

# *the* MEN'S CHALLENGE DECK

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PRACTICING  
*the* WAY *of the*  
SUPERIOR MAN

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## Table of Contents

Important Caution . . . . .	6
Introduction . . . . .	7
What Is the <i>Men's Challenge Deck</i> ? . . . .	9
Why Use the <i>Men's Challenge Deck</i> ? . . . .	11
Why Are Men's Groups So Important? . . . .	13
What Is a Men's Challenge Session? . . . .	17
The <i>Men's Challenge Deck</i> Cards . . . . .	19
Running a Challenge Session . . . . .	22
Men's Groups . . . . .	30
In Closing . . . . .	41
Appendix A: Recommended Reading . . . . .	42
Appendix B: Extended Session Card List . . . . .	43
Appendix C: <i>The Way of the Superior Man</i> —	
Men's Group Curriculum Sample Lesson . . . . .	44
Other Resources . . . . .	47
Feedback to the Author . . . . .	48

## **Important caution — please read this!**

Although anyone may find the practices, disciplines, and understandings in this booklet and these cards to be useful, they are made available with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is engaged in presenting specific medical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or spiritual advice. Nor is anything in this booklet or these cards intended to be a diagnosis, prescription, recommendation, or cure for any specific kind of medical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or spiritual problem. Each person has unique needs and this booklet and these cards cannot take these individual differences into account. Each person should engage in a program of treatment, prevention, cure, or general health only in consultation with a licensed, qualified physician, therapist, or other competent professional.

Before using the *Men's Challenge Deck* cards, please first read through this entire booklet. Certain concepts and understandings contained herein are essential to the appropriate use of the cards.

## Introduction

This work is for men interested in the understanding and exploration of their true Self. My goal has been to create a useful and easy-to-use tool for this kind of spiritual work: the *Men's Challenge Deck*. It is also my intention to encourage men to join a men's group, which is the ideal context for the use of the *Men's Challenge Deck*.

This is not a scholarly work. There are established voices far more eloquent and expert than mine who have published good work on men's spirituality (see Appendix A for some of them).

This book describes what the *Men's Challenge Deck* is and how it should be used as a men's group activity, including the rules and mechanics of conducting a Challenge Session with the *Men's Challenge Deck*. I also discuss the benefits of being in a men's group and include a distillation of my own personal experiences with men's groups in the hope of helping those men interested in using the *Men's Challenge Deck* but who do not have any experience with spiritual men's groups.

It is not just the *Men's Challenge Deck* cards that will deliver service to men; it is also the other men who participate in a card deck session. It is the community of men who use the card deck who will provide the wisdom, feedback, and experience for each individual to move further along his path. I see the *Men's Challenge Deck* as a kind of catalyst to encourage the growth of both individual men and any men's group as a whole.

My mission is to create more love and freedom in the world. My hope is that this *Men's Challenge Deck* will help bring that about by challenging and supporting men and men's groups towards greater self-awareness, openness, and love. I hope that the men who are gifted in this way will in turn serve the world more fully by gifting us all with their particular strengths and capabilities.

To some special people, I acknowledge and give thanks for the help and encouragement I received in completing this work. They are David Deida, Meri Walker, Mark Mandel, the Journeymen men's group in Austin, Texas, and my loving wife, Natalie.

## What Is the Men's Challenge Deck?

*It is time to evolve beyond the macho jerk ideal, all spine and no heart. It is time to evolve beyond the sensitive and caring wimp ideal, all heart and no spine. Heart and spine must be united in a single man, and then gone beyond in the fullest expression of love and consciousness possible, which requires a deep relaxation into the infinite openness of this present moment. And this takes a new kind of guts. This is the Way of the Superior Man.*

—David Deida, *The Way of the Superior Man*<sup>1</sup>

The *Men's Challenge Deck* is not another card game or divination deck. It is a tool for spiritual exploration in the company of men. The content of the *Men's Challenge Deck* draws heavily from David Deida's work and, in fact, evolved as my personal response to Deida's book *The Way of the Superior Man*. In *The Way of the Superior Man*, Deida suggests that groups of men commit to regular, pur-

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<sup>1</sup> David Deida, 1997, 2004. *The Way of the Superior Man: A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work, and Sexual Desire*. Louisville, Colorado: Sounds True.

poseful interaction that supports the participants' spiritual growth and development. Men's groups have also been forming for many years through the encouragement of other well-known figures associated with the men's movement, such as Robert Bly and Sam Keen, and also through organizations such as the The Mankind Project (formerly the New Warrior Network).

I make the effort in this book to promote the benefits of belonging to a men's group since I intend that the *Men's Challenge Deck* be used in the context of a men's group. I will relate some of my own men's group experiences so that men unfamiliar with such groups will gain an informative glimpse of what can happen in them. It is my hope that as many men as possible will be encouraged to get involved in a good men's group.

I have participated in men's groups for some time now. In truth, the *Men's Challenge Deck* originated as a gift to my first men's group in Austin, Texas (the Journeymen). I made the original deck for the Journeymen to use together to spark our own growth. The *Men's Challenge Deck* is no more *and no less* than a tool that men can use to push each other's edges, that is, to bring each other through the fears that limit us from actualizing our gifts to the world.



## Why Use the *Men's Challenge Deck*?

*About once a week, you should sit down with your closest men friends and discuss what you are doing in your life and what you are afraid of doing. The conversation should be short and simple. You should state where you are at. Then, your friends should give you a behavioral experiment, something you can do that will reveal something to you, or grant more freedom in your life.*

— David Deida, *The Way of the Superior Man*

Drinking beer or watching TV together can be great fun for men, but they're not the kind of activities that usually push our edges. As David Deida says, men grow by facing fears, opening against the urge to close down, overcoming inertia, being authentic, and finding direction. To live the life men most deeply desire, we *must* do these things. The intention of the *Men's Challenge Deck* is to help men connect with their deepest levels. Its purpose is to create safe, structured situations where men challenge each other to overcome perceived limitations and learn together from their experiences. Learning, insight, and experiences gained from the use of the *Men's*

*Challenge Deck* can help men to open more physically, emotionally, and spiritually in their lives.

The *Men's Challenge Deck* provides re-creational challenges that invite men seeking spiritual growth to step beyond their current comfort zone. A re-creational challenge is a task or activity that ignites awareness and manifestation of one's deep Self and resources. The *Men's Challenge Deck* can be used as a starting point for a new men's group, or it can provide an off-the-shelf tool for established men's groups seeking to reenergize, refocus intent, or move into action-based spiritual learning.

There are many kinds of men's groups. The *Men's Challenge Deck* won't serve all of them. In fact, it will best serve only those groups whose direct purpose is to enhance each member's personal and spiritual growth through the practice of encouraging each man to live at his edge.

A common spiritual practice or religion is not necessary but may provide a useful context. A men's group may have come together around the work of any number of teachers in the men's movement. Or it may have formed after attending a personal growth workshop, retreat, or other event where an initial bond was forged around common values and a desire was sparked for further spiritual exploration and shared experience.

## Why Are Men's Groups So Important?

*In one sense the voyage of self-discovery is solitary, but that doesn't mean you have to take it all alone. A lot of men suffer silently when they are in creative chaos, and feel something is wrong with them because they don't realize other men are experiencing a similar disintegration of the old modes of masculinity. In matters of the psyche and spirit, taking the journey and telling the story go hand in glove, and that is why we need a listening community in order to make our solitary pilgrimage. The most powerful resource we have for transforming ourselves is honest conversation between men and men, women and men, men and women.*

— Sam Keen, *Fire In The Belly*<sup>2</sup>

If, in your quest for fulfillment or enlightenment, you've read a lot, attended seminars, workshops, retreats, or church, but none of these things seems to have made much difference in how you've been living your life, then joining a men's group could be just what you

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<sup>2</sup>Sam Keen, 1991. *Fire in the Belly*. New York: Bantam Books.

need. If you know what kinds of changes you want to effect in your life, but you just can't seem to find the time or the discipline to follow through on them, then you should also take a good look at joining such a group.

On the other hand, perhaps you feel that you are making great progress with life's challenges, living on your edge, and gifting the world. In such a case, please consider joining a men's group in order to gift others, because we can all use the help of a fully present man.

A men's group can be valuable in several different ways, depending on the group. A main function of my men's group for me is that it has allowed me to "recharge my masculine batteries." It seems to me that in the modern Western world we live our lives amidst an almost constant casual interaction with both men and women. How much time per day, per week, or even per month do you spend only with men? Maybe you occasionally go out drinking with the guys, go bowling or fishing together, or watch the Super Bowl or NBA championship games. Why do you do that? What do you get out of it? And why is that experience different if there are women present?

*When men are together they will say things that they will not say when a woman is present.*

— Robert Bly<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>From "The Secret Life of Men," an interview by Jeff Wagenheim in *New Age Journal* (September/October 1990).

I have found that, in the company of men, I can relax as my deepest essence, just as women can be more free to be women when they are with other women and no men are around. Of course, there's a lot more to it than that, and I would suggest reading David Deida's *The Way of the Superior Man* or *Intimate Communion*<sup>4</sup> for a more in-depth explanation of masculine and feminine essences. But, basically, meeting regularly with a group of trustable men has provided me with an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth and healing that I ordinarily would never have gotten around to on my own.

*Regardless of your specific orientation, the most valuable focus in men's work is the expression of the truth of our own experience. It's through men hearing other men express the honest story of their lives that the most healing results.*

— Aaron R. Kipnis, Ph.D., *Knights Without Armor*<sup>5</sup>

The men in a good group will encourage you, scold you, love you, challenge you, consult with you, listen to you, learn with you, cry with you, laugh with you. They will share with each other what is going on in their lives and missions. Most importantly for me, they will reflect the truth about yourself to you. Most of us see ourselves

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<sup>4</sup> David Deida, 1995. *Intimate Communion*. Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron R. Kipnis, Ph.D., 1991. *Knights Without Armor*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

differently from how the rest of the world sees us. It is a great gift—and sometimes a shock!—to receive this kind of feedback. In the words of my favorite Scottish poet, Robert Burns:

*Oh wad some power the giftie gie us,  
tae see ourselves as ithers see us.*

The experience of working with other men who all share the same thirst for learning, mission, and growth has been a source of great joy to me. I have found that I just can't get that from passive study. I have to be actively participating in the lessons I want to learn in order to really absorb them.

The *Men's Challenge Deck* was designed to further this active participation in growth by men.

## What Is a Men's Challenge Session?

A Challenge Session consists of a meeting in which, in turn, each group member receives and performs a challenge. Sessions have an action phase and a debriefing phase (see **Debriefing** on page 25). Depending on the levels of challenge drawn and the arenas in which particular challenges take place, action sessions and debriefing sessions may happen during the same meeting or take place over two or more meetings.

Challenge Sessions should not be taken lightly, as if you were playing a game. A Challenge Session is neither a casual nor a social gathering. They are not called “Challenge” Sessions for nothing. This is based on the idea that people with a masculine essence grow via challenge.

*Your close men friends should be willing to challenge your mediocrity by suggesting a concrete action you can perform that will pop you out of your rut, one way or the other. And you must be willing to offer them your brutal honesty, in the same*

*way, if you are all to grow. Good friends should not tolerate mediocrity in one another. If you are at your edge, your men friends should respect that, but not let you off the hook. They should honor your fears, and, in love, continue to goad you beyond them, without pushing you.*

— David Deida, *The Way of the Superior Man*

Each Challenge Session provides an opportunity for group members to experience and manifest their deepest gifts. It is recommended that Challenge Sessions take place only in a group **sacred space**, that is, a “safe” gathering spot where participants have established trust amongst each other and hold strong clarity of their intent (see **Sacred Space** on page 36).

It is very important that everyone be authentically committed before you even start a Challenge Session. As you will read below, some cards have consequences far beyond just the present session. If a certain card is not appropriate for your particular group, or any group members are not ready to handle certain types of challenges, then you can modify them as needed. This does not mean to back off from truly difficult challenges when they arise. The goal of using the cards is to help bring about the fullest expression of love and consciousness possible in any moment, and this is often difficult. The underlying assumption of the *Men’s Challenge Deck* is that men grow best through challenges.



## **The *Men's Challenge Deck* Cards**

There are eighty unique *Men's Challenge Deck* cards. Each card describes a task to be carried out by the person who receives it. Meeting challenges requires action. Cards are ranked according to levels of difficulty—low (23 cards), medium (33 cards), and high (24 cards)—and identified by color. Yellow signifies low difficulty, blue is medium, and red poses a high difficulty challenge.

The cards are ranked in this way so that the participants can choose the levels on which they wish to engage before beginning a Challenge Session. These levels reflect different intensities of challenge to one's "edge," or comfort zone. Not everyone would rank the cards exactly as I have. Different men face different challenges according to their various strengths and weaknesses. *Men's Challenge Deck* users should feel free to re-rank the cards as they see fit to meet the needs of their group.

*Yellow /Low* No more than a little discomfort.

*Blue /Medium* Stirs emotions or fears.

*Red /High* Takes considerable energy and can involve considerable facing of fears, especially if a card requires **consequences** (see below) for unmet challenges.

There are also two jokers and six blank cards in the deck. The blank cards are intended for the creation of your group's own unique challenge cards. Until you've made them, remove blank cards from the deck before beginning a challenge session.

## **Consequences**

A consequence is an action to be taken if the challenge presented by a card is not completed to the group's satisfaction. A good consequence is something important to the person who doesn't meet the challenge, something that might serve that person or the group. But the consequence should also be harsher than the challenge itself was. Usually, consequences require you to give up some of your resources, such as time, money, etc.

In my group, for example, one man who was a carpenter but mainly made his living doing other things didn't meet a certain challenge. The challenge was difficult for him but was designed to help him grow. His consequence for not meeting the challenge was to donate

eight days of his time to do carpentry. Other members of the group needed some carpentry projects done, and the man also worked on house building with the local Habitat For Humanity group. By carrying out his consequence, this man was able to benefit our group and the local community, and he also got more in touch with his own gifts as a builder.

## Running a Challenge Session

### Standard Rules

1. The most important thing for every man to do before a Challenge Session is to commit to follow through on his challenges before the session starts. Remember that some cards will have consequences beyond just the present session. If everyone is not authentically committed, then a Challenge Session shouldn't even be started. Instead, address why the required commitment is not there.
2. Once again, the group should meet in a space where all the members feel safe. Some men's groups always hold their meetings in a **sacred space** (that is, a space that, through their full presence and conscious intent, they actively make loving and free; see page 36 for more information).
3. A man should be excused from a challenge, or the challenge may be modified, if he has a health problem that impacts the

challenge he has drawn.

4. Decide which, if any, of the **optional rules** (see page 27) to use.
5. Establish the order in which each man is to receive a card.  
Everyone will receive one card at a time from the deck.
6. Shuffle the deck and deal the first card. No other cards should be dealt until the first man has followed through on his challenge (or gone as far as he can in the context of the current Challenge Session).
7. The man dealt the card should read the card out loud to the group, unless it says otherwise on the card.
8. Any **consequences** (see page 20) required by an unmet challenge should now be determined by the group (try to keep the discussion of a consequence to two minutes or less).

For example, Joe chooses a Medium challenge level card. He reads it to the group. The group feels into Joe, and someone who knows that Joe has a fear of public speaking says, “If Joe fails to meet this challenge, then his consequence is we take him to a karaoke bar and get him up on stage to perform at least three different songs during the night.” If this feels right to everyone, decide on that consequence. Note that it probably won’t feel good to Joe, because it’s pushing his edge. But, if he

recognizes it would be good for him even though it's difficult, he should accept the consequence, which, of course, he'd only have to enact if he fails the challenge on the card he has drawn.

9. The man holding the card does whatever its challenge demands of him. The others present should not interrupt or interfere unless the Challenge Card allows for interaction.
10. If the challenge requires others to express themselves, they need not always do it verbally. Other creative ways of expression are encouraged, because often full bodily expression communicates much more than just words alone. For example, you could use your body to dance your expression.
11. There are two cards in the deck that are identified as the "jokers." As in many games, jokers are "wild." You can use them in different ways. For example, a man receiving a joker decides what the challenge should be; or perhaps the group will take two minutes to pick a suitable challenge for anyone who receives a joker; or the group can decide ahead of time what the jokers will mean for the particular session about to ensue (for example, anyone who draws a Joker does 50 pushups).
12. Do not go on to the next man until the current man has completed his challenge, any time limit set by the card has expired, or he has done as much as he can at the time (some cards require action outside of the normal group meeting – see Appendix B).

Make sure that if a man gets a card that requires action outside the normal group meeting, he takes notes if necessary or has another way of remembering what his challenge is.

13. When a man finishes with his card, he should place it in a discard pile separate from the rest of the deck.
14. Hold a **debriefing** (see below).
15. Deal the next card and continue with the above process for each man until everyone has had a card, in which case the challenge part of the session is over.
16. You may, of course, decide to hold another Challenge Session, but a person who still has a High level challenge to complete should consider sitting out so he won't be overwhelmed with too many High level challenges.
17. During debriefing, the group decides if everyone has met his challenge successfully or not. Those who did not must now meet any **consequences** (see page 20) that were predetermined by the group.

## **Debriefing**

A debriefing is a discussion held after an individual challenge has completed, so that experiences may be incorporated and learning

may be shared. Debriefing provides another opportunity to build and show trust through open communication and caring support. Participants come to closure on their experiences while still in the conscious space of the men's group meeting.

Debriefing should include the following:

- Feedback from all men present on what learning has been gained individually and as a group.
- Decisions on how well the challenges were met.
- Creating plans to follow through on any consequences that must be met.
- Creating suggestions on how someone might take any challenge he encountered a step further, or deeper, so as to enhance his learning.
- Self-expression in other ways besides talking.
- Creating initial plans for any challenges that cannot be completed in the current Challenge Session.

For example, Joe draws a Low-level Challenge Card, #4: *Describe all the things about your intimate partner that irritate you. After each one say, "I love this about [partner's name], and I don't need to 'fix' it."*

In the debriefing after Joe has carried out the challenge, Max says, "I really didn't trust that Joe *does* love it that his partner gets so upset that sometimes she does things like break his stereo."

Ralph says, "I felt the same thing. But, then again, who would?"



Waldo says, “I *like* it when my lady gets all fiery. Sure, maybe some things get broken, but there’s a lot of energy there. It’s exciting.”

Peter says, “You know, I felt Joe try during this challenge, and that really impressed me. Next time my wife gets really upset, I’m going to remember that.”

Joe says, “I was trying, but it’s hard for me to imagine myself loving her upsetness. Especially when she’s not here. I know what Waldo’s saying, but still....”

Albert says, “Maybe what you should do is commit to doing what the card says, but with her present, over the next week and see what happens.”

“Yeah!” say Max, Ralph, Waldo, and Peter simultaneously.

## **Optional Rules**

1. Have everyone select his own card from a face-down deck.
2. When you decide to reshuffle is up to you. You could work through the deck putting each selected card aside until your group has worked through the whole deck (which could take several sessions), or you could return a selected card to the deck and reshuffle after its use. If a man gets the same card again in the same session, he puts that card back into the deck and gets another card.

3. Keep dealing or selecting cards until a person gets a Medium challenge or a High challenge.
4. *Slow ramp-up.* Decide how much of the deck you want to include in any particular Challenge Session. You might decide, for example, to start your first session with just Low-level Challenge Cards. Then, when Low-level Challenge Cards feel too easy, add in the Medium-level Challenge Cards at a later session. Then, add in the High-level Challenge Cards when the Medium-level Challenge Cards feel too easy.
5. Create Low-, Medium-, and High-level Challenge Card stacks and let each man pick from whichever stack he is ready for in that moment.
6. A number of blank cards are provided so that you can add your own creative challenges, perhaps of particular relevance to your own group.
7. At any time you may propose a modification to your card if you believe it will better serve you or the group. The group must give its consent for the change to be adopted.
8. Instead of the usual process of a debriefing session after each man's challenge, postpone all debriefing until everyone is done selecting cards and meeting all the challenges for the session.

9. Decide on the consequences for a group member not meeting a challenge. You could alternatively decide to do this just for High-level Challenge Cards or take a moment after each card is drawn to decide the consequences for the current cardholder if he doesn't meet the challenge. This is highly recommended for well-established groups.
10. Use a single card as a group exercise. For example, everyone in the group takes a turn at meeting the current challenge, or the group uses one card as the theme for a whole meeting. Note that you will likely need some discussion to agree on what exactly the theme should be for your group as invoked by a particular card.
11. Develop your own house rules.
12. You could try to work through the deck in a solo fashion if for some reason you can't get into a men's group. If you attempt this, I would recommend that you try at least to buddy up with one other person so that there can be some kind of debriefing, and someone who can set consequences for you (and vice versa). Even so, many of the cards will not be meaningful unless applied in a session with a group of men.

## **Men's Groups**

Becoming a new member of a men's group is taking a big step. In my group, I have seen the nervousness on their faces as new members sit in the circle for their first meeting. They immediately serve the existing members by raising the awareness and consciousness of the group. With new members coming in we are required to redefine ourselves. What are we? What do we do here? Where are we going? These are questions that we find we need to ask ourselves again and again.

Whether forming a new men's group, joining an established one, or considering one that you already belong to, the following are good questions to ask:

### **What do you expect to get from the group?**

Some common expectations that I have found in men's groups are wanting a place to:

- bond deeply with other men

- explore what it is to be a man in this day and age
- learn masculine spiritual practices
- get feedback on how we are leading our lives or missions
- have help with healing
- be open and vulnerable as men

## **What Will You Contribute to the Group?**

This covers the whole spectrum of capabilities:

**Personal attributes** examples: clarity, commitment, honesty, and intuition.

**Spiritual practice** you can benefit the group by bringing the insights or teachings of your spiritual path or discipline.

**Work** examples: project management, computer skills, car mechanics, and carpentry.

**Hobbies** examples: mountain climbing, PC games, cycling, cooking.

## **What Is Your Life's Mission?**

If you don't know your life's mission, it's time to find out now what it is. And any good men's group can help.

## **Where to Find a Men's Group**

Want to join a men's group but don't know where to start? Here are several ways to try:

Explore the idea with your male friends. If you can get at least three other men to commit to meeting on a regular basis for spiritual growth, then start having meetings. Don't wait until you have everything figured out. Just get started and the rest will come with time and experience. It will also make it easier to recruit more members once you have a core group.

Post an ad where likely candidates for a men's group will see it. Some suggestions are: spiritual bookshops, places of worship, suitable e-mail lists or websites, yoga or meditation centers, etc.

If you attend a workshop, intensive, or retreat, talk to the other men and see if anyone is already in a group that might be open to new members. If there are none, find out if there are any men at the event who share your interest in starting a group and then get together with them.

Perhaps you have a partner, friend, or relative in a women's group. See if the male partners of the other women would be interested in forming a group.

Check out The ManKind Project's website at <http://www.mkp.org>. Joining one of their groups will require that you attend a New Warrior Training Adventure weekend. These weekends offer a lot, and I highly recommend them.

There are also good pointers in Bill Kauth's book, *A Circle of Men: The Original Manual for Men's Support Groups*.

Also see **Other Resources** (on page 47 of this booklet) for information on *The Way of the Superior Man* — Men's Group Curriculum (see **Appendix C** on page 44) and other great resources.

### **Some of My Experiences with Men's Groups**

When my wife first encouraged me to join a men's group, I was clueless. I had no idea what a men's group might be, and I'd never heard of the men's movement. Since my wife had no experience with men's groups, and no one we knew was in one, I did not give the suggestion much attention. It was not until I became more active in exploring my spiritual path that I finally encountered men who were meeting regularly in a group. For me, this happened through my involvement with David Deida's workshops and intensives.

The guys I met who were in a men's group volunteered to lead a few meetings for me and some of the other men from the workshop who were not in a men's group. I still remember driving to that first meeting having only a real fuzzy idea of what was going to

happen. Yet, given that we'd all just come out of a ten-day workshop, I felt comfortable enough since I had already established a good level of trust with these other men. That first meeting was pretty loose—no set agenda, no clear leadership, mixed expectations and needs, etc. The experienced men from the other group stayed with us for a couple of meetings, but it was not enough for the rest of us to gel into a cohesive group.

Without establishing a mission, some structure, and agreements on what people should contribute and get out of the group, we floundered. Fortunately, for me at least, I was able to join an established group a short while later after participating in an intensive with Deida. Even after that I was still nervous when attending that first men's group meeting, but the deep trust I had experienced and developed in the intensive carried me through. I've been a regular member of that group ever since. We call ourselves the Journeymen, and I have experienced a lot of challenge, growth, and opportunities to serve my fellow men since I've been involved in the group.

Since then I have also participated in the ManKind Project's New Warrior Training Adventure. This immediately gave me access to a worldwide network of men to share my journey with, and I am proud to contribute and thankful to receive the support I do with my New Warrior brothers.

In my group, our meetings usually open with some kind of physical exercise, yoga, or meditation. This helps each man expand awareness



to his entire body rather than being stuck just in his head. Everybody then checks in to share our thoughts and feelings in the present moment, and also to find out if any major issues are up for anyone. We then check for approval of the night's agenda. If approved, we move on as planned; if not, then we deal with whatever has come up.

## **Presence and Depth**

One thing to be aware of is every man's presence and depth in each meeting. Many of the *Men's Challenge Deck* cards deal with this directly or indirectly. Often things occur in a meeting that irritate or make someone uncomfortable. It is then that man's responsibility to make the group aware of what he is feeling.

If you watch people and notice when they are not present in their whole body (for example, they are squirming, not sitting erect, fidgeting, etc.) then it is usually a sure sign that they are not expressing their discomfort in the moment.

For instance in our group, one fellow in particular is very sensitive to moments when lots of words are being spoken but have little or nothing to do with anything *real* that is going on inside of us. This man could just feel irritated when he experiences this. But usually he will let the group know what he is feeling at the time that he is feeling it. This always gifts the group by bringing our attention to the fact that we're just basically "mentally masturbating," as we like to call it in our group, instead of getting down to actual growth and truth.

Things to look out for during meetings that are directly tied to each man's presence and depth are: How alertly is everyone sitting? What is their body language saying? Is their posture straight and erect or slumped over and crooked? Are they looking people in the eyes when they speak? Are they breathing fully? Is there a lot of nervous energy, random movements, or joking that interrupts energy, or is everything contributing to more depth, to more truth, to more freedom?

## **Sacred Space**

A men's group needs to create a sacred space and safe "container" or "vessel" for meetings. The sacred space is created by the intention of the group to meet for spiritual growth, by the members' openness to hold nothing back and keep nothing hidden from the group, their willingness to take risks, their passion, and their integrity.

The vessel of a men's group needs to be strong and large enough to hold all the energy that can be unleashed. There should be no cracks in the vessel, so that the energy that is liberated doesn't seep out and threaten the integrity of what takes place. For example, in my group the Journeymen, we do not reveal the details of what goes on inside the group to those outside the group. I strongly recommend that all groups follow this practice. In the appropriate context, there is much intimate knowledge that can be shared among men. And you absolutely need the trust and integrity of all the men in your group for the group to work at its utmost depth.

We sometimes find it acceptable to talk in general terms about our own experience within the group to those outside the group, as I am doing here, but the specifics about our experiences within meetings need to be respected and contained within the group. For example, all the material in this book that comes from the Journey-men has been reviewed and approved by the group for sharing with the public in the desire to encourage other men to join or form men's groups.

An effective and strong men's group knows that everyone's deepest growth occurs, and their fullest gifts are given, especially during difficult times. Whatever we do we constantly strive to be authentic and act from our hearts in every moment. This is one of the reasons I have created the *Men's Challenge Deck*.

*Choose men friends who themselves are living at their edge, facing their fears and living just beyond them. These kind of men can love you without protecting you from the necessary confrontation with reality that your life involves. You should be able to trust that these friends will tell you about your life as they see it, offer you a specific action which will shed light on your own position, and give you the support necessary to live in the freedom just beyond your edge, which is not always, or even usually, comfortable.*

— David Deida, *The Way of the Superior Man*

## Mission

We touch on all topics of our lives in our group: our life's mission, health, fitness, intimacy, relationships, family, divorce, death, children, work, money, spiritual practice. The one area in which we focus most of our attention is in our life's mission. Our group believes that the single most important thing for a man to know is his life's mission or purpose. Everything else he does must be aligned with that purpose for him to be living authentically with himself. Before recording our personal missions we thought it fit to create a group mission statement:

*The Journeymen's mission is to serve each other and the world in love, bliss, and freedom. The group facilitates understanding, healing, development, and celebration of our personal missions and relationships as men. We do this by providing honest feedback, challenge, and support from an open heart.*

We regularly check in with each other to see how we are doing with this. Sometimes a man might still be searching or feel he has lost touch with his mission. It is our highest priority to help men in these situations.

For example, one man had doubts about starting down a new career path for which he had been attending college. With the help of some women friends we staged a "sacred theatre" event. Sacred theatre involves dramatizing an event or circumstance under considera-

tion so that you can better incorporate what it is you are trying to feel, express, or get in touch with.

In this case we dramatized the man's death. We held a wake while people mourned his loss and passed comment on his life. Then we staged an afterlife where he was given choices on how to lead a new, or next, life. It all served to make him feel what it would be like to look back at his life had he not made the new career move. It worked for him. He felt that this new path was indeed his authentic mission and stuck with it.

## **Political Correctness**

Interacting deeply with the other men is not about being politically correct or "nice." Rather, it's about constantly questioning whether what is occurring is helping to create more freedom and love in the world, and this often includes calling people on their bullshit. Doing this is not nice, and it's not politically correct, but it can help us as men to remember to be present when we have forgotten.

For example, there was a time when the personal relationship issues of a man in our group were being considered. He had been listening to some good input for about half an hour, but nothing seemed to be really effecting any change in him. It took a man with real presence to pound the floor with his fist and tear into him with a "Wake up! You son of a bitch!" to shake him out of his ambivalence, to get him off his fence where he had gotten comfortable in the

ambiguity of his relationship. With that fierce intrusion we were able to move deeper into the problem and better serve him, and he was able to gain more clarity and determination about the actions to take. All of us in the room were instantly more awake, more alive, and more free after that “calling of bullshit.”

## **Ending a Men’s Group Meeting**

Each meeting should have a closing ceremony. It should be short, but it should mark the end time of the meeting. From then on, men will pass from the sacred vessel of the men’s group to their normal lives. There should be a clear transition because the men’s group is *important* and it deserves appropriate respect. This ceremony need not be complex. It is the intent of the men that matters most. It is often as simple as clapping three times and saying a loud “Ho!”

## **In Closing**

It is my sincere hope that the *Men's Challenge Deck* serves you and your community as deeply as it has served me and mine. May all of our paths be filled with growth, love, and freedom.

Ho!

*Rob Biagini a.k.a. Lion Rampant*

## **Appendix A: Recommended Reading**

*The Way of the Superior Man*, by David Deida

*Instant Enlightenment*, by David Deida

*Finding God Through Sex*, by David Deida

*Blue Truth*, by David Deida

*Dear Lover*, by David Deida

*Wild Nights*, by David Deida

*Intimate Communion*, by David Deida

*Iron John*, by Robert Bly

*A Circle of Men: The Original Manual For Men's Support Groups*,  
by Bill Kauth, cofounder of the New Warrior Training Adventure

*Fire in the Belly*, by Sam Keen

*Tending the Fire: The Ritual Men's Group*, by Wayne Liebman

*Knights Without Armor*, by Aaron R. Kipnis, Ph.D.



## **Appendix B: Extended Session Card List**

The challenges on the following forty cards cannot be completed at the time of the session, and so they require a kind of extended session. They ask the cardholder to do something outside the current group meeting and report back to the group for debriefing later.

They are listed here in case you want to remove them from play so that you can have a session that can be entirely complete in one meeting.

You might also want to remove these cards if you are having a session and those present will not be able to get back together for a while, or if there are men present who are not regular members of your group.

The card numbers are: 14, 15, 18, 19, 29, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 55, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80.

## **Appendix C: *The Way of the Superior Man* — Men's Group Curriculum Sample Lesson**

The Men's Group Curriculum was developed by the author and colleagues to help support men's groups following David Deida's book, *The Way of the Superior Man*.

Like the *Men's Challenge Deck*, the Curriculum can help consciously evolve your group and individual lives through focus, depth, sincerity, humor, and celebration. Based on principles in *The Way of the Superior Man*, the Curriculum offers detailed group meeting plans with key learning points and exercises. Men in groups all over the world use the Curriculum to live more fully as “Third Stage” men.

The two-part Curriculum has been taught by the author at men's events and is currently available to groups doing workshops with Eli Buren (see **Other Resources** on page 47 for more information). What follows is a sample lesson from part one of the Curriculum.

### **Lesson 1, First Meeting: Stop Hoping for a Completion of Anything in Life**

#### **Key Learning Points:**

- The masculine error is to think that eventually things will be different in some fundamental way. Most men hold off giving their gifts waiting for something to change.
- What do you put off doing in life?

- What are your excuses for doing so?
- What gifts are you holding back?

### **Pre-Meeting Tasks:**

1. Buy a copy of David Deida's *The Way of the Superior Man*.
2. Buy a notebook you can write in daily for the next 6 months.
3. Read the Introduction and Chapter 1 of *The Way of the Superior Man*.
4. Make a list of:
  - The things you love to do and are passionate about
  - The things you want to give to others and to the world
  - What stops you from doing the things you listed above

Start the meeting with a brief check-in (the *Team Leader Meeting Guidelines* in the Curriculum provide details for this).

### **Exercise:**

Your deepest gift is your most valuable God-given talent. For example, your deepest gift could be clarity of communication, emotional strength, artistic ability, etc.

Your life's purpose is what you need to accomplish in your life so that you can die complete before God.

1. One at a time, each man shares the contents of the list he created before the meeting. He ends by stating what he believes his life's purpose and deepest gifts are. Each man is allowed no more than three minutes.

2. After each man has finished, the rest of the group gives him feedback on how real or authentic the stated purpose and gifts are for that man. Feel into the depth of the man. Don't allow the discussion to get lost in insignificant specifics. This is about how this man feels to you in this moment. Are his stated purpose and gifts aligned with how he feels and who he is in this moment?
3. The discussion for each man should last no more than 10 minutes. Move to the next man when the discussion feels complete.

The group leader should end the exercise with 10 minutes remaining in order to close the meeting and go over the homework to make sure everybody knows what to do before the next meeting. If time runs out before all men complete this exercise, the rest will be handled at the next meeting.

### **Homework:**

Spend one hour tomorrow doing what you most love to do. During the next two weeks, commit to five more hours living from your deepest purpose and giving your deepest gifts. Spend a minimum of five minutes each day journaling how this homework is affecting you.

## Other Resources

Visit my website at **[www.masculinechallenges.com](http://www.masculinechallenges.com)**

Contact Eli Buren, a workshop facilitator and coach of David Deida's men's work (and supplier of *The Way of the Superior Man* — Men's Group Curriculum):

Website: **[www.eliburen.com](http://www.eliburen.com)**

Email: **[eli@eliburen.com](mailto:eli@eliburen.com)**

Phone: **+1 (727) 504-1202**

For information on David Deida's work, see **[www.deida.info](http://www.deida.info)**

Another men's work facilitator of note is Satyen Raja at **[www.warriorsage.com](http://www.warriorsage.com)**

## **Feedback to the Author**

I am interested in any feedback on your use of the *Men's Challenge Deck* cards. I would like to hear how you or your group was served by a Challenge Session, how you used jokers and blank cards, which optional rules you found most effective, what house rules were useful, and any suggestions for improvement.

Please contact me at **rob@masculinechallenges.com** or write to:

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