

## **Transformation and Change**

If you want to make the same kind of transformation in your life, the first thing you have to do is take an honest look at yourself and where you are. You can't make changes if you won't acknowledge what needs to be changed. Where are you starting? What is your current situation? If you could change one thing in your life, what would it be? It is only from honestly assessing where point A is that you can develop a well-defined, well-planned route to point B. Then the next obvious thing to determine is where or at what point B *is located*. In other words, what exactly are you aiming for? What do you want?

Now is not the time to be timid. Don't shortchange yourself because you want to be "careful" or "reasonable" or you don't want to "rock the boat." Shoot for the stars! You'll define the path to get there, but first you have to know what exactly you're even trying to reach. In other words, you must begin with the end result and then work your way backward. You have to know exactly where you want to go and what you need to change to get there. Sometimes, people are actually afraid of being "too" successful. To be brilliant or amazing might actually be a scary proposition. As success comes into sight, you might feel a lot of responsibility weighing down on you. So, how successful should you be? How healthy should you be? How wealthy should you be? How strong should your relationships be? Consider the following powerful quote from Nelson Mandela:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our Light, not our Darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. – 1994 Inaugural Speech

We are unique creatures. In spite of the seeds of greatness that lie within us, we seem to program ourselves to do the least amount possible to get by. That is, we often do only what is necessary to survive. I see this tendency with my students at the local university all the time. Their mentality is: What is the least amount of work I can do to pass this

class? They are paying top dollar to get their education yet rarely do you see a student take advantage of all the learning that is at her/his disposal. We see symptoms of the same mental laziness, lack of progress and resistance to change in the workplace, too: What is the least amount of work I can do to get a paycheck and not get fired? When we are in this lazy mindset, we can't find happiness, and as a result, our souls start to rust.

The challenge is that we often don't see the consequences of our behavior fast enough. Time ticks by, and by the time we're even aware of how off course we've gotten, years have flown by. We live in a society where we want the quick fix, the easy way out. Unfortunately, however, that is not how life works. If it takes someone five years to gain twenty pounds, why does someone else think he can completely lose it in a couple weeks? Another example is fast food. We know it's not good for us, and yet hey, nothing bad happened today after I had that super-size order of fries. The consequences of the unhealthy food will take time to manifest, but in the meantime, the instant gratification of a fast and delicious meal *now* overpowers concerns about the future that, in the moment, seem immaterial. Imagine if every time you ate at a fast food restaurant the consequences were immediate. You took a bite and felt a bulge near your midsection. If that were the case, it wouldn't take long before you changed your ways.

There are thousands of habits and patterns in our lives that fit the instant gratification scenario. Another example is debt. So what do we do when we're constantly confronted with such difficult choices: immediate pleasure versus future gain? What do we do about it? You would be very wise to make a habit as soon as possible of analyzing your life on at least a weekly basis. Determine what you want to change *now*, not after years of reinforcing the wrong habits. The saying goes, "Old habits die hard" and it's really true. Stop destructive cycles now before the strands that bind you become impenetrable rope. Without *changing your action*, your wishes and hopes will only be whims that never go anywhere. It's time for you dreams to start to bear fruit!

So, are you ready to welcome change into your life? Good! Remember, as Albert Einstein said, "You can't solve a problem with the same mind that created it." Once you have

*recognized* the need to change and have *embraced* the opportunity to change, then you will need to start organizing your plan of action. Think backward. What is the big picture? What are the major phases within that big picture? What are the steps within each phase that will move you from one point to the next?

It is worth pointing out here that you must be careful not to let the opinions of others dissuade you. I'm sure you've experienced this before—you've gotten yourself all excited and pumped up, you tell someone you really care about all your great plans and they barely listen or care. Or worse, they start pointing out all the reasons why your plan isn't going to work or why it's a bad idea. Crash! You can't remember the last time you felt so deflated. I'll admit that it is hard to stay focused and persistent when people spit on your dreams. Fear of failure, fear of what others will think—these are totally normal feelings. But you can't let them debilitate you. Napoleon Hill said, "The fear of criticism robs man of his initiative, destroys his power of imagination, limits his individuality and takes away his self-reliance." You are destined for greatness. Follow your heart not the useless criticism and discouragement of those who have forgotten how to live and dream.

So many people assume that if they don't try, then they can't fail. If they don't try, no one will criticize them either. The tragedy of this mindset is that they will fail by virtue of never having even attempted to succeed. George Shinn once said, "Growth means change and change involves risks, stepping from the known to the unknown." I have always loved the phrase "jump and the net will appear." Consider the fact that most of the fears we face in life are not life-and-death matters. And yet, we are so gripped by our fears that it's almost as though they were life-and-death matters.

The next time you feel yourself paralyzed by fear, stop and honestly assess your feelings. What is the worst thing that could really happen? Are the possible setbacks really life-or-death situations, or are they just opportunities to learn and grow, even if they are sometimes unpleasant or painful? Reflect on the fact that almost all successful people have their stories about where they came from and what they had to go through to achieve success. What's more, it's rarely a rosy picture. It might also be worth asking

yourself what the worst thing is that could happen if you do *nothing*. Chances are the consequences might be more severe in the case of inaction versus action. Either way, there is a price to be paid. Do you want regrets or do you want results? We say no to some things because we are saying yes to other things. You just need to be sure you know what hangs in the balance either way. Sometimes it is the realization of the imminent, stark reality hitting us in the face that provides the momentum for change. Whatever the motivator is, just don't let fear stop you from forging ahead.

As you ready yourself for positive changes ahead, watch how you talk to yourself. In other words, there is to be no more talking down to yourself like: "Well, I blew it again. Surprise, surprise." Negative self-talk is a dead giveaway for an attitude tune-up. Thoughts and attitudes are where change begins. Don't take this advice lightly because your thoughts have the power to control your destiny. When you feel or think there is no hope, you are right. Understand that your thoughts control your emotions and that your emotions control your actions. What you concentrate on will happen. If your thoughts always focus on rejection and failure, you will see a self-fulfilling prophecy in your life. Change your thoughts, change your focus and you will change the future.

Draw on strength and support from family and friends who *will* support you. Fortify yourself so that you're immersed in an environment where success can grow from success. When you surround yourself with people, places and things that inspire you, you'll feel encouraged. Sometimes we think that all this "change your attitude" stuff is great, but it doesn't just click like the snap of your fingers. It's true; unfortunately, our progress and results are rarely instantaneous. It can take a lot of effort to muster the mental and emotional fortitude that is necessary to forge ahead when the support seems so distant. This concept underscores my point even more: If you're having trouble mustering the inspiration for change yourself, surround yourself with the people and things that will give you the springboard you need. Moreover, remind yourself that even under the best circumstances, progress comes in spurts. There's no sense in waiting for everything to be just right before rolling up your sleeves because it's just never going to happen. Let's face it, fate isn't going to just catapult you to the top without any scrapes or

bruises. Sometimes, it will be a matter of taking three steps forward and one step back. Other times, you'll go through a phase of feeling like you're not taking any steps forward, and then you will suddenly leap ahead by ten or twenty steps or more. Don't fight the natural growth curve you're going to experience.

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