

Personal Excellence

The Magazine of Personal Leadership

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February 2011

Noah Blumenthal
Consultant

**Manage
Energy**

**Brainstorm
Destiny**

**Be the Hero
Change Your Story**



"Personal Excellence is the only reading you'll need to do for continual self-improvement both personally and professionally!"

—Sharlene Hawkes, Former Miss America, award-winning ESPN broadcaster

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Personal Excellence

February 2011

The Magazine of Life Leadership

INSPIRATIONAL • VIRTUES

Wake Up, and Live

Embrace these 15 vital virtues.

by David and Andrea Reiser

EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK TODAY, YOU SEE PEOPLE wringing their hands over the condition of their lives and the state of our nation. Our national debt is out of control. Many leaders are corrupt, greedy, or inept. Many young people are disrespectful and lazy. And many citizens grab entitlements rather than work hard to pursue a dream.

If we don't shift our culture back to one that embraces the principles that made our country great, conditions will only worsen. We can't legislate our way back to greatness. We have to find the seeds of greatness inside us, one person at a time.

We've identified 15 virtues that built our country and that foster personal success:

• **Education.** The way we make a living has changed; our education system needs to change also. John Dodig, principal of Staples High School in Westport, CT, the top public high school, wants to transform education to emphasize flexibility and adaptability to enable young people to compete in a global marketplace: "These kids need to think on their feet, solve problems, and learn something new at the drop of a hat."

• **Hard work.** Too many people expect maximum return for minimum investment of work. Eli Zabar is the antithesis of this mindset. The youngest son of Russian immigrants, he's proof of what can happen when you're born into a hardworking family and internalize their values. He's become an esteemed icon of New York City gourmet food through his proprietorship of numerous markets, restaurants, and other operations. "Every day I feel there

are so many things that are left undone, and I'm still trying to get right," he says.

• **Recognizing opportunity.** Some people think that life owes them what they need, when they need it, on a silver platter—and they shouldn't have to look for opportunity. Tim Brabham decries that attitude. Since graduating college in 1992, he's held challenging positions at many companies. He's learned that actively looking for the next great thing, combined with hard work and self-marketing, attracts opportunity: "When I start running out of growth opportunities within a company, I look for something that makes sense from a career perspective and for my family and move on it."

• **Realistic vision.** Many folks think that they're the next big reality TV star, inventor, or CEO. They live in a dream world, and their inflexibility often causes them to crash. Matt and Kate Jennings take small steps, stay



realistic, and constantly refine the plan to their dreams. Their passion for food has grown into popular restaurants. "I thrive on bringing people together and celebrating the conviviality of a great food experience," says Matt.

• **Integrity.** Integrity requires having a strong set of beliefs (core convictions or a personal code of honor) and basing decisions and choices on these values and principles (living consistent with them). When you have integrity, you keep your word and meet commitments. Integrity describes Ellis Waldman, a Providence, RI business owner and community leader. He displays a fierce determination to see his commitment through. "If I believe something is important, I don't stop. I find a way to accomplish it."

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• **Positive attitude.** Negativity is draining. It repels people. It squelches hope and blinds you to possibilities. Now is a time to be positive and resourceful. It's shameful to hear people gripe and complain when you know Marucha Andrzejewski. Forced to leave her native Cuba with nearly nothing as a young woman in 1962, she finds that you can achieve more—and be happier—if you choose to look forward and move forward with hope. She has embraced her new home and chosen not to live in the past. "I realize what I didn't have back there—freedom."

• **Resilience.** Yes, times are tough. Many people have lost jobs, homes, or retirement portfolios. Yet, we have the prerogative to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and get back in the race. To do so, we need resilience. Take a cue from New Yorker Patrick Ciriello. Despite losing his job and most savings, he sprang into action. He streamlined his finances and used his mortgage banker skills to become a financial advisor. "I didn't waste time feeling sorry for myself, he says.

"When things don't go your way, you must fight through obstacles, turning a negative into a positive."

• **Accountability.** Accountable people keep their words and meet responsibilities. Despite witnessing the horrors of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks from one building away, Mike Nardone felt obligated to his employer and colleagues to push forward. "When bad stuff happens, you either respond or you don't," he reflects. "I started working the phones, reconnecting with my colleagues and my responsibilities. Don't try to be a hero—just focus on what has to get done, and what you can control."

• **Self-discipline.** This refers to the ability to defer or delay gratification. Amy and Howie Blustein live a prudent lifestyle, maintaining little debt, taking the time to think about what they really want and spending their money accordingly. That means wants (like a new kitchen for home chef Howie) take a back seat to pragmatic needs. "We could take out a home equity loan and do the kitchen. But it's more important to start the kids in college." When it comes to spending and saving, it's all about choices.

• **Patience.** Good things come to those who wait—but most people won't wait. It's often tough to be patient, but as Mary and Alberto Lobo have learned, having an achievable goal makes the wait more bearable. Originally from Portugal, the couple started their life in America with almost nothing. Knowing that they wanted to leave a legacy, the Lobos saved and invested, little by little. And their patience paid off. Says Mary, "If I have it, it's because I worked hard and saved for it."

• **Harmonious balance.** Overextending, overworking, or overcommitting results in being burned-out and unhappy. Stefani Phipps

finds a way to balance it all. She's created two different selves: *Work Stefani* (a successful banker) and *Life Stefani* (who plays the harp, dances, cooks, and travels). Phipps has woven *Work Stefani* and *Life Stefani* together into one unique and fulfilled individual. "I make a great income. But it is not my life—my priorities are people, family, and health. So daily, I eat well and exercise."

• **Kindness.** When you show kindness and give of yourself, you receive many benefits in return. Meredith Fried puts her natural positive energy and empathy to work, helping women with breast cancer, which she herself has beaten. "Mentoring is how I give back," she explains. "I'm happy to share and listen."

• **Gratitude.** You likely have a place to live, regular meals, and family and friends who love you. You have the freedom to do what you want with your life. And yet, when asked, "How are you?," you might answer with a complaint. Rather than engage in self-centered whining, express gratitude for what you have—gratitude is powerful.

• **Courage.** Playing it safe is not what this country was built on. Men and women took risks. Alysa Mendelson Graf, left behind a successful law career to become a rabbi—her heart's desire. Due to her courageous decision, many lives have been changed for the better. "I believe the only thing that can stop me is myself—and that's what stops any of us. It can be hard to believe in yourself, but I'm glad I did it. I'm living my dreams."

• **Living without regrets.** Many people come to the end of their lives with major regrets. If they'd acted on their desires, what might they have done? Ina Garten, dissatisfied with her policy-writing job, decided to follow her dreams. She bought a specialty food shop and made it wildly popular. She's since written bestselling cookbooks and hosts the Food Network's *Barefoot Contessa*. "Taking a risk always turns out well," she says. "You don't figure out what to do while on the side of the pond. You have to get into the pond, splash around, figure out what the pond feels like, and then go in some direction—or get out of the pond if it's not right for you."

Think of making values-centered inroads in your circle of influence—your family, friends, school, or workplace. Apply these values to your life. Stop griping—be grateful for all you have. Don't be lazy and entitled. Contribute. If enough people make the effort, we can shift the culture. Yes, it's an ambitious goal, but we're up to it. PE



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ACTION: Expand your circle of influence.

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Manage Energy

Forget time management.



by Jean Kelley

PHRASES LIKE *MANAGE YOUR time and do more with less* have become buzzwords.

The idea is that *if you can manage your time well, you'll be more productive*. The flaw in this thinking is that *time is finite*. You can manage time well and push yourself to get more done, but all this managing and pushing tires your brain, drains your spirit, and disengages your soul—leading to mistakes and burnout. The key is not to simply *manage your time*, but to *manage your energy*.

Unlike time, energy is restorable. And when you manage your energy well, you'll have more energy for your priorities, both personal and professional. If you don't manage your energy, you can't manage your time. Sure, you can think about all the things you need to do and schedule them, but if you don't have the energy to do the tasks, you can't accomplish them.

Managing your energy goes beyond work/life balance. While many people talk about balance (devoting ample time to all areas of your life), few address those things that make life rich and fun. Since many things compete for your attention daily, you need to give attention to *energy replenishment* so you can devote the time your priorities demand. This is why you need to manage your energy *before* you manage your time.

Three Pillars of Energy Management

Keeping your energy in check means giving attention to your brain, spirit, and soul. Think of it like a *three-legged stool*. For the stool to be useful, you need all three legs. Remove one leg, and the stool topples. To keep your energy replenished, try these three suggestions:

1. Stimulate your brain. Your brain likes control and certainty, and it's good at predicting the next thing that is likely to happen. That's why you often feel better when you perceive you have control over a situation—and feel stressed if you think you have no control over events. Also, the brain is programmed to fear. This is a good thing, though, because the inborn fear has enabled us to evolve. The drawback is that the brain will take pieces of information and make a story out of it—usually a

negative one. This negative story becomes your reality—until you get another piece of data. Talk about an energy drain on your brain!

To replenish your brain's energy, try these four tips:

- *Feed your brain the right food* for optimum health. Eat three nutritious meals a day, exercise to increase the oxygen flow to your brain, and drink plenty of water to keep hydrated.
- *Reconstruct your stories*. You have to purposefully stop the story and seek the missing pieces of information. For example, if you get an email from your boss telling you not to take part in a task you volunteered for, with no explanation, you may think your boss doesn't believe you're capable of the task. In reality, your boss may need you for another task, or think the task is not challenging enough for you, or may simply not need any assistance on the task. But you'll never know (and never stop the negative story) until you ask.
- *Analyze what helps and hurts your thinking ability*. For instance, doing 200



emails first thing in the morning can make you exhausted before you even start the day. So, don't do that task first thing. Do the most important things when you're alert and at your best, as those tasks will energize you so you can handle the stressful tasks later.

- *Give yourself two hours a day for focused attention on a key project*—the earlier in the day the better. No multi-tasking! Your brain is rested after your sleep, so this is the key time for focused attention and productivity.

2. Awaken your spirit. Your spirit yearns to soar—it enjoys *lofty goals* and *challenging tasks*. How *spirited* you are often relates to how *purposeful* you are. In fact, when you lose your purpose in life, you feel deflated, even depressed. Hence the phrase: *Her spirit was broken*.

An energized spirit catapults you out of the mundane and into a new and exciting endeavor. To replenish your spirit's energy, do the following:

- *Do one thing every day that makes your spirit soar*. Whether it's reading poetry

or listening to music, if you feel your spirit is fed by that, do it.

- *Think about what you want to do in your life*. Dream big! Give planned time to your future in order to nurture your spirit.
- *Read things that stretch your mind*. Your spirit wants to reach for the next best thing. Unleash the power of your spirit by exposing your mind to new things—even things that you feel are impossible to accomplish right now.
- *Take time each day to think and concentrate*. Many people are in knowledge-oriented jobs and need some degree of quiet time. So even though a particular task must get done, that task often requires planning and thinking. Your spirit can't gain energy to tackle big goals unless it has some quiet time to prepare. So, schedule some quiet thinking time. If others know your needs and intentions, they will respect them.

3. Feed your soul. Your soul likes *the familiar*, *the deep*, and *the poignant*. It likes *ritual*, doing the same thing at the same time every day. It also enjoys the simple things in life, beauty, and nature. The soul is what connects you to life and to what is deeply meaningful to you. To replenish your soul's energy, try this:

- *Clarify your intentions and plan what you want your tomorrow to be like* before you go to bed. This allows your mind to work on your challenges and big decisions while you sleep.
- *Take time for enchantment*. Linger at a museum. Enjoy preparing a simple elegant meal. Go outside regularly and experience nature. Your soul loves beauty and *wants a connection* with the earth.
- *Experience the present fully*. Focus on the things around you—the colors and textures. Be mindful of your current surroundings and activities rather than always trying to multi-task. Engage in life in the moment. Feel yourself breathe.
- *Build rituals for yourself and your family*. Even something as simple as eating dinner at the same time every day is a ritual. Both your soul and your brain crave ritual and gain energy from it.

By focusing on these three areas—your brain, spirit, and soul—you'll gain the energy to tackle life with enthusiasm and zest. With your energy replenished, time won't be an issue. You'll feel ready to handle anything that comes your way with ease—and you'll do it faster. So make it a habit to stimulate your brain, awaken your spirit, and feed your soul. It's one investment in yourself you can't afford not to make. PE

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ACTION: Build on these three pillars.

Happy and Hired

Find success in job search.



by Richard Bayer

LOOKING FOR A JOB IS STRESSFUL. Doing so in a recession can feel *soul-crushing*. If you've lost your job, you know about uncertainty, money woes, rejection, and questions and pressure from family and friends. The stress *really* amps up. It's easy to think that *you'll never find another job*. But by staying upbeat, using the right job-search techniques, and working diligently daily, you *will* find a job.

Realize it's okay to be between jobs. When you have a job, it's easy to tell people what you do; when you don't have a job, you might say, "I'm between jobs" without believing it. Ignore the inner voice that says, *'I'll never get a good job again*. Seek more options.

Stay in touch with colleagues and friends from work. They're likely stressed and worried about keeping their jobs and may need a friend like you to talk to. Also, having worked with you, they'll provide you with some positive reinforcement on your down days and remind you of your past achievements.

Treat your job search like a job. The lack of routine or schedule can be disorienting. You can feel that you've been cut loose. So, *create a new daily routine*. Treat your job search as your new job. With updating your résumé, scanning ads, and networking, you have much to do.

Exercise regularly and keep a healthy lifestyle. Regular physical exercise and a healthy diet help reduce tension and stress. Get some exercise every day. Keep an eye on what you're eating as well. Healthy foods give you energy and keep you well. If you eat the wrong things, you'll gain weight—preventing you from looking and feeling your best.

Enjoy the change of pace. Take stock of what you want to achieve and plot course corrections. Ask: What matters to me the most? Focus your job search so that you don't waste time looking in places where you won't be happy. You may even see losing your job as a gift—one that spurs you to change your life.

Stay away from negative news and naysayers. If you're struggling to keep up your morale, stay away from news about layoffs and unemployment. And, stay away from naysayers who reinforce the negative news. Their negativity will get you down. Stay positive.

If you need to vent, vent! If you're angry, frustrated, or feeling betrayed, find people to talk to. There's only so much your family wants to hear, so find a support group. *Getting it all out* has healing power.

See unemployment as a business problem. After a job loss, your emotions might block this rational response. So, set your goal: *To find a satisfying job that pays the bills*, develop a strategy for achieving it. Connect with people who can hire you, position yourself, offer proposals, and *turn interviews into offers*.

Celebrate short-term successes. In the morning, don't grumble, "I'm looking for a job again today." Set goals for the day: *write five targeted letters, identify 10 companies to contact, make 10 follow-up calls, set up two networking meetings*. Achieving such goals boosts morale.

Keep on top of your game. Don't let your skills and knowledge slip. Stay current and sharp. Read journals, attend association meetings, volunteer for a committee, help a friend, take a graduate course—such activity can be a great selling point when you're interviewing. Network, and do something to bring in cash.

Have fun. You can get *burned out* on your job search—so take a break from your job hunt for a few hours of fun a week. Laughter is good therapy. If you stay positive and make *I "will persevere!"* your motto, you'll land a great job. **Choose hope.** You'll get to where you want to go faster—and enjoy the journey. **PE**

Richard Bayer is an ethicist, economist, and COO of The Five O'Clock Club, a career coaching organization, and author of The Good Person Guidebook (Five O'Clock Books). Visit www.fiveoclockclub.com.

ACTION: Stay productively employed.

PROFESSIONAL • CHANGE

Pause, Clarify, Decide

Are you thinking of a job change?



by Debashis Sarkar

IF YOU ARE THINKING OF changing jobs, I suggest that you practice the *Pause-Clarify-Decide* (PCD) principle. This will help you to make *the right decision*. Here are four reasons why you seek change:

1. Goal-deficient: Not contributing to the company. Do you feel that you're not adding much value—that your efforts do not contribute to team goals or impact strategic priorities? Do you feel excluded from key meetings? I suggest that you first talk to your boss to clarify the situation. If you believe that your boss is helpless, engage with his superior or someone in HR to express your concern and then probe into what you could do to contribute more. If you do not get a suitable answer, explore being placed in a different function or team. If you do not get suitable response, move on.

2. Learning-deficient: Not adding value to yourself. Even when things are good at work, you may feel that you are not adding value to yourself. Perhaps your role is repetitive, not intellectually stimulating, or the assignment is not challenging. Since your lack of personal development or professional growth is just cause for concern, ask your boss if your work profile can be modified and embellished. Ask for roles that meet your learning requirements and meet

organizational needs. Seek to move into any other function or department before looking for greener pastures.

3. Rudderless: Not knowing where your career is going. You need to have an idea where you want to be in 2020 and know what you want to achieve in your career. Having a long-term goal helps you know if your career is progressing in the right direction. You can better sense if what you are doing will lead you to achieve your aspirations. If not, chat with your supervisor. If you do not get suitable response, engage with the talent development team and ask them to help you shape a career plan. Often jobs that may appear not to add to your career path can serve in a larger development plan.

4. Structural dissonance: Not having the right standing. The positioning of a department signifies its importance to the company and its relevance to leaders. The structure signifies what and who is important. If you feel that you lack the right standing, engage with your leaders and understand the reason. If you feel that you have done justice to your role but lack the right standing and have no internal options, you should move on.

Evaluate first any job opportunities inside. Before you jump ship, *Pause-Clarify-Decide*. Make decisions in keeping with your long-term goal. Talk to people before you make a decision. Know the business case on why you are doing what you are doing. **PE**

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ACTION: Pause, clarify, and then decide.



Beyond Resolutions

Five steps to lasting behavior change.



by Howard Rankin

ARE YOU TIRED OF MAKING and then attacking New Year's resolutions full force, only to falter before January ends? You might fervently vow that *this* is the year you'll lose weight, spend more time with your family, get your finances under control, or start exercising three times a week, but nothing changes—except you feel defeated.

Real lifestyle change is *possible*, but just *saying* you're going to do better next year won't cut it. You *can* change behavior, but sheer willpower alone won't work. You need the *right strategy* to get rid of unhealthy and unproductive habits and behaviors; otherwise, you just set yourself up for failure.

Over 32 years, I've counseled many people who want to change the way they live. They are not content to drift along practicing the same old unfulfilling, unproductive (and sometimes self-destructive) behaviors. But whether they're looking to overcome an addiction, lose weight, or break destructive relationship patterns, they must first understand that *real change* takes more than willpower or wishful thinking.

I've identified *five keys to behavior change*:

Step 1. Stoke your motivation. You may think that you have failed if you can't muster the energy to go to the gym. But that's *normal*. Motivation isn't static—it ebbs and flows. You're super-motivated at the outset of a personal change effort, but a week later you've run out of steam. The key is to develop ways of keeping motivation at the forefront of your mind enough of the time to make a difference. Motivation is about emotion and passion—*why* you want to do something. You may set a goal to lose 20 pounds—but have nothing in place to drive that behavior. The question is, *why* do you want to lose 20 pounds? It's the *why* that will influence your actions. You might say, *I don't want to have a stroke when I'm 60 years old*, or, *I want to live long enough to see my grandchildren graduate from college*. Come up with a mantra that captures your *why*

(for example, 'Fit at 50, Free at 60') and visualize both what you *don't* want (you eating junk food and having a heart attack) and what you *do* want (you exercising and enjoying an outing with your family). Yes, it's okay to be negative! In most instances, it's a fear of loss and negative consequences that kick-starts motivation the hardest.

Step 2. Find a way to self-monitor. Most human behavior is done on autopilot—so if you want something to change, you'll have to *pay attention* to your behavior. Otherwise, by the time you realize you're going in the wrong direction, it'll be too late. The more you're aware of what you're doing, the more you can control it. So find ways of monitoring your behavior related to your resolution. You might write their behavior patterns, or talk into a recorder. Keeping a record helps you pay attention to what you're doing, and facilitates subsequent analysis that will help you understand what prompts your behavior, and any patterns it might fall into.

Since many people tend to self-monitor with diligence at first, become more lax, record *every* instance of a successful or unsuccessful behavior in the first week. Then, pick one day a week for self-monitoring.

Step 3. Hone your self-control skills. While willpower goes only so far, *self-control is a critical skill* when changing a behavior, and it *can* be developed. There are two broad approaches to managing temptation: 1) avoidance (not always possible); and 2) confront your temptation and develop a controlled way to deal with it. Visualization is valuable because it enables you to practice your self-control without being exposed to real-life dangers and pitfalls. Daily, imagine yourself successfully resisting difficult situations. Throw away or discard things that prompt your unhealthy behavior, such as a favorite junk food, alcohol, cigarettes. There's no shame in resisting temptation by any legal method you can—walk away, leave the premises.

Step 4. Identify and manage backsliding red flags. Your moods, outlooks,

and attitudes change often—and they play an important part in the decisions you make and the way you behave. You are more prone to make unhealthy decisions, give in to temptation, or “backslide” when you're tired, stressed, angry, or exposed to weak spots. Fortunately, knowledge is power. When you identify and anticipate things that typically cause you to slide into a self-destructive state, you're better able to handle them. If you know that something or someone will cause you to backslide, you can proactively practice visualization. To help you identify and manage self-destructive states, ask yourself what moods, physical states (e.g., pain, fatigue), people, places, and times of day are associated with self-destructive states. Then brainstorm how you can manage them, how you can avoid them, and who can help you handle them effectively.

Step 5. Examine the 'other people' factor. Since other people have a *huge* influence over your behavior, you'll have to factor in other people when going after your resolution-keeping goals. No matter what your preconceived opinions or decisions might be, your behavior will slowly change to reflect that of the people you spend time with. Avoid people who aren't acting the way you want to act and seek those who have the same health and life goals as you. I like support groups because they are effective agents of change. They give you helpful information, hold you accountable, and ensure you stay connected to your motivation. If you can't find a well-run weight loss support group or debt management support group in your area, tell family and friends exactly how they can help you.

Lifestyle change isn't a one-step fix—it's a constant process. Life is hard, and you need practice! If you're ready to do what it takes to make your resolutions last, start using these five keys to behavior change. They give you the tools you need to optimize your life. Think about how each step applies to you, and how you can hardwire it into your daily routine. Make time for yourself so that you can focus on your needs—ideally, you should have one hour of 'me time' every day. If you take one resolution at a time and build behavior change slowly, you'll be amazed at how much healthier your life is when it's time to celebrate the coming of 2012. Guaranteed! **PE**

Howard J. Rankin is creator of www.scienceofyou.com, president of the American Brain Association, a licensed clinical psychologist, author of The Five Secrets of Lifestyle Change, and coauthor with Todd Patkin of Finding Happiness. Visit www.scienceofyou.com.

ACTION: Make one lasting behavior change.



Power of Attraction

Create positive relationships.



by Barry Eisen

YOU MAY KNOW PEOPLE WHO can energize a room full of people by leaving—and others who light up a room by arriving. What's the difference? Those who *light your spirit* by simply arriving have a *positive mental attitude*—their behavior models the *possibility of yes*. Why do we respond to them?

Just as you work on automatic pilot, physiologically, you function on learned habits and feelings. The good news is that *you can change both by your decisions*. You already know what your *weakness* and *strength* feel like inside yourself.

- **Weakness.** You know what it means to feel fear and not want to make the call, do the presentation, or function from discipline. When you operate from the dark side (limitation or negativity), you become a weaker person.

- **Strength.** You also know what it is to feel the certainty that *yes, now's the time to perform and you're on your A-game*. You reflect *your own possibilities* and remind others of what's possible. You model hope, and best within you. You celebrate *the best of yourself, your highest self*.

You go where you look, and you look for heroes with whom to identify. Those who can listen without being judging, support without manipulating, lead to a worthy destination. They are comfortable, enjoyable, compelling, energizing. They engage *your best self*, and cause you to discipline yourself. Their security and confidence are based on *accomplishment*.

From Wanna-Be to Real Deal

How do you get from a *wanna-be* to the *real deal*? Here are *nine ideas*:

1. **Use the word yes more.** Open up to new experiences, people, ideas, music, art, literature, politics. See a broader picture. You'll experience a new passion! We love to be around passionate people.

2. **Set goals that stretch you.** Don't just *play it safe*. Attaining a goal is the byproduct of the growth you experience in its pursuit. *You can't solve a problem with the same mind that created it*. Change is stimulating. Set an example. Most people are attracted to *doers* not *talkers*.

3. **Read positive self-help books or autobiographies of successful people.** You can't benefit from a book you don't read. Tickle your brain with new concepts. Make yourself a problem solver.

4. **Consider what can be done.** Most

negative people don't think they're *negative*, but *realistic*. When you're being realistic or negative, ask yourself what *can* be done. It's easy (and lazy) to be a *nay-sayer*; show yourself what you *can* do.

5. **Surround yourself with supportive friends and associates.** Negativity is contagious. Choose carefully with whom you spend your time.

6. **Stay away from the news, morning and night.** Don't dwell on the bad news. If your name is not in obituaries, consider yourself blessed and go have a great day. Other people are attracted to those who have purpose and gratitude.

7. **Show you care.** *People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.* Make a strong first impression. Smile more, hold eye contact longer, and shake hands firmly. Become an *active listener* by asking interesting questions. Pay

attention to answers. Practice remembering the names and details of others.

8. **Interview and hire a coach, mentor, or trainer** who will give you honest feedback, ask the right questions, keep you accountable, and brainstorm with you to find options and opportunities.

9. **Create clear pictures.** Since *thoughts become things*, as you go to sleep and wake up, create clear pictures of yourself in social situations mingling in groups, one on one, meeting people and establishing relationships. Play the scenario over in your mind. See yourself attracting people to you like a magnet.

When you apply the *power of Intention to Attraction*, it's dramatically effective. **PE**

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ACTION: Gain the power of attraction.

SOCIAL • BRAND

Your Personal Brand

Avoid behaviors that damage it.



by Brenda Bence

BRANDS ARE POWERFUL. In fact, most people are so loyal to certain brands that they stick with them for life. If brand-name products can evoke such loyalty, why can't people? They can!

You have a personal brand. Simply by being yourself, others perceive, think, and feel about you in a certain way. The question is whether you have created the brand you want.

Your personal leadership brand (PLB) impacts your image, reputation, relationships, performance, career, and finances. So, unless you create your desired PLB consciously, negative perceptions can undermine your best efforts.

Here are *five mistakes* that can damage your personal brand:

1. **Not taking risks or accepting tough challenges.** It can be easy to rest on your laurels. When you have experience, you tend to stick with what you know has worked in the past rather than try something new. However, this keeps you in a static place, without the opportunity for growth. You need challenges.

2. **Not speaking up when you disagree with someone.** It's difficult to speak up to superiors. It's natural to worry about the reactions of a boss when you disagree with their decisions, but it also hurts your personal brand to hold back and keep opinions to yourself. If you're

diplomatic, your input will *usually* be appreciated—even if the decision stays the same. Offer ideas to solve problems or improve operations. You'll be respected for making your views known.

3. **Worrying about being liked, not respected.** A good leader is liked *and* respected. If you worry too much about *being liked*, you won't make the tough decisions to lead effectively. If you worry too much about *being respected* and don't care about *being liked*, you won't garner support. Others may even feel victimized by your leadership. The best PLB includes *being liked* and *being respected*.

4. **Fearing feedback, both giving and receiving.** Many people stop progressing because they aren't good at *coaching* or *being coached*. Practice coaching people and accepting regular feedback. Keep an open mind and recognize *there's always room to improve*. Strengthen your PLB by giving *and* receiving feedback.

5. **Using destructive language.** Even if it's intended as *funny*, destructive lan-

guage harms everyone. Speaking negatively and complaining present a poor PLB, and it can undermine success. If you don't believe in yourself or your people, how can they believe in themselves? If you are derided for past failures, you become so afraid of *making mistakes* that you stop moving forward. Notice how you speak. If talking negatively is a habit, you can break it and turn negatives into positives. To motivate others, create an inspiring PLB. **PE**

Brenda Bence, branding expert and coach, is author of How You Are Like Shampoo. www.BrendaBence.com

ACTION: Build your desired PLB.

Brainstorm Destiny

Choose a productive obsession.



by Eric Maisel

TO BE ETHICAL, ENGAGED, creative, successful, and lively, you need to use your brain. If you don't use your brain, you'll find yourself trapped in trivialities, condemned to impulsivity, led by anxiety, and duller and sadder than you need be in your daily life.

Indeed, the mind is a terrible thing to waste, and yet many people waste their brains. They allow themselves to worry endlessly, grow numb with distractions, be ruled by a perpetual to-do list, run from errand to chore to chore to errand—because they don't aim their brain in the direction of *rich and rewarding ideas*. Hence, they stay mired in a rat race, spending their neuronal capital on spinning hamster wheels when they could be brainstorming.

Our culture applauds this brain abdication. It needs you to care about the latest movie, gadget, sermon, and opportunity. Every aspect of our culture has something to sell you and needs to grab your attention. Marketers do not want you to think too strenuously about your budding symphony or scientific research and miss their sales pitch.

This antipathy to rich thinking occurs at home and school, among friends and mates. Parents tell you to clean your room—not to create your own cosmology myths. Teachers tell you to do homework, not to turn your brain over to a magnificent obsession. Friends ask you to shop, not to think; to play cards, not to think; to eat out, not to think; to see a movie or watch TV, not to think. Your wife doesn't say, "Honey, let's spend a few hours thinking!" Your husband doesn't ask, "What big ideas are you working on?"

The good news is that you can opt for brainstorming. The trick to creating an *authentic life* is taking charge of how you use your brain. It is your choice—to dumb down or smarten up. If you opt to smarten up by cultivating rich ideas with weight and worth, you'll get to *make meaning* in ways that few people experience. The person next to you may think that the epitome of brain powering is a sharp game of bridge or a rousing afternoon with a crossword

puzzle. You'll discover that real brain power is holding a rich idea over time as you productively obsess your novel into existence, build your remarkable business, or aid in the understanding of some profound scientific puzzle.

You learn to opt for brainstorming, for big thinking over time, and by doing so you fulfill your promise—and your promises to yourself. When an idea for a novel strikes you or a scientific problem grips you, it can turn into a brainstorm—if you let it.

A brainstorm is the full activation of your neuronal forces in support of an idea that you intend to cherish and elaborate, so powerful that it amounts to a productive obsession. You work on it in the mind, by thinking, and you



work on it in actuality, by actually writing, by actually running for office, by actually launching your business.

You are not guaranteed successful results. You might, for example, chew on a scientific puzzle for a decade or more and never solve it. Albert Einstein explained, "I think and think for months and years. Ninety-nine times the conclusion is false. The hundredth time I am right." Not even that hundredth time is guaranteed you. All that you are guaranteed from brainstorming is the *possibility of successes* that you'd never achieve if you'd avoided thinking—and pride from living up to your expectations for yourself. That's everything.

Thinking is destiny. Theologian Tryon Edwards noted: "Thoughts lead on to purposes; purposes go forth in actions; actions form habits; habits decide character; and character fixes our destiny." As you think, so you live. If you think about nothing, it would hardly be a surprise if you complained

about feeling empty and failed to rise to most occasions. If you keep your thinking as small as possible, you'll feel and act small. If you demand that your brain produce nothing but conventional thoughts, how can you be anything but conventional? If your idea of flexing your mind is to spin fantasies, play word games, second-guess your choices, or worry endlessly, I can picture your destiny. Can't you? How you use your mind determines who you are and how you lead your life?

I invite you to live up a storm—a brainstorm, or series of brainstorming, season after season, year after year. When you engage your mind with an enthralling idea, you scoot boredom out the door, make sense of your days, and live your reasons for being. When you bite into a juicy idea, your own chewing drowns out the world's chatter.

To make the meaning you intend to make, you must use more of your brain. So, opt for brainstorming. Their light illuminates the darkness, and their fire warms your heart. I promise you: your brain really wants to work—it would love to be more focused, engaged, and passionate; it would like to dream large and bite into what interests it.

You can train your brain to function at its best by creating and nurturing *productive obsessions*. You will find life more interesting, get more done, and feel alive. This does not suggest that you rev yourself up into a clinical mania, forget to pay the rent, cavalierly ignore your loved ones, or drive other good thoughts out of your brain. Don't give up everything to your productive obsessions—they should serve you, not rule you.

I suggest that you try your hand at productively obsessing for a month. Choose your productive obsession and really bite into it. One month is a fascinating amount of time to spend focusing on one idea. If you're productively obsessing, in a month you might create a business plan and begin to enact it or write enough songs for an album. By spending a month productively obsessing, you learn how to *extinguish distractions* so that you can concentrate, training yourself to work hard on your own behalf, and fully committing to your own loves and interests. Choose your productive obsession today and get ready for a thrilling brain ride! **PE**

Eric Maisel, Ph.D., is creativity coach and author of Brainstorm: Harnessing the Power of Productive Obsessions (New World Library), and Creativity for Life. Visit www.newworldlibrary.com or www.ericmaisel.com.

ACTION: Productively obsess this month.

Happy New Year!

Learn and apply 10 secrets.



by Todd Patkin

ARE YOU HAPPY? WHAT IS happiness, and how can you achieve it and sustain it?

We all long for happiness. We think we can achieve it by losing 10 pounds, kicking a bad habit, or making more money—so we vow to do such things. But *true happiness isn't about these things—it's about learning to love yourself* and celebrating all the things you do right.

Here are 10 things you can do:

1. Exercise regularly. Exercise keeps you healthy and helps you control your weight but it's also a natural antidepressant. Exercise has magical, mood-boosting powers. So, make exercise a part of your life. Even a 20-minute walk every day is great for your body and mind.

2. Be easier on yourself. Don't make resolutions just to beat yourself up. Self-improvement needs to come from a place of self-love and forgiveness for your mistakes and shortcomings. A mindset of *I'm never-good-enough or do enough* is antithetical to happiness.

3. Put your gifts and talents to work. If your job doesn't enable you to express your talents, find one that does. Playing to your strengths brings happiness. And when you combine those strengths with *doing good*, you receive double benefits.

4. Build rich relationships with loved ones. Is your relationship with spouse or kids on autopilot? Do you sit in front of the computer while they play or watch TV? *Start engaging with your family in meaningful ways.* Don't miss out on the joy they could bring you, and then *feel guilty.* Spend more time with them—doing what they want to be doing with you.

5. Celebrate your spouse. If your marriage is mired in negativity or characterized by bickering or tension, you'll never be happy. It takes only a few small daily efforts to dramatically change the tenor of your marriage. If you resent your spouse or feel chronically angry, only you can change that. Speak gently and kindly. Surprise her with a small gift, or do one of his chores. Random acts of kindness are powerful in marriage.

6. Let people you appreciate know it. Let family members, friends, and co-workers know how you feel about them. Include acquaintances: your barber, child's teacher, neighbors. Be generous with hugs. If you're not a hugger, try

sending thank-you notes. Express gratitude for what others do for you.

7. Forgive someone who has wronged you. Forgiveness is an act of *self-love*. To be happy, you must let go of pain, anger, and resentment. Negative emotions reverberate through your mind and body, setting up toxic thoughts, stress, and illness. Why feel miserable when the other person is *oblivious to your feelings*?

8. Become a giver. Happiness is not about how much you *make or get*—it's about how much you *share and give* of your money, time, and talent. So, find a way to share *your fortune* (not necessarily *your money*). You can find great joy in tutoring kids or delivering hot meals to the elderly. *Giving is no sacrifice* at all.

9. Find your faith. You might attend a place of worship, or read scripture. Have a personal connection to a Higher Power.

MENTAL • ATTITUDES

Limiting Attitudes

See out the blue open window.



by Gary Bate

HOW ARE YOU? WHAT ATTITUDE did you wake up with? What attitude is now ruling your day? I invite you to *pull the plug on your limiting attitudes.* Make up your mind to be all you can be—you owe it to yourself. Mow down limiting attitudes that are born from ignorance and unwittingly adopted by you.

Does your drive to maintain the *status quo* come from a fear of losing everything? Are you driven by your *self-created neediness*, or by your *greater know- ingness*? You only learn the truth about yourself when you let go of your insecurities and gaze into the future—through the *blue open window.*

How important is what you are doing now? Is your mind creating a future beyond your *current circumstance* and *past dramas*? Are you moving forward—or are you trying to hold onto your past? Where is your momentum?

Your mind creates your reality. Why would you not want to drink from a vast reservoir of incredible knowledge? What limiting attitudes hinder you?

I invite you to conceive a new potential. You don't need to do *what you habitually do*, if your repetitive behavior no longer serves you. *Choose to change.*

I invite you to join the spiritual warriors who look at themselves objectively. When others shy away, hide, and



You don't have to go to church, temple, or a mosque—but *you need to see God's work in your life and believe that God has a plan of happiness for you.* It will change your life—and the lives of others—by focusing your energy on the community.

10. Make 2011 a year of gratitude. Be more appreciative. *Grateful people are happier people.* Open your eyes to the blessings you have. When you're grateful for your family, you'll treat them better. When you're grateful for talents, you'll use them more. When you're grateful for your health, you'll work to maintain it.

Focus on a tip that resonates most with you. You have *all you need* to be happy. So, start living with an *attitude of gratitude.* PE

Todd Patkin is co-author (with Dr. Howard Rankin) of *Finding Happiness.* Visit www.toddpatkin.com.

ACTION: Discover happiness this year.

think they can keep their silly lives secret, you can be seeing a better future through the *blue open window.*

Do you think your life would be the way it is if you were viewing it through the *blue open window*? Of course not. Limited, unloving attitudes create the conditions in which you currently live.

You can only see what's in you when you decide to look at it. You don't need to look outside of yourself. Deal with your issues, and leave others to theirs. You may think that you are clever in your confined field and have all the answers, but when you move beyond your arrogance, you see that there is so much to learn. When you are held back

by your limiting attitudes, your energy sits *below your sternum.* When you are enlightened—when you can see the words *Give* and *Good* and *God* indelibly marked on all of your body's cells—your energy sits in your forehead.

Your attitudes are determined by *where your energy naturally sits* and by *your level of conscious decision-making.*

So, you have a clear choice: you can either remain *stuck where you are*, or *progress toward your potential* by going within yourself, being introspective, and knowing your deeper self. It is easier for you to be *the god that you are* than to be *the phantom personality* that you have "enjoyed" being much of your life. The masks you wear and the games you play are never-ending and self-serving. To perceive and achieve your potential, you must gaze through the *blue open window!* PE

Gary Bate is author of *We Are Here to Know Ourselves.* Visit www.whatstress.com.

ACTION: Pull the plug on limiting attitudes.

You Are What You Practice

You inevitably fall to the level of your training.



by Richard Strozzi-Heckler

TO GET GOOD AT SOMETHING, you need to practice. Expertise is hard earned. It isn't magic, a gift from the gods, good luck, or wishful thinking—it is practice. "We are what we repeatedly do," noted Aristotle.

Compare this notion with a recent ad that promotes weight loss by promising: "You don't have to change your life, you only have to take a pill." We live in a culture that sells the quick fix, instant gratification, and get it all right now. While we may sense the importance of practice when we tell our children to practice the piano, we're often swayed by the illusion that by simply stepping into the right car, dressing in the latest fashions, or dyeing our hair a certain color, our goals will be instantly attained.

The idea of committing to a practice to achieve mastery or personal fulfillment is not highly endorsed. When you are constantly fed a diet of fast, temporary relief, you find little incentive to consider practice as a way to positively take charge of your health, behaviors, relationships, attitudes, or success in life.

The notions we have of practice are through the realm of sports or the performing arts, where perhaps we've had some experience, or enough familiarity to know that it's required for success.

We know that athletes and performers practice, but what is invisible to us is how much they practice. They practice during the season, the off-season, and even while they're in a championship series or in a performance cycle. Larry Byrd, the all-star player for the Boston Celtics, would faithfully go to the arena two hours before every game to practice his shots alone. Michael Jordan, at the top of his game, would be the first at practice and one of the last to leave.

Athletes practice three times as much as they play, and the ratio is even higher for performing artists. If we heard a baseball player say, "I'm not going to batting practice anymore" or a heart surgeon say "I don't need to practice my craft anymore," it would sound preposterous.

If you want to introduce new behaviors in your life, you can't count on will and discipline to make them happen; to become more effective, you need to practice. And to achieve mastery, you'll

need to go beyond your comfort zone. Researchers say that 300 repetitions produce *body memory*—the ability to enact the correct movement, technique, or conversation by memory—and 3,000 repetitions creates *embodiment*—not having to think about doing the activity, as it is simply part of who you are.

You'll engage in practice if you are passionate about what you're practicing, and you are passionate about the practice if it's relevant to the life you want to create.

You are what you practice. When you're under pressure, stress, conflict, or transition, you'll inevitably fall to the level of your training and rarely, if ever, rise to your level of expectation. So, choose your practices wisely—and engage in them with conscious intent to build desired skills and character virtues. It is possible to strengthen the



muscle of bicep, and it's equally possible to train the muscles of integrity, confidence, collaboration, courage, and empathy. You can build muscles in every dimension of your life, including the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—if you will practice and go beyond your comfort zone.

Come to terms with the fact that you are always practicing. Your body is incapable of not practicing—and what you practice you become. Your biology is organized to take in stimulus from the environment, and then shape yourself to cope effectively with that stimulus. The next time you're walking down the street, notice the expressions on people's faces and the way they hold their bodies. Notice the down turned mouths, the hunched shoulders, the scowls, grimaces, and even the rare few whose faces reflect joy and a positive attitude toward life and ask yourself, what have they been practicing? The way you comport yourselves is a direct reflection of what you practice.

Because we rarely think about the fact that we change through practices, we live in hope and fantasy about people and cultures changing by simply being introduced to a new idea. The consequences of this can be a downward spiral of frustration, resignation, and despair. When the learning paradigm is that teachers talk, students listen, and knowledge is in books, we shouldn't be surprised when our expectations fall short when we're asked to take on new roles without proper practice. We must commit to practices that enable us to embody new ways of being and acting.

I find it useful to distinguish between reflexes, habits, routines, practices, and generative ontological practices.

- A reflex is an involuntary, physiological response to a stimulus. A reflex is hard-wired in your nervous system. Reflexes come with the package. There is no choice, training, or practice required for the reflex to be engaged.

- A habit or routine is the outcome of training in certain practices. A habit is a behavior that is regular, repetitive, and unconscious. A routine is the way a set of tasks is arranged that is repetitive and unvarying. Routines are also embodied and connote an unreflective behavior that lacks the element of choice. Like habits, routines are often inherited or unconsciously adopted. Without conscious intent, you embody habits and routines that are present in your behaviors but remain in the background of your awareness. Habits may be useful or harmful, but in either case they become so much a part of you that you don't live with them as if you are making a choice.

- In contrast, a practice is a conscious choice we make to train ourselves so we will behave and act in a particular way so that it becomes embodied, or part of who we are. To choose a practice is to have a narrative why you're committing to this practice. For example, you may choose not to eat anything or drink alcohol three hours before going to bed because you will sleep more soundly or lose weight. You may choose a practice of saving money every month as a way to prepare for a child's college education.

- A generative, or ontological practice is a conscious choice to embody a behavior that you can use in any situation. It is a commitment to a way of being. It is life-affirming, creative, and produces a reality by how you orient to your situation. In this case you are the practice. It is not something you do but who you are and what it makes you. PE

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ACTION: Practice what you want to be.

Be the Hero

Tell positive stories.



by Noah Blumenthal

HA VE YOU EVER HEARD THAT *the only thing you can control is your attitude*? I disagree. I'm lousy at controlling my attitude. When I'm angry and someone tells me to *cheer up*, I can't do it. But I can control the one thing that most influences my attitude—my stories.

It's hard to be happy, focused, or energized when you are thinking how your life stinks. When your stories are negative, critical and harsh, your attitudes follow. Fortunately, your attitudes also follow when your stories are forgiving, open-minded, and optimistic.

You sabotage yourself whenever you slip into the role of victim. You might wallow in frustrations over *opportunistic colleagues or an unfair world*. In worst case scenarios, you self-destruct before you realize the negative impact of your stories. For example, if you are passed up for a promotion, you might feel angry and focus on *the worst elements* of your situation. Your stories are one-sided—and you play the role of victim in them.

When you look at other elements of your situation, you might feel remarkably good about where you are.

Once you turn your stories around, your approach to your situation will change. You create a plan to better position yourself for future opportunities and to forge relationships to strengthen your influence. You go from telling yourself a story that your situation is lousy to a story in which you have much to be thankful for and many options.

When your stories become positive, you feel grateful for opportunities. You give people the benefit of the doubt. Instead of getting mired in anger, you respond positively to the people around you and to the challenges of your life.

When you tell negative stories, you are quicker to anger. People around you become the enemy. Your negative stories sap your energy and limit your ability to cope. You interpret events from this dour perspective: *Why does this always happen to me?* This perspective shapes your attitude and emotions.

You tell stories about three subjects—other people, your situation, and yourself. These stories can either make you into a victim or a hero. *Victim stories* make people out to be selfish, inconsiderate,

and unfair. When you are the victim of others, *they are jerks; you are an innocent bystander.* *Negative stories* have the theme: *woe is me.* In them, you tell yourself that *you have no options: I can't change my boss, family or job so there's no reason to try. There's nothing for me to do.* You see the worst in everything and everybody. Things are *hopeless*; and you don't believe any actions will make a difference.

Your stories shape both your happiness and success. When you tell positive and optimistic stories, you relate better to others, form stronger relationships, and have more energy to perform your work, take risks, and support people. Positive stories give you hope, enabling you to see possibilities and to be more innovative; even when challenges arise you're better prepared to find solutions.

The antidote to negative stories is to

make yourself the hero of your story. The hero sees and acts differently. The hero has empathy for other people, sees their pain, and knows that *most people truly want to do a good job and to be good people.*

The hero draws inspiration from the best elements in his world without being dragged down by the worst. As a hero, you became grateful instead of frustrated, enthusiastic instead of critical. *Once you feel better about the people around you and your situation, you take positive action.* There's little difference in the circumstances faced by the hero and victim. The big difference is in their stories. So change your story, and ask, *What would the hero see and do in my situation?* **PE**

Noah Blumenthal is President, Leading Principles, and author, *Be the Hero, You're Addicted to You.* Call 516-352-2744 or visit www.leadingprinciples.com.

ACTION: Play the role of hero in your stories.

PHYSICAL • COURAGE

Exercise Courage Overcome any obstacle.



by Sandra Ford Walston

WHEN YOU FACE DIMIN-
ishing opportunities,
obstacles seem larger than life.

But when you tap into your personal courage, you can overcome uncertainty, intimidation, denial, apathy, and doubt.

In history, we find people who overcame obstacles that make our hardships *pale by comparison.* Can you learn how to overcome obstacles? I attest: *You have the courage within you to overcome any obstacle that holds you back.*

Courage is vital in today's climate of fear. By recognizing, developing and wielding *the power of personal courage,* you can realize higher job satisfaction, earn rapid advancement, develop stronger interpersonal skills, experience personal fulfillment, and *transcend the limitations of any situation.*

Stepping up in courage requires you to step deeper into yourself. Only by delving beneath the shallow thought patterns and melodramas of the ego-personality can you discover your true identity, thus nurturing your courage and empowering you to take specific *courage actions* to overcome obstacles.

The word *courage* is derived from the Old French word *corage*, meaning *heart and spirit.* In other words, *courage is an innate quality that resides within the core of every human being.* Courage is the ultimate source of personal empower-

ment, happiness, job satisfaction and social advancement. So, recognize the courage that you possess in your heart and spirit. Courageous action represents the honest expression of your innermost self, your heart and spirit.

You simply need to identify your personal obstacles, and begin to practice the matching courage action skills that empower you to overcome your obstacles. You also might identify a person who exemplifies the courage action that you need to *overcome your obstacle.*

Recognizing your courage and acting in courage are not so much about *what you are doing* as *who you are being!* Don't ever sell your soul or swallow

your voice for a piece of business, even if it looks like *the big one!* The courage that supports effective leadership is not *bravado* or *physical courage* but the day-to-day courage that's seen in everything from speaking up in a meeting to overcoming an obstacle that hinders your

advancement. These instances often create *the defining moments* of your life.

You need courage daily to explore new ideas, confront gossip, transition to a new career, transcend rejection, or take the initiative to spearhead change. You can be a courageous leader regardless of your position! *How you confront issues speaks volumes about your courage.*

Acting with courage is about acting from your heart and spirit to overcome obstacles and personal limitations. **PE**

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ACTION: Exercise courage daily.

Wealth or Character

Why all the weirdness about money?



by Lisa Earle McLeod

WE ARE ALL WEIRD ABOUT money. We want it. But nobody wants to talk about it. Sometimes—like on a date or at a class reunion—we pretend like we have money, when we don't. Other times—like when we see a homeless person or our kids whine for designer jeans—we might pretend we don't have any money, when in fact we do.

I come from a long line of money weirdness. My parents fought about money. But they told us that it was rude to talk about money. My grandfather was so weird about money that he changed out all the light bulbs in his house to 15-watt bulbs. He had money when he died. But I don't think he enjoyed it much after he passed away.

A Marist Institute poll reveals that over 55 percent of Americans *always* or *sometimes* worry about money. So all those times when we could be enjoying our family, improving our performance at work, watching a funny movie or walking in the park, there's a running commentary in our head fretting and worrying about next month's VISA bill.

One reason so many people are so stressed out about money is that *they owe more than they make*. As a person who once grossly overpaid for a business and went deeply into debt to finance it, I can't take the moral high ground on this one. I know what it feels like to lie awake at night with your heart pounding, worrying about how you're going to cover your expenses.

We act like money is only one part of our lives. But when your financial life is a mess, it overshadows everything else. It's hard to be a fully present parent, spouse or employee when you're preoccupied by how much you owe VISA.

Like it or not, money affects every area of your life—your job, relationships, health, and even your spirituality. Because when you're worried about money, it chips away at your soul.

If you're in a bad money situation, there are basically two solutions: earn more, or spend less. If you can do both at the same time, you'll fix your situation even faster. It's an obvious solution; yet, time and time again, we're drawn into believing that we can improve our

life with stuff; we confuse needs with wants, and there we are again, staring down a big stack of bills, finding ourselves with more month than money.

If I've learned one thing through the ups and downs of a business disaster, it's this: You can't fix a problem you won't talk about. The only effective way to start solving a money problem is with a pencil, paper, a calculator and an unflinchingly honest conversation with all the parties involved.

Because if we're honest, we already know that spending less than you make is the only way to get ahead. We also know that creating a family budget will keep you on track, and that you have to plan for your financial future rather than let it just happen. We know it; I just wonder why we don't do it? As I said, *we're weird about money*.



Character and Competition

What's more important—to be the best and win? Or to be humble, and put yourself in the service of others?

Year ago, businesses looked for someone of *good character* when they were hiring. Parents stressed moral values, and literature was filled with stories of honor and integrity. Then at some point, the pendulum swung, and our culture began to emphasize winning over ethics. Character and compassion took a back seat to accomplishment and achievement. Humility and caring were something you talked about at church, if at all.

Yet one need look no further than our current economic situation to see that when super smart, highly skilled people lack high moral character, they wreak absolute havoc on the rest of us.

So where did we go wrong? As a product of the women's movement, I was raised with the *Go Girl* message: "You can do anything. Don't be afraid

of competition. It's OK to stand out."

Yet when I go back and read the letters Rose Kennedy wrote to her children, the lessons Laura Ingalls Wilder learned from her parents, and the values Louisa May Alcott explores in *Little Women*, I see a clear theme of character, of service, honesty, humility and compassion.

It's no coincidence that the young women who absorbed these lessons went on to accomplish great things. They're the same character traits at the center of most great men's lives.

I don't want to go back a time when women were *supposed to be subservient*. Or when children were seen and not heard. Or when people were expected to submit to authority no matter what the circumstances. But I think we threw out the baby with the bath water.

People used to say they wanted to raise *children of good character*. Now parents are more likely to say they want to raise children who are successful and happy. It's a subtle but a very important, and detrimental, shift.

In our quest to win, we forgot that being the best isn't just about being the smartest, fastest, or the most skilled—it's also about having the character to make difficult decisions during times of struggle. It's not about trying to balance inner morality with outer accomplishments—it's about maximizing both.

To those who suggest that we have to choose between being competitive and being of good character, I say, bunk.

Imagine you're hiring someone for a key position. The choice comes down to two people. Both are super smart and super skilled. One tells you that they make decisions based on what's best for the bottom line. The other tells you they run all their decisions through the character lessons they learned from their depression-era grandfather.

Who would you rather have handling your payroll or computer system? Who do you think will attract higher quality employees? Whom would your customer want you to hire? The belief that competition and character are in conflict is a myth perpetuated by people who prefer shortcuts over hard work.

As a parent, I assure you that I expect my daughters to succeed—and to be kind, loving, honest, humble, and gracious. It's a tall order. But we can combine ethics and achievement. *Character* isn't something you abandon in order to win. *Character is your competitive advantage!* PE

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ACTION: Cultivate character in your quest for wealth.

Mental Zip Code

Relocate to a new one.



by Simon T. Bailey

IT WAS A WARM SUMMER DAY when a woman heard a knock at the door. It was a startling continuous knock. The woman scurried to put on her robe and slippers as she made haste to see who had disturbed her peaceful sleep. She peeked out the curtain to see what looked like a delivery truck, but she wasn't certain. She opened the door and there stood a man who said "Hello, I am Mr. Recession and I have come to repossess your uncommon hope, your unfulfilled dreams, and your unrealized future."

The woman, without breaking a sweat or making the slightest flinch, said "I'm sorry, but you have the wrong address. I'm a house sitter. The people who lived here moved to a new neighborhood and have a new zip code."

Mr. Recession was visibly flustered by this response.

We are living in a time when Mr. Recession is knocking at everyone's door, perhaps even yours. He is traveling throughout the land seeking those who are at the brink, who are on the edge of the cliff, and have raised the flag in surrender. He exists to sift you as wheat and siphon off every ounce of positivity that may exist.

In the midst of this world war against your mind and your money, you must stand up and protect one very important asset. This possession is more valuable than your home, car, and 401k retirement plan. Don't let Mr. Recession repossess it. This asset has been around since the beginning of civilization. This asset has made you who are today and will be what helps you break free.

This asset is your confidence. Richard Nixon said: "Recessions happen when people lose confidence in the future." As I travel, I observe that many people have decided to stay in their zip code of fear. You may need to go to the post office of life and submit a change of address: *I have decided to relocate my mind, relocate my spirit, and relocate my future, because this zip code no longer works for me.*

A zip code locates you, but doesn't define you. It's time to discover life beyond your zip code. There is a brand new world that is waiting for you to think your way into it. When the recession comes knocking at your door, it will see a sign hanging on the door

"Relocated Permanently". Some would wonder why it's a permanent relocation; well, I don't plan on returning to this old neighborhood. I've gone fishing—fishing for a new life, a new opportunity, a fresh start, a new relationship, a new job or better yet *same job, different mind.*

Here are *five ways to relocate* to a new zip code:

1. Change what you read daily. What you read feeds your brain. Your input because it will determine your output.

2. In your journal, write down how you envision your ideal life instead of your current reality. Once you know the life that you really want, determine ways to close the gap. You may need to invest in a coach, class, or schedule some time with your mentors to really get a handle on creating the life you want instead of the one you now have.

3. Take time and meditate. Quiet the mind by taking 5 to 15 minutes every day to relax and imagine the day.

4. *Find someone who is living in the new mental zip code you desire to live in.* Ask them how they made the shift and what you can do to make it as well.

5. *Everyday put one foot in front of the other and move toward your inner vision.* If you think you have to accomplish everything at one time, give yourself a break. *Stay the course and develop a consistency* in the direction you seek to go.

You've been *confined* by your zip code long enough. Get ready to have a moving party, my friend, because you are relocating to a new way of living. PE

Simon T. Bailey is CEO of the Brilliance Institute. Visit www.simontbailey.com.

ACTION: Change your mental zip code.

FINANCIAL • RESOLUTIONS

Money Resolutions Boost your financial health.



by Louis Scatigna

THIS YEAR, after two years of recession and slow recovery, make some solid resolutions to change some old habits.

You may think that your financial woes revolve around *not earning enough money* to make ends meet, but you can improve your financial health, *even without making more money*, by taking five tips:

1. **Calculate your net worth.**

Your *net worth* tells you how financially healthy you are now. Take a piece of paper and make two columns. On the left side, list the value of all your assets; on the right side, list the balances of all your loans and debts. Now, subtract your total debts from the total value of your assets and you arrive at your net worth, the money you'd have if you liquidated all your assets and paid off all your debts. Grow your net worth each and every year.

2. **Prepare a budget.** Take another piece of paper, and make two columns, one for monthly expenses and one for annual expenses. On top of the page, list all your sources of income (wages, interest, dividends, odd jobs). Total all your income. Now list every expense as accurately as you can. Keep track of your cash expenditures. Spend one month writing down every penny you spend. Now, total all your expenses, then subtract your expenses from your



income. If you're in the hole, it's time to *reduce your spending*. If you're ahead, you now know how much you might save every month. Most families can cut 5 to 10 percent of their monthly expenses without too much trouble.

3. **Manage the money together.** If you're married, it's imperative that you manage the money as a couple. In most families either the husband or the wife handles the monthly bills, often leading to miscommunication and overspending. Sit down together and pay the bills and discuss with each other how you can reduce expenses. Review bills for accuracy and resolve to pay down the balances as fast as possible. Review each investment statement for performance and risk. Doing it together ensures *fewer crises and more savings.*

4. **Learn more about money.** Most people know little about finances, so they make costly mistakes. You can access many websites to learn the basics about investing, buying cars and homes, insurance, the different types of mortgages, and credit cards. Knowledge is power, especially when it comes to your money.

5. **Be financially responsible.** What do you *really need*? What do you *really want*? These days, it's difficult to have both, so you need to determine *what you can do without*. Do you need to eat out *every day* or have 20 HBO channels?

You now live in frugal times; so, adjust your behavior in order to survive and become financially healthy. PE

Louis Scatigna is a CFP, talk show host and author of *The Financial Physician*. www.thefinancialphysician.com

ACTION: Improve your financial health this year.

Seven Fears of Dying

How to address them in giving care.



by Donna Authers

THE PROSPECT OF DYING CAN be frightening; in fact, for some, death might even be the most daunting thing we'll face. As we take our final walks, our physical and emotional realities rapidly change, and we might wonder or worry about what awaits us. For these reasons, one of the greatest services you can offer is identifying *the fears* a dying loved one has and alleviating them.

I lived in fear of death from childhood well into my adult life, the result of several tragic losses in my family. That fear was broken by my grandmother's faith, which marked my calling as a caregiver to others near death. Since then, I've tried to bring hope and healing to hurting people. I've been invited into the homes of many families learning to accept death and accompanied them through the grieving process.

No matter how strong a support network your loved ones enjoy, their fears about dying may linger. So, make sure that they don't remain unspoken. By being sensitive to their desires and fears, you can help ensure that they are not frightened or burdened by stress and anxiety, and die in peace.

When you face the reality of your mortality, you see that *fear has many faces*. Acquaint yourself with the most common fears your loved ones are likely to have so you can recognize and address them. Also, learn what to expect as death draws near—the behavioral and physical changes that typically occur after a terminal diagnosis, up to the moment of death. Knowing what to expect and what to do when the time comes will help you prepare and focus on the job at hand—addressing the fears your loved one has.

Talking about your loved one's impending death and helping him confront his fears are difficult, emotional tasks. Resist the temptation to sweep these issues under the rug. Easing *the seven fears of dying* will bring the fullest measure of peace and closure.

Fear 1. The process of dying: *Will death be painful? How will I get through this?* You can dispel this fear by ensuring your loved one knows that he'll likely experience little or no pain—if he

takes advantage of hospice services. They are experts in pain management. Staff members are trained to interpret what patients need using verbal and nonverbal cues, and can discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each option.

Fear 2: Loss of control: *Must I give up independence? Can I cope with being dependent on others?* You can dispel this fear by encouraging your loved one to live a normal lifestyle for as long as possible—a life-threatening or terminal diagnosis does not change who the person *fundamentally* is. When it becomes clear that the patient will need to accept care from others, arrange for her to meet and get to know her caregivers in advance, especially if medical professionals are involved. When the time



comes, this will give her the sense of being cared for by acquaintances, even friends—not strangers.

Fear 3: Loss of loved ones: *What will happen to them? How will they manage without me?* You can dispel this fear by openly discussing with your loved one how all the practical details will be handled and reassuring him that you and others will be okay. When children or dependent adults are involved, help your loved one formulate a *plan for their future care*—giving a gift of peace.

Fear 4: Others' reactions: *What if I see fear in the eyes of others? How do I respond to differences in their nonverbal communication and body language?* It's natural to feel fear and sadness when faced with the loss of a loved one, but after the initial shock has worn off, you can dispel this fear by behaving normally. Remember, it's not about you. Ensure that all caregivers are getting enough sleep, exercise, and emotional support, since the strain of not receiving them is evident in both appearance and demeanor. Lastly, ensure that all

caregivers and visitors are told in advance of any physical changes in your loved one. This way, displays of shock or fear can be avoided.

Fear 5: Isolation: *What if my visits with healthcare professionals and friends decrease? Will I die alone?* You can dispel this fear by ensuring that regular visits with close friends, family members, and other volunteers are scheduled, especially if medical appointments have decreased because a cure is no longer possible. If you don't live near your loved one or can't commit to frequent visits for other reasons, consider taking advantage of hospice care, private nurses, paid companions, or church ministries. End-of-life care and socialization from these resources can increase quality of life.

Fear 6. The unknown: *What can I expect? Will there be life after death?* Addressing this concern has physical, emotional, and spiritual implications. Everybody wants to have hope at a time like this. Even if your loved one is not *religious*, consider asking a priest, rabbi, minister, or pastor to speak with the patient—to offer a gift of peace, regardless of past doubts and skepticism. Even believers often need reassurance as well.

Fear 7: My life will have been meaningless: *What did I achieve during my life? Did I have a positive impact on the world?* You can dispel this fear by telling them that they are valued and that they won't be forgotten. Tell her how much you love her, and remind her of all the good she brought to your life. Reassure her that her life had purpose and meaning, and encourage others to do the same, either in person or through cards and letters. Also, go through photo albums, share memories, and absorb life lessons from your loved one.

It's natural to fear *the unknown and circumstances beyond your control*, but try not to let those fears rob you and your loved one of your last weeks and days together. If you are ready, willing, and able to help someone enjoy life to the end and be with her as she prepares to leave this world, *you learn so much about how to live*. Providing any emotional, spiritual, or practical support will result in *receiving so much more than you give*. By making your loved one's final days relaxing, affirming, and reassuring, you'll have no regrets, and create priceless memories to cherish. Above all, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you provided a service of inestimable, eternal value. PE

Donna Authers is a teacher, trainer, caregiver, speaker, and author of *A Sacred Walk: Dispelling the Fear of Death* (A&A Publishing). Visit www.asacredwalk.com.

ACTION: *Serve as a caregiver to someone near death.*

Just Say 'No'

Get your priorities straight.



by Abby Marks Beale

IT'S EASY TO SAY YES—YES TO a piece of chocolate, *yes* to a colleague who asks you for a favor, *yes* to taking your grandmother to the doctor, *yes* to helping sell Girl Scout cookies. Saying *yes* can make you look and feel good, but this pleasure fades fast if you take on too much.

Too many pleasing *yes*'s to people's requests mean more depriving *no*'s for you. *No*, I can't go to the gym—I have to go shopping instead. *No*, I can't take a day off—I have to work on a project. *No*, I can't go to the beach—I have to clean my house. *No*, I can't go to sleep yet—I have one more thing to do!

Saying *No* doesn't have to mean you have to do without. Instead, you are choosing *freedom and enrichment*, such as "No, I can't help with the project now. I would over-extend myself," or "No, I can't come today because I'd like to go to my friend's 50th birthday bash", or "No, I'm not going to check my email constantly because it stresses me out." I prefer the *No*'s that give me the freedom to say *yes* to life enrichment.

You may feel guilt when the things you've agreed to do seem so daunting and time-consuming that you can't do the things that matter most to you. You become stressed and unhappy. Perhaps you feel guilty because you believe that you should be able to *do it all*. That myth comes crashing down somewhere between preparing for the next day's business meeting, making calls for the church bazaar and baking cupcakes for your child's birthday party (reasons why you are so sleep-deprived). These activities are important, but you need not do them all at the same time. The stress can take months off your life.

So how can you help reduce your stress and get more pleasure out of life? **Learn to say No!** *No* to things that just don't fit with who you are and what you want to do in this life, *No* to things that aren't important to you; *No* to things that take up too much of your time with little mental, spiritual or physical reward; and *No* to all things that you just don't feel right taking on.

Yes, it may be difficult to start saying *No*. At first you might be afraid to say *no*, worrying about what others might think. It may be hard to say *no* to the

Girl Scouts, but if you need that time to visit your ailing grandmother, you'll be happier saying *yes* to your grandma.

How can you say *No* to your boss? How can you tell him that you can't do a project because you have too many other things to do and don't have time for it. Try letting the boss tell you what you can't do. Show them all the work you have and let them decide which thing they don't want you to do. Then they are saying *no*, not you. In the end, it's you who is responsible for how you spend your time and stress level.

So how do you evaluate what to say *No* to? I suggest that you **spend more of your time on things that truly matter to you, not to others**. It doesn't mean

you don't ever do things you don't want to do; it means you become mindful of what you choose to do and be happier with the decisions you make.

It's rare that I've regretted saying *no*, but I've often dreaded saying *yes*. **Use the power of NO to get your priorities straight.** You'll be relieved!

There is an imbalance between causes and results, between effort and reward. If you often feel overwhelmed by conflicting demands or the number of tasks, focus on the 20 percent of your activities that will make the difference. This puts you in control of your life. **PE**

Abby Marks Beale is a corporate productivity expert. Visit www.TheCorporateEducator.com.

ACTION: Say *yes* to what matters most to you.

SERVICE • OPTIMISM

Be Optimistic

See through the cracks.



by Jane Bernhardt

SOMETHING BIG IS HAPPENING—earthquakes, floods, climate change and economic upheaval. Some say *the sky is falling*. But I hold a different view. Thanks to visionary friends and enlightened communities, I'm seeing beyond the collapse and into the light.

Think of a snake shedding its skin.

Better yet, think of the caterpillar breaking down inside its chrysalis and this whole new creature emerging that's otherworldly, with flight and color and gossamer wings. Sometimes it takes a crisis to awaken the best in us.

Here's what I'm seeing: out of scandals about pesticides, bioengineering and the vast expense of transporting food worldwide, I'm seeing local farmers' markets and organic, sustainable agriculture. Out of the cost of fossil fuel in terms of wars and toxic spills, I'm seeing a rise in support for local businesses and green energy technologies. In view of the toll of runaway cowboy economics, I'm noticing an *awakening sanity* from the consumer addiction to *more*—and that's not a bad thing. Some folks are looking at handmade, fair-trade items, or third-world donations as alternative holiday gifts.

Again, sometimes it takes a crisis to awaken the best in us. A crippling housing slump is awakening care for our friends and neighbors on a new level. Co-housing communities with shared

gardens and industry are springing up. Friends are moving in together. The insular nuclear family model makes less sense with the cost of fuel and housing—and the cost of human loneliness and need for community. Who knows: The vast expense and tragic human cost of warfare may lead us at last to resort to saner solutions for equitable co-habitation on this precious planet.

The crisis of a broken health care system seems to be refocusing our attention on quality and even meaning of life. We're forced to question the obsessive fear of death that's led to budget-breaking efforts to extend human life beyond any sense of quality.

Here I'm seeing the wings of the butterfly peeking out—hospice:

Tender help in the inevitable passage out of this life with attention to the emotional and spiritual needs of the one navigating this great journey. It isn't new, but we may be ready at last to receive its gifts. Hospice workers, family members, friends of those

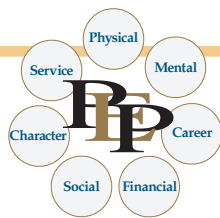
engaged in "passing on" are seeing—in the midst of sorrow—signs of new life beneath this shedding skin. *Something very exciting is happening here.*

Don't take my word for it: look for the signs yourself—the joy of a local farmers' market; the creativity of innovative alternative energy sources; expanding family units and communities; and sweet attention to the passage of death and what lies beyond.

Call me an optimist, but I'm sure that the upside of collapse and brokenness is this: the light is shining through the cracks. The butterfly's on its way! **PE**

Jane Smith Bernhardt is an artist, performer, writer, graduate of the Guild for Spiritual Guidance, and author of *We Are Here*. Visit www.janebernhardt.com.

ACTION: Serve others with optimism.



GOAL GETTERS



Communicate in a way that resonates with your audience. It is easy to communicate, but hard to be heard. Today we are overwhelmed with messages. They constantly bombard us—trying to lure us to acquire and consume information. Social media allows for constant communication, but *easy communication* doesn't necessarily translate to messages that are received, understood, and capable of driving action.

The best way to connect and create change is to make in-person presentations communicated with clarity and passion. Great presentations are like magic, but crafting and delivering a message that resonates with an audience means committing time, energy and discipline to the process.

To make a strong connection with your audience and lead them to purposeful action, you need to present in a way that truly resonates. If people can easily recall, repeat, and transfer your message, you did a great job conveying it. To achieve this, you should have a handful of succinct, clear, and repeatable sound bites planted in your presentation that people can easily remember. The right sound bite can create a *Something They'll Always Remember* (STAR) moment.

Here are a few tips:

- **Create crisp messages.** When one sound bite is sent to your followers, it might be re-sent by them over 100,000 times.
- **Craft a rally cry.** Your rally cry will be a small, repeatable phrase for promoting your idea.
- **Coordinate key phrases with the same language in your press materials.** This ensures that the press will pick up the right sound bites. Have a 15- to 30-second message that is so salient it's obvious.
- **Use catchy words.** Craft a message with catchy words. Astronaut Neil Armstrong used the time between his moon landing and first step to craft his historic statement.
- **Make them remember.** Ensure the audience remembers your message by repeating the phrase more than once, punctuating it

with a pause and projecting the words on a slide so they receive the message visually as well.

- **Imitate a famous phrase.** An imitation of the *Golden Rule* might be *Never give a presentation you wouldn't want to sit through yourself.*

When you communicate your ideas effectively, people follow and change. Words that are carefully framed and spoken are *the most powerful means of communication.*

—Nancy Duarte, www.duarte.com



How can you impress, involve, and inspire your audience? First,

realize that *they want you to succeed.* They want to be *impressed, involved, and inspired.* Hence, you need to be *natural, prepared, and enthusiastic.*

- **Be natural.** Honor who you are: your gender, age, experience, sense of humor, wisdom, vocabulary—all the things that make you unique. *Being natural* beats *being phony* every time. When you come across as being natural and real, the audience relaxes and listens to you and your ideas. Trust levels rise. Instead of concentrating your thoughts on how nervous you feel, review your positive attributes. *Positive self talk creates positive talk.*

- **Be prepared.** Until you reach your personal comfort zone, you are not ready to speak. It takes time and effort to get into that zone, but it's worth it. It takes one hour per minute of prep time to be on top of your speech—*20 hours for a 20-minute speech!* When you are well prepared, your presentation flows, and the audience feels involved and inspired as well.

- **Be enthusiastic.** *Enthusiasm is contagious!* When you have it, the audience feels the energy and joins the conversation. Enthusiasm can only come as a result of being natural and prepared. Enthusiasm means that you are totally present with the audience, you're happy to be there, and it's obvious to all. That's a great place to be. It makes speaking fun for you, and your audience appreciates your effort.

—Dorothy Lynn and Jessica Selasky, www.confidencebuilders.com

PersonalCOACH



Get Hired

Grab attention.
by Jim Kukral

TODAY'S JOB MARKET IS COMPETITIVE. If you've been on interview after interview but keep losing out, re-think your strategy.

The search techniques of yesterday—send out résumés, search the want ads, and wait for a job to fall in your lap—don't work. You need *the courage to put yourself out there* and *grab the attention* of employers. You need to stand out, get noticed, and *prove to them that you want the job more than everyone else.*

Here are *five creative ways* to use the web and social media to land that new job:

1. **Ramp up your résumé.** Employers have piles of résumés to look through—so you need to stand out. For example, if you find out that the hiring manager loves donuts, have a box of donuts delivered to her office. Put a picture of you on it and a reason why you're perfect for the job. Be the person who does something to stand out.

2. **Try Facebook advertising.** Facebook is a great way to network. Many companies have Facebook pages that enable you to make contact with them. And using Facebook's ad service, you can *create your own ad*—including your skills and qualifications and what job you are looking for—and then target it to companies where you want to work.

3. **Get personal.** Before an interview, learn all you can about the people who'll make the hiring decision. Look them up on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter; learn their interests to know what may impress or annoy them. In the interview, try to connect—be friendly, honest, and open. The more personal the connection, *the more they like you as a person,* the better chance you have at being chosen.

4. **Use YouTube to your advantage.** YouTube is a cheap and easy way for you to show off your skills. You can use a video to follow up and say thanks, or send the *potential employer* something you put together that displays your creativity or a skill that sets you apart. Send a link to your video via email to the people who interviewed you. With a little investment, you can make a great impression.

5. **Think outside the box—and then go one step further.** Advertise yourself in unexpected places, step out of your comfort zone, and invest a little money to see some results! Don't limit yourself by thinking something is *too outrageous* or *unexpected.* Try unique strategies to make your search *fun—and fruitful.* PE

Jim Kukral is author of *Attention!* (Wiley). Visit www.attentionthebook.com or www.JimKukral.com.

ACTION: Set yourself apart.

Temple of Joy

Taste the fruit of faith.



by Alan Cohen

RECENTLY MADE A PILGRIMAGE to the ancient Mayan temples at Chichen Itza and Tulum in Mexico. I was impressed by the staggering structures the Mayans created, demonstrating their sophisticated understanding of mathematics and astronomy. At one pyramid, our tour guide informed us that the Mayans regularly offered *human sacrifices* to appease their gods: "They feared that if they did not make sacrifices to the sun god, the sun would not rise the next morning. In times of drought, they sought to appease the rain god with multiple sacrifices."

While we regard such offerings as primitive, the mindset of sacrifice is still alive today. Many of us believe that *we must sacrifice something we value to gain something else we want*. We believe that struggle, strife, sweat, and sorrow are required to get anywhere in our career; that we must *deny our joy* so others can have theirs; and, under a *no pain, no gain* mentality, we believe that if we are not suffering we have it too easy.

While we are not sacrificing our bodies, we do sacrifice our emotions, our happiness, and often our health. Our sacrifices do not rob us of life in one dramatic moment, as the Mayans experienced, but they rob us of life a little bit more each day. We die not under the knife of the shaman, but under the whip of ongoing self-recrimination.

Many religions thrive on the tenet of *sacrifice*—even glorify it. It is said, "the Jews invented guilt and the Catholics perfected it." Many sects of Christianity extol "the blood of the lamb" and seek to emulate the crucifixion of Christ. Yet many of them never arrive at the joy of the resurrection. They emulate the *sorrow* of Jesus but not his *joy*.

The Mayans labored under the illusion that sacrifices were causing the sun to rise. *Superstition reigned over science*. If they had suspended sacrifices for even a day, they would have discovered that *there's no relationship between the loss of life and the gain of sunlight*. They would have found that *the sun is happy to shine on all things unconditionally*, delivering its blessing because that's its nature and *what it loves to do*—no payment needed.

When you suspend your belief in *personal sacrifice*, you discover that *the sun is*

happy to shine on you without exacting a fee. The Mayans projected human emotions and ego onto the sun. People in fear and pain may demand sacrifices, but the sun does not—and neither does anything in nature. If you question fear, you realize it is void of substance. In faith, you find well-being sufficient for all to bask in.

The assertion that *you do not owe* is a radical one in a society where *debt* is a dominant theme. The jaw-dropping volume of debt reflects an underlying belief that *we must lose in order to get and gain*.

Rather than working harder to pay off debts (while accumulating more), you might look within to *examine your core belief of indebtedness* and thus address the source of the debt rampage and begin to heal your belief in paying blood for what would otherwise come to you by grace.

INSPIRATION • MEDITATION

Your Higher Self

Access it through meditation.



by Echo Bodine

AS I ASKED QUESTIONS about getting closer to God, the practice of *meditation* kept coming up. This was not an answer I wanted to hear, because it seemed impossible to quiet my mind. When I tried to meditate, my mind kept wandering to my chore list.

One day I asked my friend Roy, who meditated daily, to explain the concept of *Higher Self* and teach me to meditate. Roy said that the *Higher Self* is the part of me that is God-like and that I should meditate to communicate with this presence.

I recall hearing that there's a *personal God* who resides inside us, and an *impersonal God* who resides outside us and watches over the world.

Meanwhile, I kept trying—and failing—to meditate. Then one day I had a breakthrough. I was running on a treadmill and for some reason grabbed the bars, closed my eyes, put my attention on my belly button, and asked God, "Are you in there?"

I heard a male voice say, "Yes, I am." My first impulse was to jump off the machine and run! But I felt peaceful and sensed a beautiful white energy.

I believe I experienced this because on the treadmill, I wasn't trying to quiet my mind—I was free to hear the voice. I began to record the insights, inspiration, and guidance I was receiving as I was in touch with my *Higher Self*.



The Mayan calendar ends in 2012, but it's not the end of the world. But I hope it marks the end of the *old world*, which, as far as I can see, wasn't working so well. Even today, *psychic self-mutilation* still rules the masses. Wouldn't it be wonderful if 2012 marked the end of *that world*!

Life takes no joy at your loss; to the contrary, the heart of God cries when you do. If you could suspend your belief that *death (human sacrifice) keeps the sun rising*, you'd find that *your blood serves you far better in your veins*. Then you shall erect new temples where you deliver to its altars *the fruits of your joy*, not those of your tears and fears. PE

Alan Cohen is the author of *Linden's Last Life*, and host of the radio show *Get Real* (www.hayhouseradio.com). Visit www.alancohen.com, email info@alancohen.com.

ACTION: Offer the fruits of your joy.

After years of talking to *Him*, the feeling of this male presence became softer, more feminine. I sensed that it was *the feminine side of God*. I realized that since *we are made in God's image and likeness*, there must be a female side to God. Once I accepted the female half of my *Higher Self*, the male side began talking to me again. I now receive guidance from both the male and female sides of my *Higher Self*.

Do you meditate? If not, what is keeping you from doing so? Prayer is talking to God; meditation is God talking back! You need to give this inner voice time each day to express itself. Try sitting in silence for at least five minutes every other day. Close your eyes, and ask God if He/She has any messages for you. *Give God some time to talk back.*

Do you have dreams that you're afraid to pursue?

Does a lack of money hold you back? Do you worry about what people will say? Do you put their opinions first? Think about what you are meant to be doing. Don't get so caught up in what others think you should be doing that you bury your dreams.

Look into your heart. Forget about the money and time. Forget about your age, and tune out the critical voices in your head. Pursue *your* dreams. Ask God, and others, for help in overcoming obstacles. Meditate. Listen for answers, guidance, or direction. Then take one step at a time. Be persistent. Pursuing your dreams will get you where you most want to go. PE

Echo Bodine, author of *Look For the Good & You'll Find God* (New World Library), is a spiritual healer, teacher, and radio host. Visit www.echobodine.com.

ACTION: Engage in meditation daily.

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