

Chapter 3

Create Your Bipolar Battle Plan

How do we battle a mental illness that has the ability to take control of our thoughts and emotions and cause our minds to deceive and betray us? How do we overcome an illness that has the power to cause us to attempt suicide, become violent, and spend money recklessly, not to mention act in so many other destructive ways? How do we surmount the health issues attributed to bipolar disorder such as a shorter life span, obesity, diabetes, and abuse of drugs and alcohol?

The best solution is to follow a lifelong battle plan that is based upon the expert recommendations of the medical community. The consensus is that successful treatment of bipolar disorder depends on diligently following a comprehensive treatment plan including medication, educating yourself about the illness, communicating with your psychiatrist and therapist, having a strong support system, and helping yourself by making healthy lifestyle choices.

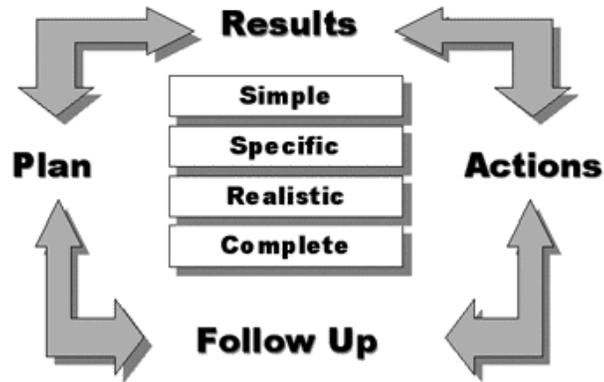
This chapter guides you through the process of creating your personal bipolar battle plan. It explains the planning process, how to establish your goals and objectives, enemy reconnaissance, selecting your weapons, warrior training, and becoming a bipolar warrior.

I don't claim to be an expert. I make decisions based on whether I am experiencing bipolar symptoms, the state of my mental and physical health, financial well-being, status of my relationships with my significant other, children, family, and friends, and level of satisfaction with my job and my career. If changes are needed, I make adjustments to my battle plan. Each of you will have different circumstances and challenges than I do, so you should tailor your battle plan accordingly.

Bear in mind that you are the General of your own individual bipolar battle plan. You must become an expert at treating your own disease. Live by the motto, *Bipolar Heal Thyself*.

The Planning Process

Planning ahead is how we deal with most challenges in life. Understanding the planning process will aid you in creating your battle plan. The planning process is shown in the figure below:



THE PLANNING PROCESS

As you go through the process of creating your bipolar battle plan, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is the plan simple? Is it easy to understand and to act on? Does it communicate its contents easily and practically?
2. Is the plan specific? Are its objectives concrete and measurable? Does it include specific actions and activities?
3. Is the plan realistic? Are the goals realistic? Nothing stifles implementation like unrealistic goals.
4. Is the plan complete? Does it include all the necessary elements?

Even if it passes all of these criteria, you will need to refine and make improvements to your battle plan on an on-going basis, depending on what is working for you and what is not working. The success of your plan depends on your level of commitment and involvement, as well as your ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

You are engaged in an undertaking of major importance to you. To be sure of success you must have plans that are faultless. If the first plan which you adopt does not work successfully, replace it with a new plan, if this new plan fails to work, replace it with still another. And so on. Be persistent. Your achievement can be no greater than your plans are sound.

Establish Your Goals and Objectives

The first rule of combat is to believe in your reasons to fight, which are your goals and objectives. This is the key: you have to believe that you WILL win. Not that it will happen, but that it should happen and that you are in charge.

When establishing your goals and objectives, consider your deepest wants and desires, your dreams, and what you want to achieve before leaving this great earth. Don't limit yourself—you deserve the best of everything!

Consider the following questions when setting your goals and objectives:

1. What motivates me?
2. What interests me?
3. What would I do more of if I could?
4. What do I care about?
5. Where do I want my life to go?
6. What brings me joy?
7. What are my dreams and desires?

The goals and objectives I set for my bipolar battle plan include:

1. Never again attempt suicide.
2. Effectively deal with any bipolar symptoms or side effects that may occur.
3. Eliminate bipolar episodes.
4. Maintain strong mental and physical health.
5. Establish lasting financial security.
6. Be in a romantic relationship with an intelligent, desirable woman who enjoys my company as much as I enjoy hers.
7. Continue to enjoy and foster good relationships with my kids, extended family, and friends.
8. Laugh out loud on a regular basis.

Know Your Enemy

“Know your enemy and know yourself and in a 100 battles you will never be in peril.”

—Sun Tzu, The Art Of War

Bipolar disorder is a very complex disease. It's also very serious and life-threatening. The more you know about bipolar disorder and how it affects you, the better you can manage and overcome the illness.

This chronic illness is best described as a mood disorder. It causes unusual and dramatic shifts in mood, energy, and the ability to think clearly. The mood of someone who is bipolar rotates between polar opposites: at one end of the spectrum are the highs (mania) and at the other end are the lows (depression). The most identifiable bipolar symptoms are these polar mood swings, each of which can last anywhere from days to weeks.

Bipolar disorder can look very different in each person. The symptoms vary widely in their pattern, severity, and frequency. However, bipolar disorder can also be somewhat predictable. For each person, the disorder tends to follow a pattern or can have some consistency. Within the broad groupings of manic and depressive symptoms, each person will have their own markers, or unique expressions of the illness that help to define their specific brand of bipolar disorder. For example, you may notice racing speech and thoughts, prolonged periods of irritability or anger, decreased need for sleep, or delusions of grandeur. Recognizing that you are having similar symptoms to ones you experienced during past bipolar episodes can be a huge advantage if you are able to take evasive action sooner rather than later.

As you become familiar with your illness, you can learn your own unique patterns of behavior. If you learn to recognize these signs and seek effective and timely care, you can often prevent additional episodes. Recognizing and naming your typical bipolar symptoms is the first important step to understanding and beginning to take control over your bipolar disease.

Select your Weapons

For us who are bipolar, it is important to understand that we are facing a highly complex situation, and we can't hope to change it until we arm ourselves with the necessary psychological and intellectual capacity.

The weapons you select to include in your arsenal can be thought of as strategies, techniques, tactics, and knowledge you can deploy as needed to battle the enemy, your bipolar disorder. Choose your weapons based on the advice of the experts in the medical community, knowledge of the illness from past experiences, and the specific challenges that you currently face.

The nine weapons I selected to include in my battle plan for fighting the war against bipolar disorder are shown in the following figure:



WEAPONS IN MY BIPOLAR BATTLE PLAN

My Bipolar Battle Plan

Weapon 1: Contingency Plan

“Every military disaster can be explained in two words: too late.”

—Douglas MacArthur

The contingency plan, explained in Chapter 4, is one of the most important weapons of the overall battle plan. The purpose of the contingency plan is to keep you alive, out of the hospital, and out of jail when you are having a bipolar episode. It is the last line of defense to keep a manic episode from skyrocketing out of control or a depressive episode from plummeting to disaster.

In my experience, there is a point in time during either a manic or depressive episode when I have a lucid moment and realize I need to seek help. This is the critical point in time when I must launch my contingency plan. It is the point of no return—if I do nothing, things always end badly.

An important part of my contingency plan is the prearranged agreement I made with my psychiatrist regarding what to do if I start going off the deep end during a bipolar episode. There have been times during a bipolar episode or while recovering from an episode where I suddenly go from being okay to feeling like swallowing all of my medications, jumping off of a bridge while taking a walk, or running at top speed through a grocery store. It is as if a switch has been thrown and my brain has been invaded by a crazy man who hijacked my thoughts. I have to fight

with all my might to avoid disaster. When I talked this over with my psychiatrist, he told me to carry a 400 mg tablet of Seroquel (one of my medications) in my pocket, and take it immediately if I start having these feelings.

Another critical part of my contingency plan was to assemble a team of people who I can call for help when my bipolar illness starts to get the best of me. My team consists of my psychiatrist, my daughter Rachel, and my uncle Bud. They all know my history and struggles with bipolar disorder and I trust them with my life.

Recommendations:

1. Always remember there are help lines with people on call at all times. Some examples include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255), the Mental Health Hot Line (1-844-549-4266), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Helpline (1-800-662-4357). There is also the Crisis Text Line (Text 'HOME' to 741741). Most importantly, if you are in trouble and your life is on the line, dial 911.
2. Keep in mind that even a badass needs to be rescued every once in a while!

Weapon 2: Enemy Reconnaissance

The more knowledge and understanding you have of bipolar disorder, the better you can control your illness. It is important to educate yourself on all aspects of bipolar disorder, just like you would do if you were going to have a major operation such as brain surgery or kidney replacement. Study the subject as if you are getting a Master's degree in Bipolar Disorder. Never stop learning.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed understanding of the true nature of the enemy, bipolar disorder. This includes the definitions of five types of bipolar disorder, as well as descriptions of mania, hypomania, depression, mixed-episode, seasonal pattern, bipolar episode triggers, and sleep disturbances. Also included are a number of facts and statistics about bipolar disorder, the causes of bipolar disorder, and current research that is underway on bipolar disorder.

Weapon 3: Optimize Your Medication

Learning how to determine the best medications to treat your bipolar illness is imperative, and can be one of your most powerful weapons in fighting the war against bipolar disorder. Your psychiatrist will prescribe your medications, but you are the only one who can tell if they are working effectively. You must become an expert at treating your own disease.

Chapter 6 explains how to determine the best medications and corresponding dosages to effectively battle your bipolar illness and achieve optimal mental and physical health. This includes being your own mental detector, researching your medications, dialing-in your medications, ramping up and ramping down your medications, knowing the possible side effects of each of your medications, and understanding the reasons why people stop taking their medications.

It is your job to push the limits of your medications in order to find the sweet spot where you are mentally sharp and focused, have plenty of get up and go, a positive attitude, no bipolar symptoms, and are happy with yourself and your life.

Recommendations:

1. It can be extremely detrimental to stop taking your medications, especially all at the same time. Two of my bipolar episodes escalated out of control when I stopped taking my medications. I ended up in the psychiatric hospital on both occasions.
2. Keep a close eye on your medications and don't let yourself run out or forget them if you go on a trip. It is easy to do and has happened to me more than once. Going without my medications for even a couple of days will drastically mess with my mind. Also, I keep an extra set of daily medications in my vehicle in case I forget to take my pills in the morning.
3. If you don't have prescription insurance coverage, or even if you do, there are huge savings to be had by using GoodRx (www.goodrx.com). For example, I filled a prescription for 30 days of 400 mg tablets of Seroquel. Since I don't have prescription insurance it was going to cost \$370.00. Fortunately, using GoodRx, it only cost me \$17.00 for the same prescription.

Weapon 4: Choose the Right Psychiatrist

Finding a psychiatrist who you trust to treat your bipolar disease and keep you healthy, alive, and out of the hospital is essential. The skills, abilities, and competence of your psychiatrist to repair, tune up, and maintain your mind can be likened to that of an auto mechanic who is the only person you trust to work on your car.

Chapter 7 discusses how to rate a psychiatrist, how to get the most out of appointments with your psychiatrist, when you should consider getting a new psychiatrist, and also provides pointers on how to find a new psychiatrist.

Remember, you are the customer paying a professional for their services. If your current psychiatrist isn't meeting your expectations, find someone who is better suited for your needs.

Weapon 5: Train Your Mind

Your mind is your most powerful weapon. Your thoughts are the only thing over which you can exert complete control. What you think and believe becomes a reality and rules your life. However, for those of us who are bipolar, it is a paradox that we must use our mind to fight a disease that at times has the power to take control of it.

Chapter 8 includes strategies and techniques you can use to strengthen your mind, increase emotional well-being, decrease stress, and bring you happiness and joy. Three of my favorite

strategies are: “The Path With Heart,” “Always Do Your Best,” and “Self-Importance Is Your Greatest Enemy.”

Recommendations:

1. Operate on the premise that it takes the same amount of work to make yourself strong as to make yourself miserable. It is in your power.
2. One technique I use on a daily basis that is making a positive difference is paying close attention to my thoughts. If I notice I am thinking in a negative way, ruminating over past events, or worrying about what people think of me, I say out loud my keyword “Noise”, and change my train of thought to something more productive. My psychiatrist recommended I try this idea and it has served me well in my experiences.

Weapon 6: Train Your Body

If you take care of your body, your body will in turn take care of you. Your mind and body are a unit; being good to your body benefits your mind. Taking care of your body will help stabilize your mood and maximize your energy for the battles ahead.

Chapter 9 includes a number of things you can do to improve your physical health and turn your body into a weapon.

Recommendations:

1. For those of us who are bipolar it is CRUCIAL to get enough sleep. Lack of sleep is one of the strongest triggers of a bipolar episode. If you are having trouble sleeping, get a sleep aid from your psychiatrist. You can also try taking Melatonin or ZzzQuil which is available over the counter. Meditation and herbal tea may also help.
2. Avoid getting sick. If someone around you is sick (coughing, fever, etc.), immediately distance yourself from them, even if you have to make a disturbance, like moving to new seat during a sermon in church. Do your best not to let them infect you, because life is way too short to be sick.

May 1, 2020: I wrote the paragraph above in December 2019, before the advent of the Corona Virus (COVID 19) pandemic currently spreading across the globe. Now it is more important than ever to heed this advice. In fact, it could be a matter of life or death. As of today there have been 3,300,000 confirmed cases of COVID 19 worldwide, resulting in 235,000 deaths and 1,040,000 recoveries from the epidemic. The United States is the country which has been hit the hardest by COVID 19, with 1,130,000 confirmed cases resulting in 65,253 deaths and 137,000 recoveries. Scientists are scrambling to find a vaccine as the virus continues to wreak havoc around the world.

3. Making love will keep you energized and can be one of the best therapeutic agents for maintaining good health.

4. If you drink or do drugs, evaluate whether they are keeping you from being your best self. I'm not preaching here, believe me—I can relate. I used marijuana for quite a few years and have finally been able to stop smoking it altogether. Alcohol, pot, or other drugs can trigger an episode if you aren't careful, so treat them with respect. As an alternative to self-medicating with drugs and alcohol, learn to use bipolar medications to your advantage instead. Bipolar medications are very powerful pharmaceutical drugs and if used intelligently can work wonders.

Weapon 7: Recovering from a Bipolar Episode

By definition, a bipolar episode never ends well, unacceptable things have happened, your mind has deceived you, and you crashed and burned. Now you are left to pick up the pieces, regain your balance, and try to get back on an even keel.

Chapter 10 provides a number of actions you can take that will help you deal with the aftermath of a bipolar episode and speed up the time it takes for you to recover. These actions include working closely with your psychiatrist regarding medications, eliminating stress, using coping techniques, forgiving yourself, setting goals, reaching out for face-to-face connection, getting therapy, educating yourself about bipolar disorder, surrounding yourself with people you can depend on, and making a plan to keep from having future episodes.

Weapon 8: What you Need to Know about Psychiatric Hospitals

Hopefully, you will never have to spend time in a psychiatric hospital. However, if you do, knowing what to expect is invaluable in speeding up your recovery and shortening your hospital stay.

Chapter 11 discusses reasons why you should consider checking yourself into a psychiatric hospital, explains the difference between voluntary committal and involuntary commitment, emphasizes the importance of going with the flow, and describes what it is like to be a patient in a psychiatric hospital. Also included are tips for speeding up your recovery time when you are in the hospital.

Weapon 9: Legal Rights

If you have bipolar disorder there are certain legal issues that may arise related to your condition, including job discrimination, consent to treatment issues, and trouble with the law.

Chapter 12 explains:

- Your legal rights as an employee based upon the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- The laws governing involuntary commitment.
- Your legal rights as a patient in a psychiatric hospital.
- Your legal rights if you are incarcerated.
- Whether you can be forced to take medication.
- The process of getting discharged from a psychiatric hospital.
- The benefits of having a Psychiatric Advance Directive.

Bipolar Warrior Training

“There is no such thing as tough; there’s trained and there’s untrained.”

—Denzel Washington, Man on Fire

Now that you have selected your weapons for fighting the war against bipolar disorder, it is time to begin your training. Your objective is to become skillful in the use of each weapon and to master the fundamental technical and tactical skills necessary for warfare. This includes conditioning your mind and body. Conditioning is not only used for the purpose of conditioning for something, but it is also used for the purpose of conditioning against something.

For example, let’s assume you are training yourself on using the weapon “Optimize your Medication.” Firstly, break your training into steps. The first logical step would be to educate yourself on each medication you are taking or thinking about taking by using internet research, reading books, asking your psychiatrist questions, and studying Chapter 6 of this book. Then answer the following questions:

1. How will I know if the medicine is working?
2. What are the expected results or pros of the medicine?

3. What are the side effects and risks or cons of the medicine?
4. What is the target dosage and therapeutic range for this medication?
5. What time of day should I take the medicine?
6. Are there any foods or other substances I will need to avoid?
7. How will this drug interact with my other prescriptions?

Additional steps in your training would be to gain proficiency in rating your medications, ramping up and ramping down a medicine, dialing-in the perfect medication cocktail, as well as educating yourself on the reasons why people stop taking their medicine.

Attributes of the Bipolar Warrior

“The hardest thing in the world is to assume the mood of a warrior. It is of no use to be sad and complain and feel justified in doing so, believing that someone is always doing something to us. Nobody is doing anything to anybody, much less to a warrior.”

—Carlos Castaneda

Warcraft of all types must be mastered. Developing expertise and proficiency in fighting the war against bipolar disorder is paramount for everyone with this sometimes devastating illness. I am giving you a call to arms to become a bipolar warrior. Fight, claw and scratch with all of your strength, courage, and willpower to overcome the bipolar beast that invades your mind and wants to destroy you. This is the most difficult and important undertaking you will ever face! No one deserves a negative kind of life and I am passionate in my belief that it should not happen to you or to anyone else.

Ingrain this list of attributes of a bipolar warrior into your mind and incorporate them into your daily routines in order to successfully fight and win the war against bipolar disorder.

A Warrior:

- Knows that this is a battle for their life.
- Never accepts the unacceptable.
- Makes a plan to defeat the enemy.
- Knows that no plan survives first contact with the enemy.
- Knows that wars are won on strategy, not impulse.

- Knows that until they understand exactly what is going on and how to stop it, the most important weapon in their arsenal is reason.
- Remains calm and in control at all times, because it increases the odds of victory.
- Knows that every minute lost in war can be the cause of defeat.
- Makes up their mind to overcome struggles and challenges.
- Adopts the mindset of a warrior every morning when they wake up.
- Always does their best.
- Prepares to battle.
- Knows they are in a war with the parasite in their mind.
- Fights with all their might.
- Makes a plan and sticks to it.
- Takes action to further their plan on a daily basis.
- Focuses on what they can control.
- Knows that once they face down the enemy, they are able to accommodate, or even work with them.
- Rolls with the punches.
- Knows their strengths and weaknesses.
- Avoids being taken by surprise.
- Knows that even a badass needs rescued every once in a while.
- Practices vigilance.
- Learns as much as possible because information is power.
- Voices and directs daily intentions.
- Respects their enemies.

- Knows that sometimes they have to change things up.
- Trains their mind.
- Trains their body.
- Shores up their defenses wherever needed.
- Eats healthy and stays hydrated.

Precious moments have already been snatched from your life by the enemy, and it will only try to steal more—if you allow it. Make the decision to win the war against bipolar disorder **NO MATTER WHAT**. Victory means living a productive, happy life—and making your dreams come true!