

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK: A QUICK-START GUIDE

There are several ways to get the most out of this book. One, of course, is to read *Stage Climbing* straight through as you would any book. That's the best way to gain maximum understanding of yourself via the *Stage Climbing* process and all of its applications to virtually any part of your life. I also suggest that you read one chapter at a time and let the material "sink in," before going to the next chapter. **This Quick-Start Guide will then give you a "cheat sheet" overview of what *Stage Climbing* is about and the terms unique to it.**

Another way is to **follow this Quick-Start Guide for the "short version" of the book and then *skim the book by reading the bold print, charts, boxes, and strategies in Part I. This way, you will find the book to be a very quick read.*** Of course, I also strongly recommend that you refer to the full text for any elaboration you might need as you go along. **Then use the pages and strategies in Part II that apply to what you are interested in learning about yourself and those around you, and to carry out your unique *Stage Climbing* process.** This can be an effective way to both get the gist and to use the *Stage Climbing* process and the specific strategies most applicable to you in order to understand and resolve a specific issue or to learn specific applications. The detailed Table of Contents starting on page v will point you to the application(s) in Part II most relevant to you whenever you need them.

To get the maximum benefit when reading Part I, think of *Stage Climbing* as reading a book about your life in seven chapters. Expect to

12 STAGE CLIMBING: THE SHORTEST PATH TO YOUR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

read many things about yourself. Some things may seem exhilarating, others might be quite painful and difficult to read (especially in Chapters 1 to 4) and still others will put you in touch with new possibilities you may eagerly wish to explore. Every reader will experience Part I differently. Many things in your life will come together more and more as you read. So please remember—if you stay with the difficult parts; be assured that the good stuff will follow. Your past will become clearer, and in reading about the target stages (Chapters 6 and 7), you will get a glimpse into what I refer to as “your highest potential,” along with the strategies to get there. **The action steps at the end of each chapter can be taken before going to the next chapter, or you can come back to them later.** Just be sure that at some point you make optimal use of those strategies that speak to you. **The exercises and strategies are what hold the key to lasting change.** Reread Part I or the relevant chapter(s) any time you want to understand a particular era or another aspect of your life (or even when you are trying to gain some insight about someone else).

Part II gives you a look at many of the *Stage Climbing* applications by calibrating numerous categories of life by the stages. For this reason, I even call them “**calibrations.**” **Consider Part II to be an encyclopedia of choices, along with special strategies for many of the categories included.** You will find reproducible worksheets to make your own custom calibrations at the end of each chapter in Part II. **Use the calibrations in Part II along with those you have created for yourself as specific points of reference to help you maximize those applications that most resonate with you.** Chapter 14, the final chapter of *Stage Climbing*, contains strategies for resolving problems, making decisions and bringing many aspects of your *Stage Climbing* process together. **All of the strategies in this book are timeless.** They can be revisited anytime you determine that your *Stage Climbing* process is in need of a major overhaul, a minor tweaking in one stage, or anything in between. *Stage Climbing* is a book you will want to come back to often or whenever you are facing a new challenge.

What follows is a five-step protocol you can use to become familiar with *Stage Climbing* and quickly begin your process:

STEP 1 — LEARN THE LANGUAGE OF STAGE CLIMBING THROUGH THIS GLOSSARY

Here are the important terms you need to know:

Stage: Stages are simply levels of maturity that pinpoint the degree to which you have evolved *in a given life area*. **Think of your stages as benchmarks or plateaus. They can explain practically any aspect of who you are or why you do what you do in that part of your life.** There are seven possible stages in any life category, numbered from one to seven. (They are summarized in Step 2 below.) You probably will identify various parts of yourself in each stage. For example, you could be operating at different stages with respect to your career, love relationship(s), etc. as a parent, socially, spiritually, and/or sexually. Our complexity as human beings makes this possible at any given time. These ascending stages are in reality the lenses through which you see your life and all of its challenges.

Default Stage: **The stage that defines how you *typically*—but *not* always—function with respect to a given aspect of your life.** Consider this as a rough measure of your actual degree of maturity in any given life area. Your default stage may or may not be the same as your chronological age would indicate. If your default stage is lower than what is age appropriate, it can explain much about your patterns and where you may be stuck. Thus, **your level of maturity** (for that area of life, of course) is simply what you recognize as your default stage as compared to your actual age. **Generally speaking, the higher the default stage in an area of life, the better.**

14 STAGE CLIMBING: THE SHORTEST PATH TO YOUR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

Target Stage: This is the stage from which you would most like to operate. **Think of it as a goal.** Your target stage in any life area is **the zone in which you are most likely to be living life at your *highest potential*.** When you are operating out of your target stages, **you are using the best parts of yourself to accomplish almost anything!** (See also Life at the Target Stages at the end of this Quick-Start Guide as well as Chapters 6 and 7 for a complete perspective on target stages.)

Hook: **Any part of you that is *uncharacteristically* in a stage higher or lower than what your default stage would indicate.** Some hooks can be highly beneficial, while others extremely counterproductive. Thus, hooks can propel you forward or hold you back. **Think of your hooks as things you *sometimes* do, feel, or believe that are anomalies or exceptions to how you normally operate via your default stage.**

Stage Climbing: **A simple system for understanding just how complex you are.** *Stage Climbing* uses deliberate strategies to help you develop new attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to move you forward to the higher, or target, stage, which you have chosen for one or more aspect(s) of your life. **Ideally, your target stage then becomes your default stage. This is the very definition of operating at what is now your highest potential.** The goal of *Stage Climbing* is literally to help you to “grow up” (or operate as a grown-up) and in the shortest time possible, in those specific areas of your life where *you* believe you may have fallen behind. ***Maturation to the point where you are operating at your highest potential is a natural process that often becomes stuck for various reasons.*** *Stage Climbing*

restores that natural process and brings it firmly under your control. By removing the hooks that block it, you can quickly advance to your **chosen** target stage. This book will offer you numerous strategies to do this.

Calibration: A customized breakdown of the seven stages, each offering a different view or perspective for a specific issue or aspect of your life. Calibrations define each stage and help you pinpoint such things as **where you are now** (your default stage) versus **where you want to be** (your target stage). The chapters in Part II offer you many calibrations for virtually every area of life.

STEP 2—LEARN THE BASICS OF THE SEVEN STAGES BELOW

Stages One through Four are our *normal* (or typical) **default stages from birth through late adolescence**. However, these first four stages are the ones you as an adult will most want to get beyond. Your hooks there—and we all have some—can be troublesome to any aspect of your life. However, as you learn more about the stages, you will find ways that certain lower-stage hooks can actually serve you well and even be great resources and sources of enjoyment. *Thus, there will be times when you will choose lower-stage hooks for temporary and/or specific situations.*

Stage One: Only possible stage during **infancy**; later can potentially render one profoundly **dependent** upon others and result in feelings of inadequacy and victimhood.

Stage Two: Typical stage for **toddlers**; thereafter, a life without internalized limits can result in **primitive** and **undisciplined** behavior, extreme self-centeredness, the tendency to act out and create much chaos for yourself and others.

16 STAGE CLIMBING: THE SHORTEST PATH TO YOUR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

Stage Three: Usual stage through **late childhood**; thereafter can morph into various degrees of an authoritarian personality and/or **rigid rule abider** who is extremely inflexible regarding rules and ideas.

Stage Four: Typical stage throughout **adolescence**; as an adult, can result in anxiety, depression, self-doubt, alienation, shame, and a wide variety of neurotic and **approval-seeking** behaviors.

Stage Five: Typical stage for an **adult** in our society, where you often think of yourself as a **role juggler**, or the sum of all your life roles. Your characteristic view of life at this stage is often **comfortable, dispassionate, or neutral**. This stage offers the ideal attitudes and frame of mind to function best, while doing what is merely necessary to keep your life together and functioning in order to live in the higher stages. While a Stage Five frame of mind is important to have at times with respect to certain relationships and activities, it often results in disappointment when you expect higher degrees of fulfillment than this stage can deliver.

Stages Six and Seven are the **target stages** that most people aspire to. As you understand Stages Six and Seven, it will become clear that by removing anything that blocks that natural drive to be your best, you will quickly get to the zone in which you can naturally and effortlessly operate at your **highest potential**. Most people view life at the target stages as life at its very best. **It is at the target stages that you feel the very best about yourself.** The target stages represent what you are here for, or from a spiritual perspective, your life's purpose.

Stage Six: Mature adult (determined not by chronological age but by the way you conduct your life) with a strong integrity and sense of self. At Stage Six, you rise *above* your roles; and operate according to your own **unique internally generated values and passions**. To the extent that these become your driving forces; genuine spirituality, fulfillment, and happiness result. This is the stage in which you love, enjoy, excel, and create in your own distinctive way.

Stage Seven: The highest stage attainable. You are beyond *needing* self-gratification, and find fulfillment as a result of your **benevolence** and your unique contribution to others, to the world, and to how you can be an agent of change in some large *or* small way. At Stage Seven, your purpose outside of yourself has more importance to you than what is purely in your own self-interest.

STEP 3—UNDERSTAND THE BASIC STAGE CLIMBING DRILL

Identify a hook, issue, or an area of your life in which you believe you are not functioning optimally:

Identify the **stage from which you are currently operating** with regard to the above issue, hook, or aspect of your life:

Stage 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

Choose your **target stage** (consider this your goal) from which you would like to be operating when addressing this issue, hook, or in this area of your life.

Stage 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

Looking at this issue **through the lens of your target stage**, how do you now see it?

By using both the calibrations that appear in Part II and any variations of those that you customize to your own unique situation, **identify the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that characterize your chosen target stage in the specific situation you have identified.** Sometimes, that's all you need to do. However, in other situations, more of the strategies in Parts I and II are needed to "hardwire" aspects of your target stage.

18 STAGE CLIMBING: THE SHORTEST PATH TO YOUR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

Apply whatever strategies and action steps at the end of each chapter in Part I may be needed to **lock in your target stage** in order to make it your default stage with respect to that hook, issue, or aspect of life. The purpose of almost all the strategies throughout this book is to help you do this. With some practice and what you will learn as you read *Stage Climbing*, this will soon become second nature.

Chapter 14 has the complete strategies for breakthroughs in managing your hooks, making your target stage your default stage, and much more, using variations of this basic *Stage Climbing* drill.

STEP 4—READ THE BOLD PRINT AND BOXES IN EACH CHAPTER OF PART I

However, be sure to refer to the text wherever you can use more clarification. Then read about and **apply the strategies at the end of each chapter that can be of any help to you with your unique challenges.**

STEP 5—READ THE INTRODUCTION TO PART II: CALIBRATING YOUR STAGE CLIMB—“WHERE YOU ARE NOW VERSUS WHERE YOU WANT TO BE”

Then refer to the calibrations for the issue(s) you are trying to resolve and/or the aspect(s) of your life you would like to understand. These calibrations are the direct applications of *Stage Climbing* to your life. They each offer you a glimpse of what life looks like at every one of the seven stages in the areas that are important to you. In Part II, there is a reproducible worksheet for making your own custom calibrations at the end of each chapter (all worksheets can be downloaded at www.StageClimbing.com/worksheets). In addition, there are several worksheets in Chapter 14 to help you pick your target stages and further facilitate your *Stage Climbing* process. Note: To enter the “Members” section of StageClimbing.com, enter your email address (this is your user ID) and the Password: MyStageClimb.

LIFE AT THE TARGET STAGES: HOW GOOD CAN IT BE?

I include this perspective in the quick-start guide in order to give you a glimpse of **what's in it for you** to work on your *Stage Climbing* process. The mission of *Stage Climbing* is simple: **To help you live any aspect of your life at the target stage(s) you have chosen.** Your target stages represent the optimal life that you either are living already or can be living very soon. **You are in the target stage zone whenever you are operating at your highest potential.** For most aspects of life, you will most likely aspire to Stages Six and Seven. Those stages also represent your unique and most authentic self. They are you at your best and happiest, because at Stages Six and Seven, you are guided by your passions, living beyond your ego, and solidly aligned with your purpose. **Your target stages define you as a “grown-up.”** They are where your heart *is*, as opposed to where you or someone else thinks it *should* be. In that sense, your target stages can even define *why* you are here.

Any success, victory, or windfall can trigger great feelings in you—temporarily. However, as you have probably noticed many times, a frame of mind that depends on external factors does not last since you are always subject to the next life event or occurrence, and then the next one, and the one after that. The good news: As humans, that state of fulfillment characterized by your target stages is in fact part of your *natural state of being*—a state that will not fluctuate with external events. In other words, you have inside of you all you will ever need to live a gloriously fulfilling life right now... No batteries are required. Getting there is where *Stage Climbing* fits into your life.

To the extent that you commit to living your life at the target stages, this could be a laundry list that defines your state of mind. Some of these items may not resonate with you but chances are that most of them will. Therefore, the first step is to decide if you are you ready to:

- ❖ Never again allow the expectations of others to govern you, except when they truly match those you have for yourself—in the privacy of your own mind.
- ❖ Have a strong and certain sense of self that allows you to overcome (and not be governed by) your confusion, self-doubts, fears, anxi-

20 STAGE CLIMBING: THE SHORTEST PATH TO YOUR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

ety about the approval of others, depression, and frustrations. Your own judgment and sense of what is right is no longer undermined or overpowered by the judgments of others. You no longer fear the future or death and you have a layer of emotional muscle that insulates you from the pain of feeling the negativity of others, even when it is aimed directly at you. You accept and never berate yourself. You are at peace, free of inner conflicts, and *feel best about yourself*. Thus, self-defeating behavior is an unnecessary thing of the past. It simply no longer serves a purpose.

- ❖ No longer *blame* your parents, former love relationships, bosses, work associates, or anyone else, including yourself, for the state of your life; are not troubled by the past or hung up on expecting things from people that they will not or cannot deliver. Forgive all of those toward whom you still have anger or other negative feelings—including, and perhaps most importantly, yourself.
- ❖ View your self-confidence/self-esteem separately from your achievements. That is, think of them as two parallel lines that do not meet and are never dependent on each other. Thus, your successes and failures no longer influence your opinion of yourself in any way.
- ❖ Be aware of the infinite number of life choices available to you. Feel empowered to make them and have an almost *childlike* openness to new experience.
- ❖ Live by your passions, desires, purpose, and strong determination. Recognize that your will and inner wisdom are the forces or engines that drive and motivate your life. Be passionate about your chosen activities and allow work and play to be equally joyous. *Your motivation now comes from within yourself*. External rewards are still nice, but secondary.
- ❖ Experience life as easier and not a struggle. With much less effort than you may ever have imagined, be able to find a way to manifest almost anything you truly need.

- ❖ Understand just how to relate to almost anyone you encounter, no matter how wise or wisdom-free he or she may be. Be able to accept the right of someone else to have an alternative viewpoint, no matter how much you may disagree with it. At the same time, however, allow yourself to automatically and effortlessly discontinue or emotionally downgrade relationships with other people that are not harmonious and fulfilling. Attract—but never, need to *demand*—the love and/or support you want from those who matter most in almost any situation.
- ❖ Have a deep and cherished internal commitment to use your natural gifts to the fullest. Know what your assets are and know how to maximize them; understand too your areas of weakness—accept them and no longer allow them to lead you in the direction of failure. Thus, you can make the most of all you have.
- ❖ Watch your potential keep rising higher and higher and your best keeps getting better and better with only you determining the limits.
- ❖ Connect to and leave your footprint on things much bigger and more important than yourself.
- ❖ Be open on a spiritual level with purpose and gratitude your guiding forces providing direction whenever you need it. Connect directly with God, your Higher Self, or whatever you may call your source of higher power—perhaps, *but not necessarily* through religion. However, know that you have the ability to bypass religion and go directly to that source.
- ❖ Be uniquely your own person and realize that your own happiness and destiny are in your hands exclusively.

If these characteristics seem farfetched or grandiose, remember that they all have one thing in common. **They are each traits that you are free to develop all by yourself, within yourself** regardless of your status or station in life, how others see or approve of you, your standing in the community, your annual income or net worth, who you know, your educational status, or anything else out of your ultimate control at this moment. That is how good your life

22 STAGE CLIMBING: THE SHORTEST PATH TO YOUR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

can be at the target Stages Six and Seven. **You can choose to own any or all of these traits and keep them forever, beginning now.**

So how do you get there? Remember, it's a **natural phenomenon** to have that very state of mind you've been reading about. However, if you've become stuck along the way, the *Stage Climbing* process you are about to undertake could be the most important step in your journey to those target stages. In some or perhaps even most areas of your life, you may already be there. Yet, in other life areas, you—as do most of us—may need to help the process along by learning about and clearing away the obstacles that block access to your target stages. While doing that, you will master a new tool for understanding yourself and others, making life changes, managing your emotions, motivating people, and much more.

Page 125 picks up the discussion of the target stages and leads you to those strategies for getting there. However, **I urge you to keep these highly accessible and beneficial goals in mind** as we focus first on the stages that you may need to climb in order to gain full access to the great things that await you at those coveted target stages.