

Personal Chaos Index¹

The Personal Chaos Index [PCI] is a tool to assist you to stay on track and maintain the changes you have made. It is designed to help you recognize those times when you are more vulnerable to slipping back into old habits.

Each person uses the PCI to generate behavioral signs that are warnings that you are “losing it”, slipping back to old habits or becoming “burnt out”.

Following are 10 areas of personal behavior. As you write down answers to the questions in each of these areas, the answers may help you to identify warning signs. When you know the warning signs you will be more capable of taking action to do things differently.

1. Physical Health: The ultimate insanity is to not take care of our bodies. Without our bodies we have nothing, yet we seem to have little time for physical conditioning. Examples are being over a certain weight, having missed regular exercise for two days, smoking, being exhausted from lack of sleep. How do you know that you are not taking care of your body? [at least 3 examples.]

2. Transportation: How people get from place to place is often a statement about their lifestyles. Take for example, a car owner who seldom comes to a full stop, routinely exceeds the speed limit, runs out of gas, does not check the oil, puts off needed repairs, has not cleaned the back seat out in three months and averages three speeding tickets and ten parking tickets per year. Or the bus rider who always misses the bus, never has change, forgets his or her briefcase on the bus etc. What are the transportation behaviors that indicate your life is getting out of control? [at least 3 examples.]

3. Environment: To not have time to do your personal chores is a comment on the order of your life. Consider the home in which the plants go unwatered, fish unfed, grocery supplies depleted, laundry not done or put away, cleaning neglected, dishes unwashed etc. What are ways in which you neglect your home or living space? [at least 3 examples.]

¹ Adapted from Carnes, P, [2005]. Facing the Shadow. Carefree, Az., Gentle Path Press.

4. **Work:** Chaos at work may place your ability to support yourself in jeopardy. Signs of chaotic behavior are phone calls not returned, chronic lateness for appointments, being behind in promised work, and unmanageable in-basket, and “too many irons in the fire”. When your life is unmanageable at work what are your behaviors? [at least 3 examples.]

5. **Interests:** What are some positive interests besides work that give you perspective on the world? Music, reading, photography, fishing or gardening are examples. What are you doing when you are not over extended? [at least 3 examples.]

6. **Social Life:** Think of friends in your social network who provide support to you and are not family or significant others. When you become isolated, alienated, or disconnected, what behaviors are typical of you? [at least 3 examples.]

7. **Family/Significant Others:** When you are disconnected from those closest to you, what is your behavior like? Examples are silent, overtly hostile, passive-aggressive. [at least 3 examples.]

8. **Finances:** We handle our financial resources much like our personal ones. Thus, when your checking account is unbalanced, or overdrawn or bill overdue or there is no cash in your pocket or you are spending more than you earn, your financial overextension may parallel your emotional bankruptcy. List the signs that show when you are overextended. [at least 3 examples.]

9. Spiritual Life and Personal Reflection: Spirituality can be diverse and include meditation, yoga and prayer. Personal reflection includes journal writing, completing daily readings and pursuing therapy. What are sources of routine personal reflection that are neglected when you are overextended? [at least 3 examples.]

10. Symptom Behaviors: Compulsive behaviors that have negative consequences are symptomatic of your general well-being or a warning sign that you may be slipping into old habits. When you watch too much TV, overeat, bite your nails – any habit you feel bad about afterward – these can be warning signs. Symptom behaviors are behaviors that are evidence of overextension, such as forgetfulness, slips of the tongue, or jealousy. What symptom behaviors do you notice when you are feeling overwhelmed? [at least 3 examples.]

Now – from the signs of “personal chaos” you recorded choose 3 or 4 that are most critical to you. On your own or with someone, decide how you will do things differently.