

Lesson 1 A Step to Spark Change

Reading 1

A Judge Who Broke Down Barriers

Two girls excitedly pose to take pictures in front of a statue of a woman. Who is this woman? She is not a famous actress or a pop star. Her name is Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She is an American icon who inspired the world by devoting her life to justice and gender equality.

Ginsburg was born in Brooklyn in 1933. During her academic career, Ginsburg was an excellent student, despite having to overcome many barriers. She always received good grades as a child, and she continued to excel in university. In 1954, Ginsburg graduated from Cornell University at the top of her class, and she was later accepted into Harvard Law School. While attending Harvard, however, Ginsburg faced discrimination. There were only nine women out of 500 students in the program, and many people thought the school should have given the women's spots to men. They were even restricted from using some sections of the library. Ginsburg transferred to Columbia Law School for her final year, and she graduated at the top of her class in 1959.

Even with her impressive academic record, Ginsburg still had a hard time finding a job as a lawyer. She was not only a woman but also Jewish and a mother. The first position she found was as a law clerk for a U.S. district judge. After two years in this position, she finally started to get offers from law firms. However, these offers always came with a salary lower than those of the firm's male lawyers, so she didn't accept any of them. Instead, she decided to study other areas of law and eventually became a law professor. She taught at Columbia University, and, in 1972, she became the first woman to be offered a permanent professorship there. While at Columbia, Ginsburg also worked hard as general counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and argued many gender discrimination cases in the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1980, Ginsburg left Columbia University to become a judge. Thirteen years later, she was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court and became only the second woman to hold the position. During her time as a judge, Ginsburg never stopped fighting for women's rights and gender equality.

Here are three examples of legislation that Ginsburg helped to pass.

1 Men are entitled to the same caregiving and Social Security rights as women.

Ginsburg always argued that gender equality policies should benefit both men and women. In 1972, Ginsburg represented Charles Moritz, who was a journalist in his early sixties. Moritz needed help taking care of his sick mother. However, he could not receive tax benefits for hiring a caregiver, because they were only available to women, divorced men, and men whose wives were disabled or had passed away. As an unmarried man, Moritz did not qualify to have his taxes reduced. Nevertheless, after this case, the federal law was changed to allow people of any gender to have their taxes reduced so that they can hire caregivers.

2 Women have the right to financial independence and equal benefits.

In 1974, Ginsburg's work also helped pass the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, which prevents banks from discriminating against people based on their age, race, gender, national origin, or marriage status. Prior to this act, married women needed their husband to sign for a loan, even if they had a job and a higher income.

3 State-funded schools must admit women.

In 1996, Ginsburg was also responsible for the Supreme Court's historic decision in *United States v. Virginia*. The decision stated that Virginia Military Institute's male-only admissions policy went against the principle of equal protection. Ginsburg argued that women should be allowed to join the same program as men. This decision helped ensure that women have equal rights to education at public institutions in the United States.

Throughout her life, Ruth Bader Ginsburg fought for the things she cared about and inspired others to follow in her footsteps. Even though she passed away on September 18, 2020, she will always be remembered as a champion of equality and a tireless defender of justice.

Reading 2

Think, Feel, and Do: The Key to a Better Me

Marco is a high school student who loves acting. Unluckily, he was rejected the last two times he auditioned for a local community play. That made him think that he didn't have enough talent to act. These thoughts made him feel disappointed and discouraged. Therefore, he started to behave like he had lost all hope, and he stopped auditioning altogether. That led him to tell himself that he was a bad actor. This cycle of thoughts, feelings, and behavior is known as the cognitive triangle. If one point of the triangle is negative, it can affect the other points. However, the reverse is also true. If you change one point in a positive way, it can change the others as well. It can be used as a tool for resetting our attitude toward life, resulting in positive changes.

1 Tackling Negative Thoughts

Each day, your mind is filled with thousands of different thoughts, some of which are negative. Do any of these sound familiar?

"I'm not good at conversation."

"I shouldn't have bothered trying."

"There must be something wrong with me."

These thoughts, which are often not even rooted in fact, are simply part of habit or instinct. Yet they cause real feelings that are painful and depressing. Using the cognitive triangle, you can challenge these thoughts one by one and begin to reprogram the way you think.

2 Accepting Your Feelings

The feelings you have, whether negative or positive, are real and valid. Dismissing or minimizing them does not change that. When you think of your feelings as being childish, inaccurate, or not allowed, you may feel negatively about them. Of course, feeling bad about your emotions is normal and natural. Therefore, the first step in changing them is to embrace them. Once you accept them, you will feel less stressed. Then, finally, you can alter your feelings, taking back control.

3 Changing Your Behavior

Changing your behavior can be a good way to interrupt the negative cycle, because it challenges your thoughts about it. Even if the new behavior does not create the desired outcome, you will be glad that you at least tried. In some cases, you can ask for specific feedback about why something didn't go right, which will help you the next time.

Unsurprisingly, it would be difficult to suddenly start behaving completely differently one day. So begin by making one small change to your behavior—it could be a big step toward changing your cycle. Now let's get back to Marco's case to see how a positive cycle works.

If you are suffering from challenges in your life that are pushing you into a negative cycle, how about trying the cognitive triangle? You can stop yourself from thinking too negatively, and you may discover a positive aspect of your life that wasn't there before.