to what you hear. Why? Because whatever life brings us and

whatever happens to us, we react not only to *what happens* but also to *what we say to ourselves* about what happens.

As for the “hard work” part, remember that when change presents itself and opportunity knocks, you have to be willing to open the door to let that opportunity into your life.

As adults we are responsible for meeting our own needs. When we allow our self-worth to be determined by the way others treat us, or by the fact that we don’t respect ourselves, we are no longer in a good place. Those attitudes and behaviors are not healthy ones for our emotional well-being. Each of us has value and worth. As the saying goes, “God made you. And He doesn’t make junk!”

Here are some Questions for Reflection as you think about where you are at the moment in your career, your relationships, and your life.

Questions for Reflection

Where are my junk drawers located at home or at work?

Working up the energy and the courage to look inside each of them, I can now answer these questions:

What am I keeping that is of no longer any value to me? (List)

Why am I still hanging on to it?

If I've been involved in a garage sale, how did it feel to de-clutter my surroundings and get rid of some of my "junk"?

What does my idea of “junk drawer thinking” look like?

What does it sound like?

What does it feel like?

Which of my attitudes, beliefs and behaviors are holding me back?

Which of my attitudes, beliefs and behaviors add to my stress?

How do I handle feelings of anger, fear or disappointment?

How do I handle the challenges of marriage, parenting, career decisions, and other life choices?

What and who are the blessings in my life – the people and things I take for granted?

How do I allow others to determine my worth?

Do I respect myself and treat myself with respect?

How do I demonstrate that I am responsible for meeting my own needs – in mind, body and spirit?

What changes am I willing to make to change my future?

Closets and Attics and Basements! Oh My!

If you've made the decision to clean out your "attitude junk drawers" I congratulate you! But I hope you didn't think you were finished, because we haven't talked yet about cleaning out the closet, the attic and the basement... those pesky negative thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that you keep hidden away but are still impacting your life.

I don't know how you feel about the job of cleaning out your closet once in a while, but it's always been a task I put off until it's long overdue. Going through my closet a couple of times a year and bringing things to the local thrift store has always been a chore that I don't look forward to or enjoy. An event in 2005, however, gave me a new appreciation for its importance.

Hurricane Katrina destroyed so much of New Orleans and thousands of homeless people sought shelter in cities and towns across our

country. They stayed with friends and family, and many people opened their homes to strangers to provide shelter. Baton Rouge is only 60 miles from New Orleans so we were the first stop on the escape route for many. In churches and shelters throughout our city, collecting clothing for the homeless was a daily event.

Like many others, I did a serious purge of my closet contents and dropped bags of clothes off at one of the local shelters. It didn't matter that I would never know who benefited from my clothes, but my dear husband Les had a much more personal experience when he cleaned out **his** closet in the days after Katrina.

We sheltered 12 family members who fled New Orleans just hours ahead of the storm. Two of them were my Uncle Jerry and Aunt Helen, married for 60 years and both in their 80's. With the exception of two changes of clothing they brought with them when they escaped, they lost their home and everything in it.

Uncle Jerry and Les are both six feet tall and about the same weight. So Les went through his closet and gave everything he could to Uncle Jerry – shirts, pants, shoes, coats, jackets and sweaters. In fact, Uncle Jerry bragged for many years that thanks to Les, he had the most extensive wardrobe he'd ever owned!

Since the days after Katrina, I've returned to my regular routine of cleaning out my closet twice a year. Despite my careful shopping I usually find a favorite skirt or pair of slacks that I haven't worn lately because they no longer fit well. And I can always count on finding a pair of shoes that used to feel comfy but now hurt my feet. Then I have to make a decision. If I pay to have those clothes altered, will I wear them? Shoes that hurt don't offer many options. If they pinch and bind – if they're too tight – they have to go.

Does this scenario apply as you analyze your life at the present time? Maybe you've come to

realize that you're in a job that just doesn't fit any more. You've been working at it for years, and your *comfortable* job has gradually become a *boring* job. Or perhaps there's a personal relationship that fits this description. What can you do to infuse some passion and excitement into one or both areas?



Thinking about those tight shoes I described earlier, I looked up the word *tight* in my handy dictionary and came across these words: *tense*,

stiff, rigid, constricted and *crowded*. Do any of these words sound familiar?

Are you in a relationship that's becoming defined by words like these? Although it was once a comfortable fit, has it gradually become more and more painful for one or both of you?

What changes CAN you make... SHOULD you make... WILL you make?

Perhaps there's something you can try to make that once special bond more comfortable. Is it worth it? If you think it is, give it a shot. Make sure, however, that you give it your *absolute best* shot instead of a half-hearted effort. That's the only way you'll be able to know for sure if things can change for the better.

Questions for Reflection

Do parts of my life no longer fit me well?

Has a comfortable job become a boring job?

Has a comfortable relationship become boring?

What do I choose to do about that?

What thoughts and feelings have I pushed down as “out of sight, out of mind”?

Is that healthy or unhealthy for me?

What am I willing to work on to change that?



If you can relate to this photo, I'm envious!! While you may be the proud owner of a basement, I must admit that I don't know much about them because we've never had one. With many cities in Louisiana below sea level, we worry enough about our homes flooding *above* ground. Having a designated living area *below* ground that might fill up with water is an added stressor we just don't need. But I've been in basements that belong to family and friends

who live in other parts of the country – above sea level – and I’ve eyed them as such handy places for extra storage.

Down here in Louisiana we have to depend on our attics to hold those possessions designated as “we don’t need this right now” or (more commonly) “out of sight, out of mind.” But sometimes that philosophy can lead to much larger – and more troublesome – issues.

When Les and I decided to buy a newer home and move to a different part of town a few years ago, we had to come to terms with the contents of *three* attic areas.

Other than getting the Christmas decorations down and storing boxes for our grown children when they moved out, we hadn’t done a thorough cleaning of our attics in *years*. This means that as we prepared to move to our new home, we had 27 years’ worth of accumulated items (remember my earlier term of *trash and*

treasures) that needed serious and immediate attention.

While I consider myself a competent organizer, it soon became quite evident that we needed more than the three standard categories we had labeled as:

1. Take to the new house
2. Give away
3. Throw away

Of course there were certain things that belonged to our kids when they were little that I definitely wanted to keep. Their baby clothes, school papers, special books, toys and artwork all had sentimental value for me.

In fact, our grandsons now play with some of our children's favorite toys and enjoy their much loved books. And what fun for their JeJe (that's me) to settle in with them on the sofa

and (depending on which grandchild is there) say to them, "When your daddy was a little boy, I used to read this book to him." Or, "When your mommy was little, I played this game with her. Now I can play it with you!"

But back to our three attics and the realization that there was definitely more here than Les and I could manage. Multiple boxes held trophies that Steven and Michael had won for football, baseball, basketball, tennis and golf. Other large boxes were filled to overflowing with Jennifer's basketball and volleyball trophies along with dolls and doll clothes plus a menagerie of stuffed animals, large and small.

Out of desperation we designated a new category and creatively named it "The kids' stuff that we are not taking with us." A more literal translation would have been "These are the items we are not paying someone \$90 an hour to move to our new house."

If you're the parent(s) of grown children who still have their bits and pieces of memorabilia in *your* attic, even though *they* live somewhere else, you can appreciate the title of this fourth category.

At the time of our move Steven was married and living in Dallas, and Michael and Jennifer were still single apartment dwellers. Jennifer was getting her MBA and Michael had finished LSU and was working in Baton Rouge. Les and I decided to invite our children home for one last weekend in "the old house." It was a very sentimental weekend, to be sure, as this was the house in which they had all grown up. It held many wonderful memories for all of us.

Our adult children arrived fully prepared for a relaxing weekend filled with the laughter and tears of nostalgic "Remember when?" stories. There were sure plenty of those! But they were not prepared early on Sunday morning when Les got everyone out of bed with the words, "OK,

everybody, rise and shine. It's time to clean the attic."

I lost count of how many trips our kids made up and down the attic stairs that day. And remember, we had *three* attics so it took a while! Their dad calmly continued to hand down boxes until all three attics were emptied of all of their personal belongings.

At this point our entire carport was filled to overflowing and people began parking in our driveway, coming into the carport, taking a look around, and asking what time the garage sale started. They were so disappointed to learn that we weren't having one, although that might not have been such a bad idea!

Steven and Catherine had a new home and a new son, so they took some of Steven's toys and books for Carter to enjoy. Since Michael and Jennifer didn't have extra space in their already crowded apartments, we agreed to store a small

amount of their possessions until they became homeowners. And I'm delighted to report that they are all currently in full possession of their own "stuff."

As you can imagine, all three of them had to be very selective in their decision making, especially when we told them about our new policy: "We're not paying someone \$90 an hour to move your stuff to our new house." We made them take ownership of their *junk* and their *jewels*, their *trash* and their *treasures*.

It turned out to be quite a fun filled day with much less stress than I anticipated, and I have some wonderful photos to commemorate the occasion. In the end, what we essentially achieved was to put our kids in charge of what belonged to them. We accomplished our goal in a weekend. Unfortunately, it's not always as easy to do that in real life.

Perhaps this story applies to some of the people

in your life at the moment. We know that most adults are quite capable of taking responsibility for their attitudes and behaviors, understanding that they are accountable for both. But other folks can go an entire lifetime without taking responsibility for themselves and their actions. In fact, they don't take responsibility for much of anything at all.

They have too much emotional baggage – too much “stuff” to manage on their own. So they search until they find someone to unload on – often without the unsuspecting person's permission or consent. If YOU are that person, read on!

Do you have people in your life, at work or at home, who need to take ownership of their own junk, as it applies to the attitudes and behaviors involved in “junk drawer thinking”?

Are you tired of holding on to someone else's junk for them? Maybe you feel sorry for them.

Or maybe they've made you feel guilty enough, or worried enough, or scared enough, that you have trouble standing up for yourself.

Whatever process they've used to get you involved and keep you involved, *their* burden gradually becomes *your* burden. That's because they have figured out how to manipulate you into helping them carry their burden, even when it's not your job to do so.

Quite often they are even skilled enough to totally transfer their burden to you. So now you're feeling overloaded while they are free and clear to make more poor choices and create more problems for themselves and others. One such group in particular comes to mind.

Ah – whiners and complainers. I call them “the little gray raincloud people” because they have a perpetually gloomy outlook on life. And they are everywhere!

You probably have at least one of them in your

personal or professional life. It could be a family member, friend, co-worker or colleague. Maybe you serve on a committee with one, or you work with one in your volunteer duties in your community. And yes, they can even be found in your church!



No matter how hard you try to remain positive and even try to help, you eventually come to understand that they really don't want your

help. They don't want to change. It's easier to whine, complain and blame others.

A client shared one of her challenges when it came to dealing with a whiny coworker who constantly complained about her life. "To hear her talk, you would think she's the only one who has ever had trouble in her marriage or problems with her kids. At first we tried to help by listening, covering for her so she could have time off, and excusing her when she snapped at coworkers or customers. But it's been a while and there's no end in sight."

She continued, "We've also realized that most of her 'big problems' are not really that big. Many of us are dealing with problems similar to hers, but we don't let it affect our work. We can't keep this up. We can handle one crisis every now and then, but her 'crisis of the week' attitude is affecting productivity. No one wants to work with her!"

I'm not suggesting that we turn a cold heart to those who may be experiencing tough times and need our help and support. Like you, I've had my share of difficult times that would have been even more painful and much harder to bear without the support of family, friends and colleagues.

And I've done my part to *pay it forward*, as the saying goes. As inhabitants of this planet we all have an obligation to help others. How much we *choose* to help is up to us, but our duty to help is clear.

Our world is filled with many compassionate and caring people who are ready and willing to take the time to help others. Sadly, our world is also filled with individuals who will always need to accept that help. Those are not the people I'm writing about or the people I'm asking you to think about. I'm asking you to focus on the people in your life who *can* help themselves – but choose not to take action.

Even though they've made poor choices and bad decisions over the years, they refuse to take responsibility and be held accountable for the *burdens of life* they have created for themselves. It's easier for them to pass their burdens (problems, troubles, trials and tribulations) on to you... especially when they have learned that you won't say NO!

Les and I didn't mind helping our kids out – on a temporary basis – by storing some of their important things a while longer. But we were not willing to spend our hard earned money to move ALL of their stuff to the new house and continue to be responsible for it.

How does that story apply to your life at the moment? Have you been holding on to someone else's "stuff" for them? Are you tired of doing that? Does it no longer make sense? Maybe you feel sorry for them. Or maybe they've managed to make you feel guilty, worried or scared and you're having trouble standing up to them.

What is it costing you in terms of money, time, worry, stress, anger and/or frustration to continue to be responsible for someone else's "junk drawer thinking"?

How much longer are you *willing* to do that?

How much longer can you *afford* to do that?

What is one step you can take now to start putting certain people in charge of their lives and the decisions they make?

Well, I think we've covered the bases for doing your own personal version of "attitudinal spring cleaning." All of our "hiding places" have one thing in common that we need to talk about before we wrap up. We may have stashed items there that we know we may never use again, don't want to ever see again, and want to forget about – for good. But for whatever reason, we still keep them around.

Attics, closets and basements are where we

tend to store our “out of sight and out of mind” possessions so we don’t have to deal with them now. We do the same thing in our minds.

Maybe you’re storing a memory that you never want to think about again, or that you want to forget ever happened. But you continue to hold on to it. While that might seem like the logical thing to do, or the easiest thing to do, what is it costing you in terms of your peace of mind?

How is it affecting your ability to make good choices in your personal and professional life?

How is it influencing your capacity to be in healthy, mutually respectful relationships?

Reaching into these places to clear out what you no longer need to carry is hard work, and can sometimes be painful. But you don’t have to do it alone. Talk to someone who can help. It could be a friend or family member whom you trust, or it could be a paid professional. Speaking from personal experience, it can be one of the best

gifts you ever give yourself.

Sometimes people think that asking for support and help is a sign of weakness – that they should be “strong” enough to work through grief, pain, fear, and/or depression on their own. I’ve found the opposite to be true. Weak people rarely ask for help.

For the most part, people who do seek help tend to be very strong and very determined not to become victims of abuse, neglect, violence, or tragedy. They may have been momentarily “weakened” by a specific event, but it was their strength of purpose and character that led them to seek the help and support that would allow them to heal and move on. As I tell my audiences in my keynotes, there is never a situation in which we are completely helpless... unless we choose NOT to take action.

Our challenges are many. Raising and educating our children in a drug-free environment,

providing for aging parents, losing some or all of our possessions in a natural disaster, facing financial problems, dealing with the loss of a loved one in some form or another, and facing a life-threatening illness are just a few of the issues with which all of us may struggle at some point in our lives.

And there are myriads more challenges that are not as serious, but can still impact us on a daily basis. And for many people, the hardest thing to do is to ask for help. What about you? Can you ask for help when you need it?

Are you unwilling to remain a victim of circumstance and actively search for ways to cope with whatever comes your way?

If your personal life is in trouble or out of control, then maybe you could benefit from some of the many excellent services available in your community, your church, or through your own company, if you're still employed.

If it were simply a matter of deciding on the quality of our relationships and the direction in which we wanted our lives to go, none of us would purposely choose to have a life full of problems. We don't always get to choose what life sends our way, but we DO get to choose the attitudes and behaviors that will help us get through any situation. Making the choice to assess our beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors is the necessary first step toward any successful change. The second and most difficult step is taking the actions necessary to make that choice a reality.

Whether you solve your problem yourself or with the help of others, the results are worth the effort: peace of mind, healthy and respectful relationships, a new outlook on life, and better performance at work and at home.

Here are some Questions to help you put these thoughts and ideas into action.

Questions for Reflection

Are there people in my life who won't take responsibility for their actions and behaviors?

Am I carrying someone else's burdens and problems?

Is this a temporary situation or have they permanently unloaded their troubles on me without taking responsibility?

Does guilt, worry, fear, or some other emotion prevent me from standing up for myself?

Which emotion is it?

What is it costing me in terms of money, time,

worry, stress, anger and/or frustration to continue to be responsible for someone else's problems?

How much longer am I willing to play this role?

How much longer can I afford to play this role, for my emotional and physical well-being?

Am I holding on to a memory or experience that is causing me continued pain and affecting my ability to make good choices?

With whom can I talk – a friend, family member or professional – to help me work through the issues to gain the peace of mind I need and deserve?

What changes am I willing to make to change my future?

I hope you've enjoyed this book and that it's given you a fresh perspective and gotten you thinking about making some changes in your life. No matter what happens in your life, you get to choose how you will handle it. You can choose to feel powerless... or powerful. The question to ask yourself is this: which choice will deliver the long term results you want?

Making good choices creates confidence. And we all know that to survive in today's world, you need as much confidence as possible.

But people often make choices based on what's easy, rather than on what's right. Unfortunately, the easy choices won't usually get you where you want to go. "EASY" doesn't always get the job done! Let's face it. It's hard work to do almost anything that will add meaning and value

to your life. So don't make choices based on the work involved or what's easy and comfortable, but rather on the impact that choice will have upon your future.

I wish you well!

Looking for more strategies to help you deal with stress, manage change, reduce conflict, improve your relationships and handle life's challenges? Keep reading, and then check out my other books at <http://jeangatz.com/shop/>

Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This!

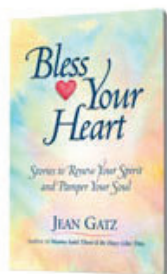
Does your day begin with promise – until you get out of bed and begin it, and then it's downhill from there? Do you feel pulled in a dozen different directions at once? Do you have colleagues, customers and kids who are getting on your last nerve? If so, this book is for you! Jean blends entertaining yet true stories with insightful strategies to help you handle change with more flexibility, make tough decisions with more clarity, communicate more effectively, and deal with difficult people – without becoming one yourself.



<http://jeangatz.com/shop>

Bless Your Heart

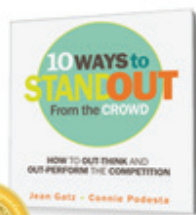
You don't have to be a Southerner to appreciate the versatility of that simple yet powerful little phrase, "Bless your heart." Jean's stories will make you laugh, think and reminisce about your own life experiences. When you open your mind and heart to look at life from a fresh perspective, you can renew your spirit every single day. And that will qualify you as an honorary Southerner even if you weren't born and raised in the South... Bless your heart!



<http://jeangatz.com/shop>

10 Ways to **STAND OUT** from the Crowd

To be successful today, you must **STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD**. The question you must ask is: “What do you bring to the table that’s so unique and memorable that people **CHOOSE** to be your customer, colleague, coworker, employee, leader, partner or friend?” Jean’s award-winning book gives you the tools you need to **OUT-THINK** old ideas and **OUT-SHINE** past performance in your personal and professional life. If you’re ready to **STAND OUT** in a positive way, this is the book for you!

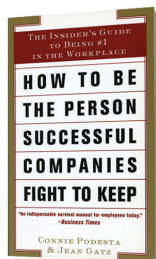


Gold Medal Winner
2011 Independent
Publisher Book Awards

<http://jeangatz.com/shop>

How to be the Person Successful Companies Fight to Keep

Jean doesn't just talk about taking charge of your career. She literally wrote the book on it! From interviews with hundreds of decision makers, Jean learned how they determine which employees they would fight to keep. Jean will help you look at your future and understand what today's organizations expect from employees at every level. With insight and humor, Jean shares the skills you must demonstrate to remain employable and marketable in challenging times. Keep your options open and develop a plan to build the career you want ... and deserve.



<http://jeangatz.com/shop>

**If you enjoyed this eBook, be sure to visit
my website at www.jeangatz.com.**

It's jam packed with lots of additional free resources, quizzes, articles, videos, ideas, strategies and solutions to help you create and sustain the life you want to have – now and into the future.

**And if you ever need me to deliver my
message “in person” at your next event,
I’m only an email or phone call away!
jean@jeangatz.com 225.907.4138**

www.linkedin.com/in/jeangatz
www.youtube.com/jeangatzcsp
www.facebook.com/jeangatzspeaks