

Self-Mastery and Personal Development

If we all did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.

THOMAS EDISON

There is a story about two neighbors who lived near each other in the mountains. They were quite competitive and were always testing each other's strength. One day, the first neighbor challenged the second. They would see who could chop the most wood in three hours. The second neighbor agreed to the challenge. The first neighbor started out strong. As he chopped away, the second neighbor chopped for only ten minutes and then sat down under the shade of a large tree. The first neighbor could not believe his neighbor's laziness. To his surprise, the second neighbor continued to take these ten-minute breaks each hour for the duration of the contest. Finally the three hours passed. Not having paused to take even a single break, the first neighbor was sure victory was his. To his dismay, he found that the second neighbor had chopped twice as much wood as he had! In disbelief, he said, "That's impossible! You took a break every hour." Without batting an eye, the second neighbor replied, "I wasn't resting; I was sharpening my axe."

Great persuaders all adhere to an intensive personal development program. They know that "dull knives work the hardest," so keeping themselves sharp is of the utmost importance. Average persuaders don't consider personal training to be worthwhile. They figure working harder is the answer. They also assume that they'll figure it all out on their own sooner or later, maybe from reading a book or two. They also think it's too expensive to learn from the best. Great persuaders know that experience is the best teacher, and that there is a lot to be learned from books, but that having an expert guide them through an experience dramatically shortens the learning curve. Instead of being a painful expense, intensive training is an indispensable investment. This is why successful persuaders can work half as hard—and get twice the results. Have you ever been in the situation of breaking your back with effort and then seeing someone else hardly lift a finger, only to run circles around you? This extremely frustrating scenario

can often be traced back to the more successful person having a solid training or personal development program in place.

You are not truly educated unless you are learning and growing every day—learning from others, from your experiences, your mentors, your coaches, books, training programs, seminars, and CDs and DVDs. You should spend time every day contemplating what you have learned and applying it to your future. Take time to think about what happened during the day. What did you do well and what could you have done better? Are you wasting valuable time? Failing to work on personal development and ongoing training is like putting your paycheck in the trash after you have earned it. Just like a computer, if you don't upgrade yourself, you will become obsolete to both yourself and your future.

Get the Advice of Experts

"I'll figure it out on my own." This has to be one of the most common—but most impeding—attitudes of mediocre persuaders. It may eventually prove true, but only after pain, stress, time spent, money blown, and many costly mistakes. This line of reasoning may be common, but it is not how great persuaders think. They know someone else has already figured out what they need to know. They magnify their productivity by maximizing their gifts, talents, and strengths and by using other people's strengths when dealing with something outside their expertise.

Great persuaders don't squander their time and energy in their areas of weakness. They excel because they learn to leverage their areas of natural strength and leave the rest to the experts. Think of some of the most brilliantly successful people you know. Chances are they focus on what they are good at and don't waste their time on the things they are not good at. This is why they excel. For example, trying to build an amazing Website when you have no computer savvy will take you forever and divert your attention from areas where you can get impressive results with significantly less effort. And in the end, it's likely that your site will not be what it could have been if you'd left it to an expert Web designer. The time spent and the money lost (loss of income

because it took you so long and didn't do it right) is not worth it. There is no money saved in the long run; there is only money lost.

Early in my career, I used to say, "I will figure it out on my own. How hard can it be?" Over the years, that phrase has cost me millions of dollars. I remember going to a stock market seminar that dealt with learning how to trade. It was going to cost me over \$10,000 to attend additional training, so I declined in favor of figuring it out on my own. I got burned when I lost three times the amount I would have spent on training. The students who attended the additional classes, on the other hand, invested up front, learned the proper skills, and became great traders. I lost out by not allowing the experts to teach me the right skills.

It was a great day indeed when I realized that all the problems and obstacles I was encountering in life and in business had already been solved or figured out by someone else. Someone had already found the answer to all my problems. I could either pay them to teach me, or end up paying far more in the school of hard knocks. I'd pay more, not just financially, but with my time, energy, and commitment. Successful persuaders do not care how much it costs to learn the skills; they are concerned with their return on investment.

If you wanted to learn how to fly, would you just try to figure it out on your own? Would you read the best book on learning how to fly and then hop in a plane and learn along the way? No, of course you wouldn't! This is because the stakes would be so high—you'd likely end up losing your life. But if you're always falling short, missing the mark, and experiencing pain and frustration that could have been avoided—if you never reach your goals and aspirations—isn't it time to find someone that has mastered these skills?

None of the problems we will experience in life are new. All our potential challenges have already been experienced and solved by someone else. So, why struggle to solve them yourself when you can find someone who already has? There is someone

out there—a seminar leader, a coach, a mentor—who can make a difference in your life. Find people who are experts in their field, ask questions, attend seminars and workshops and take college classes. Success is an open book test; the answers are all there right in front of you when you're willing to look for them.

There is no such thing as a “self-made” man. We are made up of thousands of others. Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered into the makeup of our character and our thoughts, as well as our success.

—George Matthew Adams

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