THE GAME YOU CAN'T WIN

PURPOSE

When you get frustrated, mad or annoyed, you're playing a game you can't win. You wanted something you don't control, and you didn't get it. Three problems. One trap.

INSTRUCTIONS

Write your answer to every question as we go. Be honest and be specific. Keep this sheet: it's your record to look back on.

START **The last time I was mad, it was because...**

EGO

PART 1 · NEEDING TO BE RIGHT

THE DRIVER

Gets things done. Owns its mistakes. Cares about the result.

THE SHOW

Needs to look good, be right, win, be seen and be important.

Q1 **Where in my life does needing to be right cost me something?**

Q2 **Something that didn't go the way I wanted, and why, in detail.**

Now read it back. How much of it was The Show?

Q3 **What do I want most in my life? How is The Show stopping me from getting it?**

Q4 **What am I doing right now because of The Show?**

Q5 **If I keep letting The Show make my choices for the next ten years, what will my life look like?**

FREEDOM

PART 2 · LETTING MY REACTIONS CHOOSE FOR ME

FROM	TO	INSIDE
Nobody has control over me.	I'm able to do what I choose.	I decide how I react.

Q1 **When I picture being free, what do I actually see?**

Q2 **Which freedom is that?**

- [ ] From
- [ ] To
- [ ] Inside

Q3 **What's really making me feel trapped right now?**

- [ ] Something out there
- [ ] Something in my own head

Q4 **Name one thing that controls me. Be specific.**

Q5 **If I got the life from Q1 tomorrow, would that thing still control me?**

RESPECT

PART 3 · DEMANDING TO BE TREATED AS IMPORTANT

EARNED	OWED	DEFERENCE	FEAR
Worth wanting. You work for it.	Worth giving. Basic decency, free.	From a title. Goes with the power.	Stops when you can't hurt them.

Q1 **Someone I really respect, and exactly why.**

Q2 **A time I felt disrespected. What did I want?**

- ☐ Basic decency
- ☐ To be treated as important

Q3 **Is there anyone I don't give basic decency to because they "haven't earned it"? Is that fair?**

Q4 **When I say "I value respect", do I mean...**

- ☐ How I treat others
- ☐ How I need to be treated

Q5

Where have I demanded respect instead of earning it? How did that go?

THE FIX

ONE TRAP, THREE PROBLEMS

LOOK BACK

My mad moment from the start was mostly...

Circle one. Often it is more than one.

EGO
Needing to be right.

FREEDOM
Letting my reaction choose for me.

RESPECT
Demanding to be treated as important.

COMMIT

Next time I feel the need to win, to look good or to be treated as important,

I will _____

7 DAYS

Every evening, the three questions I control

Stop judging yourself by how other people react. Tick yes or no.

DAY	DID I ACT WELL?	DID I DO WHAT I SAID I WOULD?	DID I CHOOSE HOW I REACTED?
Day 1	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 2	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 3	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 4	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 5	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 6	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO
Day 7	YES · NO	YES · NO	YES · NO

DAY 7

Looking back: what changed, in me and in the people around me?

Why this works. Most anger comes from wanting something you don't control. Splitting what you control from what you don't is an old idea from the teacher Epictetus, and the psychologist Albert Ellis named him as a root of his therapy. In studies of groups, people who got their way through fear and people who got it through skill both gained influence, but only the skilled ones were liked. A plan for the moment the urge comes makes you far more likely to follow through, and checking yourself each day helps you keep going.

WHAT WE CONTROL (EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION 1) · RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY (ELLIS, 1962) · DOMINANCE AND PRESTIGE (CHENG, TRACY ET AL., 2013) · IF-THEN PLANS (GOLLWITZER & SHEERAN, 2006, META-ANALYSIS) · TRACKING PROGRESS (HARKIN ET AL., 2016, META-ANALYSIS)