

Chapter 4
Environment
Surroundings and Associations

Environment, “the circumstances, objects, or condition by which one is surrounded”. You might have heard of the saying, “people are a product of their environment”. Don’t be fooled by this statement. True, the *probability* of us replicating the conditions illustrated by our environment *is* significant, but this does not mean because we are surrounded by a particular type of environment that we will, without a doubt, imitate those influences. We always have the option to utilize our *power of choice* no matter the circumstance. Plenty of times people that go on to achieve greatness have come from an environment of the opposite. Just like a person can be surrounded by a positive environment to only live a negative lifestyle. As we are most susceptible to influences, the goal here is to sustain from *unhealthy* environments to grant our self a higher percent chance to accomplish success by surrounding ourselves around *healthy* environments. At first glance the task of evading unhealthy environments may seem to be an uphill challenge simply for the reason being that a lot of us reside in inner city communities where the crime rate is just as high as the poverty rate, while the rate of education is at a minimal. If this is you don’t be discouraged because this was me too; actually it still is me! To this day I live in the middle of “*the hood*”. The difference from me *now* living a healthy lifestyle in an unhealthy environment is that rather than concentrating on the fact that I live in a malicious neighborhood I began to divide my environment into separate sections. I acknowledged the reality that there are *environments inside of environments*.

Check it out; if you walk outside your front door and see drugs being sold on your block, a liquor store on the next, a gun shop down the street, and a gangway around the corner it can be easy to allow these influences and opportunities to persuade you to participate in and associate with the activities and peers of the environment. I know this because I myself spent most of my years “*doing as the Romans do*”. As it was simple to be drawn in, it was extremely challenging to get out. The way I escaped the pressures of this atmosphere was by first discontinuing my negative *peer associations*. It goes back to “*The Basics*” and “*K.Y.P*” (know your personnel). As I soar for *success* in my life, associating with *failures* will bring no benefit. Therefore, anybody

that sold drugs, carried pistols, or used chemicals was depleted from my life. Soon later my contact list consisted of only select family members, my kids' Mom, and my one law abiding responsible true friend named Dee.

Like I said, it's hard to break loose from negativity, however, if we *truly want* to endure a healthy, crime free, responsible, and sober lifestyle we must take initiative to eliminate interactions amongst unhealthy relationships by setting and enforcing *boundaries*. I understand that sometimes our relationships with negative peers can hold a strong bond, but we have to be willing to evaluate the situation and assess the fact that if nothing positive is coming from the relationship it is time to make the decision to sever ties. I also understand that regardless whether one's association comes in the form of a romantic companionship or a friendly camaraderie, a relationship is a **relationship**, thus *emotions* will be involved between both parties. With that said, you can expect the other party to feel devastated, betrayed, or even resentful towards you as the association and communication dissolves into a complete nonexistence. Be prepared for these people to talk down upon you behind your back making false claims of you being "this" or "that" while they attempt to smear your name and reputation. Take note that when it's all said and done none of these comments will matter because you'll have moved on to experience the best of what the world has to offer while they will continue to be bound to the same redundant unhealthy lifestyle that you left behind. My advice to you would be not to retaliate to any of the other party's behaviors, for they are only "hating" on you, most likely the reason being they are *angry* and *jealous* that you chose better for your life and they wish they had the *strength, courage, and wisdom* to do the same. As "*misery loves company*" "haters" attempt to build their self-esteem *up* by trying to tear yours *down*. Long as you don't let hate faze you, it could never defeat you. Personally I use this form of criticism as a positive tool to measure my success. It seems that the more success I obtain, the more *haters* I have *hating* on me; in return ensuring me that I indeed am doing *something* right.

Fk Em**

*F**k em, F**k em all*

Not one of them I trust at all

They all tell the same story, I just listen when they talk

Actin' like they got my back, but actually won't walk the walk

Sayin' that they'll hold me down, but then excuses seem to spark

Me; I always kept it real, I never had to lie to them

I was down for anything, they knew that I would ride for them

I put my life on the line, I showed em I would die for them

Now im saying bye to them, I wasted too much time with them

*F**k Em*

—Michel Durell Comer

After disengaging from negative peer associations the next aspect to breaking your environment down is being aware of how you navigate through physical surroundings. Those making moves in the streets call this “*cutting the city in half*” the objective is to avoid contact with anyone or anything that may prevent forward progression towards reaching the destination of our intended goal.

This phase can be a reflection of “*The Basics*” and “*K.Y.P*” (know your positioning). Say you just bought a brand new pair of expensive Original Air Jordans and your goal was to keep them mint as possible as you wear them out as the final contribution to complete your elaborate ensemble. You know when you step out into the environment you will be faced with elements in which may jeopardize the integrity of the shoes. This could include someone stepping on them, poor weather conditions, or you yourself performing an action that soils, scuffs, or creases the shoes. With all the possibilities of damaging the shoes and coming short of reaching the goal of maintaining their quality condition you will become very mindful to how you *maneuver* and where you *position* yourself in the *environment*. You will notice yourself moving more gracefully while being more cautious of the surroundings. You will also neglect mucky and or wet terrain. If achieving this goal meant enough to you, you would find yourself willing to do things you normally wouldn't do as well as putting a cease to the things that you usually would.

So if you were in the middle of the block and had to walk down to the corner of the intersection just to cross the street in efforts to avoid walking through the grassy boulevard you would do it if that's what it took to uphold the shoe's quality grade, though any other occasion you would cut straight through. Or if you were known as a dedicated basketball player and were invited to go play a game of ball, you may decline the offer due to the fact you didn't want to crease the shoes, under any other circumstance you would be first to the court.

If you're a shoe fanatic, a.k.a. "*Sneakerhead*" like I used to be then you know everything I just said is absolutely true, what else is absolutely true is the fact that these same tactics of *awareness* and *avoidance* can be translated into how one orchestrates their movement and positioning in **any** environment while intending to reach **any** *lifestyle goal*.

Whether describing the life of a criminal addict in the streets, or a law abiding citizen on the straight and narrow, each have their own unique intentions and goals as they set fourth into an environment. The *criminal addict* aims to indulge in mood altering substances while committing to illegal activities as he or she attempts to *avoid* contact with law enforcement or anybody else in that nature who disagrees on how they conduct their behaviors. This is totally different from the intentions and goals of the *law abiding citizen*. A person on the "straight and narrow" aims to retain sobriety while diverting away from crime and prohibiting themselves from contact with negative associations, influences, and temptations.

When I was running the streets making moves as a *criminal addict* my agenda was simple; get money, get high, and don't get caught, so I positioned myself accordingly. In my hood I was the go-to guy when it came to looking for your fix. I was serving weed, cocaine, ecstasy pills, and prescription pills— you name it I had it and if I didn't have it I could get it. I was also a user of most of the drugs I advertised. If I wasn't driving around the area making drop-offs then I was loitering outside of the corner store down the street from my house networking in efforts of obtaining new clientele. There were days I stood outside that store from 8am until it closed at 10pm, that or until the police drove by too many times, whichever came first. I was a regular customer at the liquor store to the point the owner knew me by name and even knew my favorite bottles. There were times I'd walk in and he'd pull out a bottle from under the counter that he was saving just for me knowing I would come in and buy it before the day was over. I made good use of the gun shop

down the street as well. I would trade people drugs in exchange for them to purchase gun accessories for me. My collection included 30 round extension clips, laser scopes, and specialty ammunition. I spent countless hours by the gangway closely associating with my so-called “friends” as we encouraged each other to perform illegal acts and enabled one another to use drugs and alcohol. I kept my distance from anyone who didn’t agree with my habits. Besides dodging police I was avoiding communication with family and supporters that truly cared for me and wanted to see me do better. They would constantly attempt to persuade me to withdraw from this horrid lifestyle. I dismissed their requests as I convinced myself that they were interfering with the progress of my intended goals. In the midst of my mayhem, I refused to be interrupted. So if it meant I had to take the long way navigating through back roads to reach my destination in order to avoid intertwining with common police routes, I did it with no hesitation. I would also ignore phone calls from my family as well as skip holiday events for the reason of not wanting to experience the sense of shame and guilt I would receive after my family pleaded with me to change my ways.

It was not until these poor habits propelled me to hit my rock bottom breaking point did I commit to change and chose to live the lifestyle of a *law abiding citizen*. After being released from prison serving the remainder of a 57 month sentence I was dispensed right back into the same environment I was a part of while living as a *criminal addict*. Although my surroundings are identical, the way I position myself inside this environment has changed dramatically. No longer am I “the dope man” in my neighborhood. I know that selling drugs again will be detrimental to my recovery and contradict my change. The corner store down the street from my house is still up and running, only these days I’m not the one standing outside of it pushing packs. The liquor store is still in the same spot too, I’m just not a customer anymore. Nothing against the owner Sam, but since sobriety has become such a major role in my life it’s been a few years now since I’ve even stepped a foot inside of that place. The gun shop continues to sell guns and accessories and the gangway is still occupied by my old associates, they’re still committing crimes and smothering each other with drugs and alcohol.

See, the world doesn’t stop its motions and the game of life always stays the same. The only thing that changes is the player. It is up to us to choose how **we will** execute our game plan. “*Ain’t ‘bout what you walk away from, it’s ‘bout what you walk away with*” –Lil Wayne

Now when I navigate through my environment I treat my “M.V.Ps”, freedom, and sobriety as if they are that brand new pair of Jordans on my feet that I refuse to tarnish. Unhealthy surroundings and locations are interpreted as piles of mud and my goal is to keep those shoes in superior condition for the remainder of their days. Clearly, I wouldn’t stomp through a pile of mud with expectations of my shoes surviving unscathed, in comparison neither would I partake in unhealthy doings with expectations of healthy results. Identical to how I used to dodge police by taking the long way to reach a destination, I applied that same effort in taking the long way to avoid unhealthy associations, influences, and temptations. I don’t shop at the same store, drive down the same streets, or enjoy the same activities that I once did before. During these days that I’m actually living my life legit, the police bring me [almost] no worries and my family and I are closer than we have ever been. It feels astounding to finally be able to introduce my “*other self*” to those who care for me and to share this experience as a changed man with my family. I am grateful to now be a part of my children’s life while providing them with the presence of their Father where there was once a previous void. Now days you couldn’t pay me to miss a family gathering and the only people you’ll find me ignoring is those old so-called “friends” of mine that hope to one day see me return to the streets.

As I’ve broadened my perception beyond the surface of my immediate environment I have come to unravel an *environment inside my environment*. Throughout the many years I have lived in my current location I didn’t believe it had anything positive to offer. However, I recently noticed a small café across the street from the liquor store and after ditching my alcohol use I discovered that I enjoy a good cup of java from time to time. I found out there is a family owned thrift store behind the gun shop, since unveiling it I’ve donated countless boxes of clothing and a myriad of miscellaneous items to support their cause and continue to do so to this day. I refuse to go to the old corner store down the street, so now I purchase my convenience items from the gas station on the main road about a half of a mile away from my house. Sure, this option demands more travel time but this new route has allowed me to avoid situations that could be hazardous to my livelihood, and you can’t put a limit on that.

All in all, the universe reacts to *attraction*, whatever you choose to engulf yourself in either mentally or physically leaves you only a matter of time before it stems into habits and circumstances which then unfold as your *reality*. If you hang around four criminals chances are high you will eventually become the fifth. You drive past a liquor store enough times and before you know it you're a full blown alcoholic. This is the law of attraction. Make your environment make you successful, be aware of your surroundings and position yourself to avoid unhealthy situations. Circulate in new groups; stay clear of "haters" and "petty thinkers". Associate yourself around people who are going somewhere with their lives and that want to see you succeed as well. If **I** can make it *here*, **you** can make it *anywhere*!