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Understanding Yourself With The McInnis Method

BEFORE WE BEGIN

The first guide explained what the McInnis Method believes about people. This one applies those ideas to understanding yourself.

People are not broken. They are organized.

Nothing you do developed for no reason. Anxiety, anger, perfectionism, avoidance, and people-pleasing can look like flaws from the outside. From the inside, each one solved something once.

This isn't a guide about what's wrong with you. It's a guide to the organization that's already there: the rules you built, the reasons you built them, and why they made sense at the time.

That's not a comforting idea we're offering you to feel better. It's the starting assumption behind every session, and once you see it, you'll start reading your own behavior differently, and you'll start reading other people's differently too.

PART 1

Organization always makes sense.

Two people hear the same criticism. One shrugs it off by dinner. One is still turning it over three days later.

Same event. Different organization. Neither reaction tells you who they are. It tells you which rule got activated.

Not everything you do is healthy. Everything makes sense. Panic isn't random. Anger isn't a character flaw. Perfectionism isn't vanity. Avoidance isn't laziness. People-pleasing isn't weakness. Looked at closely enough, each one turns out to be a solution built for a problem that was real once, even when the problem is gone now.

You'll start noticing this before you ever try to change anything: the impulse that looks irrational from the outside usually made sense in the situation it was built for.

Adaptation outlives the situation.

The Method moves through seven connected stages:

REALITY → THREAT → PROTECTION → FUNCTION → COST → CAPACITY → ACTION

REALITY	<i>What is actually happening, and what actually happened.</i>
THREAT	<i>What you learned to expect and organize around avoiding.</i>
PROTECTION	<i>What you learned to do in response.</i>
FUNCTION	<i>What the protection is still doing for you now.</i>
COST	<i>What maintaining the protection is taking from your current life.</i>
CAPACITY	<i>What ability exists or remains available now.</i>
ACTION	<i>One real step the old protection would not have let you take.</i>

Protection gets built around what you learned was dangerous. The trouble is, protection doesn't come with an expiration date. It keeps running long after the conditions that built it have changed. The Method also asks what the protection still does now, what maintaining it costs, and what capacity may already be available under different conditions.

A girl learns that asking her mother for help usually ends with criticism. So she adapts: figure it out yourself. It works. She needs less from her mother.

Twenty years later, she is overwhelmed at work and her coworker offers to help. “I've got it,” she says.

Same adaptation. Different reality. The mind is solving yesterday's problem. Her mother is not there anymore, but the rule never got updated.

You'll start finding your own version of this: a rule still running after the conditions that built it have changed. The seven-stage spine gives you more to look for than the old rule alone: what it still does, what it costs, what remains available, and what reality can test.

PART 3

Why insight isn't enough.

“I know why I do it.”

Good. Then why are you still doing it?

Understanding an adaptation isn't the same as reorganizing it. Your nervous system runs on what actually happens, not on what you've figured out about what happens. Knowing where a habit came from rarely stops it the next time you're standing in the moment that triggers it.

That gap between knowing and changing is most of the work. You'll notice we don't stop once something makes sense to you. Making sense is where the work starts, not where it ends.

PART 4

What therapy actually changes.

Not symptoms first. Organization.

Old organization becomes new organization, and behavior changes on its own from there. You'll notice we don't spend much time trying to argue a feeling out of existence directly. If the organization underneath it changes, the feeling usually changes with it. Not because anyone talked you out of it, but because the feeling was never really the problem. It was downstream of one.

A man who apologizes before he's finished a sentence isn't taught confidence. Nobody hands him a script. The organization that required the apology starts to change. The old belief that taking up space costs something begins to loosen, and the apologizing goes with it, without either of you working on it directly.

PART 5

Curiosity versus projection.

Curiosity approaches a person with a question. Projection answers the question before it's asked.

You've probably done both, with the same person, in the same conversation. Curiosity goes looking for what's actually there. Projection replaces it with the version of the other person you'd already decided on before they said a word.

Curiosity finds reality. Projection replaces it.

Watch how often “I know why she did that” turns out to be a guess wearing the clothes of a fact. The work is catching the moment you stop asking and start assuming. You'll start noticing how much of what you call knowing someone is really just not asking.

What you notice is part of the pattern too.

Organization doesn't only shape what you do. It shapes what gets your attention.

You walk into a meeting and three people smile at you. One person barely looks up. By the time you leave, that's the person you're thinking about.

If criticism once mattered a great deal, you may notice signs of disapproval before signs of acceptance. If rejection was dangerous, you may register distance before connection. Someone else in the same room may notice something completely different.

That doesn't mean what you notice isn't real. It means attention is selective. Part of understanding yourself is noticing not only how you respond, but what your mind has learned to look for.

You'll start asking another useful question: What am I noticing quickly, and what might I be missing?

What looks like personality is usually a sequence.

Take four things people say about themselves as if they were settled facts.

"I'm the responsible one." → Someone had to hold things together once, and you were the one who could, so you never stopped.

"I'm easygoing." → Having a preference caused a problem once, so not having one became the safer way to move through a room.

"I don't ask for help." → Asking cost you once. It was used against you, or it simply wasn't there when you needed it. So you built a version of yourself that doesn't need to ask.

"I just don't trust people." → Trusting someone went wrong once, badly enough that caution became the default instead of the exception.

Each one sounds like a permanent description. Reconstructed, each is a sequence with a start date: a reality that felt threatening, a protection built in response, and a label that got attached to the protection instead of the moment that produced it.

You'll begin catching yourself doing this: reaching for a permanent noun to describe something that started on a particular day, for a particular reason, and never got re-examined since.

PART 7

What looks missing is usually just running somewhere else.

If a capacity looks gone, it's usually not gone. Patience. Calm. Honesty. Restraint. Saying no. These don't typically disappear from a person. They go quiet in one room and keep working fine in another.

You can't hold a boundary with your mother. But last week, a vendor tried to renegotiate a signed contract at the last minute, and you told them no without blinking.

Same capacity. Different room. The boundary isn't missing. It's just not licensed to work in that particular room yet.

This changes what you're looking for. Instead of asking what's wrong with you, you'll start asking a more useful question: where is this already working, and what's different about the place it isn't? The answer to that second question is usually the protection standing guard at the door. It's still doing a job reality stopped requiring a long time ago.

PART 8

The Method shows up everywhere, once you can see it.

This isn't a framework that only applies in a therapy room. Once you can see the sequence in yourself, you start seeing it everywhere.

The teenager who slams his door instead of answering the question.

The manager who stays late every night because nobody else can do it right.

The husband who says “whatever you want” to every decision, all the way to the restaurant no one enjoyed.

Different lives. Same question underneath each one: what problem is this solving? Once you know what you're looking at, you'll start seeing the sequence running in other people too, not just in yourself.

PART 9

Why it ends with action.

Not because action is magic. Because understanding the old rule doesn't test it.

Insight can tell you the rule no longer applies. Doing something the old rule would not have allowed is how the rule gets tested against reality.

You do not wait until it feels completely safe. You take one real step. Then you see what actually happens.

WHAT THIS ADDS UP TO

None of this requires you to remember a diagram.

The work is catching yourself mid-sequence, seeing the organization while it is running, and deciding whether the old rule still fits the life you're living.

You don't need to become someone else. Once you start seeing sequences instead of personalities, people become easier to understand, including yourself.

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