

NATIONAL BESTSELLER



**PERSONALITY
ISN'T
PERMANENT**

**BREAK FREE
FROM SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS
AND REWRITE YOUR STORY**

BENJAMIN HARDY, PhD

Advance Praise for Personality Isn't Permanent

“This is a generous, empowering and purposeful book. If you’re ready, it will help you unlock a future that you may have been brainwashed into believing wasn’t possible. Worth sharing a copy with someone you care about.”

—Seth Godin, author of *This Is Marketing*

“*Personality Isn't Permanent* is possibly the best self-help book I’ve ever read, and a book that will redefine the genre. After this book, it’s no longer good enough to talk about untested theory—Ben backs everything up with both amazing stories and cutting edge, tested science, while still making it actionable to anyone. Best part: this is the book that destroys all the useless personality test peddlers that infect the world.”

—Tucker Max, *New York Times* bestselling author

“In *Personality Isn't Permanent*, Dr. Hardy crushes an outdated paradigm and gives you the process to create a bigger, bolder future.”

—JJ Virgin, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Ben Hardy is proof of what he writes about. He keeps getting better and better—and so can you.”

—Ryan Holiday, bestselling author of *Stillness Is the Key*

“For those looking to up their game, *Personality Isn't Permanent* is more than a hopeful and fascinating read, it is utterly applicable. In the crowded space of self-help/business, Benjamin Hardy’s book is a game changer.”

—Richard Paul Evans, *New York Times* bestselling author

“*Personality Isn't Permanent* beautifully illustrates why people get stuck and provides a science-based process to help you transform yourself and your life. This is required reading for anyone who wants to improve their self-awareness and success!”

—Dr. Tasha Eurich, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Insight* and *Bankable Leadership*

“Personality Isn’t Permanent is a supremely brilliant work and a must read. Addressing trauma and addiction in a hopeful and impactful way. You can rewrite your story.”

—Glenn Morshower, award-winning actor, producer, and director

“Dr. Hardy enlightens you on the role trauma plays in shaping your personality. Change is possible when past traumas are healed. Personality is in a continual state of change. This book will help you write your future story.”

—Dr. Donald Wood, founder and CEO of Inspired Performance Institute

Personality Isn't Permanent

Break Free from Self-Limiting Beliefs
and Rewrite Your Story

Benjamin Hardy, PhD

PORTFOLIO / PENGUIN





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For Lauren.

Thank you for betting on me when it made no sense and for continuing to bet on me.

It still doesn't make much sense.

I love you forever.

May our future always be brighter than our past.

Contents

Introduction

A Personality Test Almost Ruined My Life

One

The Myths of Personality

Two

The Truth of Personality

Three

Transform Your Trauma

Four

Shift Your Story

Five

Enhance Your Subconscious

Six

Redesign Your Environment

Conclusion

Embrace Your Future to Change Your Past

Acknowledgments

Notes

[Index](#)

A painting is never finished—it simply stops in interesting places.

—*Paul Gardner*

INTRODUCTION

A Personality Test Almost Ruined My Life

My wife—the woman I love the most in the world and have five wonderful children with—almost didn't marry me . . . *because of a personality test.*

A very popular personality test while I was in college was called the Color Code, which categorizes people into one of four colors. Reds are your type A go-getters, driven by ambition and self-interest. Blues are heart-centered and relationship-based. Whites are introspective and often passive. Yellows seek fun and are the life of the party.

Lauren was a Red. So when her family found out that I was a White, they were very concerned. Lauren had previously been married to an abusive and self-absorbed guy, who was also a Red. Her parents thought, given her interest in me, that she might be going too far in the opposite direction to compensate. Or that she was being overly cautious to avoid the trauma of her prior marriage.

Like many others who put stock in personality tests, Lauren's family considered the Color Code to have some validity and truth. They saw people through the test's lens—as one of four types.

“If this guy is a White, and she's a Red, she's going to walk all over him,” were their genuine concerns. “She needs a real man, not a White.”

She was wondering the same thing. Could a Red and a White really work together? Whites rarely get promoted at work. Whites are pushovers. Whites are dreamers but don't stick to long-term goals.

Luckily for me, Lauren gave me a chance. She got to know me, and after we were together awhile in a great relationship, she took the leap of faith against her prejudgment of Whites and her parents' initial concerns.

Lauren and I laugh about this now, happily married with five kids and fourteen years of combined formal psychology education later. But the fact remains: *A personality test almost ruined our life together.*

I'm not the only one who's been misdiagnosed or unfairly limited by a personality test. In fact, you likely have also fallen prey to this epidemic. The Color Code is just one of countless popular "personality" frameworks sweeping through modern culture. Some other major culprits include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the DISC assessment, the Winslow Personality Test, NEO, HEXACO, Birkman, Enneagram, inkblots, and more.

The list goes on and it doesn't stop. It won't stop. It seems like hundreds of new tests are devised every single day.

The obsession with "personality" is so ridiculous that in 2019 Facebook had to ban personality quizzes and other apps with "minimal utility." This happened after more than 87 million people had given away their personal information in exchange for the answer to a personality quiz.

Personality tests can be interesting, entertaining, and playful, yes. But there's a dark reality about them, and the entire notion of "personality" in general, which limits—and in some cases *ruins*—the lives of countless people.

The mainstream perspective is that your personality is the real and authentic you. Your personality is "innate" and, for the most part, *unchangeable*. As a result, your job as a human being is to gather enough information and experience—to find the right personality test—in order to adequately "discover" your "hidden" personality.

Once you make this all-important discovery, you are then enabled to build your entire life around that personality. This life you build may not be the one you'd have chosen for yourself, but it's the life you were born to live. It's the hand you were dealt. To do anything otherwise would be disastrous, painful, and delusional.

Through all of this is the underlying assumption that *you were born "hardwired" as the person you are, and you cannot change that.*

The truth is, though, that virtually everyone wants to change their personality. Recent research at the University of Illinois proves this. Over 90 percent of people report being dissatisfied with at least some aspect of their personality, which they hope to improve for the better.

Despite wanting to change, people have been led to believe they can't. Many popular schools of psychology argue that personality is innate, immutable, and fixed.

The reason personality is viewed as fixed is because, as a rule, psychologists place extreme emphasis and value on the past. A core tenet of many personality theories is that *the past is the greatest predictor of the future*. This comes from the common viewpoint of "causal determinism," the idea that everything that happens or exists is caused by prior conditions or events. From this view, people are *caused* by prior events, like one domino in a toppling chain.

The word "caused" here is extreme: not "influenced" or "guided," but "caused." Being "caused" by the past means you have no choice or possibility in the matter of who you are and what you can do. Instead, you're forced to accept whatever personality you have been dealt. Who you are right now is simply a domino being toppled over by your past experiences. You can't change the past. You can only *discover* and better understand who you *really* are and why.

This is why people seek to discover or "find" themselves. They are looking for who "they" are. For most, the notion that you can imagine and create yourself and your own personality almost sounds ridiculous, like magical thinking.

But does it have to be this way? Is your personality actually fixed and unchangeable?

No, it's not. And there is a lot of data, especially newly unearthed data, that proves this.

If you're someone who's tried making big changes in your life but feel stuck or discouraged, then this book is for you. The argument of this book is that your "personality" *doesn't matter*. Even more, your personality is *not* the most fundamental aspect of who you are. Instead, your personality is *surface-level*, transitory, and a by-product of something much deeper.

The most fundamental aspect of your humanity is your ability to make choices and stand by those choices, what Viktor Frankl called the last of human freedoms, "To choose one's own way." Choosing your own way has at least two key meanings: making decisions about

what you want to happen and choosing how you respond to what does happen. Choosing one's own way is what makes one human—and the more you own the power of your own decision-making, the more your life and outcomes will be within your control.

Making decisions and “choosing your own way” are not necessarily easy. There are constraints that both limit and heavily influence your ability to make choices. The two most crucial factors influencing your ability to make choices are your social and cultural environments, as well as your emotional development as a person. The more emotionally evolved you become, the less defined you'll be by your past and the less constrained you'll be by your circumstances.

Instead of being fixed, *you will be flexible*. Instead of avoiding or suppressing emotions, you'll embrace and be transformed through them.

You'll courageously pursue the life you *truly* want—regardless of how “impossible” or difficult it may currently seem to you or those around you. You'll deal with whatever emotions, lessons, or struggles come along the way. Through your learning and experience, you'll transform as a person. Your circumstances will change.

From this moment forward, you can forget about silly personality tests and “types.” Instead, you can decide who you're committed to being and becoming.

Who you become is a choice—which *only you* can make. Albus Dumbledore, the wise wizard from J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books, understood this. When Harry Potter was seeking guidance, trying to understand why the Sorting Hat suggested he join the Slytherin house, Dumbledore explained, “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.”

Harry Potter wasn't “born” to be a Gryffindor. He didn't have the innate personality of a Gryffindor. He chose to be one, and that choice and the experiences that followed shaped his personality.

Although Dumbledore is fictional, his lesson is fundamental to understanding the truth of personality. You become who you choose to be. Yet, *fully choosing* who you are and will become is rare. We've been brainwashed into believing we don't have such a choice. Facing the responsibility and freedom of choosing your own way is, indeed, scary.

That fear and risk is why many people prefer a Sorting Hat to simply make the call for them, to decide what their destiny is. It's why people defer their decisions, potential, and identity to external measures. It's much easier emotionally to have a box to fall back on—"Oh yeah, this isn't comfortable, it must not be for me"—even if that box limits your freedom, vision, and creativity.

Creativity is risky business. It requires vulnerability and courage—with a high probability of mistakes and failures along the way. There is no guaranteed outcome with creativity and courage. Moreover, creativity can be unpredictable and take you places you didn't initially expect to go. It's not surprising, then, that most people view themselves as increasingly less creative as they age—we want things to be stable and predictable. It's also not surprising that we prefer being told what we can (and *can't*) do rather than face the risks of *creating ourselves* and our own experience.

When you decide who you'll be and the life you'll live, you can have anything you truly want. You can become an outlier. You can have experiences that not only shock other people but shock yourself. "Is this really happening to me?" will become your common experience.

Yes, it is really happening to you. Amazing, right?

You're moving forward and acting with boldness and intention. You're not limiting yourself based on what has been. You're becoming increasingly confident in your ability to see something in your mind and then watch it unfold experientially. You're seeing yourself become surrounded by others who live by creation and design, rather than default and passivity.

You don't have to be limited by what other people say you can have or achieve. If you want to be more confident and creative, or more extroverted and organized, you can become any or all of those things. If you're timid but want to become a powerful, bold, and inspirational leader, you can become that as well.

Stacy Salmon, a friend of mine, told me how she learned this truth during a Sunday school class when she was thirteen years old. As a child, Stacy had been shy, timid, and awkward. On that day, the teacher explained to the students that they could all become who they wanted to be. They could develop attributes they admired in others.

This idea sunk in for Stacy, and from that moment forward, *she stopped acting shy around others*. Stopped hiding behind her parents in social situations. Stopped awkwardly yawning to avoid attention when someone asked her a question. And in the more than twenty years since that experience, she has continually sought to develop skills, learn from others, and grow as a person. Now in her midthirties, Stacy still seeks to grow and learn, and to develop attributes and characteristics she wants or admires in others. She's no longer that shy girl. She's confident and intentional.

That's the truth of personality. It's not innate but trained. It can and does change. It can and should be chosen and designed. Choosing one's own way is a primary purpose of our lives. Yet there is a fear in making choices, because choices have consequences. As a result, people avoid making decisions, fail to choose their own way, and limit their capacity for growth, learning, and change.

Anyone who's ever done something great with their life had to transform themselves from who they were to who they became. They had to see something new in their mind and convince themselves it was possible. They had to act courageously beyond their current personality and circumstances to eventually do what they did and become who they became.

Outsiders may view the hyper-successful or influential as "different" or "special." But if you asked those who actually did it, they'd say they are quite ordinary, and that the life they created was a matter of choice.

In order to become a new person, you must have a new goal— a purpose worth pursuing. Your goal is the reason you develop new attributes and skills, and have curated transformational experiences. Without a meaningful goal, attempting change lacks meaning, requires unsustainable willpower, and ultimately leads to failure.

The Past Is Not Prologue

The only thing “special” about those who transform themselves and their lives is their view of their future. They refuse to be defined by the past. They see something different and more meaningful and they never stop fueling that vision. Every single day, they maintain their vision of faith and hope and take courageous steps in that direction, accompanied by much failure and pain. With each step forward, their confidence increases and their identity becomes more flexible and less constrained by what was.

You can be the narrator of your life’s story. You don’t have to be defined by your past. It doesn’t matter what your past identity or outcomes were.

“What’s past is prologue.” That’s a line from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, uttered by Antonio, a power-hungry, manipulative character, to argue that all that has happened previously—the “past”—has led Sebastian and himself to do what they were about to do, which was commit murder. They had no other choice, it seems. They were dominos, not agents.

People use the past as the excuse to remain stuck in habits and attitudes that keep them from growing. Additionally, like Sebastian, people often use the past as the reason for previous or continued missteps. Blaming the past means you’re off the hook. You’re not responsible and you have no personal agency.

But as you will find over and over in this book, your past is *not* prologue. Your past is not the defining feature of who you are. You are not “caused” by your past.

Your personality isn’t permanent.

The most successful people in the world base their identity and internal narrative on their future, *not their past*. For example, Elon Musk often speaks of wanting to live out the end of his life on Mars. Human travel to Mars is not a possibility yet. But dying on Mars is the story Musk tells about his future. That is the purpose shaping his identity, actions, and decisions.

Whatever you think of him, Elon Musk is focused on where he is *going* as a person, and it’s entirely in his future, not his past. His

attention, energy, and narrative are based on the future he's creating. You don't hear him talking about "the PayPal days." You don't see him limited by what he's previously done or failed at. You don't even hear him mention the past unless he's explicitly asked about it.

This is how successful people live: *They become who they want to be by orienting their life toward their goals, not as a repeat of the past; by acting bravely as their future selves, not by perpetuating who they formerly were.*

This book will show you how to become who you want to be, regardless of who you've been. It will teach you everything you need to know about why people get stuck in unhealthy patterns, and will provide you with science-based, actionable strategies for proactively choosing what you want, and then creating it in your life.

In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Pirsig wrote, "Steel can be any shape you want if you are skilled enough, and any shape but the one you want if you are not."

In this book, you're going to learn how personality is shaped, and how you yourself can and should be its shaper. You'll learn to be the architect and blacksmith of your personality, and thus be enabled to forge yourself into whomever you decide to be. Specifically, *Personality Isn't Permanent* will help you:

- Discover the myths of personality that limit most people's potential.
- Decide for yourself the life you want to live, regardless of how different it is from your past or present.
- Become emotionally flexible so your past no longer defines you.
- Reframe trauma and live like everything in your life happens *for* you, not *to* you.
- Become confident enough to define your own life's purpose.
- Create a network of "empathetic witnesses" who actively encourage you to continue moving forward through your highs and lows.
- Enhance your subconscious to overcome addictions and limiting patterns.
- Redesign your environment to pull you toward your future, rather than keep you stuck in the past.

In short, this book provides you the science and strategy for never getting stuck in an identity or pattern again. You will learn the most direct, simple, and effective path to change and growth. This is a proven, scientific process that you can master and apply to your life to ensure you are never trapped or defined by your past again.

Let's be clear: Deciding and creating a bigger future isn't wishful thinking. You must face uncomfortable truths you've been avoiding, and take ownership over your life. What currently prevents your dreams from becoming reality is buried trauma keeping you trapped in your past, shutting down your confidence and imagination. Sure, trauma occurs as major, life-altering events. But more often, "trauma" is planted in minor incidents and conversations that limit your view of who you are and what you can do, creating a fixed mindset.

This can't be ignored. It must be addressed.

Moreover, you have a social environment supporting your current or past-based identity and patterns rather than pushing you to evolve and become something more.

This book will challenge you to take responsibility for yourself. The fact is, basing your life off personality tests, or any other external measure, is elementary and lazy. Sure, it's helpful when growing up to get guidance and direction, but fundamental to maturity is making your own decisions, defining a meaningful purpose for yourself, and elevating yourself and others through that purpose.

If you take the personality craze seriously, then you have already forfeited your ability to choose. You've handed over responsibility for both your past and future to something outside of yourself. Instead of seeking change, you've limited your potential for change. Instead of focusing on what you can do to enhance your life, you've merely tried to discover or understand why you're disabled or limited. Instead of improving yourself, you've submitted to simply accepting yourself for who you "really" are.

Deep down, you know that is all nonsense. Deep down, you want more for yourself. You want to believe you can make changes in your life—even radical changes. Perhaps you've given up hope that it's possible for you.

But if you truly want to change your life in powerful and deliberate ways, then this book will teach you how.

Why Listen to Dr. Benjamin Hardy?

The fact that I was a “White” according to the Color Code isn’t the only thing I had working against me when I was trying to date my wife. It just so happened that Lauren’s best friend married a guy who went to high school with me. He strongly advised her against dating me. And for good reason.

The person I was in high school wasn’t someone I’d recommend dating or marrying either. But I wasn’t at all the same person I had been back then. I didn’t even feel like I was in the same universe.

Back in high school, I was a highly traumatized and confused young man. My parents divorced when I was eleven, and the pain it created led my father into a deep drug addiction. Over the course of a few years, his home became a dark and strange place, filled with other drug addicts. My younger brothers and I lived with my father until it became too unstable and unhealthy to be there. During my junior year in high school, we moved in full-time with my mom, who loved us deeply but was busy trying to run a company with her sister and support additional family members.

I was the oldest of three boys and our lives became completely unstructured and uncertain. I felt like I was standing on sand, never sure of or stable in anything around me. Naturally, I began surrounding myself with kids who were also going through trauma and confusion. Although we weren’t bad kids, we often bullied and teased others. We got in quite a bit of harmless trouble. More than anything, we had no stability or foundation. We played online video games all day, skateboarded, snowboarded, and did nothing productive.

I barely graduated from high school, missing so many classes that I was required to plant a tree on the school’s property and do community service to make up for my absences. The year following high school, I lived at my cousin’s house and slept on his Lovesac, doing nothing with my life. I had no job and had dropped out of community college after two weeks. It was way too much for me to handle. I had no work ethic, no vision for my future, and no confidence or ability to comprehend textbooks. *World of Warcraft* was my escape.

Around age twenty, I decided to leave my hometown and serve a church mission. I was fed up with how my life was going and wanted a fresh start. This two-year experience changed everything for me. I came back a different person with enhanced capabilities and a powerful vision for my future.

My mission was the first time in my life that I felt free to be whoever I wanted to be. I wasn't constrained by my past or my environment. I had a singular focus and purpose, which allowed me to craft a new identity with new behavior and drive. I committed on my first day to be the best missionary I could be—an example and a leader. It was the perfect situation to reinvent myself.

And that's exactly what I did.

I learned how to process and transform my trauma. I did this by reading more than a hundred books, filling stacks of journals, having open conversations about my painful past with loving friends and leaders who encouraged me, and especially through serving and helping others improve their lives. I spent two years helping other people overcome their problems and saw and experienced things that completely changed how I viewed the world and life in general. I came to grasp just how finite life is, and how coddled many are from the realities of the world.

This woke me up.

When I got home, I knew how much I'd changed and also sensed that my friends and family couldn't comprehend that change. I decided to attend a different college from my high school friends where no one knew my backstory and kept me trapped in their perceptions of my former self.

I flew through college from start to finish in three years, married my dream girl, and got accepted into a top-tier PhD program in organizational psychology. I started my PhD in the fall of 2014, and during the first year made \$13,000 as a graduate administrative assistant.

In January 2015, Lauren and I became foster parents to three children—Kaleb, Jordan, and Logan. Also in early 2015, I started blogging online and sharing my insights about psychology and personal change. My work immediately took off, reaching millions of people within the first few months. Over the next three years, from 2015 to 2018, I was the number one writer in the entire world on Medium.com, one of the largest online platforms at the time.

In February 2018, after years of fighting the foster system in court, we were able to adopt Kaleb, Jordan, and Logan. Less than a month after the adoption, Lauren became pregnant with twins who were born in December of that same year. We officially went from zero to five kids in a single calendar year. It was insane. But such is the life we chose and continue to choose. Our shared vision and purpose pave the way for a very steep growth curve—not easy, but incredibly meaningful and deep.

In early 2019, I completed my PhD and my writing continues to be read by millions of people online every month. I went from a derelict sleeping on someone else's sofa to running a successful seven-figure business and being a father of five kids by doing exactly what I'm about to explain to you in this book.

Despite the fact that my work and education have shown me that people can and do change, the biggest evidence of the ideas in this book is *my own life*. I'm not trying to be a guru on a stage. I'm an ordinary person experiencing a humbling and transformative life. I want to help you do the same—whatever that means or looks like for you.

It truly doesn't matter what your past has been. It doesn't matter what some stupid personality test says or what people from your high school think about you.

What matters is *who you want to be*.

What matters are *the choices you make*.

If you've ever questioned if you can really change, the answer is *yes!*

Regardless of who you've been, you no longer have to be *that person*. As you'll soon discover, you actually aren't that person now, and you won't be that person in the future. Your personality changes over time regardless of intention. But once you make it intentional, your level of change will be dramatic and directed, not random. As the actress Lily Tomlin explained, looking back over her life and career, "I always wanted to be somebody, but now I realize I should have been more specific."

You are going to become *someone*. That much is certain. The question is: *Who are you going to be?* And how specific and intentional will you be in that creation process?

The more specific the vision, the more clear the path and the more potent the motivation. You choose your purpose and then you give

your whole soul to that purpose. In due time, you'll transform.

You're the one who decides who you become. Not some personality test, and not your past.

Who will you choose to be?

This is *the* book that will show you the most effective way for intentionally and strategically becoming the person you intend and choose to be. If I've done my job, you will experience a high dose of emotions over the course of reading this book. Emotions are the doorway to change and transformation. If you experience resistance through your reading, take heart. You're on the brink of facing the truth of who you are.

Are you ready to learn the truth about personality?

Buckle your seat belts. You're bound to hear something you've never heard before. Something that could change your life.