

Take Charge of
Your Feelings,
Become a
Better You

THE MOOD ELEVATOR

LARRY SENN

Founder, Senn Delaney,
The Culture-Shaping
Firm



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Praise for *The Mood Elevator*

“Larry Senn has had a profound influence on my life through elegant yet simple principles, now found in *The Mood Elevator*. Practice the lessons in *The Mood Elevator* and the arc of your life will be changed forever—for the better.”

—**Dr. Gordon Gee, President, West Virginia University, and former President, The Ohio State University**

“*The Mood Elevator* inspires leaders to live more of life at their best, build better relationships, and create more success.”

—**Leslie H. Wexner, Chairman and CEO, L Brands**

“Larry Senn and the concepts he teaches, like the Mood Elevator, have had a profound impact on my career, on the success of Yum! Brands around the world, and on me personally.”

—**David Novak, former Chairman and CEO, Yum! Brands, and author of *Taking People with You***

“Larry’s tools for teaching leaders how to do the ‘right people things’ leaves an indelible mark on the emotional IQ of any business enterprise. The Mood Elevator has become an important part of the nomenclature of the three companies I’ve run.”

—**Mark Frissora, President and CEO, Caesars Entertainment**

“Larry’s gift of offering simple yet powerful guidance to high happiness and success is masterful. The Mood Elevator tool is helping change lives, organizations, and families—thus, our world. I invite all leaders interested in upping their organization’s mood and impact to read *The Mood Elevator*.”

—**Vance Caesar, PhD, coauthor of *The High Achiever’s Guide to Happiness* and author of *Uncommon Career Success***

“This book is the ticket for anyone who wants to spend more time on the top floors of the Mood Elevator. The concept has been invaluable in all walks of life. It helps us work better together as business colleagues but has equal benefit in personal relationships. There is much to be gained from an attitude of gratitude and understanding how to get there. Larry Senn is doing a great service by bringing the Mood Elevator to a larger audience.”

—**General Josue “Joe” Robles, Jr., former President and CEO, USAA**

“As his personal physician for decades, I know that Larry has been living the principles of the Mood Elevator and that this has resulted in his phenomenal cardiovascular and mental health. The principles of the Mood Elevator regarding living a balanced life emotionally and physically are cornerstones of cardiovascular risk reduction, as Larry has illustrated personally.”

—**Jay A. Johnson, MD, FACC, board-certified cardiologist and Attending Staff, Stanford University Medical Center**

“*The Mood Elevator* is an engaging lift into the deeper aspects of ourselves and the richest parts of our lives. Through his immense personal and corporate experience, Larry Senn shares practical wisdom on how to enhance our success in business, relationships, health, and everyday living.”

—**Rev. Joshua Reeves**

“*The Mood Elevator* is the best thinking and guidance I have ever read on healthy living for individuals and healthy cultures for organizations. The tools are being used and embraced in our organization, and we are experiencing remarkable results.”

—**Gary Shorb, former CEO, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare**

“It is an amazing book that elevates your moods to the highest levels and unlocks your potential to achieve all-around success in your life. I wish I had this book long ago.”

—**Professor M. S. Rao, international leadership expert**

“Once again, Larry Senn has written a book that is simple to understand but has profound implications on how we interact. He makes the point that we are in control of our mood. I highly recommend this book.”

—**Tom Voss, former Chairman, President, and CEO, Ameren Corporation**

“The book is brilliant! Growing up, the book that influenced me perhaps more than any was Napoleon Hill’s *Think and Grow Rich*. This is really like the modern-day version of *Think and Grow Rich* . . . the concept that our thinking creates our feelings makes us realize what control we have. Great stories.”

—**Robert Reiss, host of *The CEO Show***

The Mood Elevator

The Mood Elevator

*Take Charge of Your Feelings,
Become a Better You*



Larry Senn



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
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The Mood Elevator

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

www.bkconnection.com

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First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-8461-6

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8462-3

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8463-0

2017-1

Cover design by Kirk DouPonce, DogEared Design. Interior design and composition by Gary Palmatier, Ideas to Images. Elizabeth von Radics, copyeditor; Mike Mollett, proofreader; Rachel Rice, indexer.

*To my wife and soulmate, Bernadette, and to our five children
Kevin, Darin, Jason, Kendra, and Logan.*

*You keep me young at heart and
provide the love and the life lessons that help
me gracefully ride the Mood Elevator in life.*

Contents

Preface ix

CHAPTER 1

The Mood Elevator 1

CHAPTER 2

What Drives the Mood Elevator? 13

CHAPTER 3

Up the Mood Elevator: The Big Payoffs 23

CHAPTER 4

Escaping Unhealthy Normal 41

CHAPTER 5

Braking Your Mood Elevator:
The Power of Curiosity 57

CHAPTER 6

Interrupting Your Pattern 67

CHAPTER 7

Feeding the Thoughts You Favor 77

CHAPTER 8

Living in Mild Preference 89

CHAPTER 9

Shifting Your Set Point: The Wellness Equation	99
---	----

CHAPTER 10

Quieting Your Mind	115
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER 11

Cultivating Gratitude	121
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER 12

Honoring Our Separate Realities	137
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER 13

Nurturing Faith and Optimism	155
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER 14

Dealing With Your Down Days	165
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER 15

Relationships and the Mood Elevator	171
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER 16

Pointers for Riding the Mood Elevator	175
---------------------------------------	-----

How This Book Came to Be 179

Notes 187

Bibliography 191

Acknowledgments 193

Index 195

About the Author 211

Preface

I invite you to join me on a journey of understanding about a concept that can be life-altering: the Mood Elevator.

I had been researching and gathering ideas for this book for several years but had allowed a busy personal and professional life to keep me from completing it. Then one day we conducted an off-site meeting on personal purpose for all employees at my company, Senn Delaney, a Heidrick & Struggles company. After taking the time to reflect on how I hoped to make a difference in the world, I concluded that my purpose was to “provide understanding and inspiration to an ever-widening circle of people, beginning with my family, to live life at their best mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.”

As soon as I articulated that, I knew I needed to complete my book. I saw sharing these ideas with the world as one of the best ways to bring that purpose to life.

I founded Senn Delaney almost four decades ago to fulfill a vision of enhancing the spirit and performance of organizations by systematically shaping their cultures. Today it is widely recognized as the most successful culture-shaping consulting firm in the world. The Mood Elevator is

just one of many concepts Senn Delaney uses as part of its overall process to create thriving organizational cultures.

The Mood Elevator has been enthusiastically embraced by hundreds of thousands of employees of Senn Delaney clients around the world. Many of them have expressed a desire to learn more about the Mood Elevator and to share it with friends and loved ones. The book is designed for them, as well as for others who may learn about the Mood Elevator for the first time through this book.

While many ideas in the book are taught to clients in Senn Delaney sessions, a number of the ideas and suggestions, including those about wellness, fitness, and healthy living, come as a result of my own personal life journey and do not necessarily reflect the views of Senn Delaney or its work with organizations.

My focus in writing *The Mood Elevator* is simply to benefit individuals by bringing them ideas I have discovered through my life experiences. My hope is that the book will help you take charge of your emotions and be a better you.

Larry E. Senn

The Mood Elevator



The Mood Elevator

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.... To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Let me tell you a story about my friend John. I wonder whether you've ever known someone like him.

In many ways John is a lucky guy. He has a wonderful wife, two smart young kids, and an interesting job in the marketing division of a company we'll call Tip-Top Products. In the eyes of many people, John is on top of the world. But as our story begins, John is feeling very upset. He has just left his office at Tip-Top Products at closing time and is on his way home as usual, but he decides to stop for a few minutes at a nearby park to try to regain his composure.

John is troubled because of a conversation he had just a few minutes earlier with a colleague named Fran.

“Say, John,” Fran remarked, poking her head into his office. “Have you heard the latest rumor about next year’s budget? It’s all over the company.”

“Haven’t heard a thing,” John replied. “What’s the scoop?”

“Well, it’s just a rumor, of course, but the word is that the board is worried about this quarter’s profit downturn. They’re supposedly talking about downsizing. And from what I hear, your division might be on the chopping block.”

John felt a knot beginning to form in his stomach. “Really? Who told you that?”

Fran shook her head. “I’m not supposed to say,” she replied. “And it may turn out to be nothing, but I thought you’d want to know.”

“Thanks, Fran,” John answered. Suddenly his plans for the evening—enjoying dinner with the family followed by a football game on TV—seemed utterly inconsequential. Fears and worries flooded his mind as he left the office.

Now, sitting on a park bench a few minutes later, John thinks about the possibility of being laid off and the dire consequences that could have. What if he can’t find another job? Will his kids be able to go to college? Will he lose his home? (A neighbor got laid off a year earlier and had to move back in with his parents—it can happen that easily.) Can his ego handle being fired? How will he break the news to his wife? Susie is such a worrier—and maybe she’ll figure he must have done something wrong to deserve being let go. *She’ll probably wish she’d married her old boyfriend Ben*

after all— isn't he a hotshot lawyer by now? And who could blame her? She deserves better than to be hitched to a failure like me. John finds his mood rapidly plunging from anxious, to worried, to downright depressed.

Then his thoughts turn back to Tip-Top Products. He recalls all the years of hard work he's put in and the contributions he's made to the company's success. How had the bosses gotten the company into this position? And how did they decide that downsizing would be the solution? Was the decision made just to benefit the people at the top? *I bet those fat cats in the executive suite aren't facing any pay cuts—let alone layoffs,* John fumes. His feeling of depression gives way to a sense of resentment and self-righteous anger.

Suddenly he remembers Fran's words: "It may turn out to be nothing." That's true, isn't it? Rumors like this have circulated before and turned out to be just hot air. And Fran is always one of the first to spread the latest scuttlebutt—true or not. John's anxiety begins to lift. Heaving a sigh of relief, he says to himself, *It's probably not true at all! After all, one quarter of bad financial results is no big deal. I bet our profits are going to be back to normal in no time—and the board probably thinks so, too.* He gets up from the park bench and heads toward home.

Strolling through the park, John finds his thoughts going in a different direction. He says to himself, *Maybe this rumor is really a wakeup call for me. I've been trying to work up the courage to leave Tip-Top for the past year and look for something better—like a job at that high-tech startup*

my buddy Ron just joined. Maybe now is the time to do it. He begins imagining the exciting changes that a new career path could bring—a higher salary, a bigger office, maybe a company car and a country club membership. Picturing the admiring expression on Susie’s face when he brings home a handsome bonus check from his new employers, he becomes quite excited, even inspired. He vows to get to work on updating his résumé as soon as possible—maybe tonight!

John’s buoyant mood is mellowed by the sight of two kids, about the same age as his own, climbing on a jungle gym. *After all*, he thinks, *isn’t that what really matters—having a family you love?* There’s a spring in John’s step as he exits the park and heads for home, looking forward to some quality time with his wife and kids. As for the rumor about Tip-Top, that can wait till morning, when he will compare notes with his closest colleagues and figure out what’s *really* going on.



You may have never had to deal with a downsizing rumor like the one that sent John into a tizzy that afternoon, but I’ll bet you’ve experienced emotional ups and downs like he went through. It’s a common, almost universal experience—especially in a world as full of unpredictable, uncontrollable changes and chances as ours. As you can tell from the story, John’s emotional ups and downs simply

followed his thinking. It's our thinking that takes us on this kind of wild ride in life.

I call this “riding the Mood Elevator”—but you might call it simply the human condition. It's our moment-to-moment experience of life. The Mood Elevator carries us up and down as we swing through a wide range of emotions. Those feelings play a major role in defining the quality of our lives, as well as our effectiveness in dealing with daily challenges.

We all ride up and down the Mood Elevator every day. So wouldn't it be great if we knew the right buttons to push to stay among the top floors? And wouldn't it be helpful if we knew how to make our visits to the lower floors less unpleasant and shorter in duration? Providing the keys that can help you control your rides on the Mood Elevator is the main purpose of this book.

Let's begin by looking at the Mood Elevator and the various floors it visits. The Mood Elevator map is based on my own experience, as well as input from hundreds of groups and tens of thousands of people who attended seminars designed or conducted by Senn Delaney and our client facilitators. In reality, we each have our own unique set of Mood Elevator floors, but most of the levels shown on the map are probably familiar to you—and it's likely you've visited them at one point or another in your life.

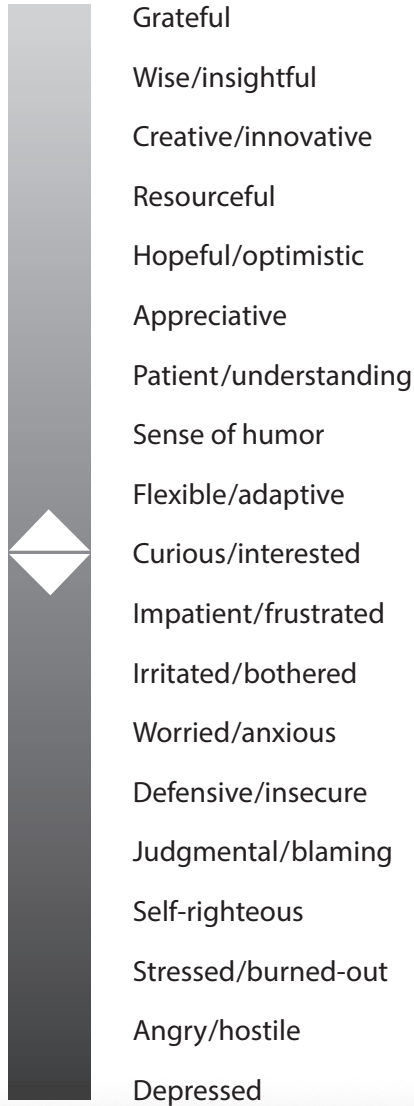
Think about your own travels on the Mood Elevator, beginning with your visits to the upper floors. These are

moments, hours, or days when we are lighthearted. We are in touch with things we are grateful for in our lives; we feel secure, confident, creative, and resourceful. We are not easily bothered by people and situations and are less apt to “sweat the small stuff.” We are more curious than judgmental and are inclined to see the humor in things. We tackle life’s challenges with a sense of ease and grace, feel connected to the flow of life, and may even find ourselves able to tap into a source of universal wisdom or intelligence. At times like these, we are operating “up the Mood Elevator,” and they are times we are likely to remember with a feeling of satisfaction and pleasure.

But being human means that we spend some time “down the Mood Elevator,” as well. These are times when our lives don’t look or feel as good, times when we feel insecure and worried. We find we are easily irritated and bothered by people or circumstances; we may feel judgmental, defensive, and self-righteous. Or we may feel vaguely “down,” troubled, or depressed. When we are down the Mood Elevator, our emotions may range from quite passive (listless, lethargic, or blue) to very intense and active (resentful, fearful, or angry).

We’ll use the Mood Elevator as our map of human experience throughout this book. It is simple and straightforward, and it fits well with my subjective perceptions of how my moods tend to shift. I am not claiming that the Mood Elevator has been scientifically validated; it is simply a tool that I have found very effective in my own life—and many others with whom I have shared it agree.

The Mood Elevator



To begin reflecting on the Mood Elevator and its role in your life, ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ Which floors are most familiar to me as part of my normal day-to-day experience of life?
- ▶ Which floors most commonly define my temperament? On which floors would the people who know me best most often expect to find me?
- ▶ Which floors would I like to visit more often in my life? On which floors would I like to spend less time?
- ▶ Which floors do I most often get stuck on when I am having a bad day?
- ▶ Which floors do I tend to land on when my mood begins to drop?
- ▶ Which floors do I visit on days when I am feeling most productive, creative, and happy?

Everyone experiences the Mood Elevator in their unique way. For me, the feeling of gratitude tends to mark those moments when I'm on the very highest floor of my personal elevator. When I slow down, quiet my mind, and set aside the preoccupations and pressures of the day, I become aware of the gratitude I feel toward my wife, Bernadette, and our five children. The same sense of gratitude wells up in me when my teenage son, Logan, or one of my other kids gives me a hug and says, "I love you, Dad,"

or when I pause to experience a beautiful sunset that paints the sky with a multitude of amazing colors.

Good things seem to happen to me when I am on the upper floors of my Mood Elevator. I find myself feeling creative and resourceful. Ideas and answers come more easily, and solutions to problems seem more accessible. The feelings of love, hope, patience, and curiosity that I experience make my life richer and enable me to contribute more to my family and friends, to my church, and to my chosen life's work.

In fact, the pleasure I take from my days on the upper floors is what drove me to write this book—and also what enabled me to turn that desire into a reality. When I am on one of the lower floors, creative thoughts don't come at all. Frozen by writer's block, I find it hard to think of examples or stories to illustrate my ideas—and the ones I do manage to come up with appear silly and worthless. By contrast, there are days when metaphors and images come pouring out, as if I am connected to a source of inspiration and ideas greater than myself—some fount of universal intelligence and original thought that I only have to tap into.

One of the warning signs I've learned to recognize that tells me I'm heading down the Mood Elevator is when I notice myself becoming more impatient, more easily irritated or bothered. A minor inconvenience, mistake, or misunderstanding that I would ordinarily shrug off or laugh about seems to get under my skin, provoking annoyance or anger when I'm sinking toward those lower floors.

I am sure you can recall experiences from your travels on the Mood Elevator in your own life. Most people have a natural desire to experience life on the higher floors more often and more consistently. Who wouldn't want to worry less, feel less stress, and be irritated and bothered less often? Who wouldn't want to feel more gratitude, love, humor, and lightness? Who wouldn't want to experience a heightened degree of creativity, curiosity, flexibility, and resilience?

What's more, the benefits of life on the upper floors are long lasting and cumulative. The more time we spend at those higher levels, the better our lives tend to go—because the upper floors on the Mood Elevator are where we function at our best, thinking most clearly, making the smartest choices, and behaving most creatively. Think about it: Which floors would you rather be on when you are trying to build—or repair—an important personal relationship? When discussing a sensitive issue with someone you love? When tackling a complex problem at work? When making an important life decision?

For most of us, the answer is obvious. The higher levels on the Mood Elevator lead to more success with less stress—to healthier relationships, greater personal productivity, and a better quality of life. No matter how you personally define success—regardless of what realms of achievement and happiness are most important to you—the upper floors on the Mood Elevator are a better place from which to parent, to lead, and to build a career.

Just imagine how different your life, work, and relationships might be if you spent a lot more time on the upper floors—and if you knew how to minimize the negative impact on yourself and others from your inevitable visits to the lower floors.

When I talk with people about the Mood Elevator, almost everyone immediately recognizes the concept—yet very few have ever thought about their life experience in this way. That’s probably because they assume that the Mood Elevator is “just the way life is,” a basic truth of human existence that we can’t change and that it’s therefore pointless to think about.

It is true that being human means we all spend time riding up and down the Mood Elevator. We all will visit most of the floors at one time or another. But the time we spend at the various levels differs dramatically. Have you ever known someone who seemed to have permanently moved in to the floors labeled *impatient/frustrated*, *worried/anxious*, and *judgmental/blaming*? On the other hand, have you ever been lucky enough to know someone who was habitually in residence on the floors named *resourceful*, *hopeful/optimistic*, and *patient/understanding*? The choices we make can have a significant impact on which floors we spend the majority of our time on—and that, in turn, has a huge effect on the people we come in contact with and the quality of our lives.

There’s much more to say about the Mood Elevator. The relationships among the different floors can be complex,

and moving from one floor to another can sometimes be quite challenging. In the chapters to come, we delve more deeply into the realities of navigating life on the Mood Elevator.

For now, the key takeaway is this: The central purpose of this book is to provide you with some techniques you can use to increase the amount of time you spend up the Mood Elevator and reduce the duration and negative impacts of operating on the lower floors. The principles I share in the chapters that follow have already enabled countless people to spend more time on the upper floors, and I believe they can do the same for you.

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