

Major General Bill Mullen, USMC (Ret)



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN

How to Become a Better Person



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Quantico, VA
2023

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Mullen, William F., III, author. | Marine Corps University (U.S.). Press, issuing body.
Title: What it means to be a man : how to become a better person / Bill Mullen.

Other titles: How to become a better person

Description: Quantico, Virginia : Marine Corps University Press, 2023. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "We all have flaws because, as humans, we are all inherently fallible. If we can focus on becoming better people in life, it will likely help mitigate that fallibility. How to Be a Better Man focuses on the concept that if all young Marines internalize the words and thoughts here, and use them to not only be better Marines but more importantly, better people, then we can be a much better Service overall. The U.S. Marine Corps and the American people have invested so much time, effort, and money into them that they are more than worth the effort to make them better people now but also when they take off the uniform and return to civilian society"— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022042873 (print) | LCCN 2022042874 (ebook) | ISBN 9798985340464 (paperback) | ISBN 9798985340471 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Self-actualization (Psychology) | Moral development. | Professional ethics. | Marines—United States—Conduct of life.

Classification: LCC BF637.S4 (print) | LCC BF637.S4 (ebook) | DDC 158.1—dc23/eng/20221003 | SUDOC D 214.513:P 43

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022042873>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022042874>

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The production of this book and other MCUP products is graciously supported by the Marine Corps University Foundation.

Published by
Marine Corps University Press
2044 Broadway Street
Quantico, VA 22134

1st Printing, 2023
ISBN: 979-8-9853404-6-4
DOI: 10.56686/9798985340464

THIS VOLUME IS FREELY AVAILABLE
AT WWW.USMCU.EDU/MCUPRESS

Dedicated to my fellow Marines,
both past and present—semper fidelis

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Foreword

Given the opportunity to write a foreword for this book, written by a leader I respect and was lucky to have served under twice during my 26-year career, I immediately thought about the meaning of the key phrase in the subtitle, “How to Become a Better Person.” This explicitly suggests there is room to grow, and that is true for all of us. In his introduction, Major General Bill Mullen quickly dispels the notion that this book is written solely for men. Rather, it is intended for anyone seeking self-growth. As many other men and women have done during their journey wearing the military service cloth of our nation, I often reflected on what I was doing and how well I was doing it. Servicemembers do not have a corner on the market in this regard and, while this book is doubtless an invaluable tool to add to any leader’s tool kit, the growth possible by the self-reflection it encourages will benefit anyone seeking to be better in life’s endeavors.

Many leaders continue to ask themselves questions like, “How do I live the best life, be the best version of myself, lead a life of worth and take care of those who rely on me?” Being a “total Marine”—or good

person—encompasses a near-endless list of attributes and skills one must master and study. To improve in each requires one to spend countless hours searching for resources; however, in this book, the general provides something akin to a roadmap for being the best person of which one is capable. Conveniently, much of it boils down to choices: the choice to listen, to not give others power over us through their opinions, or just to smile. Mullen covers several of the simple yet hard choices we face every day and in every stage of our personal and professional development. He touches on many of life's landmines, visible and hidden, that most people—Marine or not—must navigate around to live well and content in their choices.

Candid about his own early career missteps, and occasional want of effort, but also of the maturation process and realization that becoming a professional requires dedication, determination, and effort, General Mullen writes from the heart to impart a life's worth of knowledge gained from reading and curious inquiry. By writing this book, he continues his record of seeking to give others the opportunity to grow or excel. I met General Mullen when, as the president of Marine Corps University, he decided that including senior enlisted Marines in the student body of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College would benefit the enlisted and officer students alike from the exchange of ideas and perspectives. During my interview with him for that opportunity, it became clear he was looking foremost for potential applicants interested in ways to grow. I believe he is still doing that with *What It Means to Be a Man* and offering his thoughts on how to do so.

This book's chapters begin with his definition of self-discipline, that is, "the ability to focus on the right choices in life and having the willpower to pick them instead of the wrong ones, especially when they are difficult or unpopular" (p. 9). He writes on "ideal" behaviors throughout the book in the voice of a trusted mentor rather than a

haughty examiner. While he admits that it is not easy to live up to these standards to the fullest extent, and that he himself is forever endeavoring to do so, he describes the satisfaction to be found in a valuable life well-lived that will follow from the effort.

This book is not a lecture on the art of living well; instead, Mullen offers “before they made it big” stories of larger-than-life or well-known personalities—men and women—who overcame their own obstacles in life or whose tenacious pursuit of greatness paid off. The extreme variety in the many different sources for quotes and historical anecdotes to illustrate his points is augmented by suggestions of books, articles, and programs for further study. Additionally, at the end of every chapter, he poses questions to consider that will lead to self-reflection and, no doubt, improvement in those so inclined. The book has something for everyone, and I found myself taking a few notes of titles to add to my own personal list of books to read soon. Mullen makes his points even more accessible to multiple generations of learners through his use of YouTube videos, movies, and articles in addition to books.

Imagine being able to provide yourself, those close to you, or your Marines, the wisdom and advice that comes from more than 30 years of pursuing self-improvement. Investing the time to read this book’s widely ranging anecdotes and, perhaps, investing some time reading further about the men and women or historical events in the suggested reading or self-reflecting and answering the questions to consider will immediately broaden one’s knowledge and thinking. While reading the examples of attributes Mullen discusses, I recalled times in my own career that I had witnessed, or experienced firsthand, the same triumphs and failures he describes. Growing up in the Marine Corps, and lucky enough to have leaders who valued critical thinking and ideas outside the norm, I benefitted from some truly great mentors and received very good advice. Still, having read a book like this ear-

ly in my career, I believe, would have saved me some time and pain in learning the hard way a few of the lessons General Mullen tackles here.

Scott Hamm
Sergeant Major (Ret)
U.S. Marine Corps

Preface

I succeeded in getting you to open this book because of the title. That was by design, but it does not mean what you think it might mean. This is not just a book about men for men. It was written for all who choose to pick it up and consume the content. Its origin lies in a discussion that my son and I had regarding a movie we both love—*Secondhand Lions*. Released in 2003 by New Line Cinema, the movie stars Robert Duvall and Michael Caine as two crotchety old brothers who live together in an equally old house in rural Texas in the 1950s and are decidedly antisocial. Their world is turned upside down when they have their young grandnephew (Haley Joel Osment) dumped on them for the summer by their flaky niece who wants to go off and party. It is a funny and thoroughly enjoyable movie, but what impressed me most was referred to as the “What it means to be a man” speech.¹

¹ “ ‘The Speech’—*Secondhand Lions* (2003),” YouTube video, 14 August 2016, 4:42 min.

Robert Duvall's character is a rough and tumble guy who, though old, still knows how to fight and proves it against a group of punk teenagers in a local café who successfully pick a fight with him. After the altercation, in which he does some damage to them physically, but even worse, thoroughly embarrasses them in public, he invites them to his house for a steak dinner, where he gives these young men his "What it means to be a man" speech. Michael Caine and Haley Joel Osment's characters watch him speak to these young men and Osment asks what it means. Caine's character explains that Duvall's character gives it to young men in an attempt to encourage them to grow up and be good people instead of the knuckleheads they were before they met. Osment's character spends the rest of the movie doing everything he can to ensure that Duvall's character will be around to give him the speech when he gets older. In one of the climactic scenes, he finally wheedles a portion of it out of Duvall who says:

Sometimes the things that may or may not be true are the things that a man needs to believe in the most: that people are basically good; that honor, courage, and virtue mean everything; that power and money, money and power mean nothing; that good always triumphs over evil; and I want you to remember this, that love, true love, never dies. . . . No matter if they're true or not, a man should believe in those things because those are the things worth believing in.²

Both my son and I enjoyed the movie and, after watching it, he asked me what I would say if I were to give this speech. While I had thought about the advice I might pass along based on my knowledge and experiences in life, I had not passed that advice along as much as I should have and certainly never put it in writing. The result of that

² "The Speech."

discussion was an article that I wrote that was published in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in November 2018.³ I wrote the article due to my belief that we all have flaws because, as humans, we are all inherently fallible. I believe that if we can focus on becoming better people in life, it will likely help mitigate that fallibility. I wrote the article thinking that if *all* of our younger Marines could read the things I wrote, internalize the words and thoughts behind them, and use them to not only be better Marines but more importantly, better people, then we can be a much better Marine Corps overall. By expanding the article to this short book, I do so in the hopes of reaching a larger audience, but with the same general intent.

The importance of younger Marines taking this information to heart is that there is a real need for them to mature much more quickly and without the penalties of immaturity and bad behavior that are becoming so much more prolific in the information age. When I was young, youthful mindlessness was just as prevalent as it is today, but there were no cell phone cameras to record some of the less admirable aspects of my life and that of my peers. Today, cell phone cameras are everywhere and almost nothing seems to go unrecorded and then posted on some social media site for all to see and “admire” . . . or not. Unfortunately, whatever makes it onto the internet stays there forever (except for Snapchat, I suppose) and potential employers are now using these platforms to evaluate those who have applied for jobs. I am not sure I could have successfully weathered that kind of scrutiny in the early 1980s when I was competing for a scholarship from the U.S. Marine Corps and then becoming a Marine officer.

That original article, and now this book, focuses mainly on young Marines because, as with most young people, they tend not to consider the potential consequences before taking action and generally have

³ MajGen W. F. Mullen III, “The ‘What It Means to Be a Man’ Speech: Crossing the Minefield of Your Career and Your Life,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (November 2018).

little sense of perspective. They are damaging their future with this behavior, and they are, for the most part, seemingly unaware of this fact. My intention with the article was to get their attention in order to change their behavior for the better. Both the Marine Corps and their families have invested so much time, effort, and money into them that they are more than worth any effort to make them better people. This is not only for when they are actually serving in the Marine Corps, but maybe even more importantly for when they take off the uniform and return to civilian society.

Do not misunderstand me though. We have a great Marine Corps made up of some of the most selfless and patriotic young women and men you could ever want to meet. The overwhelming majority of them do exactly what we need them to do every day despite relatively low pay and, in some cases, spartan living conditions. They have never forgotten what it means to earn the title Marine and what it takes to live up to our core values of honor, courage, and commitment every day. Unfortunately, we can do a hundred things correctly and only one thing wrong, but that single wrong thing will be more readily remembered, especially when documented by the seemingly ubiquitous cell phone camera.

Being an organization made up of human beings, the Marine Corps has its share of mistakes of both omission and commission. We have a stringent indoctrination program that transforms civilians into Marines, but it is certainly not foolproof. Some of our Marines do succumb to temptation and/or peer pressure and forget what they are obligated to represent after earning the title of U.S. Marine. We also know that America expects more from the Marine Corps. While perfection is not possible, it is an ideal the Corps should strive to live up to and furthering the pursuit of this ideal is the purpose of writing this book. If it causes one Marine, male or female, to make better decisions and try harder to live up to our core values, then it will have been worth the effort to

write and publish. By extension, if it gains the attention of the general public and causes any member of the American population to become a better person, then the effort will have been even more worthwhile. We are seeing that across our society, young people are ill-equipped for the difficulties of life. Whether they are getting sucked into the alternate realities to be found in video games, addicted to internet pornography or illegal substances, afflicted by a multitude of mental health challenges, or death by their own hand, our youth today need help to enable them to be the people who will lead this country into the future.

Last, I am writing this in the hope that it will be a solid byproduct of all the reading I have accomplished by this point in my life. Throughout my career, I read voraciously and widely in the attempt to better understand not just the profession of arms but also those who I was tasked with leading. Though I have now retired, I continue to read at virtually the same pace because I believe that every book I finish adds another tool to the toolbox with which I address the challenges I face in life. The more I read, the more my personal toolbox becomes like that of a master mechanic—never at a loss for the right tool at the right time. I also believe that the combination of knowledge and vicarious experience gained from reading (actual experience is good, but we rarely have much choice in if or how that occurs) when combined with understanding, common sense and insight, renders wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to make sound decisions using good judgment, which is essential to the profession of arms, just as it is in many other walks of life. Since the list of books I have read is more than 3,000 titles now (yes, I keep track), and I cast my net widely to read not only what I like, but things that I disagree with in order to learn from them also, I hope to use some of the wisdom in the writing of this book so as to benefit those I care so much about—the youth of our nation. They are indeed our future and it is up to us to help ensure they get off to the best start possible.

WHAT IT MEANS
TO BE A MAN

Introduction

Being a senior leader in the Marine Corps is both an honor and a privilege, but along with those things comes a great deal of responsibility. Part of that responsibility is to see to the continued success of the institution. It takes effort every day to ensure that the Corps continues to train and educate Marines so that they are equal to any challenge the Service may face in today's world. The Marines have a proud history of almost 250 years of service to the nation that we must ensure we live up to and this is something that is earned every day. The Corps cannot rest on its laurels based on past glories and it must keep on earning the trust and respect of the American public. We must also build and maintain trust within the Corps' ranks. Since the cohesion that comes from Marines trusting each other with their lives is essential to success in combat, anything that erodes that trust or takes away from our ability to win the nation's battles must be removed from our Corps.

Another, and equally important, responsibility is to ensure the well-being of our most precious assets—our Marines. The American public lends us these young women and men for varying amounts of time. Some spend only a short time in the Marine Corps, while others, like me, spend decades in uniform. Someone once said that the extent of one's life is represented by the hyphen between the birth and death dates on a gravestone.¹ The life of a Marine is the hyphen between the date they step onto the proverbial yellow footprints at Recruit Training or report to Officer Candidates School and the date when they take the uniform off for the last time. Once they have done so, that person never stops being a Marine at heart, though they no longer wear the uniform or are expected to live up to our standards and, most importantly, to go in harm's way again. We, as leaders, try to ensure that, while Marines wear the uniform, they are the best Marine possible, but also when they take the uniform off, they return home better people than when they left.

The challenge here is that despite the rigors of Marine Corps entry-level training, not all our young men and women truly accept what we are trying to get them to understand and live up to. The best articulation for this issue can be found in *A Tactical Ethic* by Dick Couch. Couch states that all the efforts to inculcate the values of both the SEALs and the Marine Corps in those wishing to join the ranks are, for some, overcome in the first operational unit they join by *the need to belong*. They allow peer pressure and the desire to be seen as a member of the “gang” to persuade them to do things that run directly counter to all they have been taught up to this point in their career.²

¹ The poem “The Dash” was originally written by Linda Ellis in 1996 and then published later as part of a larger work in Linda Ellis and Mac Anderson, *The Dash: Making a Difference with Your Life* (Naperville, IL: Simple Truths, 2017).

² Dick Couch, *A Tactical Ethic: Moral Conduct in the Insurgent Battlespace* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

For the Marine Corps in particular, this is unacceptable. Our official motto is *semper fidelis*, meaning always faithful, which implies that we are always faithful to our country, our Corps, our fellow Marines, our families, and, for many of us, God. We are always faithful to the Marine Corps' core values of honor, courage, and commitment. These concepts cannot simply be repeated and then quickly forgotten in the face of daily moral and ethical challenges or the need to belong. We strive to live up to being a Marine 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Marine Corps has some of the highest standards in the military and always strives to live up to them.³ It is what has set the Corps apart as a Service since it was originally established on 10 November 1775. It has also given Marines an *esprit de corps* that has enabled us to persevere through every fight we have been engaged in during the course of the history of the Service.

Unfortunately, not everyone who earns the title of Marine remembers what they were taught, and some forget what it really means to be a Marine in every sense of the word. This was graphically illustrated by the 2017 Marines United scandal when the national media exposed a secret site where both active and retired Marines were posting lewd pictures of their fellow Marines and making derogatory comments about them.⁴ Regrettably, while the Corps has made some progress in curtailing this behavior, it continues to be a problem for the Service. The actions of those posting hateful things about their fellow Marines do not represent who we are as a Corps. They seem to believe that whatever they post online exists in some sort of accountability-free zone, where they are not responsible for their words and actions. This is just one example of behaviors that do not belong in what should be a close-knit, cohesive fighting organization.

³ "A Standard That Must Be Met," *Marines.com*, accessed 27 July 2022.

⁴ Andrew deGrandpre and Jeff Schogol, "A Nude Photo Scandal Has Shaken the Entire Marine Corps," *Marine Corps Times*, 5 March 2017.

I remember a poster that was prominent when I was a young officer that shows a drill instructor pointing out from it like the World War I “Uncle Sam Wants You!” posters. At the bottom of the poster, it reads, “If you were accused of being a Marine, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” It is this question that I want to ask Marines on a daily basis to remind them of those who have gone before us and all that we have to do to live up to the standard they set. This is especially true of those servicemembers who have altered the definition of what a Marine ought to be and how they ought to act.

The higher echelons of the rank structure receive daily reports of all the activities occurring that do not comport with the Service’s core values. Whether it involves a servicemember committing suicide, sexual assault, abuse, hazing, or irresponsible acts on social media, it can make for discouraging reading. None of these things are acceptable to a Marine and all are incompatible with what is required for success in combat—the absolute, life-dependent trust Marines must have in one another. Without trust, and the cohesion it creates, history demonstrates that combat units are brittle and tend to shatter under the pressure of conflict. An example of this was seen during the Korean War when poorly trained American units fell apart under the pressure of North Korean and Chinese attacks. It got so bad at various points during the conflict that American forces termed it “bugout fever.” Entire units would leave their vehicles, heavy weapons, and equipment and flee.⁵ We cannot allow these types of events to ever happen again.

Prior to my retirement, as I was reading these daily reports, I was struck by the desire to talk to these young men and women and help them see the consequences of their actions before they made poor decisions that took them down the wrong path. If I or any leader

⁵ Billy C. Mossman, “Redeployment South: The Eighth Army Leaves North Korea,” in *United States Army in the Korean War: Ebb and Flow, November 1950–July 1951* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1990), 151.

could do this, I think we would not see so much of this self- and unit-destructive behavior. As a senior leader in the Marine Corps, I wanted to help them learn to be better Marines and people because that was one of my obligations. It is also essential to the trust we needed to build and maintain, which made me think back to the discussion my son and I had regarding the movie *Secondhand Lions* and the technique Robert Duvall's character used to improve the young men he encountered. I believe that same approach could help the Corps, except that instead of a speech, I present what you are reading now.

In writing the earlier article and subsequently, this book, I wanted to clarify that I neither have all the answers to life nor could I live up to all that is written here to the fullest extent. I do not, but I will never stop making the attempt. In my experience, I have found that life is tough and frequently seems like a stroll (or dead sprint at times) through a minefield where you can see some of the land mines sitting on the surface, while others remain hidden from sight. We must acknowledge their presence and tread carefully around them to avoid the damage they can do personally and to those around us. No one is perfect though and all of us encounter mines in our daily lives, some big and some small. It is how we respond to these encounters that matters.

What I provide in the chapters that follow are the things that I personally believe in and that have enabled me to successfully deal with these land mines. The chapters are not long and this is by design. I want to gain and maintain the attention of a generation for whom studies show shorter attention spans than those who are not digital natives.⁶ After 34 years in the Marine Corps as well as a happy, healthy

⁶ The average attention span of an adult has dropped approximately 25 percent to 8 seconds or less in recent decades. For more on the impact of digital technology, see Maria Vedeckina and Francesca Borgonovi, "A Review of Evidence on the Role of Digital Technology in Shaping Attention and Cognitive Control in Children," *Frontiers in Psychology* (February 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.611155>.

marriage (33 years and counting) and family, I want to share what has served me well over the years. I offer what follows in the hope that the precepts do so for others too.

Suggested Further Study

Couch, Dick. *A Tactical Ethic: Moral Conduct in the Insurgent Battlespace*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010.

This book, though a short read, demonstrates how the need to belong can overcome the values instilled through some of the most rigorous indoctrination in any military in the world.

Hammes, T. X. *Forgotten Warriors: The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, the Corps Ethos, and the Korean War*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010.

This book demonstrates the danger of units that are unable to trust each other and come together as teams. Time after time, U.S. Army units in Korea collapsed and fled instead of holding together and fighting. The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade in Korea had to repeatedly plug holes formed by Army units who had deserted the battlefield.

McCanlies, Tim, dir. *Secondhand Lions*. Burbank, CA: New Line Cinema, 2003.

The movie that inspired the article and now this book.

Chapter 1

SELF-DISCIPLINE

I believe that the root of all success as a human being is self-discipline. This, to me, is the ability to focus on the right choices in life and then have the willpower to pick them instead of the wrong ones, especially when they are difficult or unpopular. It is the ability to do what is required of you regardless of convenience. It is the ability to turn away from poor choices, even when they seem more convenient or desirable than doing the right thing. It is taking the longer and more arduous path to excellence in all things rather than taking the shortcut that may offer the chance of getting where you want to go faster but at a moral or ethical cost to you. In the end, self-discipline represents our ability to control or master ourselves to gain the outcomes we desire instead of losing control and rolling the dice and hoping for the best.

Self-discipline, or the lack thereof, is demonstrated in the choices we make every day, but it starts with mastery of what is going on in our heads—what we are thinking. If we cannot master our thoughts, we will never be able to master our actions. As the actor Will Smith

said in one of his motivational talks, “You cannot win the war against the world if you cannot win the war against your own mind.”¹

The unfortunate fact about self-discipline is that I have seen more people ruined by a lack of self-restraint than anything else. Those lacking in self-discipline may have a great deal of talent, or the good fortune of having been born into an affluent family, but their inability to control themselves and make good choices leads to their destruction. Temptations in life abound. Hard work can be intimidating. Doing what is required can be very inconvenient. While patience is said to be a virtue, it seems to be in extremely short supply these days and this trend is accelerating. Having the patience to put in the time and effort to reach your goals is very difficult, especially when you see others moving much faster by taking shortcuts or stepping on others to get where they want to go. The 2019 college admissions scandal presents a perfect example of the lack of patience and will to put in the effort required. Instead of doing things correctly, some aspiring students and their affluent parents paid college admissions consultants to develop fake college applications for them, which included fraudulent SAT scores and altered pictures of them participating in athletic activities.² I personally wonder how these people can look at themselves in the mirror and honestly assess their moral compass. These acts make for a lifetime full of regrets instead of the fulfilling and self-affirming knowledge that, by making good choices, we led a good life.

As an avid student of history, I am always seeking out lessons from the past. One that stuck with me was something reportedly said by Confederate general Robert E. Lee after the Civil War. A woman approached him as he was coming out of church one Sunday afternoon in the late 1860s. She held a baby in her arms and asked Lee what she

¹ Will Smith, “Win the War against Your Own Mind,” YouTube video, 3 November 2020.

² Kate Taylor, “College Admissions Scandal,” *New York Times*, 8 October 2021.

needed to do to ensure he grew up to be a good man. His response was, “Teach him to deny himself.”³ When Lee was a young man, he was widely admired by his peers at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point for his character and self-discipline. He was dedicated to fulfilling what he deemed to be his duty no matter the personal cost in time, effort, or convenience. Some at the time would say the only negative thing he did at West Point was drawl out the word “sir,” a testament to his Virginia roots. In fact, Lee was one of six classmates to get through four years at the U.S. Military Academy without being awarded a single demerit.⁴ Considering all the things, some of which are quite minor, that can result in demerits at that institution, this is a remarkable testament to who Lee was as a young man.

Robert E. Lee was the son of the American Revolutionary War hero Henry “Light-Horse Harry” Lee III, who was one of George Washington’s most trusted subordinates. He is most remembered for his eulogy at Washington’s 1799 funeral, “First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen.”⁵ Unfortunately, the elder Lee set a poor example for his children. His ability to tell the truth was questionable, at best, and his life ended in extreme debt, poverty, and misery after abandoning his family and leaving them with an appreciation for the shame the Lee name carried. Maybe his son endeavored to be good to counter the tremendously poor example his father set for all who knew him.

Later in life, after more than 30 years serving as an Army engineer and with particular distinction during the U.S.-Mexican War for which

³ As will be discussed later, the fact the Lee served the Confederate side against the United States does not necessarily diminish his standing as a military strategist or competent leader. Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 505.

⁴ “The Life of Robert E. Lee,” PBS.org, accessed 28 July 2022.

⁵ MajGen Henry Lee, *Funeral Oration on the Death of General Washington* (Boston, MA: Joseph Nancrede and Manning & Loring, 1800).

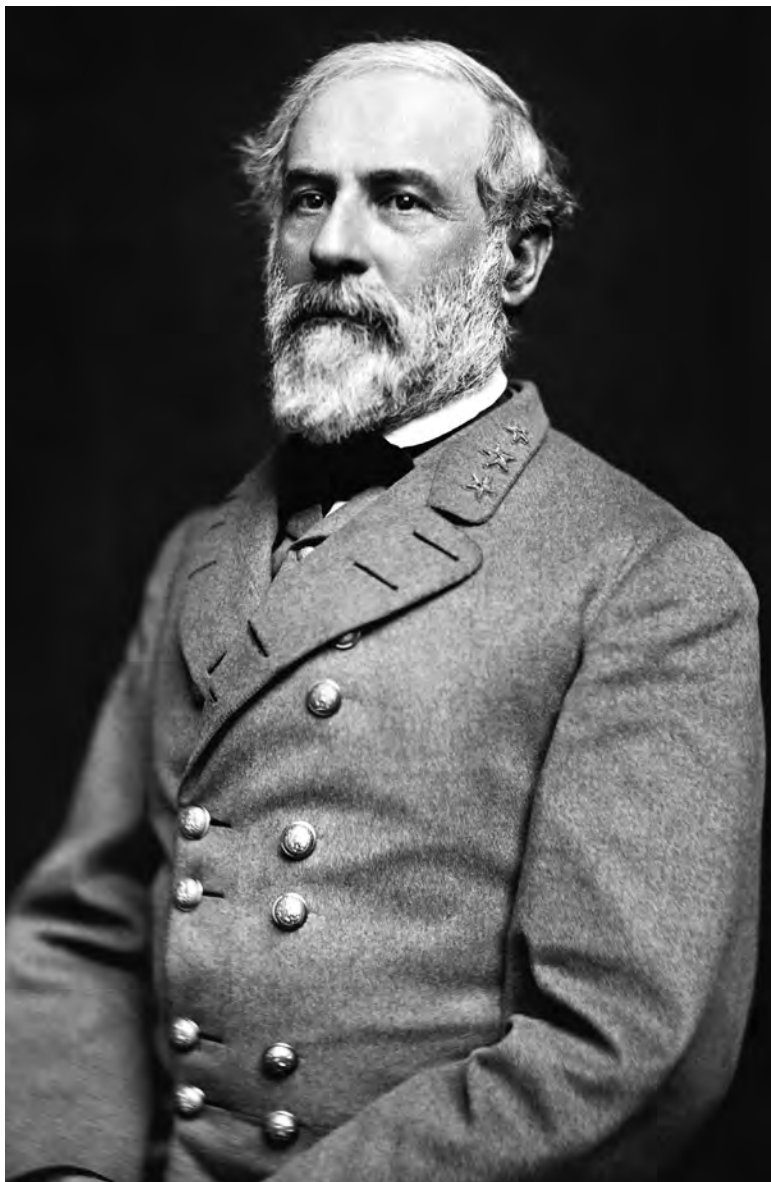


Figure 1. Confederate general Robert E. Lee

Source: Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, Library of Congress.

he was advanced from captain to lieutenant colonel for bravery, Robert E. Lee made, in my opinion, a deplorable choice. Due to the loyalty he felt for his home state of Virginia, he resigned his commission when they chose to leave the Union in 1861, despite being offered command of the entire Union Army. The then chief of staff of the U.S. Army, Major General Winfield Scott, also a Virginian and the commander of the U.S. Army during the War with Mexico, considered Lee the best man for the job and was frustrated when Lee refused the appointment.⁶ Apparently, Lee felt that his duty to defend his home state outweighed his duty to defend the Union as a whole. The words of his aunt, Anna Fitzhugh, who remained loyal to the United States, sums the situation up best, “I am so sorry that such a good man would take up such a bad cause.”⁷ His service in the Confederate Army was an act of treason against the country he had served for so many years and an attempt to defend the indefensible—the institution of slavery.⁸

Despite the fact that I could not disagree more with the decision Lee made to fight for a cause I despise, I still look to him as an example of personal discipline. Throughout a terrible war, he focused on the fight at hand, which garnered numerous early victories and the respect of his men in the Confederate Army as well as many of those who fought against him. He capitulated when the Union forces of Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant cornered his Army of Northern Vir-

⁶ “The Civil War in America: Biographies, Robert E. Lee,” Library of Congress, accessed 28 July 2022; and Paul C. Nagel, *The Lees of Virginia: Seven Generations of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 265–68.

⁷ The original quote is in *Morning Oregonian* (Portland, OR), 15 November 1872, 4. This quote is also found in William C. Davis, *Crucible of Command: Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee—The War They Fought, the Peace They Forged* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2014), 121–22.

⁸ Although Lee had misgivings about the institution, he both directly participated in and benefited from chattel slavery before and during the Civil War. For more on his views and relationship with slavery, see Elizabeth Pryor Brown, *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters* (New York: Viking Press, 2007), 123–40, 143–54, 260–75.

ginia. When he surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, on 9 April 1865, firsthand accounts of the scene illustrate the sense of awe felt by everyone present, both North and South, when Lee signed the surrender document and then left.⁹ It was the last thing in the world that Lee wanted to do and the bitterness he felt must have been intense; but, due to his self-discipline, he never let it show. Lee knew he must set the example for his troops and that is exactly what he did.

Perhaps Lee's greatest act as a leader was to encourage his men to return home and rebuild their communities after the war and make the best of the remainder of their lives instead of becoming guerrillas and drawing out the conflict. He considered what was best for his soldiers and Virginia and, despite what must have been a great deal of anger and frustration at losing a bitterly fought war, he encouraged his men to do the right thing.¹⁰ To those who know his family history, Lee's personal situation made this choice even more noteworthy because he had no home to return to after his wife's ancestral home—Arlington House sat across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, and still stands today—had been confiscated by the federal government early in the war for failure to pay taxes and was later turned into a cemetery to bury Union dead. Today, it is known as Arlington National Cemetery, where our honored dead are buried, and

⁹ For more, see Edward Porter Alexander, *Military Memoirs of a Confederate: A Critical Narrative* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907); Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1961); Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Gary W. Gallagher, *Lee and His Army in Confederate History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Jay Winik, *April 1865* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002); and Pryor, *Reading the Man*.

the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier stands among many other stirring memorials to our nation's past.¹¹

Despite these challenges, Lee “walked his talk” by returning instead to the rented house where his family resided in Richmond, Virginia, and quietly waited to see if he would be arrested and tried for treason. Other Confederate leaders fled and went into hiding, including Confederate president Jefferson F. Davis who was captured in Georgia reportedly while wearing a woman's shawl in an attempt to hide his distinctive uniform.¹² Lee was never arrested, even after the turmoil created by the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on 14 April 1865, because General Grant intervened on his behalf with President Andrew Johnson to prevent Lee's arrest and trial for treason. This act by General Grant convinced me that I should reconsider my opinion of General Lee, to a degree, for the poor decision he made in 1861. If the very man who had just spent the previous four years fighting to save the Union and to defeat the South, and the previous year in particular fighting desperately against Lee and his army, could put his reputation on the line in defense of the man, then I should be more forgiving as well.

What means even more to me in this matter, however, was what the man I admire most from this period, Abraham Lincoln, wanted for southern leaders. Lincoln was another leader who had gone through a terrible four years trying to keep the Union together. The war years aged him visibly, which images from the period illustrate clearly. He

¹¹ The home and surrounding property was held by Lee's wife Mary Custis Lee and confiscated in 1863. An 1882 Supreme Court decision would later find fault with that event and returned the properties to the family. A twist of irony saw a good portion of the property sold back to the government by George Washington Custis Lee. See “Whose Land?: Claims at Arlington Estate,” National Park Service, 22 June 2021.

¹² File 000.4 Historical (9 Oct 45), Adjutant General Decimal File, 1940–1945 (NAID 895294), Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, 1917–, Record Group 407, National Archives.

lost dear friends and loved ones and, at times, despaired that the North would emerge victorious over the South. Lincoln knew that if the country were to have a chance of truly uniting again after the fighting was over, the victors in the war could not inflict harsh terms on the defeated. As he said to Grant and Major General William T. Sherman in late March 1865, when he met them on the riverboat *River Queen* in the days just before Richmond fell to Grant's army, he was not interested in vengeance.

Instead of being arrested, tried for treason, and imprisoned or executed, Lee was offered and assumed the leadership of a destitute and failing Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, and sought to restore the campus and institution as well as to mold young men (it was an all-male college at the time) into the people they needed to be in order to be successful in life. He was so well respected and successful in these endeavors that, after his death in 1870, the name of the college was changed to Washington and Lee University, which it still bears today.¹³

Following through on what is expected of you, or what is deemed to be your duty, can be tremendously satisfying. I would also paraphrase an old adage that many miss out on opportunities because they come knocking on the door wearing work coveralls.¹⁴ Many people are not interested in doing the work required to take advantage of an opportunity, or if they do make the attempt, they only make a half effort. This is rarely sufficient, and we should all remember that a task may take time, and it may be difficult and inconvenient, but when you have the self-discipline to take the time to do something correctly

¹³ In the wake of efforts across the country to remove the connection to the Confederacy from streets, buildings, organizations, etc., Washington and Lee University administrators and board members voted in the summer of 2021 to retain the name of the college. "University History," WLU.edu, accessed 28 July 2022.

¹⁴ The date of the earliest citation that closely matches this expression was in May 1921. It was printed in a newspaper in Indiana, but the adage was not credited to any specific person.



Figure 2. *The Peacemakers* by George Healy
White House copy of the lost 1868 painting. From left: William T. Sherman, Ulysses S. Grant, Abraham Lincoln, and David D. Porter aboard the *River Queen* on 27–28 March 1865.
Source: White House Historical Association.

and complete the task regardless of how difficult it may be, the sense of accomplishment is profound. I am reminded of something said to me many times as a teenager by both my mother and father: If you do not have time to do it right the first time, when will you have time to do it again?

I have considered the advice above many times as I was faced with tasks that I did not want to do or that I thought were not worth my time. Early in my career as a young officer, I did not give my best effort to every task. As I matured toward the professional that I sought to be, I realized that professionals give every task, regardless of importance, their best effort. I came to this conclusion by watching and admiring the efforts of much better officers and Marines than myself.

It seemed that no one had to tell them these things, they just knew it and went about their tasks with a great attitude that I could not help but admire. The more I emulated them, the more successful I became as an officer and a member of the profession of arms. My only regret was that I did not start my career with this same attitude. It was always a choice available to me, but it took me a while to really understand it and make that choice. For example, when I went back to my alma mater Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to pursue a master's degree. I really enjoyed the work and performed well but looked back on my undergraduate years with regret. I thoroughly explored the full undergraduate experience and managed to keep my grades good enough to graduate and receive my commission, but I could have done so much better if I had really applied myself. Hind-sight does indeed have perfect vision.

The key is that making the morally or ethically right decision, even in the face of pressure to do otherwise, ensures that you can look at yourself in the mirror in the morning and know that the person looking back did the right thing. As life's journey comes to an end, it guarantees pleasant memories and the satisfaction that comes with the knowledge of a life well-lived. But, of course, the actual *doing* is up to each of us individually. We must choose the right and reject the wrong regardless of the consequences. We can either make good choices of our own accord, or we risk having them made for us. Author Steven Pressfield considers the early work of Greek philosopher Socrates (470–399 BCE), "The paradox seems to be that the truly free individual is free only to the extent of his own self-mastery. While those who will not govern themselves are condemned to find masters to govern over them."¹⁵ Given that Socrates is still a relevant example, it should be evident that nothing presented in this chapter is new.

¹⁵ As quoted in Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles* (New York: Black Irish Entertainment, 2002), 37.

I will close this chapter with a quote from another Greek philosopher—Epicurus. He was squarely focused on what brought happiness in life and was well known for adhering to the principles laid out below, all of which require self-discipline:

It is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently, honorably, and justly; Nor to live prudently, honorably, and justly without living pleasantly. Pleasure is good and pain is bad, but the pursuit of pleasure must be kept within reasonable bounds.

When, therefore, we say that pleasure is the chief good we are not speaking of the pleasures of a debauched man, or those that lie in sensual enjoyment . . . but we mean the freedom of the body from pain, and the soul from disturbance. For it is not continued drinking and revels, or the enjoyment of female society, or feasts of fish or other expensive foods, that make life pleasant, but such sober contemplation as examines reasons for choices and avoidance and puts to flight the vain opinions from which arises most of the confusion that troubles the soul.¹⁶

Questions to Consider

1. How strong is your self-discipline? Are you your own master?
2. Do you make the best choices possible regardless of difficulty or inconvenience?
3. What kind of example do you set for those around you or those coming behind you?

¹⁶ Will Durant, *The Life of Greece: The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1939), 647.

Suggested Further Study

Korda, Michael. *Clouds of Glory: The Life and Legend of Robert E. Lee*. New York: HarperCollins, 2015.

This is one of the most well-balanced biographies of Lee; it does not offer hero worship, but does not seek to ruin his reputation either.

Pressfield, Steven. *The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles*. New York: Black Irish Entertainment, 2002.

I was not impressed with the title, but was very impressed with the book itself. Steven Pressfield is one of my favorite authors (and a Marine), so I picked it up and am glad I did. His description of the concept of resistance is, in my mind and experience, absolutely on the mark.

Chapter 2

GOOD DEEDS

I have found that true happiness in life comes from doing good deeds for those around us. This is not a well-known understanding of happiness because the country's culture appears to prize the exact opposite in its never-ending pursuit of material things as well as the accumulation of wealth and fame as quickly as possible. It is glorified in professional sports, movies, television shows, etc. The irony is that the pursuit of happiness via the acquisition of material things is fleeting at best. While nice to have, we soon find ourselves wanting more or other things. There is no satisfaction to be found and we are always looking for ways to gain more things, especially in comparison with those around us. It is a maddening pursuit that leaves one consistently unfulfilled.

Another aspect of wanting more is that many of us envy what others have or wish we could be like them. I cannot think of anything more frustrating than wishing I was someone else. I have certainly fallen prey to this compulsion during the course of my life, but it is an

impossibility whereby, even if we had everything we coveted, we inevitably remain ourselves. One of the saddest cases of this type of envy is described in the book *Leaders* by retired U.S. Army general Stanley McChrystal, Jeff Eggers, and Jason Mangone. In the book, they profile leaders in different industries and throughout history, both good and bad, and one of the people they highlight was American conductor, Leonard Bernstein (1918–90). Bernstein achieved amazing levels of success writing musicals such as *West Side Story* (1957) as well as conducting symphonies during the course of his life, but he was never happy with himself. Nothing was good enough and, even worse, he wished instead to be composer Aaron Copland (1900–90), who was best known for his ballet scores.¹

Author Ryan Holiday has an interesting take on this aspect of our lives. In *Stillness Is the Key*, Holiday talks about the concept of enough.² For those in the never-ending pursuit of material accumulation or fame, nothing will ever be enough. For those who can resist this urge and come to a point where they have accumulated enough, or are famous enough, life tends to be much easier and happier because they are satisfied with themselves and not always seeking more. He brings up the negative example of President Richard M. Nixon.³ Nothing was ever enough for him. He ran for president several times and finally reached his goal in 1968, but it was not enough. His desire to win reelection at all costs drove him to do things that were both ridiculous and, in some cases, illegal. He directed the formation of an organization called the Committee to Reelect the President (CRP officially, but also referred to as CREEP with some level of derision). Nixon's efforts did result in reelection in 1972, but also led to the Watergate scandal,

¹ Gen Stanley McChrystal, Jeff Eggers, and Jason Mangone, *Leaders: Myth and Reality* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 123–45.

² Ryan Holiday, *Stillness Is the Key* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 119–26.

³ Holiday, *Stillness Is the Key*.

where some of the leading members of CREEP broke into the office of the Democratic National Committee located in the Watergate Office Building in Washington, DC, prior to the election to steal campaign secrets. Five CREEP members were arrested, though Nixon tried unsuccessfully to cover it up and eventually chose to resign as president instead of being impeached and forcibly removed from office by Congress.⁴ He was an intelligent and skilled politician who had reached the pinnacle office for his chosen career, but his legacy as president is that to date, he is the only president ever to resign the office.⁵ His inability to recognize when enough was enough ruined him.

Ironically, the accumulation of things also leads people to incessantly worry that they will lose all that they have collected. While some consider this the pursuit of happiness, it is reminiscent of the character from the classic novel by Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*. Quixote was an elderly man in fifteenth century Spain who had read so many books about the knights of old that he decided to become one even though their time and usefulness was long past. Quixote traveled the Spanish countryside in a makeshift suit of armor jousting at windmills because he thought they were giants. His efforts produced no tangible results and he could not understand why. His name is often used as an analogy to represent futile causes.⁶

To further reinforce this point, philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (ca. 480–525 CE), in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, covered a number of different topics and, for each one, he offered a poem. He dealt with the issue of wanting more (or never recognizing when enough is enough) in “Man’s Covetousness”:

⁴ Matthew Wills, “Mad about Nixon,” *JSTOR Daily*, 16 June 2022.

⁵ “Presidents: Richard M. Nixon,” White House, accessed 2 August 2022.

⁶ The novel *Don Quixote* was originally published in two parts: *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* [The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha], pt. 1, in 1605; and *Segunda parte del ingenioso caballero don Quijote de la Mancha* [Second Part of the Ingenious Knight Don Quixote of La Mancha], pt. 2, in 1615.

What though Plenty pour her gifts
with lavish hand,
Numberless as are the stars,
Countless as the sand,
Will the race of man, content,
Cease to murmur and lament?
Nay, though God, all-bounteous, give
Gold at man's desire—
Honours, rank, and fame—content
Not a whit is nigher;
But an all-devouring greed
Yawns with ever-widening need.
Then what bounds can ever restrain
This wild lust of having,
When with each new bounty fed
Grows the frantic craving?
He is never rich whose fear
Sees grim Want forever near.⁷

The truth is that people rarely remember us for what we have accumulated in life. Obituaries are not filled with a tabulated listing of how much the deceased was worth or how many cars or houses they owned. Ironically, many of the richest people in history seem to have been some of the most unhappy souls at the time they lived. Read the biographies of some of the multimillionaire tycoons of the late 1800s, for example. Many died alone and in extremely poor health due to the stress they encountered amassing their wealth and trying to keep it. Nicknamed “the robber barons,” many became philanthropists, giv-

⁷ Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, “Man’s Covetousness,” in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. R. James (London: Elliot Stock, 1897), 51–53.

ing away large sums of money in an effort to redeem their images, though ultimately failing.⁸

A book by Timothy Keller entitled *Making Sense of God: Finding God in the Modern World* offers a much different perspective. Keller was a member of the clergy for more than 40 years and spent a good amount of that time counseling the gravely ill in hospitals. He realized that the closeness of death forced people to focus on what is most important and everything else fades away to insignificance. In talking with those who are quite literally in the last days of their lives, he found them to be most concerned with whether they had paid enough attention to the people they loved, or if they had given enough of what they had accumulated to others in the form of charity, or if they had helped those around them enough instead of paying too much attention to themselves. In essence, it is what they had or had not done for others that mattered most.⁹

Personally, I prefer to follow the historical example best set by World War II British prime minister Winston Churchill, who said in a 10 October 1908 speech in Dundee, Scotland, well before he was famous, “What is the use of living, if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?”¹⁰ There is the rub! What people do remember us for is what we have done for them and/or others. Equate this to the eulogy test: What will people say about us at our funeral? Will it be about how we have touched other people’s lives and made a pos-

⁸ These American barons—John J. Astor, George M. Pullman, J. P. Morgan, Leland Stanford, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie, for example—ruled industry at the time, amassing vast fortunes with their monopolies, exploiting their workers, committing illegal business practices, and forming trusts that benefited few.

⁹ Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: Finding God in the Modern World* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

¹⁰ Stephen Mansfield, *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 1995), 199–200.

itive impact on them? Those are lasting memories, and the personal sense of completeness that accompanies altruistic actions are rarely matched in life. Randy Travis may have expressed this sentiment best in “Three Wooden Crosses”: “*It’s not what you take when you leave this world behind you. It’s what you leave behind you when you go.*”¹¹

Another movie, *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*, starring Matthew McConaughey, offers a contemporary example of this idea. McConaughey’s character is a rich, shallow womanizer who comes to a life-changing moment one Christmas when the ghost of his dead uncle, played by Michael Douglas, who McConaughey idolized as a great role model for the type of life he was living, comes back to warn him to change his ways and not replicate his life. Douglas makes his point by bringing his nephew to the scene of his own funeral, which was only attended by a couple of people. The funeral is an elaborate venue with hundreds of seats available, but only one or two are filled because Douglas was such a terrible person, offering a clear reminder of the scene in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* when Scrooge is brought to his own funeral by the ghost of Christmas Yet to Come and sees a great celebration. He thinks it is because they love him, but then realizes that all the people, one of whom is literally dancing on his coffin, are celebrating because they all owed him money and now they do not since he died alone without anyone willing or able to pursue the debts owed by the townspeople.¹²

During a vacation that my family and I took one year, we visited a former home of one of the original robber barons, William Randolph Hearst, at San Simeon, California. He died in 1951 and the Hearst Cas-

¹¹ Randy Travis, vocalist, “Three Wooden Crosses,” by Kim Williams and Doug Johnson, released 25 November 2002, track 5 on *Rise and Shine*, Warner Brothers Nashville.

¹² *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*, directed by Mark Waters (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 2009); and Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol in Prose; Being a Ghost Story of Christmas* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1847).



Figure 3. William Randolph Hearst, ca. 1905–45
Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

tle is now a museum. This American “castle” was only 1 of more than 40 homes owned by Hearst around the world. Granted, he was not an admirable human being for many reasons, but what impressed me the most was something that was said about him. Throughout the Great Depression from 1929 to 1939, when millions were unemployed, he refused to lay off any of his thousands of employees even though he was losing a great deal of money by keeping them on. Hearst did not want to add to the calamity of America’s economic downturn and he did this for the benefit of others—his workers—most of whom he did not know. This is what I remember the most about the visit.¹³

From a personal perspective, I spent 31 months in combat in Iraq, and there were many highs and lows during that time. One incident stands out in my memory. As the battalion commander responsible for the city of Fallujah in 2007, an Iraqi man I knew from the city council meetings approached me. His neighbor’s son had been caught up in a sweep by the battalion we had replaced in Fallujah and was languishing in the prison system. The man assured me that it was simply a matter of the young man being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and that he was not an insurgent. The neighbor personally vouched for the young man’s character and ensured that he would stay clear of any further trouble if I could get him released. Though it took several weeks, I was able to get the young man freed from jail. My security detail and I picked him up from the release point at one of our camps. As we were about to depart and return him to his family in Fallujah, I made it clear that he understood what he owed his neighbor and that he needed to stay clear of trouble. He fervently assured me he would. When we arrived at his home, he jumped down from the vehicle and

¹³ This comment was made by the tour guide during the visit and cannot be substantiated in primary sources, though some reference to Hearst’s efforts can be seen in Louis W. Liebovich, *Bylines in Despair: Herbert Hoover, the Great Depression, and the U.S. News Media* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

knelt down to kiss the ground. He then ran inside and almost immediately we could hear his mother crying hysterically and thanking God for his safe return. The young man did indeed stay out of trouble, and I like to think that we both changed his life.

Victor E. Frankl, a World War II death camp survivor, provided perhaps the best answer to what brings happiness in life in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. According to Frankl, people achieve a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their life when it means something—something to live for, a cause, or mission that enables one to feel worthwhile as a human being. His concept of logotherapy, a school of psychotherapy, considers the search for life's meaning as a human's primary motivational force. It is rarely anything material, and usually entails doing things for others, but this sense of meaning is crucial. During his time in various Nazi death camps, where Frankl lost most of his family, those who survived did so because they felt they had something to live for, and those who succumbed did so because they had given up all hope. As such, they gave up the last thing they really had—their own life.¹⁴ Frankl played off German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's early work, translating an early quote to, "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how."¹⁵

One of my favorite humorists is Erma Bombeck. She wrote a syndicated column, "At Wit's End," that ran from 1965 to 1996 that focused on the challenges of living the suburban life in America. Unfortunately, she died from cancer in April 1996. In 1979, someone asked her what she would change about her life if she could live it over. The column

¹⁴ Though it has since been translated and reprinted many times, the original work comes from *Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager* [Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy] (Vienna, Austria: Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1946).

¹⁵ Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. The original quote by Nietzsche, "Maxims and Arrows," *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) reads: "If we have our own 'why' of life we shall get along with almost any 'how'."

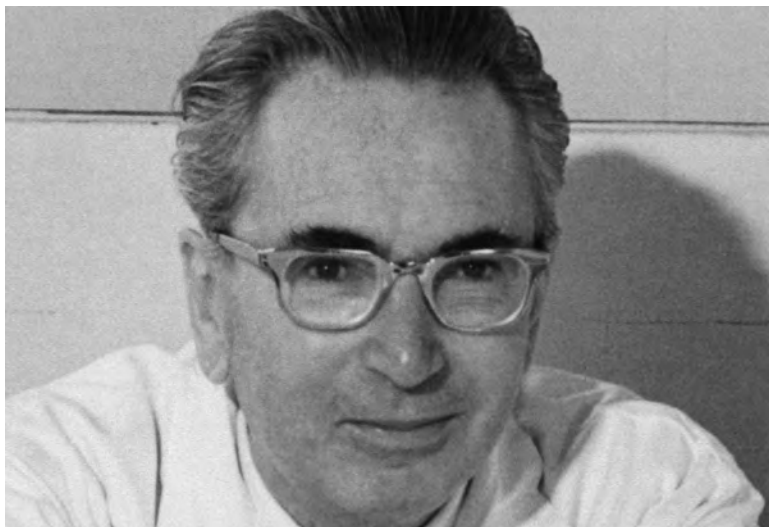


Figure 4. Victor Frankl, 1965

Source: Viktor Frankl Archive, Dr. Franz Vesely.



Figure 5. Erma Bombeck, 1982

Source: Special Collection and Archives, Wright State University Library.

she wrote in response has remained with me since. I keep it in a file marked “Wisdom for the Ages,” and the sentiments she expresses in it are not only applicable to concluding this chapter, but also words to live by.

If I Had My Life to Live Over

I would have talked less and listened more.

I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained, or the sofa faded.

I would have eaten the popcorn in the “good” living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace.

I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth.

I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed.

I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage.

I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains.

I would have cried and laughed less while watching television and more while watching life.

I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband.

I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day.

I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show soil, or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy, I'd have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life to assist God in a miracle.

When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, “Later. Now go get washed up for dinner.”

There would have been more “I love you’s,” more “I’m sorry’s” . . . but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute . . . look at it and really see it . . . live it . . . and never give it back.

Stop sweating the small stuff. Don’t worry about who doesn’t like you, who has more, or who’s doing what.

Instead, let’s cherish the relationships we have with those who do love us.

Let’s think about what God HAS blessed us with.¹⁶

Questions to Consider

1. What do you value most in your life and how do you show it?
2. What have you done for those around you lately with no expectation of anything in return?
3. What is the cause or mission for which you live your life?

Suggested Further Study

Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus. “Man’s Covetousness.” In *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated by H. R. James. London: Elliot Stock, 1897.

I have been trying to understand philosophy better by making myself read it. I do not have much patience for it, but this book was an exception due to the value I found in its pages, especially the quote used in this chapter.

Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol in Prose; Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1847.

¹⁶ Bombeck’s column originally ran in the Dayton, OH, *Journal Herald*, but was soon syndicated in hundreds of newspapers across the country. Erma Bombeck, “If I Had My Life to Live Over,” in *Eat Less Cottage Cheese and More Ice Cream: Thoughts on Life from Erma Bombeck* (Kansas, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing; Burnham: Derek Searle, 2003).

A classic of literature and a great lesson on what is important in life.

Frankl, Viktor. *Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager* [Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy]. Vienna, Austria: Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1946.

To have survived the Nazi death camps and still be the good person that is so evident in Frankl's writings truly struck me as amazing.

Holiday, Ryan. *Stillness Is the Key*. New York: Penguin, 2019.

One of quite a few books written by this author and I have found all of them to be of value in forming and reinforcing a personal philosophy for life.

Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God: Finding God in the Modern World*. New York: Penguin, 2018.

With all the confusion that seems to exist out there, seeking answers regarding God is something I have been pursuing. This book was helpful in that pursuit.

Mansfield, Stephen. *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill*. Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 1995.

Churchill has always fascinated me—he achieved so much and had such an eventful life—and his ability to resist and never give in despite all he experienced in life is a good example and this book serves to illustrate that fact.

McChrystal, Gen Stanley, and Jeff Eggers. *Leaders: Myth and Reality*. New York: Penguin, 2018.

A good study in leadership and what it takes to be successful in that regard.

Waters, Mark, dir. *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*. Written by Jon Lucas and Scott Moore. Featuring Matthew McConaughey, Jennifer Garner, and Emma Stone, Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 2009. DVD.

Much like *A Christmas Carol*, this movie offers a good lesson on what is important in life.

Chapter 3

A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE

The cultivation of a professional attitude about the accomplishment of one's tasks in life is also important. While people have different ideas of professionalism and what it entails, I believe it means that we give every task related to our profession our best effort, regardless of how mundane it might be. If it is worth doing, it is worth doing correctly and to the best of our ability. Most of the legendary professional athletes through history are renowned for practicing relentlessly for hours to get things right. They live by the Coach Vince Lombardi concept that "practice does not make perfect, only perfect practice makes perfect."¹ The challenge is that many of the tasks that need to be practiced in detail are mundane and boring, so they are avoided in favor of those tasks that are more exciting. When we skip on the mundane and boring, these things typically become stumbling blocks. People also tend to focus on those things they do well and ignore their weak-

¹ Though football coach Vince Lombardi has long been credited with this saying, the original phrase was cited in print as early as 1923.

nesses. Professionals do the exact opposite in the effort to eliminate their weaknesses.

Former UCLA head basketball coach John Wooden was one of the most disciplined coaches in NCAA basketball history. Some have said that he was one of the greatest coaches of all time, having won 10 national titles, 7 in a row from 1966 to 1973, and achieving a 205–5 win-loss record during that time span. In addition, he had two consecutive undefeated seasons, four perfect seasons, and was voted national coach of the year six times. His reputation earned him the nickname “The Wizard of Westwood,” where UCLA is located.²

The secret of Wooden’s success was likely the fact that his team practices were legendary. He ensured that every minute of each practice was valuable and that his players were tremendously proficient at the fundamentals. To the shock of his newest players, at the beginning of each season, he took all the freshman into the locker room and painstakingly taught them how to put on their socks and to lace up their basketball shoes properly. They were some of the most sought-after high school basketball talent in the nation and were phenomenal players. They could not believe they were being taught something as rudimentary as putting on socks and shoes. Each year, Coach Wooden would patiently explain that he did not want any of them missing out on practice or game time due to blisters or injured ankles.³ It was as simple as that. His practices and plays during games were much the same—simple, basic, and incredibly effective. His approach was based on something his father had told him, “Set your standards high; name-

² “John Wooden,” Sports-Reference.com, accessed 3 August 2022; and Mike Puma, “SportsCentury Biography: Wizard of Westwood,” ESPN Classic, accessed 3 August 2022.

³ See, for example, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, *Coach Wooden and Me: Our 50-Years Friendship On and Off the Court* (New York: Hachette, 2017); and John Wooden and Don Yeager, *A Game Plan for Life: The Power of Mentoring* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 120.



Figure 6. UCLA head basketball coach John Wooden, 1960
Source: Associated Students, University of California, Los Angeles.

ly, do the absolute best of which you are capable. Focus on running the race rather than winning it. Do those things necessary to bring forth your personal best and do not lose sleep worrying about the competition. Let the competition lose sleep worrying about you. Teach your organization to do the same.”⁴ Though inspiring and compelling, the

⁴ John Wooden and Steve Jamison, *Wooden on Leadership* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 9.

intention is not unique. The Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 1 BCE–65 CE) is often quoted as saying, “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”⁵ Coach Wooden and his teams were prepared because they had the dedication to professionalism to make sure they were prepared when opportunities arose.

As with most things, this attitude regarding the work or duties we face is a personal choice in that it is entirely up to each one of us which option we choose: give everything our best effort, or try to get by doing as little as possible. Some people figure this out early in life and give every task their best effort, while others fail to achieve this level of understanding and then wonder why they get left behind for promotions. Thirty-four years as a Marine officer offer many examples of this phenomena. A great many of my fellow officers coasted along in their careers and only did those things that were convenient or that they liked doing. However, there were also several (not nearly enough) who set the example for me in all that they did. They gave every task their best effort and did it all with a contagious, positive attitude. They demonstrated that a professional attitude indicates a clear understanding that everything we do, or fail to do, says something about the person we are. If we always deliver to the best of our ability, then we have personal satisfaction as well as the good opinion of those around us—at least those who can stand up by comparison.

Most importantly, determined effort will always beat those who rely on talent alone to get them where they want to go in life. There are plenty of talented people who are going nowhere in life because they are unwilling to put in the amount of effort required to become truly great. On the value of effort over talent, Angela Duckworth says in her self-improvement book *Grit*, “Without effort, your talent is nothing more than your unmet potential. Without effort, your skill is nothing

⁵ Katja Vogt, “Seneca,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2020).

more than what you could have done but did not. With effort, talent becomes skill, and, at the very same time, effort makes skill productive.”⁶ This is an amazingly simple truth, but it is not widely known or accepted. Winston Churchill recognized this aspect of life. As a child, he was frequently sick and suffered with a speech impediment. He was often picked on because of his small size and smart mouth. He overcame all of this to rise to become one of the greatest orators in history because he believed that “often, those who feel less gifted than their peers, who are unable to run on the power of talent and natural ability alone, nevertheless set themselves to the costly hard work their goals demand.”⁷ Churchill’s reputation was legendary for how hard he worked and how much he prepared to deliver speeches in British Parliament or in other venues. His active career in the military, politics, and literature spanned from 1895 to the early 1960s, and many have attributed his public longevity to his almost herculean work ethic. It often took teams of people working for him to keep up with his own personal efforts. He was a professional in every sense of the word.

Compounding the requirement for effort is the fear of failure with an end result that some do not bother in the attempt to improve. Dr. Carol S. Dweck talks about this being a fixed attitude in *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*.⁸ People with this kind of mindset do not believe that they can ever improve. They believe that they are born with all the intelligence and talent they will ever have, and it cannot be improved. They also tend to be afraid to try new things because they might fail and discover they are not as good as they think. Conversely, those with a growth mindset believe that they can always get bet-

⁶ Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 42.

⁷ Steven Mansfield, *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 1995), 179.

⁸ Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine Books, an imprint of Random House, 2006).



Figure 7. *The Roaring Lion*, Winston Churchill, ca. 1941

Source: Yousuf Karsh, Library and Archives Canada.

ter, and they spend their life in the pursuit of doing so. They are never afraid to try new things and thrive on overcoming challenges.⁹ This is the essence of professionalism—seeking self-improvement and understanding that none of us will ever be good enough, but we should

⁹ Dweck, *Mindset*, 114–32.

always strive to get better. Life moves very quickly and the changes we see around us can be mind-boggling at times. Many jobs we see today will not exist in 5–10 years and new jobs that have never been considered will exist in their place. If we are always seeking self-improvement, we will never be left behind.

So, what keeps many of us from doing what is described in this chapter? Steven Pressfield best articulates the reason in his book *The War of Art*. He called it *resistance*. It is that invisible force that keeps us from doing what we either know needs to be done, or what we want to do to reach our own goals.¹⁰ Maybe it is like “the force” in all those *Star Wars* movies except that it is a negative force in that it keeps us from becoming who we want to become. This, to me, is resistance:

Most of us have two lives. The life we live, and the life within us. Between the two stands resistance.

Have you ever brought home a treadmill and let it gather dust in the attic? Ever quit a diet, a course of yoga, a meditation practice? Have you ever bailed out on a call to embark upon a spiritual practice, dedicate yourself to a humanitarian calling, commit your life to the service of others? Have you ever wanted to be a mother, a doctor, an advocate for the weak and helpless; to run for office, crusade for the planet, campaign for world peace, or to preserve the environment? Late at night have you experienced a vision of the person you might become, the work you could accomplish, the realized being you were meant to be? Are you a writer who doesn't write, a painter who doesn't paint, an entrepreneur who never starts a venture? Then you know what resistance is.¹¹

¹⁰ Steven Pressfield, *The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles* (New York: Black Irish Entertainment, 2002).

¹¹ Pressfield, *The War of Art*, 85.

Each person must struggle to overcome this resistance because life keeps moving on and, if anything, the pace accelerates every day. Succumbing to resistance means that life will pass us by and, no matter what you do for a living, this cannot be a good thing. Journalist Thomas L. Friedman, in his book *The World Is Flat*, expressed the belief that there is no such thing as lifetime employment as was seen in our parents and grandparents' generations, there is only lifetime employability. Friedman points to how we must instead maintain our marketability by highlighting the skills we continue to sharpen and bring to the table in any environment—we strive to get better every day.¹²

One of my sisters provides a good example of this with her career in sales. The skills she has developed, and continues to improve on, have enabled her to enjoy some level of job security, at least as secure as can be achieved in today's reality. Every time she has left a position, other companies have actively sought her out, providing her with several options to choose from for her next position. She has even been recruited for other positions while still in the current one. For those who have succumbed to resistance and let their skills atrophy or become obsolete because they settled into a comfortable place instead of striving to improve, the silence that accompanies being let go from a job as a result is deafening. Avoiding the trap of complacency is the essence of professionalism. The Japanese have a word for it:

Kaizen is Japanese for resisting the plateau of arrested development. Its literal translation is: "continuous improvement." It's a persistent desire to do better. It's the opposite of being complacent. But it's a *positive* state of mind, not a negative one. It's not looking backward with dissatisfaction. It's look-

¹² Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005).

ing *forward* and wanting to grow. You are never going to get anywhere if you think you are already there.¹³

I am always on the lookout for inspiring stories and came across one several years ago. Unfortunately, the author is unknown, but it offers a fitting last thought to this chapter:

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house-building business to live a more leisurely life with his wife and enjoy his extended family. He would miss the paycheck each week, but he needed to retire. They could get by.

The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes but over time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end a career.

When the carpenter finished his work, his employer came to inspect the house. Then he handed the front-door key to the carpenter and said, “this is your house . . . my gift to you for all the years you have worked so hard for me.” The carpenter was shocked! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the house he had built none too well.

So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At some important points, we do not give the job our best effort. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have cre-

¹³ Duckworth, *Grit*, 118.

ated and find that we are now living in the house we have built. If we could do it over, we would do it much differently.

Think of yourself as the carpenter. Think about your house. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Build wisely. This is the only life you will ever build. Even if you live it for only one more day, that day deserves to be lived graciously and with dignity and pride.

The plaque on the wall says, “life is a do-it-yourself project.” What could say it more clearly? Your life today is the result of your attitudes and choices made in the past. Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today.¹⁴

Questions to Consider

1. Do you give every task your best effort?
2. Is there resistance in your life? Where does it come from and how can you overcome it?
3. How might you practice *Kaizen*?

Suggested Further Study

Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner, 2016.

This is one of the best books I have read regarding what it takes to be resilient in life.

Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine Books, an imprint of Random House, 2006.

Another great book on what it takes to be resilient. I have used Dweck’s description of the fixed and growth mindsets in my teach-

¹⁴ Anonymous, “The Carpenter’s House,” Inspirationpeak.com, accessed 4 August 2022.

ing and in my writing; it struck me as so absolutely true from my experience.

Friedman, Thomas L. *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005.

A good illustration of how competitive the world is and how we should never settle into complacency.

Wooden, John, and Don Yeager. *A Game Plan for Life: The Power of Mentoring*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009.

There are many books about and by Coach John Wooden and I have found him to be one of the most impressive men I have ever read about—not necessarily for what he achieved as a coach, but more for the good, solid person that he was. He touched many lives and made them all better for knowing him.

Chapter 4

EXCELLING VERSUS COMPETING

Most people love competition. It sharpens the edge of the game at hand and pushes us to work harder in the interest of winning—or maybe not be embarrassed by losing. While this motivation can be useful in the pursuit of forming teams and enabling them to win, on an individual basis, outside of individual sports such as running or swimming, it can be poisonous. It engenders the desire in some to cut others short or try to make them look bad so that they can advance. Competition can also kill the trust that is required for successful teams. Consider team sports and, when a team does not get along or has too many individuals instead of team members, it is almost guaranteed to be a losing team or at least not as successful.

A good illustration of this was when a friend in the Marine Corps was stationed in Cleveland, Ohio, training reservists about 15 years ago. He had developed such a strong relationship with the Cleveland Browns football team that he traveled with them on occasion. On a return trip to Cleveland from yet another loss, he looked around the

airplane at the team and remarked to one of the coaches that he did not see a team, he only saw a collection of individuals. They were all in their own world and did not interact much with each other like a good team naturally does. This might explain why they had losing records for so many years. The opposite side of this coin would be the approach Coach John Wooden always took, “A player who makes the team great is better than a great player.”¹

In essence, we should never seek to compete with our peers in the game of life. Doing so breeds aggressiveness and enables the ruthless to win at the expense of everyone else. This is not the environment that breeds the trust essential to the teamwork required in many walks of life, but most particularly in the profession of arms. Those who compete with their peers take pleasure in beating others regardless of the topic or enjoy when their peers fall short. Their entire concept of self-worth relies on them being better than anyone else and they are crest-fallen when they realize they really are no better than anyone else. The root of the issue is that, no matter how skilled or knowledgeable, with a global population of 8 billion people, there is likely someone out there who can do it better than you. For hypercompetitors, the frustration that comes with realizing this fact generally causes them to either push harder in their pursuit of being the best, usually at the expense of everything else in their life, or they quit.²

During my time in the Marine Corps, I saw the ill effects of careerism in the officer corps of the Service. But, from my experience, it is

¹ Pat Williams and James Denney, *Coach Wooden: The 7 Principles that Shaped His Life and Will Change Yours* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing, 2011), 180.

² The term *hypercompetition* refers to an incredibly dynamic and competitive world where no action or advantage can be sustained for long and advantage quickly erodes. See Richard D'Aveni, *Hypercompetition: Managing the Dynamics of Strategic Maneuvering* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

much worse in the other Services.³ This might be due to the relatively small size of the Marine Corps compared to the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and the fact that the Corps rarely promotes anyone early. During several joint tours, I witnessed the toxic atmosphere that developed among officers in particular as they competed against each other for the premier jobs, the best marks on their fitness reports, and the early promotion for each rank. Those who were successful in this “race” then used these “accomplishments” as bragging points in discussions with others. Those who either could not or would not compete for an early promotion opportunity became second-class citizens who never got the best jobs or best fitness reports. This destroys trust and demonstrates to those lower in the chain of command that these officers do not care about their subordinates. It is about them and how fast they can move up the ranks. Many of these officers do not spend enough time in one position to truly be considered competent or to make the organization they are in charge of better. They are merely “checking a box” as they move along, and everyone knows it. Though it takes place in the Marine Corps, it is relatively rare.

Ladder climbing is not uncommon in the civilian world either. In Jim Collins’s book *Good to Great*, he talks about chief executive officers who arrive with a loud crash and stir things up to enhance their reputations or to generate the short-term financial gains that the stockholders demand. The challenge is that, since it is really only about them, when they leave, the company falls back into whatever rut they previously occupied, or worse, collapses.⁴ Imagine the damage these

³ See, for example, LtCol Roger W. Alford, USAF, *The Prevalence of Careerism Among U.S. Air Force Officers* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1989); Scott A. Bethel et al., “Developing Air Force Strategists: Change Culture, Reverse Careerism,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 58 (3d quarter 2010): 82–88; and William L. Hauser, “Careerism vs. Professionalism in the Military,” *Armed Forces & Society* 10, no. 3 (1984): 449–63.

⁴ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don’t* (New York: Harper Business, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2001).

types of people have caused to countless others and the companies involved. They stop at nothing to achieve short-term gains for appearances and dividends, but what about the human beings who work in these organizations? Somehow, this element is not part of the equation for the hypercompetitive superstars who make business headlines.

The more effective approach to personal or group motivation is to excel at every task given, with the pursuit of personal and/or unit development/improvement being the end goal. The key is competing against ourselves and not anyone else. When we strive to achieve our own personal or team best with every task, we can live with the results, no matter what they are. I have seen many examples of these types of people during my career, and they always stand out above their peers and they are admired accordingly. In civilian life, legendary Duke University basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski believed that “when our goal is to try to do our best, when our focus is on preparation and sacrifice and effort—instead of numbers on the scoreboard—we will never lose.”⁵ In other words, for those who focus on excelling and being better than they were yesterday, winning is a byproduct of the effort they put into improvement.

A corollary to this is that if we can help others along the way to improve as well, so much the better. Consider the old adage that a rising tide lifts all boats.⁶ Personal excellence sets the example for others to follow and can inspire them to new levels of effort and professionalism. Taking the time, especially when it comes at the expense of our own effort, to help someone else overcome a challenge and grow often proves better than breaking a personal record. Jim Collins called

⁵ Mike Krzyzewski and Donald T. Phillips, *Leading with the Heart: Coach K's Successful Strategies for Basketball, Business, and Life* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, an imprint of Hachette, 2010).

⁶ This concept was used frequently by John F. Kennedy, though he did not coin the phrase that was typically used regarding political or economic theory.



Figure 8. Coach Mike Krzyzewski

Duke University head coach Mike Krzyzewski talks to his team during a timeout against the University of Virginia in Durham, NC, on 12 January 2012.

Source: D. Myles Cullen, Department of Defense photo 120112-D-VO565-016.

this type of leadership “great” and the opposite of the approach that hypercompetitives use.⁷ For those leaders who came in and helped a company improve by working with people and focusing on what was best for the company and its employees, the success they achieved was remarkable. Most notably, when they moved on, the companies continued to improve instead of reverting or collapsing.

The unfortunate fact is that of more than 1,400 companies examined in Collins’s *Good to Great*, less than 20 experienced the type of leadership described as great.⁸ The essence of what Collins was talking about is that being a team player is important, but never more so than

⁷ Collins, *Good to Great*, 220–21.

⁸ Collins, *Good to Great*.

when in a leadership position where your actions are always being observed and judged by those being led. Being a team player as a leader means being loyal to the people who work for you and ensuring they have what they need to be successful. If we take care of them, there is a strong chance that they will take care of us.

One of the best movie scenes, in my mind, comes from *An Officer and a Gentleman* when the character played by Richard Gere was running the obstacle course at Navy Officer Candidate School (OCS). He had been extremely self-centered throughout the movie, which had gotten him into trouble, but he had apparently learned from his mistakes. As they were preparing to graduate, he had a good chance to break the obstacle course record and his classmates were cheering for him. As he was cruising through the obstacles, he came across one of his classmates (played by Lisa Eilbacher) who, because of her height and strength, on previous attempts at the obstacle course could never get over the rope wall obstacle. Before the class ran the course for the final time, their drill instructor told her that if she could not get over the wall she would fail out of OCS. Gere's character cruised past her as she attempted the rope wall obstacle, once again without success. He said a few encouraging things to her as he went by her, but he seemed to be more intent on breaking the record than the welfare of his classmate. When he got past the rope wall, he stopped, realized what was more important, and went back to help her. The two of them finished together amid the celebration of their classmates.⁹ Even though this was only a movie, many of us can think back to instances from our own experience of something similar and they stand out as shining examples of teamwork and camaraderie that mean so much

⁹ *An Officer and a Gentleman*, directed by Taylor Hackford, featuring Richard Gere, Debra Winger, David Keith, and Louis Gossett Jr. (Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1982).

more than those times when we saw someone achieve their personal best—by themselves.

For example, I had been taught how to climb a rope by my instructors at the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps unit at Marquette University; so when I arrived at Quantico for the Marine Corps OCS in the summer of 1985, I quickly and efficiently climbed any rope I encountered—and it happens frequently since the course is very physically challenging. A fellow officer candidate from the Merchant Marine Academy was less fortunate. He did not have the proper technique for repeatedly climbing the rope, and he was not strong enough to use his arms each time. This left him in danger of being dropped from the course. Late one night, I snuck out of the barracks with him, and we went to the obstacle course where I taught him the proper technique. It was risky, as both of us could have been kicked out of the school for being out of the barracks at night, but it was worth the effort and the risk as he was a good person. More important, he was my classmate. The next day, to the surprise of just about everyone, he succeeded in climbing the rope. He subsequently graduated from OCS and became a Marine officer and helicopter pilot. I have always been grateful for taking the risk to help a fellow candidate.

There are some who think that if they do not compete and their peers do, they will lose out. While this may be true in the short run, if we can take it philosophically and not let it bring us down, we are much better off in the long run. We can look at ourselves in the mirror knowing that we did our best and did not take advantage of those around us to achieve what we wanted. Life is full of wins and losses. This is a simple fact of existing on this planet. We will never win every game or overcome every challenge we face, but if we can come away—win or lose—with the knowledge that we did our best and left everything on the field, we will be fine. Coach Krzyzewski was once asked about his team's loss in the Final Four of the NCAA tournament and his reply

was simple: “I don’t think I have to apologize for us getting to the Final Four three or four times and not winning. I’d rather play and be beaten than not be there at all.”¹⁰

The secret is that our peers have the ability to do the same, but it is a choice that some do not make. They wear themselves out trying to compete and therefore miss out on the joys of life that can best be seen when one takes the time to slow down and observe those joys instead of rushing about trying to be the best, the richest, the most popular, or the most successful—all of which can only be determined in comparison with others. A hundred years from now, everyone alive today will be dead and who will remember all the effort that was expended on fleeting opportunities or moments of perceived greatness. We should instead try to be great in comparison with who we were yesterday and seek to help those around us be great also. As Winston Churchill said, “Think what your actions now will mean, years hence, when you remember them again. What kind of person will you wish you had been, what kind of sacrifices will you wish you had made, when you or those who survive you look back upon this in the future?”¹¹

Questions to Consider

1. Do you compete with others, or do you excel against the person you were yesterday?
2. Have you helped those around you to improve?

Suggested Further Study

Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*. New York: Harper Business, an imprint of Harper-Collins, 2001.

¹⁰ Krzyzewski and Phillips, *Leading with the Heart*.

¹¹ As quoted in Steven Mansfield, *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 1995), 200.

Another good study on leadership and what it really takes. Great leaders are few and far between.

Hackford, Taylor, dir. *An Officer and a Gentleman*. Featuring Richard Gere, Debra Winger, David Keith, and Louis Gossett Jr. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1982.

This movie came out as I was starting on my path to become a Marine officer and really had a positive impact on me. It was the memory of what the main character did in this movie that caused me to work with my fellow officer candidate and teach him to climb the rope so he would not get dropped from the course.

Krzyzewski, Mike, and Donald T. Phillips. *Leading with the Heart: Coach K's Successful Strategies for Basketball, Business, and Life*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, an imprint of Hachette, 2010.

This title highlights yet another extremely successful basketball coach who is also an incredibly impressive person. I learned a lot from this book.

Chapter 5

CHARACTER MATTERS

C*haracter* is a term that has various meanings, including the original Greek term *charaktēr* for a mark or distinctive quality. Some consider it nothing more than the description of someone who is funny or odd. Others consider it in terms of the person an actor is trying to portray in a movie or play. Not many think really hard about what character is and how essential it is to living a good life. There is an unfortunate many who do not consider it at all because it is difficult to develop and maintain good character. Character requires a type of inner strength that seems to be in short supply these days. While many value (overvalue possibly?) physical strength, which is easy to identify and measure, inner or mental strength is neither easy to spot nor to measure. Be that as it may, strength is essential for the development and maintenance of good character.¹

¹ Merriam-Webster offers a detailed discussion of the term *character*, including its etymology and use through time. See “Word History: The Characteristics of ‘Character,’” Merriam-Webster, accessed 4 August 2022; and F. Clark

What is character? It is the essence of any human being. It is the attractive or repellent force that each one of us gives off to those around us. It is the mental yardstick that tells others whether you can be trusted, because it is best displayed during difficult situations. The old saying that when the going gets tough, the tough get going hits the mark. Those with good character cannot be overwhelmed by circumstances and are the type of people who can always be counted on to have your back or to be reliable with any task. As a matter of fact, the best recent description of good character was provided by Michael Josephson who laid out a curriculum focused on cultivating what he called the “Six Pillars of Character.” These include trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. While many more could be added, he believed that most universal virtues fold easily into these six.² They are a recipe for the creation and maintenance of good character.

Conversely, those without good character are fairly easy to spot. They tend to fade from situations quickly and are generally not around when things get tough. They might appear later when the situation has calmed down and act as if they had something more important to do, but this always rings hollow—even to them and you can see it in their eyes. This is one of the reasons why training is so difficult in the military—to challenge ourselves and those we lead, to build character, and if unsuccessful in that task, to weed out those who lack the character necessary to surpass any difficulty. This is so tremendously important because at the root of character is *integrity*—complete, uncompromising honesty with yourself (which is likely the hardest part) and with those around you. Or as former Navy fighter pilot, Vietnam

Power and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, “Character Development and Self-esteem: Psychological Foundations and Educational Implications,” *International Journal of Educational Research* 27, no. 7 (1998): 539–51, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355\(97\)00053-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355(97)00053-0).

² Michael Josephson as quoted in *Making Ethical Decisions* (Playa del Ray, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics, n.d.), 104.

prisoner of war and Congressional Medal of Honor winner Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale put it,

Integrity is a powerful word that derives from a specific concept. It describes a person who is *integrated*, blended into a *whole*, as opposed to a person of many parts, many faces, many disconnects. The word relates to the ancient's distinction between *living* and *living well*. Contrary to popular thought, a person of integrity is typically easygoing with a sense of humor. He knows himself, reflects a definite and thoughtful set of preferences and aspirations, and is thus reliable.³

A person with good, solid character, a person of integrity, is like a powerful magnet to whom others are naturally attracted. They can be relied on under any circumstance and people want to be near them, especially when the going gets tough. A person without good character generally repels those around them because others know that the person cannot be trusted. It is like an out of tune piano. It looks good from a distance and the music played sounds fine, but when the wrong keys are hit, they really stand out and make the experience less than enjoyable. People who lack character have keys that are out of tune, and they will always hit them, especially when they are under pressure of some sort.

Another aspect of this situation is that some people have a very strong, but negative character. They take pleasure in working to un-

³ James Bond Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1995), 117. VAdm Stockdale is one of the most highly decorated officers in the history of the Navy, wearing 26 personal combat decorations, including two Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Distinguished Service Medals, two Purple Hearts, four Silver Star medals and three Bronze Star medals in addition to the Medal of Honor. He is the only three-star admiral in the history of the Navy to wear both aviator wings and the Medal of Honor.



Figure 9. Formal portrait of then RAdm James B. Stockdale

Source: official U.S. Navy photo.

dercut the system in any way possible and seek to bring others down with them. Some refer to these types of people as charismatic ne'er-do-wells. They always seem to be in some sort of trouble and seek glory in the drama. They work hard at cutting corners, cheating, lying, or stealing to gain advantage for themselves. Ironically, if they put as much thought and effort into being good as they do being bad, they could certainly make something of themselves. The truth of the matter is that just as some kids in high school are popular because of the bad things they do, these charismatic ne'er-do-wells may be popular now, but the path they are on ultimately leads to failure.

Many people equate character to virtue, which is defined by the *Oxford Advanced American Dictionary* as behavior showing high moral standards. Interestingly enough, when provided with a list of virtues—patience, gentleness, bravery, modesty, temperance, righteous indignation, justice, liberality, sincerity, friendliness, dignity, endurance, greatness of spirit, and magnificence—they are ones that we should strive to live up to at all times, but being human, will generally fall short. That does not mean we should ever stop trying though.

President Theodore Roosevelt knew a thing or two about this as he had an abundance of character. He developed it during the course of his life after a very rough start. He was so sickly as a child that his father would carry him around at night in an effort to help him breathe during asthma attacks, and many thought he would not survive childhood. As a young adult, he married the love of his life, but lost her during the birth of their daughter Alice. To make matters worse, moments after his wife died, he went upstairs to the room of his beloved mother who was deathly ill, and she died the same day. He overcame all of his physical and mental challenges through force of will and strenuous exercise to live a life that was an example for all.⁴

⁴ Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey, *The Presidents of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House Historical Association, 2006).

In particular, Roosevelt exemplified what he wrote in the magazine *Outlook*, where he had an article published called “Character and Success.” In it, he said, “Alike for the nation and the individual, the one indispensable requisite is character—character that does and dares as well as endures, character that is active in the performance of virtue no less than firm in the refusal to do aught that is vicious or degraded.”⁵ Perhaps his most famous quote has been a touchstone since I first encountered it in my teenage years. The paper it is printed on is crinkled and a bit tattered from all the times it has been pulled out and read for personal motivation. It is from a speech he gave on 23 April 1910 at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, titled “Citizenship in a Republic.” Its most famous passage is all about character:

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again . . . who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while doing greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.⁶

In thinking about character, I am reminded of the story of a British expedition to the South Pole led by Sir Ernest H. Shackleton that lasted from 1914 to 1917. The name of the ship they embarked on was the *Endurance* (1912) and that exemplified what he and his crew

⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, “Character and Success,” *Outlook*, 31 March 1900.

⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic” (speech, Sorbonne, Paris, France, 23 April 1910).

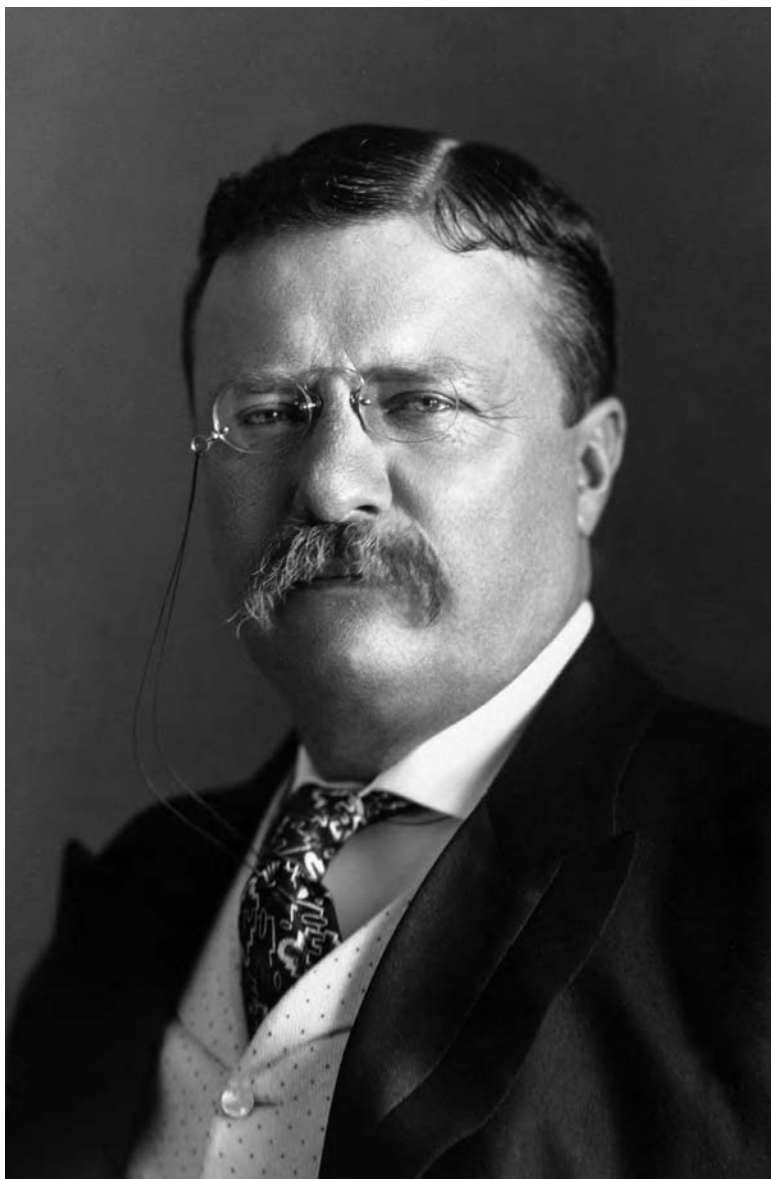


Figure 10. President Theodore Roosevelt, ca. 1904
Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

demonstrated through one major setback after another. The plan was to sail the *Endurance* to a point on the coast of Antarctica, disembark with their dogs, sleds, supplies, and equipment, then march overland to reach the South Pole. When they were about 97 kilometers short of their landing point, the *Endurance* became locked in an ice flow that was drifting north on the Weddell Sea and away from their landing site. The ship stayed locked in the ice throughout the winter of 1915 (in the Southern Hemisphere, winter is during the summer months of the Northern Hemisphere) despite all their strenuous efforts to free it. To make matters worse, as the ice started to break up and shift in the spring, it held the ship in its viselike grip and, after an agonizing two months trying to save the ship, the ice crushed the boat and sank it.⁷

Shackleton and his 28-man crew were able to save most of their equipment, supplies, and sled dogs, but were stranded on the floating ice pack. With the weather warming up as the ice pack drifted north, the break up worsened and they were left with no choice but to set out in the three lifeboats salvaged from the *Endurance*. After an arduous journey where they battled ice that could have capsized their boats or crushed them, the crew landed on the uninhabited Elephant Island off the coast of Antarctica in the South Atlantic Ocean. Since this island was not on any known shipping or whaling routes, Shackleton understood that more had to be done to survive. He and five others set out in one of the open lifeboats and managed to navigate 695 nautical miles north and east through heavy seas and horrendous winter weather to the inhabited South Georgia island (1,300 kilometers east-southeast of the Falkland Islands). Some historians have called this the greatest feat of open ocean navigating and sailing.⁸

⁷ Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell, *Shackleton's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer* (New York: Penguin, 2001).

⁸ Morrell and Capparell, *Shackleton's Way*.



Figure 11. A dog-sledge team at rest, with the *Endurance* trapped in the ice in the background, 1915

Source: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, United Kingdom.

Unfortunately, Shackleton and his men landed on the opposite side of the island from the local inhabitants. After resting for five days, Shackleton set out with two others to hike 42 kilometers across uncharted, mountainous terrain, in the harsh South Atlantic winter, to get to the whaling town of Stromness. Finally safe, Shackleton then set about rescuing the remainder of the crew on Elephant Island. Because Shackleton was such a charismatic and virtuous leader, as described by his crew, he got all 28 of them through it and home again despite starvation rations, horrendous weather, and the tremendous obstacles in their way. The best description of this epic journey and the applicable lessons from his leadership is titled *Shackleton's Way* by Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell.⁹

The inspirational story of Shackleton leads quite naturally to that of a retired British soldier who served in the Special Air Service (SAS) named Lieutenant Colonel Alastair Edward Henry Worsley who saw Shackleton as his role model and hero. Worsley's great grandfather, New Zealander Frank Worsley who captained the *Endurance*, accompanied Shackleton on his expedition and sailed with him on the desperate journey from Elephant Island to South Georgia. In 2008, after his retirement from the British Army, Henry Worsley led an expedition to pioneer a route through the Transantarctic Mountains, reaching a point 158 kilometers from the South Pole. He returned to the Antarctic in 2011, leading a team of six in retracing Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen's successful 1,400-kilometer journey in 1912 to the South Pole, marking its centenary. In completing the route, Worsley became the first person to have successfully completed the routes taken by Shackleton, British Navy captain Robert Falcon Scott, and Amundsen. Worsley showed the same character in getting himself and his team

⁹ Morrell and Capparell, *Shackleton's Way*.



Figure 12. Photograph of Sir Ernest Shackleton, taken during the *Endurance* expedition, ca. 1916

Source: Australian government.

through that arduous journey that Shackleton did almost 100 years earlier.¹⁰

Unfortunately, he then attempted a solo expedition in 2016 across the entire continent of Antarctica on foot and pushed himself beyond human limitations. He finally had to end his journey due to failing

¹⁰ David Grann, *The White Darkness* (New York: Doubleday, 2018); or visit the official website of the expedition at ShackletonSolo.org, accessed using the WaybackMachine on 5 August 2022.

health and the terrible weather conditions, calling for a rescue aircraft via his satellite phone. He referred to it as the most expensive taxi ride in history. Due to how hard he had pushed himself, Worsley died at a hospital in Punta Arenas, Chile, from bacterial peritonitis and organ failure the day after he was rescued. This epic story is told in the book *The White Darkness* by David Grann and contains some stunning photography along with an incredible story of a man who exemplified the strongest possible character.¹¹

So how do we personally demonstrate character? I certainly do not advocate attempting Henry Worsley's adventures, but it is much simpler than that. Character can be demonstrated through the personal choices we make every day, regardless of who is watching. Life is full of choices. As stated in the first chapter, many are enticing, or convenient, or popular, while others look like hard work and are likely unpopular. When we have the self-discipline to make the right choices, regardless of other considerations, and in particular when we do so only for the reason that it is the right thing to do rather than to impress someone who may be watching, we will never stray far from a good path in life. Doing the right thing every time, no matter what, is who each of us needs to be, if we are not already. We achieve this feat by ensuring that every choice we make is a good one—good choices consistently made become good habits and leave no regrets in their wake.

Another example from British history best illustrates this concept. In the late 1970s, the first woman to be appointed prime minister of the United Kingdom was Margaret Thatcher. Her nickname was "The Iron Lady" because of her incredible personal determination and will to do the best for her country as she saw it. She encountered many difficult situations as prime minister but was never found wanting and served in that capacity from 1979 to 1990, becoming the longest serv-

¹¹ Grann, *The White Darkness*.

ing prime minister in the twentieth century. Her attitude about making good choices was expressed as follows, “Disciplining yourself to do what you know is right and important, although difficult, is the high road to pride, self-esteem and personal satisfaction.”¹² The key is that, in the face of adversity, when the going really gets tough as it did for Shackleton and his crew, as well as Henry Worsley and Margaret Thatcher, character really shines through.

Much like a lack of self-discipline though, some talented and intelligent people make a wreck of their career or their life because they had little or no character. They always look for the easy or shortest path to whatever their idea of success is and pay no heed to those around them. They have no qualms about being dishonest with themselves or others and leave a path of chaos in their wake. In addition, when obstacles present themselves, they fade quickly because there is nothing inside to sustain them in the face of adversity. They are like a building made cheaply to keep costs down and to make the biggest possible profit. When an earthquake or strong storm comes along, the building quickly collapses because it did not have all that was required to withstand hard times. Unfortunately, many of these people are adept at fooling themselves into thinking that they are good people. They can fool a lot of people, but in their heart, they know very clearly that they are not a good person. This behavior catches up with them, however, and the results are never pretty.

Another important thing about character is that it shapes our lives as we grow older. It serves as the moral compass that guides us true north or, with the lack of character, spins lazily and points in any direction that seems convenient or desirable but wrong. Some may refer to this as moral relativism in that just about any stance can be justified in some way and the only value is the relative gain or loss as a

¹² John Blundell, ed., *Remembering Margaret Thatcher: Commemorations, Tributes and Assessments* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2013), 16.

result of the choice that has been made.¹³ While this may be a convenient way of evading difficult truths or situations, I could not possibly disagree more with this approach. Any situation has a right or wrong answer. While the difference between the two may be very small at times, it is still there. If we think about it hard enough and have taken the time to develop our own moral compass, we can rely on it to guide us in the right direction. By these actions, we should be able to stay on the proper path in life.

One of the most learned Americans to educate in this country was a man named Mortimer J. Adler. He was a prolific writer and each of his books sought to make his readers better people. His concept of what character does for an individual remains notable:

So the man who has a good moral character will not only be habitually disposed, in his making of choices, to act as he ought in the pursuit of his own happiness; he will also be habitually disposed to act as he ought in relation to the rights of others and in relation to the good of the community as a whole.¹⁴

Lastly, being a person of good character is particularly tough for young men these days due to both the amount of testosterone flowing in their veins and the way our culture shapes them with the plethora of negative examples, particularly with regard to the treatment of women, in movies, television shows, music videos, and now social media. The author to best address this phenomenon was Jack E. Hoban in his book *The Ethical Warrior*. In it, he strives to make people better through the ethical choices they make, especially young men whom he says struggle with this the most. He wants them making choices

¹³ Emrys Westacott, "Moral Relativism," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Alfred University, accessed 5 August 2022.

¹⁴ Mortimer J. Adler, *The Time of Our Lives: The Ethics of Common Sense* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 258.

that indicate a value for life as the highest value in existence—the life of the individual and the lives of those around them. Hoban, who served in the Marine Corps, believes that the combination of martial arts training to better focus the testosterone-driven aggression inherent to young men and ethics-based discussions that provide a positive message via short stories, can have life-changing effects on our youth. One passage seems particularly valid in this regard:

Without the physical fighting ability, along with the constructive moral education, many will often try to prove their manhood to themselves and others through a phony toughness. This includes incessant vulgarity, heavy drinking, swaggering, bullying and beating women. . . .

By teaching men “True Toughness” with (1) unarmed fighting skills and (2) the knowledge of the noble feelings that come from a readiness to protect (instead of victimizing) others, we can upgrade our confused teenagers, en masse, to the moral status that they would like to possess: that of moral giants—protectors of the innocent.¹⁵

While the majority of Marines are exceptionally good, we still see the behaviors described in the first paragraph of the quote above in our Corps. The vulgarity, heavy drinking, swaggering, bullying, and mistreating women that exist in our ranks are the actions that ruin trust within those ranks and also cause the country to lose confidence in the Marine Corps.¹⁶ On the flip side, we also have true toughness in

¹⁵ Jack E. Hoban, *The Ethical Warrior: Values, Morals, and Ethics for Life, Work, and Service* (Spring Lake, NJ: RGI Media and Publications, 2012), 220–21.

¹⁶ For more on flagging confidence in the military, see Jeffrey M. Jones, “Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low,” Gallup, 5 July 2022; Stephen Losey, “Americans’ Trust and Confidence in the Military Is Decreasing, New Survey Finds,” *Military.com*, 10 March 2021; and Phil Klay, “This Citizen-Soldier: Moral Risk and the Modern Military,” *Brookings*, 24 May 2016.

our ranks, and it is generally represented by those who win medals for valor through some incredibly selfless act to protect those around them both in and out of combat. It is also represented by the young Marines who have taken our core values to heart and confront their fellow Marines who have either forgotten them or tossed them aside as unworthy of who they think they ought to be as a Marine. This is a type of moral courage that we do not recognize and reward anywhere near enough and demonstrates an inner strength that far outweighs any amount of physical strength an individual can amass.

Questions to Consider

1. When the going gets tough, where are you: in the lead or looking for a place to hide?
2. Do others have confidence in your ability to lead in any situation?
3. Are you a “protector of the innocent”?

Suggested Further Study

Adler, Mortimer J. *The Time of Our Lives: The Ethics of Common Sense*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1996.

His books can be difficult to read, but I have always found them worth the effort.

Brooks, David. *The Road to Character*. New York: Random House, 2015.

Brooks is a journalist so he writes very well. This is a good book about what true character takes and how to acquire it.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013.

Her books are quite good and this one about Theodore Roosevelt is one of her best. I have always admired Roosevelt, and so have tried to read as much about and by him as I am able to find.

Grann, David. *The White Darkness*. New York: Doubleday, 2018.

A great companion to reading about the Shackleton expedition; the pictures in this book are as good as the story.

Hoban, Jack E. *The Ethical Warrior: Values, Morals, and Ethics for Life, Work, and Service*. Spring Lake, NJ: RGI Media and Publications, 2012.

A profoundly impactful book about trying to make our youth into better people.

Making Ethical Decisions. Playa del Ray, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics, n.d.

Ethics are as important to study as just about anything else in reading about leadership.

Morrell, Margot, and Stephanie Capparell. *Shackleton's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer*. New York: Penguin, 2001.

This expedition, though a failure in that it did not reach the goal they set out to reach, is an amazing story of leadership and determination to survive that I have come across in my reading.

Stockdale, James Bond. *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1995.

Another great book on what it takes to survive and be resilient in the face of horrendous conditions. I greatly admired Vice Admiral Stockdale and this book highlights why.

Chapter 6

RESIST PEER PRESSURE

Ah, peer pressure. The amazingly powerful desire to be accepted by one's primary group—that “need to belong” that Dick Couch spoke of in *A Tactical Ethic*.¹ This need to belong, especially when we are young and just getting started out in life, can be overwhelming at times. I have no problem remembering some of the stupid things I did due to peer pressure. My first experience with smoking came as a result of it. In eighth grade, I wanted to look cool and fit in with some of the kids who smoked, so I bummed a cigarette and puffed away on it. I am sure I looked ridiculous in my ignorance, even though I did manage to avoid a coughing fit. Afterward, my hair and clothes smelled awful, I felt like I needed to shave my tongue, and the nicotine made me feel anxious and sick. I have tried a pipe and cigars since that time, but all yielded similar results as the cigarettes, so I eventually became a com-

¹ Dick Couch, *A Tactical Ethic: Moral Conduct in the Insurgent Battlespace* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

mitted nonsmoker. I guess I was just not smart enough to take someone else's word that smoking is a foul habit best avoided.

As we mature and grow older, we realize that peer pressure is a trap that almost always results in embarrassing or unethical situations that, in hindsight, we would have done better to avoid. It is one of the largest hazards in the minefield I spoke of previously. It is the force that is generally trying to point us in the wrong direction to gain acceptance from those around us. Winston Churchill talked about it as a strong force even in his day:

There is a force in modern life that some have called the “herd mentality.” It grows from the idea drilled so effectively into the minds of youth today that the group must be right simply because it is the group. The promise is compelling: peace and security are found only within the fortress of the many.²

This type of pressure needs to be resisted, and this is a constant effort on the part of all of us because it never really goes away. As an adult, the pull is not as strong as it was when I was younger, but it is still present. One of the best methods for overcoming peer pressure is to just . . . say . . . no. In Joseph McCormack's *Noise*, he had a great deal to say about those two letters: “‘No’ is a powerful little word. It can stop bad decisions, sudden impulses, unwanted offers, and debilitating tendencies. It is as unambiguous as it is direct.”³ I am positive that this word has kept me out of trouble too many times for me to remember. This passage from *Noise* serves as a great reminder:

When I was a kid, my Dad had a million sayings. One of my favorites was “Let your no be no.” He taught me so many things;

² Steven Mansfield, *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 1995), 194.

³ Joseph McCormack, *Noise: Living and Leading When Nobody Can Focus* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 123.

among them was a constant reminder of what truly makes us human is our ability to choose. He would say that the two faculties of the soul are our intellect and our will: our faculties to reason and think along with our capacity to decide. That made so much sense to me, especially at a young age.⁴

Something else to keep in mind is that peer pressure is squarely based on the opinion of those around us and that other people's opinions are not that important—if we choose to treat them as such. This is especially true if we need to do something wrong for others to have a good opinion of us. When we are good, solid people, other good, solid people will be attracted to us, and the bad ones fade away. They may be popular now, but five years from now, they will likely be getting nowhere in life because of the poor choices they have made.

In some ways, I was lucky with my secondary educational experience because I went to three different high schools in three different states. My father was not in the military, but his work did cause us to move fairly often. All the moving around helped me see that I could rely on myself, but also that the opinion of others was not that important to me. I watched other kids who had grown up together and enjoyed tight-knit groups. These cliques frequently fell into the traps of sex, alcohol, and drugs, especially those who were in the “popular” groups. They had an image to uphold and worked harder to live up to it than they did setting the stage for a solid future. Their grades were generally poor, but they wore all the latest fashion trends. Being an outsider for the most part, I had the unique perspective of watching these groups through their formative years. I had friends but was secure in who I was and felt no overwhelming urge to belong to any of these groups. This was to my benefit because many of the people

⁴ McCormack, *Noise*, 130.

in these cliques went nowhere in life due to their poor grades, criminal records for drugs, unplanned parenthood or, in some cases, were dead from an overdose or drunk driving.

Throughout my time in the Marine Corps, I watched young Marines join the ranks and, since they are generally less than a year removed from high school, peer pressure remains a significant challenge for them. This is what Dick Couch warned us about. You can see the need to belong demonstrated by the “salty” senior lance corporals—the ones with the faded and torn camouflage uniforms, trashed boots, and shaggy hair flirting with the maximum length allowed by the regulations. They are a cliché at best; at worst, they are a liability. It is these characters who move in on the newly joined Marines like hungry wolves to tell them how things really run in the unit they just joined. Misery certainly loves company, so these Marines expend more effort dragging others down into the mud with them than being the Marine they set out to be when they first earned their Eagle, Globe, and Anchor (EGA) emblem. Over the years, many other leaders joined me in the attempt to counter the influence of these negative leaders or charismatic ne’er-do-wells that I talked about earlier. We do this because their influence generally leads to negative results, such as hazing and the early departure of young Marines who succumbed to the dumpster subculture and were discharged less than honorably as a result. The overall effect, however, is a serious waste of talent and potential that could have been avoided by people making better choices.

The main point I always tried to make with young Marines, and that I am trying to make now to those reading this book, is that none of this needs to happen. When faced with this sort of pressure, if each of us could reach back in our memories to the day we were first handed the EGA emblem and earned the title Marine, and remember what it felt like. Remember how proud we were—all the aspirations we had to be great Marines—and . . . just . . . say . . . no. If more of our Ma-

rines did this, I think the situation would resolve itself quickly. As stated above though, this takes constant effort, because no matter whether we are in the Marine Corps or not, negative leadership and peer pressure surrounds us every day and needs to be overcome through good choices and solid leadership.

Where these negative leaders want to take us is not who we need to be. It is up to each one of us to choose how we will handle peer pressure, and we can even set up a countervailing pressure to do the right things. In the battalion I had the privilege of leading from 2006 to 2008, my sergeant major and I briefed every group of new Marines that joined our ranks, telling them that no one had a right to treat them poorly just because they arrived at the unit later than others. We also told them that it could only happen to them if they let it happen because they thought it was what was required to become a member of the “team.” What we emphasized was that in a tight-knit, professional unit, everyone does their best because they do not want to let their team members down. They trust that their teammates have their best interests in mind and have their back in tight situations. No one in a group like that will let a fellow member of the group falter or be left behind. This approach paid off in spades as we assumed responsibility for the city of Fallujah in the spring of 2007, which was arguably one of the worst periods in that conflict, and we were able to have a great deal of success turning the city around. These achievements were possible because we went in as a team and worked together through seven extremely hot and, at the beginning especially, violent months.⁵

Surrendering to peer pressure is a choice. It means giving others power, with the operative word here being *giving*. Unfortunately, many people do not even realize they are doing it. Deepak Chopra and Ru-

⁵ The experience is described in detail in Daniel R. Green and William F. Mullen III, *Fallujah Redux: The Anbar Awakening and the Struggle with Al-Qaeda* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014).

dolph E. Tanzi address this in their book *Super Brain* by telling people to stop giving away their personal power:

Becoming powerless does not happen in a single dramatic stroke. It is a process, and for most people, the process is so gradual that they do not notice it. They are more than happy, in fact, to give away their power by degrees. Why? Because being powerless seems like an easy way to be popular, accepted, and protected. You are giving away your power when you please others in order to fit in. Or when you follow the opinions of the crowd. Or when you decide that others matter more than you do. Or when you let someone who seems to have more power take charge of you.⁶

A major factor in giving away personal power is the surge in moral relativism that I wrote about in the previous chapter. According to this philosophy, there is no true right or wrong. Everything is relative to the situation in which it occurs. It is a very popular principle these days, but it is not a new idea. People will always try to find a way to justify whatever it is they want to do, even if it is truly evil. Communism and Nazism used this principle to justify seizing power, then to torture and murder entire populations, even their own, in astronomical numbers. When this was not enough, they turned on other countries and did the same. Ironically, those advocating for Communism and Nazism were literally at each other's throats trying to eliminate the competing ideology and anyone who adhered to it, but they had a great deal more in common than any differences they had. English writer and historian Paul Johnson recognized the role of moral relativism in his research, "If you depart from moral absolutes, you go into a

⁶ Deepak Chopra and Rudolph E. Tanzi, *Super Brain: Unleashing the Explosive Power of Your Mind to Maximize Health, Happiness, and Spiritual Well-Being* (New York: Harmony Books, 2012).

bottomless pit. Communism and Nazism were catastrophic evils which both derived from moral relativism. Their differences were minor compared to their similarities.”⁷

Moral relativism causes people to drift away from the ability to recognize right from wrong and enables them to feel better about their actions because it eliminates the guilt that comes from knowing they did something wrong. It is surrendering personal power in the name of popularity because we are “going with the flow” and doing whatever it is the crowd deems correct rather than taking a stand against what we know to be wrong. This can also be called group peer pressure. Instead of friends providing the pressure to comply with their wishes, it is an entire crowd or, in some cases, an entire culture. The truth is that no matter how many people believe something is right and just that does not make it so. The German people, for the most part, supported Adolf Hitler and the Nazis when they came to power in 1933 mostly because they fell for the propaganda and herd mentality, but also out of fear because anyone who did stand up against the regime was arrested, tortured, or killed. The result for their country was total defeat by 1945, humiliation, and a separation of the country into East and West Germany that lasted for 44 years after World War II.

Group madness can go to extremes, as seen with what the Nazis did, but further exemplified by the Cultural Revolution in China from August 1966 to August 1977. Millions died (exact figures have never been released) or were “reeducated” in concentration camps to think the way that their leader, Mao Zedong, wanted them to think. In his efforts to rebuild the Chinese Communist Party, he published *The Little Red Book* (official title, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*). Millions of books were printed so that everyone could have their own personal copy—it was also required by law—and could follow its teachings, re-

⁷ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983; revised, 1991).



Figure 13. A poster from the Cultural Revolution, featuring an image of Chairman Mao, published by the government of the People's Republic of China
Source: Stefan R. Landsberger Collection, International Institute of Social History.

ardless of how ridiculous the topic might be. All of this was enforced by crowds of what had been normal Chinese people in the desire to adhere to the ideology of the leader or by fear of becoming a target of the mass madness because they did not conform.

I saw an example of moral relativism in action during the summer of 1994. Our unit had been ordered down to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to deal with thousands of Haitian migrants. They were fleeing poverty and oppression in Haiti and were risking their lives to flee the country to get to America. They set out into the open ocean in boats that were often unseaworthy, which resulted in an unknown number sinking or capsizing and all on board being lost. The lucky ones were rescued by

the U.S. Coast Guard and brought to Guantánamo Bay for the Marines to secure until a determination could be made by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service personnel as to their fate.⁸

To make an already bad situation even worse, some unscrupulous Haitians charged per person to load unseaworthy boats well beyond capacity then, when out at sea and the boats began to sink, they forced people over the side at gunpoint to lighten the load. Some also assaulted women, with several reportedly raping a girl as young as two. No one knows how many Haitians died during these events, but several of those guilty of forcing people over the side or raping Haitian women were pointed out to the Marines during humanitarian operations in the Caribbean. We arrested them, and I remember questioning them through an interpreter. There was not an ounce of remorse in any of them, even though they had forced men, women, and children to drown, or had raped them. It was just business to them.⁹

What all this boils down to is that each of us must *choose* to retain power over ourselves and *resist* the need to belong. Resistance to peer or group pressure and becoming a member of a team through good work and sustained effort is much more satisfying and will also gain the genuine respect of those around us. It is also another factor in establishing and maintaining the trust needed to be successful no matter what challenges we face whether in the military or the business world. This kind of trust can be seen in championship winning teams in any sport. In the military, it is present in some of our units, but it needs to be something tangible in every unit, especially those that engage in close combat. Individually, by retaining power over ourselves, we retain the power to choose correctly and resist peer pressure. It can be

⁸ Col Nicholas E. Reynolds, USMCR, *A Skillful Show of Strength: U.S. Marines in the Caribbean, 1991–1996* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 2003).

⁹ Reynolds, *A Skillful Show of Strength*.

a lonely battle, but it always pays off in a positive manner; it just may take some time to do so.

Always remember—*WE* choose what we do every day. That is power over ourselves. Aristotle referred to this as living well by choosing rightly.¹⁰

Questions to Consider

1. Are you giving away your personal power to please others and “fit in”?
2. Do you try to reason away personal actions you know to be wrong?
3. Do you choose to resist peer pressure and seek to “live well by choosing rightly”?

Suggested Further Study

Chopra, Deepak, and Rudolph E. Tanzi. *Super Brain: Unleashing the Explosive Power of Your Mind to Maximize Health, Happiness, and Spiritual Well-Being*. New York: Harmony Books, 2012.

This is a great book about how to get the most out of the incredible organ at the top of our heads. Most of us do not even try to maximize its potential, but this book points the way in that endeavor.

Pan, Philip P. *Out of Mao's Shadow: The Struggle for the Soul of New China*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008.

A good description of the madness that prevailed in China for so many years under Mao, including the use of *The Little Red Book*.

¹⁰ Richard Kraut, “Aristotle’s Ethics,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Department of Philosophy, Stanford University, 2022).

Chapter 7

GET BACK UP

As discussed earlier, we are all human. Being human, we are all prone to make mistakes, to trip over life's obstacles. When we do, we need to get back up. No one is perfect and we will all stumble and fall at some point in our lives. What is important is how we handle it. Getting back up, brushing ourselves off, learning from the experience, and continuing to march are the important things. Though Winston Churchill has historically been misquoted as saying, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts," the sentiment rings true.¹ Instead of following this advice, unfortunately, too many young people in the Marine Corps and in the country as a whole, prefer the "easy button" option of quitting. This manifests in

¹ There is no documentation supporting claims that this quote came from Churchill. The earliest known source was from a 1906 volume of literary criticism, and it included a precursor of the saying: "Comedy amuses, corrects, and heartens. It shows that the vanities of life are not final, and the failures not always fatal." Charles Mills Gayley and Clement C. Young, *English Poetry: Its Principles and Progress* (London: Macmillan, 1906), c.

many ways, but the most destructive way is through suicide. This ultimately selfish and completely irrevocable act leaves behind a trail of wreckage that, in some cases, cannot be overcome. For some, the immense pain of living with their burdens can outweigh any other considerations, but I cannot help thinking that if they consider all the people they will impact because of the action they are contemplating, it may save their life.

One of the many duties I had during the course of my career was that of casualty notification officer.² When a Marine gets seriously injured or dies, the Corps notifies the Marine unit nearest to the servicemember's next of kin and orders them to notify them in person as to what happened to their loved one and then to assist them in every way possible after that. I have performed this duty seven times, and two of those instances were for a Marine who committed suicide. At times, I wish I could have recorded those family notifications so I could replay it for any person considering suicide as a viable option to handling life's challenges. There is no greater stress or sorrow to see how spouses, mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers react to the horrendous news, and it was tremendously impactful. Listening to family members try to make sense out of a senseless act and wonder if it was somehow their fault is truly heartrending. If those considering suicide could see the turmoil they expose their own families to with the act, I think many would take a different path. Every time I hear about someone who has committed suicide, I flash back to one of those casualty notifications and remember the person's family.

Life is a fight from start to finish, and those who make something of themselves realize this quickly and always keep fighting. Those who

² This activity is supported by the Department of Defense's Casualty Assistance Program through each Service branch. The assistance to primary and secondary family members comes in the form of travel and transportation expenses, funeral honors and burial expenses, applying for benefits, personal effects and reports, legal matters, taxes, and counseling.

do not fade quickly or quit entirely. George H. Allen, former National Football League head coach of the then Los Angeles Rams and what is now the Washington Commanders, knew something about perseverance. Every season that he was a head coach, he led the teams to winning seasons and even brought Washington to the Super Bowl in the 1972 season, though they lost to the undefeated Miami Dolphins. A quote has been attributed to him that would be good to keep in mind:

One of the most difficult things everyone has to learn is that for your entire life you must keep fighting and adjusting if you hope to survive. No matter who you are or what your position, you must keep fighting for whatever it is you desire to achieve. If someone is not aware of this contest and expects otherwise, then constant disappointment occurs. People who fail sometimes do not realize that the simple answer to every day achievement is to keep fighting. Health, happiness and success depend upon the fighting spirit of each person. The big thing is not what happens to us in life, but what we *DO* about what happens to us.³

Those considering quitting or committing suicide would make a different decision if they were grittier in their approach toward life. Gritty people understand that life is full of challenges and that the only way to get through it is to drive on, to learn from their mistakes, and to keep trying. Gritty people succeed because they never give up. Angela Duckworth speaks to the concept extensively: “To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall down sev-

³ “Keep Fighting,” Geneseo.edu, State University of New York, accessed 8 August 2022. Emphasis added.



Figure 14. Coach George H. Allen, ca. 1981–87

Source: official U.S. Department of Health and Human Services photo.

en times and rise eight.”⁴ This is the attitude that gets you through anything life throws at you and, if one of those things knocks you down, it enables you to get back up and keep moving forward.

In my humble opinion, one of the grittiest people in the history of our country was Abraham Lincoln. He had a dirt-poor childhood with only one or two years, at best, of formal schooling. As he was growing up, he educated himself through extensive reading, despite taunts from his father that he spent too much time reading and not enough time working on the chores around their farm. He failed at the first couple of businesses he tried, then he became a lawyer by apprenticing with a practicing attorney and succeeded quite well in that profession. He also suffered a personal setback during this period when the woman he loved died at a young age. He subsequently married Mary Todd, but the marriage was not a happy one and one of their sons died as a young child. Lincoln ran for political office several times and lost most of those races but won the one that counted most—president of the United States.⁵

After his election, most of the Southern states voted to leave the Union and, between his election in November 1860 and his inauguration in March 1861, his predecessor, President James Buchanan, let them go through his own inaction. Many consider Buchanan to have been sympathetic to the Southern cause as evidenced by several members of his administration becoming leaders of the Confederacy. As a result, President Lincoln inherited one of the worst situations to confront a newly elected American president. He dodged reported assassination attempts as he traveled to Washington, DC, for his inauguration,

⁴ Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 275.

⁵ Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey, *The Presidents of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House Historical Association, 2006); and Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).



Figure 15. President Abraham Lincoln, 5 February 1865

Source: photo by Alexander Gardner, Library of Congress.

then sought to alleviate the concerns of those who objected to his presidency by reaching out to them directly in an effort to restore the Union peacefully. He was widely rebuked for his efforts and, when he attempted to have one of the forts still under the control of the federal government resupplied by unarmed ships, the people of Charleston, South Carolina, opened fire on the ships and then on the fort, ignit-

ing the Civil War.⁶ The next four years saw near constant personal attacks in the press, one incompetent general after another, battle loss after battle loss, massive casualties, violent and destructive draft riots in northern cities and a federal government teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, yet he persevered.⁷

To make matters worse, during this time, his wife was widely rumored to be having an affair and running up enormous and publicly embarrassing debts for her own wardrobe and to redecorate the Executive Mansion (it was not called the White House until President Theodore Roosevelt's administration), all of which she lied about and desperately tried to hide. She was also intensely jealous and flew into a rage whenever women paid attention to him. These rages were focused on Lincoln and occurred no matter how public the forum. They were so bad that Lincoln's two personal secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay, nicknamed her "the wildcat," though they never used that nickname in Lincoln's presence.⁸ Tragedy struck again in 1862 when another of his young sons, his favorite by some accounts, died from an unknown illness in the Executive Mansion and both he and his wife were nearly prostrate with grief.⁹

Lincoln suffered through each heartbreak, to include struggling personally with depression that he called "the Hypo," but he never gave up.¹⁰ In my mind, this is about as gritty as you can get. His perseverance paid off when he was able to personally tour the captured city

⁶ Freidel and Sidey, *The Presidents of the United States of America*; and Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln*.

⁷ Freidel and Sidey, *The Presidents of the United States of America*; and Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln*.

⁸ Kat Eschner, "People Have Spent Years Trying to Diagnose Mary Todd Lincoln from Beyond the Grave," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 13 December 2016.

⁹ Freidel and Sidey, *The Presidents of the United States of America*; and Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln*.

¹⁰ The term *hypo* refers to hypochondria. For more on Lincoln's personal battles, see Noah Van Sciver, *The Hypo: The Melancholic Young Lincoln* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2012).

of Richmond, Virginia, on 4 April 1865, and then to receive the news of the surrender of the main Confederate Army under General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Courthouse on 9 April. Unfortunately, he did not have long to bask in the joy of this hard-won and long-awaited victory. Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater in Washington, DC, less than a week later on the evening of 14 April and died early the next morning.¹¹

Another tremendously gritty person was Winston Churchill. He led an amazing life of ups and downs, but he never quit, no matter what confronted him. As the first lord of the admiralty at the time World War I broke out, he was blamed for the military disaster of Gallipoli, though many have argued that he supported the effort as a way to avoid the slaughter on the war's western front, which was deadlocked at the time. Originally proposed by Vice Admiral Sackville H. Carden, the operation involved a British Royal Navy attack on the Turkish Dardanelles, which was a sea passage up to Constantinople (renamed Istanbul after the conflict) from the Mediterranean Sea. Constantinople was the capitol of Turkey, which was allied with the Germans against the French and British. When that plan failed, it was followed by an army attack on the Gallipoli peninsula, which made up the western side of the Dardanelles. If it had worked when attempted in the spring of 1915, it could have ended the conflict much sooner (the war eventually ended in November 1918).¹² Then prime minister Herbert H. Asquith called it the one brilliant idea of the war.¹³

Unfortunately, neither attack worked, and many people lost their lives. Though Churchill simply backed the operation, this was over-

¹¹ Freidel and Sidey, *The Presidents of the United States of America*.

¹² Christopher Klein, "Winston Churchill's World War Disaster," History.com, 3 September 2018; and Julian S. Corbett, *Naval Operations*, vol. 2, *History of the Great War* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1921).

¹³ Richard Freeman, *"Unsinkable": Churchill and the First World War* (Gloucestershire, UK: History Press, 2013).

looked when it came time to place blame within the media and by his political enemies. The plan was very poorly executed by the navy and army forces of Britain and its colonies as well as France, which led to its failure; but this was overlooked as well. While it is hardly fair to blame him for the poor execution, he was fired from his post just after the Royal Navy's attack failed. One of the most popular newspapers of the day, *The Morning Post*, reported the following bit of propaganda in April 1915:

Who is responsible for this costly blunder—costly whether the present operation succeeds or fails? We assert that the First Lord of the Admiralty acted against the opinion of his experts (which he did not). We assert further that he led the Cabinet to believe he had behind him the opinion of Lord [John A.] Fisher (the most senior Navy Admiral), whereas Lord Fisher's opinion was that the operation to have a chance of success must be conducted jointly by the army and the navy. The truth is that Winston Churchill is a danger to the country.¹⁴

In the early 1930s, Churchill warned everyone about the rise of a madman in Germany named Adolf Hitler. No one wanted to listen because they were so tired of conflict from the experience of World War I. Churchill was vilified and lost his seat in the British Parliament, then spent the next several years in what he called “the wilderness” because no one wanted him around. He wrote articles that continued to warn the country of the coming danger, but it either fell on deaf ears or many thought he was the lunatic, not Hitler. Regardless, his views were justified because, when the British found themselves in a war with a Germany led by that same Adolf Hitler in September 1939, the government called him back to service as the first lord of the admiral-

¹⁴ Freeman, “*Unsinkable*.”

ty. By May 1940, as France was knocked out of the war, they elected him prime minister.¹⁵

Perhaps Churchill's finest hour, and maybe what he had been preparing for, came after the near total disaster at the French seaport of Dunkirk a month after he took office. British forces had to be evacuated from the port city on the coast of France after a severe defeat at the hands of German forces. The evacuation was a success in that hundreds of thousands of British and French soldiers were safely evacuated to England, but it was accomplished by evacuating them mostly without their weapons and equipment.¹⁶ In the aftermath of this disaster, with most of the military unarmed and most of his senior ministers wanting to negotiate with Hitler to reach an armistice because they believed England had lost the war, Churchill would not hear of it. He was determined to fight on regardless of the cost or time needed to win. It was this determination to never quit and to persevere in the face of monumental challenges that enabled him to lead his country to victory through five difficult years. Some say he mobilized language to make that happen by motivating the English-speaking population to fight even though they were alone in the war against Germany from the time France surrendered in June 1940 until Hitler invaded Russia in June 1941. Here, I offer a reflection of Churchill's attitude about adversity:

Through will, concentration, sacrifice and patience, adversity can be mastered. In fact, so many esteemed men and women have achieved their success by conquering obstacles that one wonders if real greatness is possible apart from stag-

¹⁵ Freeman, "Unsinkable."

¹⁶ Maj L. F. Ellis, "Dunkirk, Bethune and Ypres," in *History of the Second World War: The War in France and Flanders, 1939-1940* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1953).

gering difficulties. The lesson of history seems clear: character formed through struggle is the price of true greatness.¹⁷

What is most amazing about Churchill is what he accomplished while struggling with depression throughout his life (1874–1965). He called it “the black dog” and had many reasons for suffering from it.¹⁸ He was largely ignored by his socialite parents, who were more interested in going to parties and having affairs than their child (his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, died from syphilis). He was picked on unmercifully in the boarding schools he attended and lived an exceedingly public adult life that rendered him vulnerable to a great deal of intense public criticism. He tried many different things to avoid the effects of depression but was never quite successful. He repeated on a number of occasions that he did not like going near the edge of high places or the edge of a train platform with a train coming for fear of what he might do as a result of a split-second decision. Despite the setbacks, he led an immensely productive and successful life.¹⁹

Another example comes in the form of the 2005 movie *Cinderella Man*, the true story of the Great Depression-era boxer James J. Braddock. He was doing very well before the depression hit, then a combination of lost bouts and extremely difficult economic times caused his family to hit rock bottom. They were barely able to keep the children fed and, at one point, they almost gave up their kids to relatives who could have taken better care of them. Through it all, Braddock never quit. He kept trying to find work to pay the rent, utility bills, and put food on the table. He was then given a lucky break by being picked

¹⁷ Steven Mansfield, *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 1995), 150.

¹⁸ Nassir Ghaemi, “Winston Churchill and His ‘Black Dog’ of Greatness,” *Conversation*, Tufts University, 23 January 2015.

¹⁹ For more on Churchill’s life, see *Finest Hour, the Journal of Winston Churchill and His Times*, by the International Churchill Society.

for a fight when the promoter had no other alternative. Through his own desperation, as well as his personal drive to never quit, he won that fight and started the climb that enabled him to become a heavy weight champion against incredible odds.²⁰ It is a truly amazing and heartwarming story.

Maybe it was the way I was raised, but quitting was never an option I could consider. At age 18, I went to the U.S. Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in June 1983. I wanted to take on the challenge that the school represented and earn my parachute wings. The school had a reputation for being tough, and the harassment began several days before the actual parachute training with constant yelling and endless numbers of push-ups as we prepared for the days to come. The Sunday afternoon before training started as we stood in formation in the blazing sun and heat of a Georgia summer, the instructors were yelling at everyone and generally making life unpleasant. At one point, they yelled, "Who wants to quit?" and about 30 of the aspiring paratroopers ran to the front of the formation and did just that—they quit. I remember being amazed by their actions since the hard part had not even begun yet. I shook my head and carried on.

When I went to Ranger School in 1989, something similar occurred in that many who volunteered to go to the school quit. The class started with more than 330 students and more than 100 recycled back into the class from the classes ahead of us during the eight-week course. Despite the lack of food, lack of sleep, and arduous training—I lost 30 pounds during the course—190 of us had enough grit to finish and graduate. I can only imagine the regrets the others had if they never went back, and the excuses they made to themselves and others since that time as to why they failed to graduate.

²⁰ *Cinderella Man*, directed by Ron Howard (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2005); and Jeremy Schaap, *Cinderella Man: James J. Braddock, Max Baer, and the Greatest Upset in Boxing History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005).

Finally, let me clarify my attitude regarding quitting. There are times in life when we struggle to achieve a goal and conclude that it is not worth the effort required to achieve it. This realization after some soul searching is not necessarily a bad thing as long as it is made not because we have decided to take an easier route like quitting. It can save a lot of time, effort, and frustration if we have genuinely considered the situation fully and then come to such a conclusion. Many people ruin themselves pursuing something that costs them everything but, in reality, is not worth the effort. This is a judgment call that should be made after careful consideration and consulting with those around us who have our best interests in mind. It is also not a conclusion reached lightly. This last part is the distinction from the act of quitting.

In the end, everyone must realize that life moves pretty fast and will never be fair, so get over and on with it. As Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale said in his book *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*, “Life is not fair. There is no moral economy or balance in the nature of things such that virtue is rewarded and vice punished. The good man hangs on and hangs in there. . . . Courage is endurance of the soul.”²¹ After spending seven and a half years as a prisoner of war (POW) in Vietnam after getting shot down, Stockdale could certainly speak to this concept. He survived and served as such an inspiring example for the other POWs that he was awarded the Medal of Honor after he returned home. He inspired his fellow inmates to persevere in the face of torture and years of solitary confinement. Stockdale’s example and writing seem to be exactly what we all need to see and read:

It sort of fell out of Epictetus’s proclamation that “difficulties are what show men’s character. Therefore, when a difficult crisis meets you, remember that you are the raw youth with whom God the trainer is wrestling.” But our bottom line was

²¹ James Bond Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1995), 16.

this: The challenge of education is not to prepare people for success, but to prepare them for failure. I think that it's in hardship and failure that the heroes and the bums really get sorted out.²²

Just remember, quitting is a choice and, if allowed to become a habit, it can become a permanent condition. As Nassim Nicholas Taleb said in *The Bed of Procrustes*, "For the robust, an error is information; for the fragile, an error is an error."²³ Information implies that you can do something positive with it and make improvements to prevent further errors. Accepting an error as just an error for which nothing can be done is the path to oblivion.

I will conclude this chapter with a poem from my personal "Wisdom for the Ages" file by a man named Edgar A. Guest.²⁴ It first appeared in a syndicated column in a number of different newspapers on 3 March 1921. Though time has passed since its original release, I still find it as inspiring now as it was more than 30 years ago.

Keep Going

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you are trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must—but don't you quit.

²² Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*, 220.

²³ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Bed of Procrustes: Philosophical and Practical Aphorisms* (New York: Random House, 2010), 72.

²⁴ Edgar A. Guest was a British-born writer whose sentimental works were widely published in the United States. Often appearing in newspapers and on the radio, his optimistic rhymes typically focused on such subjects as home, mother, and the virtue of hard work.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up, though the pace seems slow—
You may succeed with another blow.
Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man,
Often the struggler has given up
When he might have captured the victor's cup,
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,
How close he was to the golden crown.
Success is failure turned inside out—
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you are hardest hit—
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.²⁵

Questions to Consider:

1. How much grit do you have?
2. How do you handle the inevitable stumbles in life? Are you able to get back up and carry on?
3. Can you use failures to learn from and get better?

Suggested Further Study

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

²⁵ Edgar A. Guest, "Keep Going," *Journal of Education* 93, no. 19 (May 1921): 509, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205742109301903>.

Probably Goodwin's best book, but then again, I am an ardent admirer of Lincoln. The author displays Lincoln's amazing wisdom and people skills in this book. It offers another great study in leadership.

Howard, Ron, dir. *Cinderella Man*. Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2005.

An amazing story of grit and determination to keep struggling to survive and win. So many others gave up during the Great Depression of the 1930s, but James Braddock never did.

Johnson, Boris. *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History*. New York: Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2014.

An amazing book written by the former British prime minister, but still incredibly good. His story about how Churchill, almost singlehandedly, kept the British in the war against Hitler is truly inspiring.

Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. *The Bed of Procrustes: Philosophical and Practical Aphorisms*. New York: Random House, 2010.

This book can be a difficult read, but it is another one worth the effort because of the lessons it presents.

Chapter 8

OTHER PEOPLE'S OPINIONS

With social media use exploding during the past 20 or so years, it seems that everyone has an opinion on something, regardless of how ill-informed that opinion may be. While this can be disturbing enough, what is even more so is the cyberbullying that drives people to depression and, for some, extreme acts such as suicide. I do not know if it is the anonymity that the cyber world enables, or the bravery to make such attacks from the safety of an insurmountable distance, but it is a disturbing trend. People have overvalued what others say about them for as long as humans have been able to communicate with each other; but the impact of that opinion seems to carry even more weight now because, if you choose to, you could bathe in all the things people say about you and wallow in it, letting it dominate your opinion of yourself. None of us are perfect, but there are many who seem to take great pleasure in pointing out the imperfections of those around them. They have no problem rendering judgments against others, but rarely would be able to stand up under the same scrutiny.

Personally, I do not believe there is much value in other people's opinions—it is getting to this mindset that is critical. We need to focus on what is important and that is our character, as we discussed earlier. Our opinion of ourselves is formed by understanding our strengths and weaknesses. The ability to do this enables us to better resist the negativity of what others say about us. Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus believed that “no one can harm you without your permission.”¹ He would certainly have spoken from a position of authority on this topic. He was a slave for 30 years in Rome and was beaten so badly that he was lame in his left leg for the remainder of his life. He gained his freedom and became widely known for his approach to Stoic ethics and philosophy. So much so, in fact, that when the Emperor Domitian (ruled from 81 to 96 CE) banished all philosophers from Rome, Epictetus was singled out for particular attention in the forced exodus. He traveled to Greece and founded his own school of philosophy. Despite all the setbacks, Epictetus believed in himself and was able to impress that belief on many of his followers through his ability to speak with such self-confidence. The key here is that attaining this attitude takes the power away from those who feel it is necessary to bully others. When they see that their words or actions have no impact, they generally end the personal attacks and move on to a more likely victim.

For those who poke fun or bully others, I believe it helps them feel better about themselves and speaks more to their lack of character and moral compass. Is it really necessary to knock others down so that you can feel some sense of superiority? Is it necessary to attack someone else's beliefs, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, or religion because it differs from your own? Humans throughout histo-

¹ Quoted in VAdm James B. Stockdale, “The Stoic Warrior's Triad: Tranquility, Fearlessness, and Freedom” (lecture at Marine Amphibious Warfare School, Quantico, VA, 18 April 1995) from the original Epictetus, *The Discourses of Epictetus, with the Encheridion and Fragments*, trans. George Long (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890).

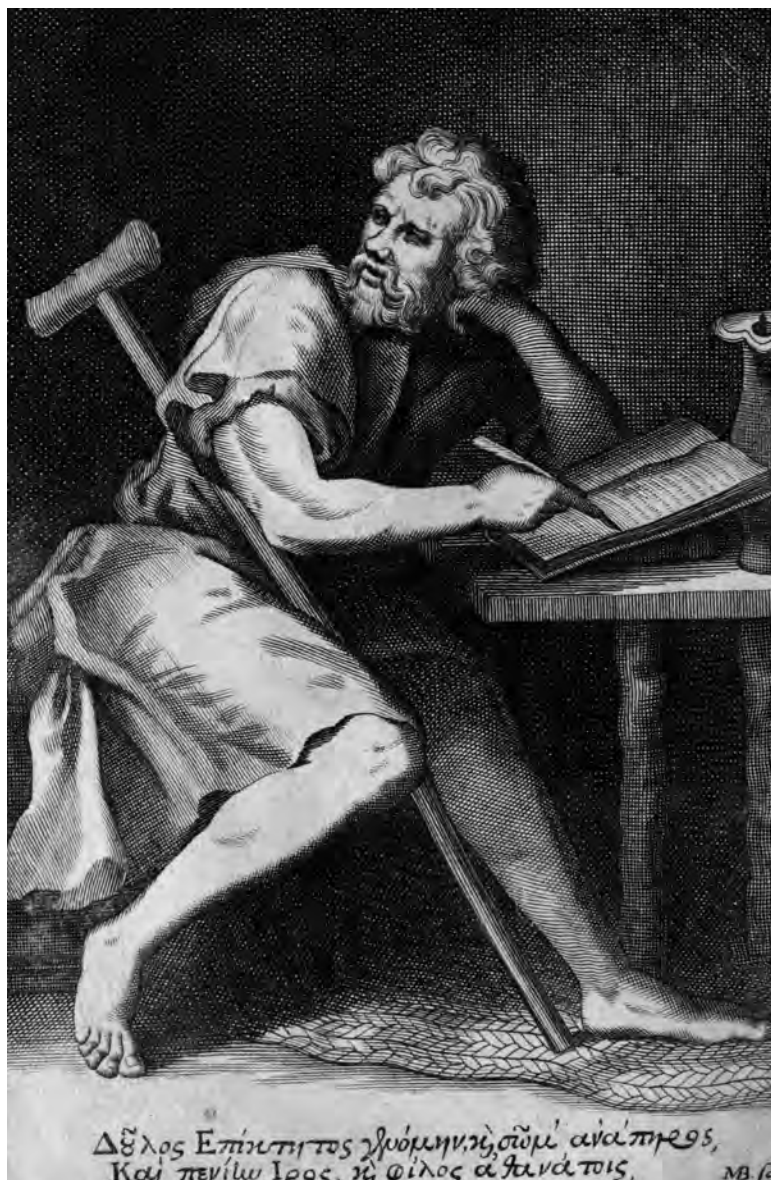


Figure 16. Illustration of Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus
Source: Edward Ivie, trans., *Enchiridion* (London: Oxford University, 1715).

ry have taken issue with those they see as “others” and, in many cases, those problems stemmed from feeling threatened in some way. There are many cases in history where this feeling was well justified, because those considered others were trying to conquer them, which usually entailed losing everything and being made a slave or being killed in some hideous manner. Still, some realized that this approach was wrong. Greek scientific writer, astronomer, and poet Eratosthenes of Cyrene implored his fellow Greeks to stop hating others because they were different. He asked them to “abandon their provincial division of mankind into Hellenes (Greeks) and barbarians; men should be divided not nationally, but individually; many Greeks, he thought, were scoundrels, many Persians and Hindus were refined, and the Romans had shown greater aptitude than the Greeks for social order and competent government.”² In other words, people are people and should be judged on their individual merits and not external factors they have no control over.

Thankfully, these attitudes are mostly in the past and we live in a much more civilized world, especially in developed nations where safety and security predominate in most places. There are still lingering issues, as we can see in the news, but they are not as bad as they used to be. That said, they still need to be rooted out of our communities and eliminated as factors in the relationship between human beings. Overcoming what has been bred into our genes from the hundreds of generations of our ancestors who tried to survive in a much more brutal world is difficult, but if we are to continue to make progress toward peace and friendship in the world, it is essential that we do so. The movie *Avatar* serves as a standard to strive for, particularly when the main character was trying to learn the language of an alien culture. That culture had a greeting of “I see you,” and I choose to interpret that

² Will Durant, *The Life of Greece: The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1939), 637.

as seeing the person before us for the person they are and nothing else.³ They are a person just like us with all the emotions, needs, and desires human beings are prone to experience.

What this boils down to is that the only opinions that should matter to us are those of our close family members, good friends, and, most importantly, our own. This last part is critical because feeling good about ourselves and being confident in our ability to achieve the goals we set for ourselves are two especially important factors in determining self-image and how other people see us. When we have well placed self-confidence, others can see or sense that. This self-confidence can allow criticism and personal attacks to roll off us without damage. Like the knights who wore armor whenever they ventured from their castle walls, we must develop our own personal armor that enables us to withstand the attacks that will always be present in some form or other.

Consider the strange knight from a previous chapter—Don Quixote. Though a fictional character, we can learn a lot from him about what it means to be true to ourselves, especially in the face of criticism from others. He envisioned himself as a gallant knight (well after the Carolingian age) who was fighting giants (they were actually windmills) and defending a beautiful young woman in distress (she was actually a prostitute). When asked why he was doing this, Quixote's response was, "I know who I am."⁴ He was being true to his personal identity and character regardless of what others thought of him. He was openly teased and, in some cases, beaten because of his behavior, but he never let it bother him. Yes, he was more than likely

³ *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron, featuring Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, and Sigourney Weaver (Century City, CA: 20th Century Studios, 2009).

⁴ The Miguel Cervantes novel *Don Quixote* was originally published in two parts. This quote came from *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* [The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha], pt. 1, chap. 5.

mentally ill, but he did not allow the opinions of others to deter him from what he thought he needed to do.

Much like the other topics addressed in this book, getting to this state of mind is a matter of choice. We must choose to be self-confident and to disregard the personal attacks that we know to be untrue. This is essential to who we are as a person because, as Mark Twain once said, “A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.”⁵ Epictetus had plenty of reason to wallow in self-pity and think less of himself because of what others said or did. If he had fallen victim to that mentality, he would not have made an impact on world history. He chose differently.

Abraham Lincoln was also able to accomplish this level of confidence. In addition to all issues related to the presidency, the Civil War, and his personal life, Lincoln was vilified in public by the press and in person too. His treatment prior to the inauguration and in the years that followed was shocking. The abuse we have seen in recent elections cannot compare to the way Lincoln was treated during the 1860 presidential campaign. He had a gangly appearance in that he was tall, awkward, and usually wore clothes that did not fit well. He was also from what was then considered the frontier of the country (rural Illinois). As a result, he was repeatedly drawn in cartoons looking ridiculous.⁶ He just laughed them off. He was called “the original gorilla” by one of his leading generals, George B. McClellan, but he chose to ignore the comment as well as several instances of calculated disrespect because he thought the general would lead the Northern armies to victory.⁷ Prior to the Civil War in 1855, Lincoln was hired to represent a

⁵ Mark Twain, *What Is Man?: And Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917), 17.

⁶ “With Malice Toward None: The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibition—The Run for President,” Library of Congress, accessed 9 August 2022.

⁷ Mark Grimsley, “The Lincoln-McClellan Relationship in Myth and Memory,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 38, no. 2 (2017): 63–81.

case on which an eminent lawyer named Edwin M. Stanton was working. Stanton was considerably less than impressed by Lincoln, calling him a baboon and treating him with contempt and sarcasm throughout the case.⁸ Despite the disparagement, in 1862, Lincoln selected him to be secretary of war after his first choice proved corrupt and ineffective. Stanton was scrupulously honest and hardworking and proved to be one of Lincoln's closest advisors. Stanton came to love Lincoln and wept at his bedside after the assassination.⁹

The key to achieving this state of mind is to understand that this is a personal battle with the voice inside your head telling you negative things. We are always our own worst critic. What most people never realize is that we have total control over this inner struggle. Winning this battle entails silencing that negative voice and then demand positive affirmations like "I've got this." In the end, the only person who can keep us from achieving our goals is ourselves. Repeatedly in my study of history, I have come across those who have overcome unbelievable criticism, obstacles, and hardships to get to where they want to be in life, and it was because they believed in themselves and never gave up. If we are willing to put in the hard work and persevere in the face of adversity, then we become truly unstoppable. Vice Admiral Stockdale encourages use to consider that:

[Epictetus] urges us to acquire a constancy of character that will make it impossible for another to do you wrong. And to get to that invulnerability, that inner invulnerability, requires mastering the ability to be continually conscious of whether you are dealing with something you control or something that in the last instance you do not control. The only good things of

⁸ Margarita Spalding Gerry, comp. and ed., *Through Five Administrations: Reminiscences of Colonel William H. Crook, Body-guard to President Lincoln* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907), 33.

⁹ Fletcher Pratt, *Stanton: Lincoln's Secretary of War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1953).

absolute value are those that lie within your own control. And they are relatively few: things like thought, impulse, our opinions, our desires, our aversions, what we conceive of, what we choose, and so on. Who is the invincible man? He who cannot be dismayed by any happening beyond his control.¹⁰

A recent airplane trip offers an example of this state of mind. The seat next to me was taken by a beautiful young lady and it was a pleasure to have a conversation with her. She had chosen to live a consecrated life, which means that she was a member of the Catholic Church and had taken vows similar to those that a nun would take, but without taking final vows (novitiate). She was so self-confident and happy in who she was, and it came out in how she presented herself and the things she talked about. She positively glowed with her religious faith and the happiness it gave her. Unfortunately, the woman in the seat in front of us could hear the young lady and kept looking back at her with a disapproving frown in what may have been an attempt to embarrass her into silence. It did not work. There is no way the young lady next to me could have missed those disapproving looks, but she did not acknowledge them or indicate in any way that she was bothered by them. She was secure in who she was, believed absolutely, and likely said a prayer for the judgmental woman in front of her. I cannot think of a better example of being secure in your own approval.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, we each control whether what is said about us is true. If we know it is not true and live our lives in such a way that it will never be true, that renders what was said irrelevant. In his review of human thoughts and ideas, Lloyd Albert Johnson rounds out the discussion in *A Toolbox for Humanity*: “A fellow can’t

¹⁰ James Bond Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1995), 241.

keep people from having a bad opinion of him, but he can keep them from being right about it.”¹¹

Questions to Consider

1. Do you let other people’s opinions bother you?
2. Are you self-confident and comfortable in your own skin?
3. Do you let things that you have no control over bother you?

Suggested Further Study

de Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quixote*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2018.

This is an incredibly long book and can be difficult to absorb, but it is worth the effort to persevere because it is a good study of human behavior. It can be quite funny at times also.

Durant, Will. *The Greatest Minds and Ideas of All Times*. Compiled and edited by John Little. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

Will and Ariel Durant were two of the most eminent historians of their time and were prolific authors. The title of this book is self-explanatory and, though long as well, it is worth the effort to read it.

¹¹ Lloyd Albert Johnson, *A Toolbox for Humanity: More Than 9000 Years of Thought*, vol. 1, *Responses to Nature and Ourselves* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2003), 13.

Chapter 9

“EGO IS THE ENEMY”¹

Ego is another one of those personal landmines discussed previously. While being absolutely integral to who we are, excessive ego or conceit can be a pitfall. It is generally caused by a combination of enthusiasm about yourself and ignorance about the conditions around you and it either ruins people or causes them to ruin those closest to them. It makes for toxic leaders and poor followers who care only for what personally benefits them and their pursuit of self-gratification by any means. You can hear it in how they communicate, particularly when “I” and “me” dominates their vocabulary. Whenever bad things happen, it is always someone else’s fault, never their own.² Some have

¹ This is the title of another of my favorite books by Ryan Holiday, *Ego Is the Enemy* (New York; Portfolio, Penguin, 2016).

² In Freudian psychiatry and psychoanalysis, the term *narcissism* denotes an excessive degree of self-esteem or self-involvement, a condition that usually points to emotional immaturity. “Narcissus,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 3 July 2022.

even said that egotism is a disease that makes everyone sick except for the person with the disease.³

Many call this condition arrogance, and it is certainly a poor path to follow. Greek classical dramatist Aeschylus claimed that “all arrogance will reap a harvest rich in tears. God calls men to a heavy reckoning for overweening pride.”⁴ The challenge is that, in many cases, the harvest of tears come to others instead of the one who is arrogant, especially if they are in a leadership position. This is because the true requirement for leadership is selflessness, meaning that the leader places the interests and welfare of their subordinates before their own. When this is not the case, it becomes painfully obvious to all except for the leader in question.⁵

One of the most well-known cases in history where ego ruined the career of a general and nearly resulted in the loss of the Union cause in the Civil War involves the general mentioned in the previous chapter—George B. McClellan. Prior to the Civil War, he graduated number two in his class at West Point in 1846, excelled in his position during the Mexican-American War in 1846–48, was appointed an observer to represent the U.S. Army during the Crimean War in 1853–56, then resigned his commission to become the president of the Ohio and Mississippi River Railroad in 1857. When the Civil War started in 1861, he returned to service and, due to his previous record, was appointed a major general. While the main Union Army was in the process of losing

³ Harvey Mackay, “Ego Trips Can Have a Dangerous Destination Point,” *Tampa Bay Business Journal*, 6 May 2011.

⁴ This quote was frequently used by John F. Kennedy. Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2000), 286. Aeschylus was known to have written 76 plays but only 7 survive: *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Suppliant Women*, *The Oresteia Trilogy* (*Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers* or *Choeophori*, and *The Eumenides*), and *Prometheus Bound*. See Herbert Weir Smyth, trans., *Aeschylus*, Loeb Classical Library vols. 145 and 146 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

⁵ See the leadership foundations presented in *Leading Marines*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6-10 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2019).

the first battle of the war at Bull Run, Virginia, in July 1861, McClellan won a couple of minor fights in what is now West Virginia and looked great by comparison with those leading other Union forces. As a result, he was called to Washington, DC, by President Abraham Lincoln and given command of all Union armies in August 1861.⁶

Initially, things went exceptionally well; he reorganized a beaten and demoralized army and developed it into an efficient fighting machine. People referred to him as the “Young Napoleon,” and both the army and the press loved him.⁷ Unfortunately, it all went straight to his head. McClellan was openly disrespectful of the president and in letters to his wife, he portrayed himself as the savior of the Union with all the public praise being just what he deserved. He was vain and extremely sensitive regarding his reputation. He was also terribly slow moving and cautious. In other words, he was the proverbial lamb leading an army of lions. When he finally got the Union Army moving in the late spring of 1862, despite great numerical and material superiority, they lost a series of battles around Richmond (the Seven Days’ Battles from 25 June to 1 July 1862) and then retreated to Washington.⁸

During this period, he blamed the losses on everyone but himself. At one point, in a raging telegram to the War Department that sought to deflect any blame from himself for the losses the army had experienced, McClellan said that he would do his best to save the army from destruction despite the best efforts of the secretary of war and the

⁶ For a quick history of McClellan’s life and career, see “Timeline: George B. McClellan (1826–1885),” Library of Congress, accessed 11 August 2022; and MajGen George B. McClellan, *McClellan’s Own Story: The War for the Union, the Soldiers Who Fought It, the Civilians Who Directed It, and His Relations to It and to Them* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887).

⁷ Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988).

⁸ “Timeline: George B. McClellan (1826–1885).”



Figure 17. Abraham Lincoln and George B. McClellan in the general's tent at Antietam, MD, on 3 October 1862

Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

president to cause it to be destroyed.⁹ In September of that same year, his forces captured the plans of the Confederate Army, and he had a very good chance to beat them at the Battle of Antietam in Maryland on 17 September. Because of the advantage he held, he moved faster than usual, but his normal cautiousness only resulted in a drawn battle and the Confederate Army escaped to Virginia without being destroyed. This proved to be the final straw for President Lincoln, who fired McClellan in October. He was sent home to New Jersey awaiting

⁹ George Brinton McClellan, *George Brinton McClellan Papers: Letterbooks and Telegram Books*, -1862; Letterbook; 1862, Mar. 18–Oct. 6. 1862, Library of Congress.

orders for further service that never came.¹⁰ He ran against President Lincoln in the 1864 presidential election and lost badly.¹¹ As a military professional, it is hard to read about McClellan because he was so consistently arrogant, disrespectful of the president, and, in the end, incompetent as a fighting general. Maybe the saddest part is that McClellan had so thoroughly convinced himself of his own importance that he never realized how his ego ruined his chance at greatness. He only had himself to blame.

So how does one avoid this relatively common pitfall? Well, it is not easy for most because it seems that people are on a journey using the self-focused “I am the center of the universe” mentality of the very young, to one that realizes that we are all in this life together and the previous mindset leads nowhere fast. As with the professional attitude referred to previously, some people figure this out early, but many never do. According to Rick Warren, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.”¹² Easy to say, but very hard to do, of course. Maybe what we should be seeking here is *magnanimity*, which is defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as a loftiness of spirit enabling one to bear trouble calmly, to disdain meanness and pettiness, and to display a noble generosity.¹³ Striving to be magnanimous would be a great place to start.

Mother Teresa strikes me as someone who had these concepts figured out and lived them out in her life every day. For example, consider her work in India, where the remnants of an iron-clad caste system are still in existence today. In many cultures from the past, a person was

¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln, “5 November 1862, Order Relieving General G. B. McClellan and Making Other Changes,” in *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works: Comprising His Speeches, Letters, State Papers, and Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. John G. Nicolay and John Hay (New York: Century, 1894).

¹¹ “Timeline: George B. McClellan (1826–1885).”

¹² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

¹³ *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “magnanimity (n.),” accessed 11 August 2022.

born into a certain caste or social class, and this dictated what their life experience would be from birth. There was no climbing from one caste to another, and the different castes most certainly did not mix. India is much less caste-conscious now, but there are enough remnants evident in their society to still be problematic for many. This is particularly true of the “untouchables” (from Sanskrit for *Dalit* or broken/scattered) who were and are the lowest social class. You have not seen completely destitute and desperate people until you have seen (and smelled) the slums of places like Mumbai and Calcutta. The 2008 movie *Slumdog Millionaire* gives a good depiction of this as the main character and his brother are untouchables.¹⁴ Mother Teresa, a nun originally from Hungary, founded the Order of the Missionaries of Charity in 1948 and spent the majority of her life working with sick and dying untouchables in the slums of Calcutta. Her life’s work earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.¹⁵ She is widely admired and quoted, but perhaps the following fits this chapter best:

These are the few ways we can practice humility: To speak as little as possible of one’s self. To mind one’s own business. Not to want to manage other people’s affairs. To avoid curiosity. To accept contradictions and correction cheerfully. To pass over the mistakes of others. To accept insults and injuries. To accept being slighted, forgotten and disliked. To be kind and gentle even under provocation. Never to stand on one’s dignity. To choose always the hardest.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Slumdog Millionaire*, directed by Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan, featuring Dev Patel, Freida Pinto, and Saurabh Shukla (Burbank, CA: Warner Independent Pictures, 2008).

¹⁵ “The Nobel Peace Prize 1979,” NobelPrize.org, Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2022, accessed 27 October 2022.

¹⁶ Jaya Chaliha and Edward Le Joly, *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Living with Mother Teresa* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1996), 406.



Figure 18. Mother Teresa, ca. 1985

Source: courtesy of Manfredo Ferrari.

After she died, the Catholic Church started proceedings to determine if she should be declared a saint. To all those she ministered to in Calcutta, or who met her personally and benefited from that knowledge, she was already considered one. She was officially canonized on 4 September 2014.¹⁷ Genuine humility is attractive and admirable, es-

¹⁷ "St. Teresa of Calcutta," Catholic.org, accessed 27 October 2022.

pecially when compared with egotism, which is one of the biggest detractors. Motivational author E. C. McKenzie believes that “the emptiest man in all the world is the man who is full of himself.”¹⁸

We must be careful not to take humility too far though. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, ego is essential to all human beings. The sense of self is what helps us make sense of the world and our place in it. It helps us to take on board and integrate daily life experiences and use them to build the person we believe ourselves to be. Deepak Chopra and Rudolph E. Tanzi talk about this phenomenon in *Super Brain* and offer a caution at the same time:

Once new experiences have registered on the brain, your ego assimilates them. You are the / to whom new things are happening, adding to a storehouse of pleasure and pain, fear and desire that has been building up since infancy. Knowing that the brain’s remodeling is always having an effect is important, even though your ego gives the illusion of constancy.

The ego is absolutely necessary for this function of integrating all kinds of experiences, but it is prone to go too far. *Egotism* is the common term for extreme self-centeredness, but that is not the issue here. Everyone is caught in a paradoxical situation with the ego. You cannot function without one but making everything personal can turn into ego delusion. “I, me, mine” overrides every other consideration. Instead of having a point of view and strong personal values (the good side of the ego), the egotist winds up defending his biases and prejudices just because he holds them (the bad side of the ego).¹⁹

¹⁸ Sir John Templeton, *Wisdom from World Religions: Pathways Toward Heaven on Earth* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002), 282.

¹⁹ Deepak Chopra and Rudolph E. Tanzi, *Super Brain: Unleashing the Explosive Power of Your Mind to Maximize Health, Happiness, and Spiritual Well-Being* (New York: Random House, 2012), 90.

Understanding this is particularly important for the profession of arms. Before his death in 1977, author and professor of philosophy at Colorado College, J. Glenn Gray, spent a lot of time as a foot soldier on the battlefields of Europe during World War II. He wrote about his reflections on what motivates soldiers to do amazing things in *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (1959). In it, he describes the contrast between friendship and comradeship, which wraps this chapter up well: “Nothing is clearer than that men can act contrary to the alleged basic instinct of self-preservation and against all motives of self-interest and egoism. Were it not so, the history of our civilization would be completely different than what it has been.”²⁰ Personally, this means that members of a cohesive fighting group subordinate their egos and desires to those of the group. They focus on accomplishing the mission and taking care of each other rather than it being a situation of every person for themselves. When you have a tight-knit group like this, they are unbeatable in any endeavor.

Questions to Consider

1. Who is the most genuinely humble person you know or have read about?
2. Can you focus on those around you more than on yourself?
3. What does it mean to be truly selfless?

Suggested Further Study

Boyle, Danny, and Loveleen Tandan, dir. *Slumdog Millionaire*. Featuring Dev Patel, Freida Pinto, and Saurabh Shukla. Burbank, CA: Warner Independent Pictures, 2008.

This movie is very well done and offers a look at what life is like in India for the less fortunate.

²⁰ J. Glenn Gray as quoted in James Stockdale, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1995), 8.

Gray, J. Glenn. *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959.

I found this book to be amazingly profound in the author's observations about what makes people do what they do for others in extreme circumstances.

Spink, Kathryn. *Mother Teresa: An Authorized Biography*. New York: Harper One, an imprint of HarperCollins, 1998.

She was another amazing person who made such a big difference where it was needed the most—the slums of Calcutta.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

A good book for those trying to develop their own personal philosophy of life.

Chapter 10

THINK CRITICALLY

We live in an age where there is a tremendous amount of data available at our fingertips, but there is also a serious lack of understanding about what that data means and how it can be useful to us. How many times have we seen people go right to their phones to look up a fact and then present it as knowledge with a smirk at their own superiority? Without understanding the context in which that fact lies, it is almost impossible to understand what it means in a sense that can be useful. This phenomenon makes us increasingly data rich but knowledge poor. Interestingly, Joseph McCormack refers to this condition as *infobesity* in his book *Noise*.¹ What an insightful and accurate term.

What makes infobesity dangerous is that we can now find information that supports whatever we want to believe, regardless of how far-fetched that belief or the information may be. Coupled with this

¹ Joseph McCormack, *Noise: Living and Leading When Nobody Can Focus* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), xx.

data surge is a seeming unwillingness to listen to those around us, especially if what they are saying runs counter to what we want to believe. It happens daily with the verbal sparring on the cable news networks, where they seem to be trying to talk over each other instead of genuinely working toward an open dialogue, which implies two-way communication. Too many people today take exception to anything contrary to their way of thinking and see it as a threat to be beaten back with labeling, insults, and, when those do not work, volume. Social media has amplified this effect, but without the volume, of course.

People should strive to be critical thinkers in that we should never take things at face value or assume someone is completely right, or completely wrong, because they either agree with what we believe or hold a totally opposite view. Automatic assumptions that someone is wrong and therefore stupid means that we just forfeited a learning opportunity. We learn more by being objective and trying to see issues from all angles than we do by participating in what people today call “echo chambers,” where we only engage in discussions with those who think like we do. If we live within that “safe” space, of course, there will be a great deal of agreement. Blogging is a good example of the proliferation of echo chambers, and it seems to be driving people to opposite extremes in our country.² It is not a healthy trend. We have made this journey before and it led to the Civil War.

Once we gained our freedom from the British in 1783, as a young nation, we had many serious issues that needed to be resolved. Two of them were enabling new states to join the Union after the initial 13 colonies and expanding across a continent that had Native Americans as well as French, Spanish, British, and even Russians to contend with as we tried to do so. Of all the issues Americans had to deal with though,

² Dag Wollebæk et al., “Anger, Fear, and Echo Chambers: The Emotional Basis for Online Behavior,” *Social Media + Society* (April 2019): <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119829859>.

the most contentious was slavery. So much so that it was essentially side-stepped as the Founding Fathers authored the Constitution. They knew they could never come to an agreement on its existence, and many, including some prominent slave-owning founders such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, assumed it would die out on its own if left alone. When the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1788 and the Confederation Congress established in 1789, every one of the 13 original states allowed slavery to some degree. As time passed, it died out or was forbidden by state legislatures in the Northern states but remained in the Southern states, where large numbers of laborers were needed for dangerous and difficult work, much of it in unhealthy conditions due to heat and mosquito-borne diseases. It not only continued to exist, it grew considerably and became an essential element in the economy of the Southern states.³

As the United States expanded, the Southern states saw that if new states were added to the Union as nonslave or “free” states, their votes in Congress would soon outnumber those by slave states and slavery could then be abolished. They had good reason for concern as there was a strong and growing abolition movement in the Northern states. Compromises were made over the years, but the arguments, both in the press and in person, became more violent. In May 1856, when one of the leading abolitionists, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, spoke out at length in Congress against slavery, a congressman named Preston S. Brooks from South Carolina came into the Senate chamber the next day and brutally beat Sumner with a cane. Senator Sumner barely survived the assault and Representative Brooks was praised as a hero throughout the South.⁴

³ “America’s Founding Documents: The Constitution of the United States,” Library of Congress, accessed 11 August 2022.

⁴ *Investigation of the Assault on Senator Charles Sumner*, 34th Cong., 1st Sess. (28 May 1856).



Figure 19. Cartoon of the caning of Senator Charles Sumner
Source: lithograph by John L. Magee.

In the ongoing effort to make compromises and control public violence, Congress decided to let the population of each territory entering statehood decide for themselves whether they came into the Union as a slave or free state. When the state of Kansas was under consideration to become a state, both pro- and antislavery people flooded into the territory from several different states and physically attacked and killed each other. Newspapers at the time labeled the territory “Bleeding Kansas.”⁵

The situation degraded to the point that, when Abraham Lincoln was elected in 1860, the Southern states assumed he would work to abolish slavery, even though Lincoln had not voiced such an intent on

⁵ See, for example, Charles S. Weyman, “The Prize Song, Fremont and Victory,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, 13 September 1856, where the author voices the antislavery, political rallying song “The Prize Song, Fremont and Victory” that acknowledges “where bleeding Kansas is waging warfare with Slavery!”

the issue during the election.⁶ Instead of waiting to see what he would do as president, the Southern states seceded from the Union, led by South Carolina, and in April 1861, the Civil War started. Before it ended in the spring of 1865, more than 620,000 Americans lost their lives. To put these losses in today's context, since the population of the United States at the time was approximately 31 million, the equivalent numbers today would be about 6.2 million deaths.⁷ Given how devastating and destructive this war was, it begs the question if there could not have been a more reasonable way to handle this critical issue.

Given the fate of abolitionist John Brown in 1859, many doubt there could have been another way. Brown's work to free slaves had embroiled him in the violence in Kansas for several years and, in particular, with the death of proslavery men on 24 May 1856 in what became known as the Pottawatomie Massacre, where Brown and his sons were accused of killing the men who gathered.⁸ He then organized and led a raid on the U.S. arsenal at Harper's Ferry, in what is now West Virginia, in mid-October 1859 in order to get the weapons stored there and give them out to slaves in the area to start an uprising.⁹ It did not go well. The first person killed during the skirmish was a freed African American man who was a night watchman near the arsenal. Brown and his men were captured by military forces, including a contingent of Marines, led by then-colonel Robert E. Lee, and he was tried and hanged on 2 December 1859. Before he died, Brown wrote a note that was

⁶ Roy P. Basler et al., ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press for the Abraham Lincoln Association, 1953).

⁷ Jennie Cohen, "Civil War Deadlier than Previously Thought?," History.com, 31 August 2018.

⁸ "Pottawatomie Massacre," Kansas Historical Society, May 2016.

⁹ For more on the man's thoughts and intent, see John Brown, "Provisional Constitution and Ordinances for the People of the United States," pamphlet, Series: Letters Received, 1805–1889, Record Group 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1762–1984, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

passed on to the press. In it, he wrote, “I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, he could not have been more right.

Aside from the Civil War, ignorance, racism, and suspicion have likely killed more in this country and around the world than any other human-made factor, especially when motivated by religion. While religion has been responsible for a great deal of good in this world, it has also been the nexus for a great deal of bad. Religion seems to magnify the effects of fear of others that has been present within human societies since we first started banding together in groups to hunt and protect ourselves.

Getting beyond this fear of other is essential for harmony in any society, but it is even more important now when every action and reaction quickly makes it onto social media or the news for all the world to see. This then feeds the cycle of bitterness and hate that causes more people to get hurt or killed. There are those who likely thought that, with the advance of technology, society would become less violent and more amenable to those who are not like us, but that does not seem to be the case. Since the internet enables one to find just about anything to support a personal belief and offers a stage for others to hop on the band wagon, this seems to create more hostility and less harmony. To make matters worse, other countries and special interest groups with bad intentions actively propagate false news and specious claims to further stir the pot in the United States. When people are unwilling or unable to think critically, they are easily led by whichever group they have latched onto.

What we all need now is more skepticism combined with the intellectual curiosity that generates a willingness to seek the truth. We need to do research to find that truth and not stop until we arrive at it, even

¹⁰ DeNeen L. Brown, “ ‘Unflinching’: The Day John Brown Was Hanged for His Raid on Harpers Ferry,” *Washington Post*, 2 December 2017.



Figure 20. John Brown

Source: frontispiece, F. B. Sanborn, ed., *The Life and Letters of John Brown: Liberator of Kansas, and Martyr of Virginia* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1885).

if that truth is not what we want to hear. At the very least, we need to consider a second opinion from a knowledgeable source, someone who can be trusted to have done their homework with an open and curious mind, but who also has a great deal of knowledge and experience with which to filter incoming information. We need to purposely question our beliefs, and never assume we are smart enough, because we will never arrive at that destination. This means that we must never stop learning. The famous sage of the *Peanuts* cartoon strip, Charlie Brown, once said, “The more I know, the more I know how much more there is to know.”¹¹ Learning is a never-ending journey unless we decide to get off the road and sit on the side as everyone else goes by and leaves us behind. Of course, this learning requires effort, and that activity seems to be beyond many people today. Though the concept has been attributed to a number of different people, it bears stating here that a person who *will not* read has no advantage over someone who *cannot* read.¹²

One of the best examples of a willingness to be a lifelong learner that I have discovered in my reading was the former first director of the Department of Defense’s Office of Net Assessment Andrew W. Marshall. He was hired in 1972 by President Richard M. Nixon and retired from that position in 2015. In the biography of Marshall written by Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts titled *The Last Warrior*, he is described as very low key and humble but also tremendously intelli-

¹¹ Charles M. Schultz, *The Complete Peanuts*, 26 vols. (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2004–16).

¹² This quote has most notably been attributed to Mark Twain, though there is no record of him ever saying it. The earliest match to the expression can be found in a 1914 periodical, though related phrases appeared earlier. The unattributed quote was being used to stop people from throwing away the newspaper ad without reading it.

gent, open minded, and endlessly curious.¹³ While being exceptionally smart, he never considered himself smart enough and was always seeking opportunities to learn. He was nicknamed “Yoda” by some (though he was apparently not fond of that nickname) due to his natural intelligence but also due to how many people he mentored during the course of his 43 years as director.¹⁴ He died in 2019 at age 97, but I cannot think of a better role model for how we should never cease thinking critically and learning throughout our lives.¹⁵ Fortunately, I work with a person who knew Andrew Marshall for a long time and they confirmed much of what the book presented about him and still admire him greatly to this day.

In my effort to live up to the example Marshall set throughout his life, I read, on average, four books a week. I do not write this to brag; I write it because I am convinced that I will never be smart enough. Due to the fear that I will be caught short by a situation, I believe that every book I read pushes off that time a little bit. I also cast my net as widely as possible in the attempt to avoid dealing with an echo chamber. I read things that I know are not in line with what I believe, sometimes just to see what people have to say. I am not always able to do this, but I try in spite of the difficulty. The only way I can do this is by starting with the assumption that the author has something worth saying and has the intelligence and background to support their ideas.

We discussed this previously, but it deserves repeating here. See those around you as the human beings they are instead of labeling them, usually something derogatory, because they do not look, think, or act like you. They are people with the same feelings, hopes, and

¹³ Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts, *The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of Modern American Defense Strategy* (New York: Basic Books, an imprint of Perseus Books Group, 2015).

¹⁴ Krepinevich and Watts, *The Last Warrior*, xxi–xxii.

¹⁵ Rand, “Andrew Marshall, RAND Researcher Who Founded Department of Defense’s ‘Internal Think-Tank,’ Dies at 97,” press release, 26 March 2019.



Figure 21. Andrew Marshall as the director of the Office of Net Assessment, Department of Defense, December 1994

Source: official U.S. Army photo by Scott Davis.

dreams as everyone else. They deserve just as much respect as we expect to receive. If this idea were adhered to around the planet, can you imagine what a world this would be?

We have had a mixed history of this open-mindedness in the military, but I believe we are further along than the civilian society we all come from and return to once we take the uniform off. It is not that servicemembers are better people, it is more that the requirement to unify and function as a team means the difference between winning and losing, and in the military, losing has particularly dire consequences.¹⁶ One of the people I admire most from my time as an active duty Marine achieved the rank of four-star general and then became a cabinet secretary and White House chief of staff—General John F. Kelly. One of his sons, Major John F. Kelly Jr., worked for me when I was the commanding officer of the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group (MCTOG) from 2009 to 2012, which enabled me to meet and speak with General Kelly in person on several occasions. He is one of the most genuine and professional officers I have had the pleasure to encounter. He made a speech in November 2010, only a couple of days after his other son, First Lieutenant Robert M. Kelly, was killed in action in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in which he illustrates the point I am trying to make here:¹⁷

Our servicemen and women also come to understand that it's not about color, but about character. That it's not about where in the world you came from, but all about why you

¹⁶ For more on the concepts of self and cross-cultural competence, see Remi M. Hajjar, "A New Angle on the U.S. Military's Emphasis on Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: Connecting In-Ranks' Cultural Diversity to Cross-Cultural Competence," *Armed Forces & Society* 36, no. 2 (2010): 247–63; and Joshua J. Jackson et al., "Military Training and Personality Trait Development: Does the Military Make the Man, or Does the Man Make the Military?," *Psychological Science* 23, no. 3 (March 2012): 270–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611423545>.

¹⁷ Luis Martinez, "Son of Marine General Killed in Afghanistan," ABC News, 11 November 2010.

came. That it's not about the God you worship, but that you will respect and even fight for the right of your neighbor to venerate any God he or she pleases. That it's not about individual achievement, but all about achieving together as a people for the common good. That there is an exceptionalism about America, and that we should cherish who we are and why we are extraordinary. Those of us who serve or have served in America's armed forces have a profound understanding of these truths. Unfortunately, many in our great country today seldom fully appreciate them, or even hear of them beyond rhetoric every couple of years.¹⁸

Some people may feel threatened by an open-minded approach to life or think that it means we do not believe in anything, but this is not true. It means that if we are truly seeking to make ourselves better and trying to think critically at every opportunity, then we should never assume we are absolutely correct, especially when we see evidence that we may be wrong. If all my reading about history has taught me anything, it is that there have been many people who held very firmly to their beliefs as they ran into the brick wall that proved what they believed was wrong. Unfortunately, this often coincided with them dying and, in many cases, they took a lot of people with them.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you have the self-discipline and intellectual curiosity to seek out the truth, even if it will likely be uncomfortable for you?
2. Do you belong to an echo chamber where you only engage with people who think like you do?

¹⁸ The speech given by then LtGen John Kelly in St. Louis on 13 November 2010 was republished in "Six Seconds to Live," *American Legion Magazine*, 28 October 2011.

3. Are you able to get out of your comfort zone and approach the world around you in a truly open-minded manner?

Suggested Further Study

Armstrong, Karen. *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*. New York: Borzoi Books, an imprint of Knopf, 2014.

I have always been curious as to the role of religion in the world—so much good mixed with so much bad. This book delves into many of the wars and battles that were the result of religious differences.

Krepinevich, Andrew, and Barry Watts. *The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of Modern American Defense Strategy*. New York: Basic Books, an imprint of Perseus Books Group, 2015.

One of the only biographies I have seen on Andrew Marshall, and it provides a good illustration of what I write about in this book.

Pinker, Steven. *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. New York: Penguin Books, an imprint of Random House, 2018.

Pinker is a talented writer and his discussion of why reason is so important, and so lacking in the world, is worth the time it takes to read this book.

Sanger, David E. *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age*. New York: Broadway Books, an imprint of Random House, 2019.

This book really helps the reader understand how information is being used and misused in the world. Sanger encourages us to build the skeptical lens that we should be viewing the world through.

Chapter 11

LISTEN

In today's hyper distracting environment, listening seems to be one of the hardest and least employed skills that we possess. The competition for attention can be overwhelming at times. When coupled with an ego that believes you can multitask and still perform every task successfully, it makes for a great deal of *non*listening. Maybe this is why the general population is experiencing an epidemic of suicides. The electronic isolation caused by the constant interface with a smart phone rather than someone standing right next to you is profoundly disturbing. So many people today walk around in groups or gather to eat and totally ignore each other. Some are texting, while others are listening to something with earphones inserted. None are involved in one of the most basically satisfying events that we, as humans, can participate in—a face-to-face conversation where each side is actively listening and contributing to the discussion appropriately.¹ This skill

¹ For the purposes of this discussion, the term *active listening* refers to when you listen attentively to a speaker, understand what they are saying, respond and

is older than recorded history. It may even predate coherent language among humans because it is something we all need so deeply. With the growth of technology and all the methods for diverting one's attention, is active listening a lost skill?

Part of the problem may be that listening, truly listening instead of thinking about what we will say next or something else entirely, is hard to do. We generally have so many things on our minds, and so little of the mental discipline required to shut out distractions and focus on the person speaking, that we have become seriously deficient listeners. As Joseph McCormack explained in *Noise*, "Few people know how to listen well, or even care to learn. It's tough on so many fronts. We're super busy, generally distracted, and more concerned about our own thoughts, perspectives, and plans. Who has the time and mental energy to listen actively and deeply to someone else? It's draining to listen."²

Maybe it is better to say that we are handicapped by distractions and a lack of focus. We are encumbered by an impatience that leads to interrupting the person we are talking to because we cannot wait to voice our own thoughts. We are largely incapable of performing one of the oldest, and perhaps most important, skills that humans have developed and used since we first started communicating with each other verbally. It is a skill as old as time and one that is required for peace of mind. As the "Father of the Field of Listening" Dr. Ralph G. Nichols once said, "The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them."³

reflect on what is being said, and retain the information for later. This keeps the listener and the speaker engaged in the conversation. See Hilary I. Lebow, "Become a Better Listener: Active Listening," PsychCentral, 27 September 2021.

² Joseph McCormack, *Noise: Living and Leading When Nobody Can Focus* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 149.

³ Andrew D. Wolvin, "Modeling Listening Scholarship: Ralph G. Nichols," *International Journal of Listening* 20, no. 1 (2006): 22–26, <https://doi.edu/10.1080/10904018.2006.10499085>.

The truth of the matter is that listening is one of the most important things we can do to help those in our lives, as sometimes simply listening to them is enough to alleviate their troubled mind. Genuinely listening shows others that we care about them, and we never have to say a word because actions speak much louder. The sense of connection that develops between two human beings who are having a deep and respectful discussion is mesmerizing for anyone participating and even for those watching it. Maybe that is why talk radio and daytime talk shows on television are so popular. Listening is also one of the sincerest forms of respect that we can offer to one another. When people get respect from those around them, they feel better about themselves, which can lift their mood better than anything else. Listening has certainly saved the lives of those who were contemplating suicide. The mere fact that someone stopped what they were doing and listened to a troubled person cut the chain of events that had the person tumbling down a steep mental slope with suicide at the bottom of it.

My wife and I are inveterate dog lovers. During the course of our marriage, we have had dogs for 26 of the 34 years we have been married. Our current dog, Ali, is a Catahoula Leopard and Australian Shepherd mix. She is just shy of being a puppy and so full of energy that she can be a lot to handle. The challenges she presents are more than worth it though, because dogs are the best listeners. They are always present in the moment and are so obvious in their devotion and affection that it is truly heartwarming. It is no wonder that they are so prevalent as service and emotional support animals, providing comfort to those with disabilities of all kinds.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an explosion of dog adoptions and purchases because people had more time on their hands.⁴

⁴Jeffery Ho, Sabir Hussain, and Olivier Sparagano, "Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Spark a Public Interest in Pet Adoption?," *Frontiers in Veterinary Sciences* 8 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2021.647308>.

While not everyone will keep their dogs' long term, unfortunately, I hope most will. Dogs love and listen unconditionally, which is likely why they are so popular as pets despite the downsides of ownership: shedding hair, chewing on everything, barking incessantly, "accidents" in the house, allergies, and many others. Why would we tolerate this if they were not such good companions? Dogs listen with their whole heart; you can see this in their eyes. They look at you with an expression that leaves you with the impression that you are the smartest and most wonderful person in the world. They never interrupt you by cutting you off to tell you their problems and, most importantly, they never betray a confidence. Maybe humans should try to be more like dogs.

Listening is beneficial in another way, because we learn a great deal more by listening than by talking. The Dalai Lama believes that "when you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. When you listen, you may learn something new."⁵ Taking in information and synthesizing it to determine its usefulness are silent acts. Despite how much we believe we can multitask and be incredibly efficient with the use of our time, this is a myth brought on by our own ego. We tell ourselves that we excel at multitasking despite abundant evidence that we actually do not. Instead of giving someone our undivided attention, we give each task only part of our attention. Since listening and thinking about what is being said takes enormous concentration and self-discipline to do properly, anything short of undivided attention means we are not really listening. Without really listening, what the person you are interacting with, however inadequately, is saying becomes noise. Listening is largely a silent act. Maybe that is why *listen* is spelled with the same letters as the word *silent*.

George Washington personified good listening skills. He was not necessarily a great speaker, because he was always conscious of the

⁵ For more on the teachings of the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, see "Training the Mind," DalaiLama.com, accessed 15 August 2022.



Figure 22. Ali Mullen, Catahoula Leopard/Australian Shepherd mix
Source: courtesy of the author.

limits of his own education, especially when compared with many of the other Founding Fathers. He knew how to listen though. This incredible skill was best illustrated in 1787 when he attended the Philadelphia convention that formed the U.S. Constitution as we know it today. He had enormous prestige due to all he had endured leading colonial forces to victory during the Revolutionary War and was elected president of the convention shortly after it convened that summer. The convention was assembled with the idea of modifying the *Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union*, which had been guiding the governance of the United States since their adoption in 1777 and later ratification in 1781. They made for a weak government that could not pay its bills and allowed each of the 13 original states to forge their own path. It did not work. Instead of making tweaks to the articles, the convention, in secret, scrapped them to form something else—the Constitution of the United States, which has been the governing document since ratification and enactment in 1789.⁶

Throughout the long, hot summer of 1787, the framers worked in secret in Carpenters’ Hall (now known as Independence Hall) in Philadelphia. Throughout the debate, tempers flared in the miserable conditions. George Washington sat at the head table in the hall quietly listening and only weighing in when absolutely required. Each time he did so, it was clear his attention was focused solely on the proceedings, much as you would see with the captain of a ship that only need-

⁶ Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey, *The Presidents of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House Historical Association, 2006). The supporting documents from the Continental Congress can be found at “Primary Documents in American History,” Library of Congress, 16 March 2022; or see *Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union between the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island, and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia* (Williamsburg, VA: Alexander Purdue, 1777). The full U.S. Constitution as transcribed by Jacob Shallus during the convention is available at “The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription,” National Archives, accessed 15 August 2022.



Figure 23. George Washington, ca. 1796

Source: Gilbert Stuart, oil on canvas, in the open collection of the Brooklyn Museum.

ed slight course corrections on occasion but was generally heading in the right direction. His role was recognized as indispensable by those who attended, which was made evident by the fact that he was drafted to become the first U.S. president and won the election unanimously without wanting or campaigning for the position.⁷ He truly was the father of our country.

We must also remember that there is a difference between listening and hearing. Hearing refers to passively taking in what someone else is saying. Body language and facial expressions add to the whole picture of what someone is trying to communicate. Going back to the topic of dogs, the fact that they do this innately is probably why they seem almost telepathic at times. They focus on “reading” their owner. They see things that people are not conscious of and react accordingly. This is one of the reasons why they assign service dogs to epileptics; they can sense an episode and provide early warning and support because they are so attentive to the signs their owner gives off, most of which are invisible to humans. The same is likely true of character, because dogs tend to be a good judge of character too. Did you ever notice how dogs react to certain people, even avoiding or responding aggressively to some? There is usually a good reason for this reaction.⁸

Active listening is the best form of taking in information and requires the most self-discipline. Active listening requires taking in every aspect of the person talking to you—words, expressions, body language, etc.—and offering supportive comments that encourage them to continue talking or asking guiding questions that enable them to explore areas where they may have been previously unwilling to go. How many times have we met someone who is genuinely good at active lis-

⁷ See John R. Vile, “Constitutional Convention of 1787,” First Amendment Encyclopedia, Middle Tennessee State University, 2009.

⁸ James R. Anderson et al., “Third-party Social Evaluations of Humans by Monkeys and Dogs,” *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 82 (November 2017): 95–109, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2017.01.003>.

tening and came away from the experience with the thought that they were one of the nicest people? Sometimes, we do not realize that we have not learned much about them, but they know all about us because they drew it out by active listening. Having others think about us in the same terms because of our ability to actively listen is something to aspire to. Change consultant Dr. Jonathan H. Westover describes a similar experience:

Years ago, as a young college student trying to learn the ropes and figure out my path in life, I found myself in the office of an older, very sage professor, seeking advice. I was contemplating switching majors (again!), but the university didn't then offer the specific program I was seeking. This professor, who became a dear mentor to me, sat there and patiently listened as I expressed my scattered, naïve, probably incoherent thoughts. Instead of offering any specific advice, he simply listened intently, only speaking at times to restate something I had said in order to confirm understanding or to ask a thought-provoking question. As I left that brief meeting, I was amazed by the clarity I had regarding my conundrum and how to move forward. My questions and concerns had been heard, I felt understood, I felt genuine compassion and caring, and I felt empowered to make my decision. Upon further reflection, I realized that I experienced firsthand the power of listening.⁹

This is the type of power that can and does change lives. It makes us better human beings because we are participating in one of the oldest and most valuable human activities. We cannot lose this skill amid the distractions caused by all the other activities in our lives. To en-

⁹Jonathan H. Westover, "The Power of Listening," *Forbes*, 17 August 2020.

sure we do not lose it, we have to deliberately *choose*—there is that word again—to listen. We have to make time to listen and demonstrate the mental discipline to close off all other distractions and focus on listening. Consider how good it feels when we are listened to and extend that consideration to others. Time spent actively listening is never wasted time.

One last consideration—and back to Epictetus again—who purportedly said that we should take a tip from nature: we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.¹⁰

Questions to Consider

1. Do you believe you are effective at multitasking?
2. Do you have the ability, patience, and self-discipline to focus on one important thing at a time?
3. Do you have the ability to actively listen to someone and actually hear what they are saying as they are saying it?

Suggested Further Study

Bowen, Catherine Drinker. *Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention, May to September 1787*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1966.

The story of how the Constitution of the United States of America was created is not well known, but it is so important to understanding the foundation of our country—the compromises that were necessary, the resistance, and how they eventually got the country to accept it. As truly amazing as that piece of paper and the bill of rights that accompany it are, this solid foundation is

¹⁰ Ancient and modern proverbs abound on this topic and, though it is frequently attributed to Epictetus, there is no documentation as yet supporting that theory.

the reason why this country held together and became what it is today.

McConnell, Patricia B. *For the Love of a Dog: Understanding Emotion in You and Your Best Friend*. New York: Ballantine Books, an imprint of Random House, 2005.

I love reading about dogs and this title is a very good one for helping humans understand them better.

Chapter 12

THE GOLDEN RULE

Can you imagine a world where everybody treats the people they encounter on a day-to-day basis exactly the way they would like to be treated? How nice that world would be . . . and how different from the world we live in today. For each of us, the Golden Rule should still mean something.¹ If we treat others as we want to be treated, we will never be far off course. It requires a great deal of self-restraint and patience, but is that too much to expect? Should this not be the measuring stick by which we measure who we are and how we are doing in life? Those we encounter each day likely have challenges we know nothing about. They may have valuable information for us. But if they look or speak differently, are we able to see beyond those differences to get to the value inherent in each person? Is that not how we would like to be treated?

¹ The Golden Rule refers to ethical conduct found in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31: do to others as you would have them do to you.

The challenge here is that we are not always treated well and the default option for many is to respond in the same manner as we have been treated. As with many other things discussed here, this too is a matter of choice: we can control our response to that situation. As the civil rights icon Rosa Parks once said, “Nothing in the Golden Rule says that others will treat us as we have treated them. It only says that we must treat others in a way that we would want to be treated.”² Here is a woman who was actively discriminated against for most of her life. At the age of 42 in 1955 in her home city of Montgomery, Alabama, she got on a public bus to return home after work. According to a Montgomery city ordinance, African Americans were required to sit at the back of public buses and were also obligated to give up those seats to White riders if the front of the bus filled up. Parks was in the first row of the Black section when the White driver demanded that she give up her seat to a White man. When she quietly refused, she was arrested. She did not rage or resist. She quietly complied with the arresting officer and went to jail. Her actions sparked a yearlong bus boycott in the city that eventually forced political leaders to change their policy.³ Parks accomplished this by applying the Golden Rule even when she was not treated well by the bus driver, police, or city officials. She was a victim of discrimination and injustice but did not act out with violence. Her lack of a reaction likely embarrassed city officials more than anything else she could have done and gave momentum to the growing Civil Rights Movement.

² As quoted in Éamonn Toland, *The Pursuit of Kindness: An Evolutionary History of Human Nature* (Dublin, Ireland: Liberties Press, 2021), chap. 2.

³ “Rosa Parks Ignites Bus Boycott,” History.com, 30 November 2021. Parks was 1 of 73 people rounded up by deputies after a grand jury charged 113 African Americans for organizing the boycott. This took place a few months after her arrest on 1 December 1955 for refusing to give up her seat to a White passenger on a segregated municipal bus in Montgomery, AL.



Figure 24. Rosa Parks is fingerprinted on 22 February 1956 by Lt D. H. Lackey
Source: *Plain Dealer*, Chicago, IL.

One of the people attracted to this growing movement was a 26-year-old preacher who had recently been assigned to lead a church in Montgomery. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a great deal of experience being mistreated and ostracized because of his race. After speaking out in support of Parks and the bus boycott, his house was bombed. In later years, as he continued to speak out and grow in prominence within the Civil Rights Movement, he was arrested, beaten, harassed, and threatened repeatedly. These things happened not only because of his race, but even more so because of his incredible ability to speak to others and motivate them to take up the cause of civil rights. His “I have a dream” speech was delivered to millions on

the National Mall in Washington, DC, as well as around the nation by television on 28 August 1963, and those words changed this nation for the better. For all that he and other people of color had endured up to that point, you would expect words of bitterness or anger in his speech. There were none. Instead, he offered words of hope and inspiration. Though only a portion of his words follow, it is, in my opinion, the most powerful passage and supports the Golden Rule:

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. . . .

So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.⁴

He eventually paid for his outspoken opposition with his life when he was assassinated by White supremacist James Earl Ray on 4 April 1968 at his hotel in Memphis, Tennessee.⁵ Despite all he experienced in life, King was still able to say, “Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.”⁶

So how important is the Golden Rule? Well, important enough that every major religion in the world has a version of it as one of the foundational elements of their belief system. For example, Buddhism teaches, “Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.”⁷ Confucianism teaches, “Is there any one maxim which ought to be acted upon throughout one’s life? Surely the maxim of loving kindness is such — do

⁴ “‘I Have a Dream’ Speech in Its Entirety,” NPR, 14 January 2022.

⁵ *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations of the U.S. House of Representatives* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1979).

⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., “The Dimensions of a Complete Life” (sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, AL, 24 January 1954).

⁷ Franz Bernhard, ed., *Udānavarga* (Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).



Figure 25. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on 28 August 1963

Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

not unto others what you would not they should do unto you.”⁸ Islam teaches, “No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”⁹ The Golden Rule is fundamental to enabling people to get along with each other, instead of contributing to the horrible things we see people doing to each other in the news media and online. Adhering to the Golden Rule requires that you place your own

⁸ D. F. Tsai, “The Bioethical Principles and Confucius’ Moral Philosophy,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31 (2005): 159–63, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jme.2002.002113>.

⁹ Islam, Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13.

interests aside and give priority to those of the person you are interacting with. For many, this is an exceedingly difficult thing to do. It requires a conscious decision to do so instead of the unconscious and automatic response inherent in most humans to look out for themselves. It is evident in the selfless acts we hear about on the news (though not nearly enough) or in the award citations for heroic actions.

Consider the Golden Rule from ancient Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus's perspective. The Greeks were known for their pursuit of philosophy, which they believed would render wisdom to those who studied it. The title of *Sophoi* or Seven Wise Men was given to those who attained wisdom.¹⁰ This label was applied by common consent of the people of Greece and when they ranked the seven most wise men of their time, Thales was ranked first. The common way that these sages dispensed wisdom was to answer questions posed to them. So, the wisest man in ancient Greece, when asked how people might live most virtuously and justly, he answered, "If we never do ourselves what we blame in others."¹¹ In other words, if we cannot treat others well, we can at least avoid doing what we do not like to see others do.

Perhaps the best example of the Golden Rule came from my time as an adjunct professor teaching leadership at the University of Colorado in Boulder. The Center for Leadership, the Bruce D. Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization, and the Aquinas Institute for Catholic Thought sponsored a virtual discussion entitled "Is Civil Discourse Dead?" It was a discussion between two people who could not possibly have been more opposite in their viewpoints: Dr. Cornel West considers himself a radical Democrat and socialist and Dr. Robert George considers himself a conservative Republican and member

¹⁰ "Thales of Miletus," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 19 April 2022.

¹¹ As quoted in Will Durant, *The Life of Greece* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1939), 137–38; or see Diogenes Laertius, *The Thought of Thales Summarized by Diogenes Laertius in the Library of Original Sources*, ed. Oliver J. Thatcher (Milwaukee, WI: University Research Extension, 1907), 138–40.

of the Catholic Church. Both men are intellectuals who speak out publicly for what they believe in, but both are also disturbed by the vitriol on display within the news as well as on social media platforms. These two gentlemen are close friends and they engaged in a remarkably candid discussion that was polite, respectful, and genuinely interesting because they chose to make it that way. They have agreed to disagree on many topics, but have done so in the mildest manner possible and without surrendering their own beliefs. Their debates start with the assumption that their partner is a smart person who has something of value to say, so they listen respectfully and then respond civilly when their opportunity comes. There are no interruptions and no name calling or “labeling.” It was one of the most refreshing discussions I have ever witnessed.¹²

This principle in action can be seen in the good deeds done for others much like was discussed in chapter 2. Doing this for those who have the ability to do something in return for us is not a hard thing to do. The Golden Rule is particularly important when it comes to those people who cannot do anything for us in return. We should ask ourselves whether we know the names of the people who clean our building or maintain the facility. A small act such as saying hello to them, by name, and asking how they are doing can mean the world to them. Again, is that not how we would like to be treated? Altruism means that we are doing something with no expectation of reward and, as stated earlier, it can be one of the best experiences in life. Doing for others is not a sacrifice—we should think of it more as an investment. It does not have to be anything big; in fact, it might be something as simple as being nice to those around us. A 2013 video on YouTube, “Video that will change your life. I have no words left,” demonstrates how

¹² Cornel West and Robert George, “Is Civil Discourse Dead?: Friendship and Faith Across the Political Divide” (panel discussion on Zoom, 21 January 2021).

contagious random acts of kindness can be and how they can make the world a nicer place, especially when paid forward.

Perhaps the biggest challenge with adhering to the Golden Rule is personal selfishness. This is the default option for human beings unless there is a conscious choice to override it. Most people are able to do this, but we all see daily examples where people are either unable or unwilling to override this default setting. They lack the empathy to care for those around them and are so self-centered that considerations about anything other than what benefits them personally do not enter their mind. If they could see themselves and, more importantly, their actions and the impact that they have on those around them, would they change their ways? A good example of overcoming personal selfishness—in this case the desire to avoid injury or death—to help someone who could do nothing in return comes from World War I:

It was a few weeks before Christmas 1917. The beautiful snowy landscapes of Europe were blackened by war. The trenches on one side held the Germans and on the other side the trenches were filled with Americans. It was World War I. The exchange of gunfire was intense. Separating them was a very narrow strip of no-man's-land. A young German soldier attempting to cross that no-man's-land had been shot and had become entangled in the barbed wire. He cried out in anguish, then in pain he continued to whimper.

Between the shells [exploding] all the Americans in that sector could hear him scream. When one American soldier could stand it no longer, he crawled out of the American trenches and on his stomach crawled to that German soldier. When the Americans realized what he was doing they stopped firing, but the Germans continued. Then a German officer realized what the young American was doing and ordered his men to cease firing. Now there was a weird silence across

the no-man's-land. On his stomach, the American made his way to that German soldier and disentangled him. He stood up with the German in his arms, walked straight to the German trenches and placed him in the waiting arms of his comrades. Having done so, he turned and started back to the American trenches.

Suddenly there was a hand on his shoulder that spun him around. There stood a German officer who had won the Iron Cross, the highest German honor for bravery. He jerked it from his own uniform and placed it on the American, who then walked back to the American trenches. When he was safely in the trenches, they resumed the insanity of war!¹³

Of course, something that compounds the effects of selfishness comes when we experience success in life and achieve higher ranks or positions. Some people allow these events to inflate their ego and neglect those who helped them get where they are. It has become routine for them to act this way, but that does not make it right in any respect. No matter how far any of us go in life, or how high the pedestal we get placed on, we should never be above treating those around us with respect and dignity. This refers back to character and is a good way to observe someone's character in action. How do they treat those around them, especially those who are unable to help them go further in life? Ironically, the respect we would like for ourselves must be earned through action. It is rarely something that is given as a matter of course.

American minister Joseph Fort Newton encapsulates the essence of this discussion:

¹³ This story appeared in Robert Strand, *Moments for Christmas* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 1993).

We can do anything for one day. So just for today let us be unafraid of life, unafraid of death, which is the shadow of life; unafraid to be happy, to enjoy the beautiful, to believe the best. Just for today, let us live one day only, forgetting yesterday and tomorrow and not trying to solve the whole problem of life at once. . . .

So, just for today, let us be agreeable, responsive, cheerful, charitable; be our best, dress our best, walk softly, praise people for what they do, not criticize them for what they cannot do. And when we find fault, let us forgive it—and forget.¹⁴

Questions to Consider

1. How do you treat those around you who have no ability to do anything for you?
2. Do you treat others with respect and dignity regardless of how they treat you?
3. Can you live by the Golden Rule as a habit and not as an occasional act?

Suggested Further Study

“Is Civil Discourse Dead?: A Conversation with Robert George and Cornel West,” YouTube video, 22 January 2021.

There are several versions of this available on YouTube since they have done this discussion many times. Each one is worth the hour or more to watch, and I wish more people would follow their example.

Lama, Dalai, and Howard C. Cutler. *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York: Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 1998.

¹⁴As quoted in Tommy Boone, *A Father's Gift of Prayer* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2011), 120–21.

The Dalai Lama has written several books and each one is valuable. This specific title focuses on personal priorities.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. New York: Basic Books, an imprint of Perseus Books, 1981.

Thomas Sowell is an African American who used to be a staunch liberal but changed his mind. When asked why, he replied, “life experience.” He writes with tremendous common sense and debunks much of what passes for popular “facts” these days.

“Video that will change your life. I have no words left.” YouTube video, 24 January 2013.

I came across this video while preparing for a leadership class I taught at the University of Colorado. It is very moving—the power or personal example and good deeds getting paid forward.

Chapter 13

SMILE

How often have we been walking somewhere and have been angry or depressed, then suddenly someone passes us by and says hello with a bright smile on their face? I am willing to bet that it turned your mind around, because I know it has done so for me. Smiles are contagious and tend to make people feel better, sometimes without even knowing why. Many times, during the course of my career, I have encountered people whose language I did not speak, but I started my interaction with them with a smile, and it changed the tenor of the translated discussion from what it might have been to something more productive. It can be that impactful, but as with other topics discussed in this book, it must be a conscious decision to offer the smile—even when we do not want to do so. That is when it is even more difficult because we also need to smile with our eyes for it to be genuine. Think about it though—a smile accompanied by gentle words and kind looks can overcome a great deal of animosity.

The nice thing about smiles is that they are free of charge, and it is a small part of the universal human language that everyone, no matter where you are, can readily understand. It opens doors and starts friendships. It eases tensions—all of which happens without ever saying a word. As Mother Teresa wrote in *The Joy in Loving*, “Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.”¹ Though it depends on the person and type of response, smiling requires less effort too; it only takes 17 muscles in your face to smile but it takes 42 muscles to frown. Think of the expression as an energy-saving device if nothing else. Lastly, it can offer a significant boost to a negative situation because of its ability to lift moods and lend strength to those around us.

Thomas Paine was considered by many to be the voice of the American Revolution in that the pamphlets (the social media of the day) he produced not only motivated colonials to go through with the incredibly daunting task of fighting for independence from the foremost military power of the time—Great Britain—though lacking forces to back their efforts. Paine’s publications helped to sustain the fight during the times when optimism was low and options were few. He seemed to have a knack for hitting the right chord with these early Americans, and they responded to him overwhelmingly by making him one of the most widely read authors of the day. Some have called him the Father of the American Revolution; in early 1776, he wrote a pamphlet titled *Common Sense* that made the case for rebelling against the king of England in clear and concise terms that most people could

¹ Mother Teresa, *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Life*, comp. Jaya Chalika and Edward Le Joly (New York: Penguin Compass, 1996).

readily understand. It provided the motivation for the colonies to come together to engage in the fight.²

Unfortunately, the revolution was not an immediate success for the American cause. By the end of the same year he wrote *Common Sense* and rallied people to the cause, the fight for independence was lagging. The Continental Army under General George Washington had spent the summer after the Declaration of Independence was officially signed on 2 August 1776 facing savage defeat through the coming months.³ They had tried to defend New York City, but were driven out of the area in a series of embarrassing losses, and then they had to give up the city after terrible losses during the Battle of Long Island on 27 August. They were then driven west across northern New Jersey. By December, what was left of the Continental Army crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania and collected every boat they could find on the river to prevent the British Army from crossing also to finish them off. Enlistments were expiring and morale was low going into the Christmas season.⁴ Thomas Paine reacted by writing a series of pamphlets called *The American Crisis* that started with the well-known words, “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of

² For more on Paine, see A. J. Ayer, *Thomas Paine* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Bruce Kuklick, *Thomas Paine* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018). The full text of *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, on the Following Interesting Subjects* can be found in Thomas Paine, *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 1, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894).

³ The Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on 4 July, but it was not officially signed until a month later. See “Declaration of Independence (1776),” National Archives, accessed 16 August 2022.

⁴ For more on the period and the major players, see the primary source documents available at “The American Revolution,” National Archives, accessed 16 August 2022; and “The American Revolution, 1763–1783,” Library of Congress, accessed 16 August 2022.

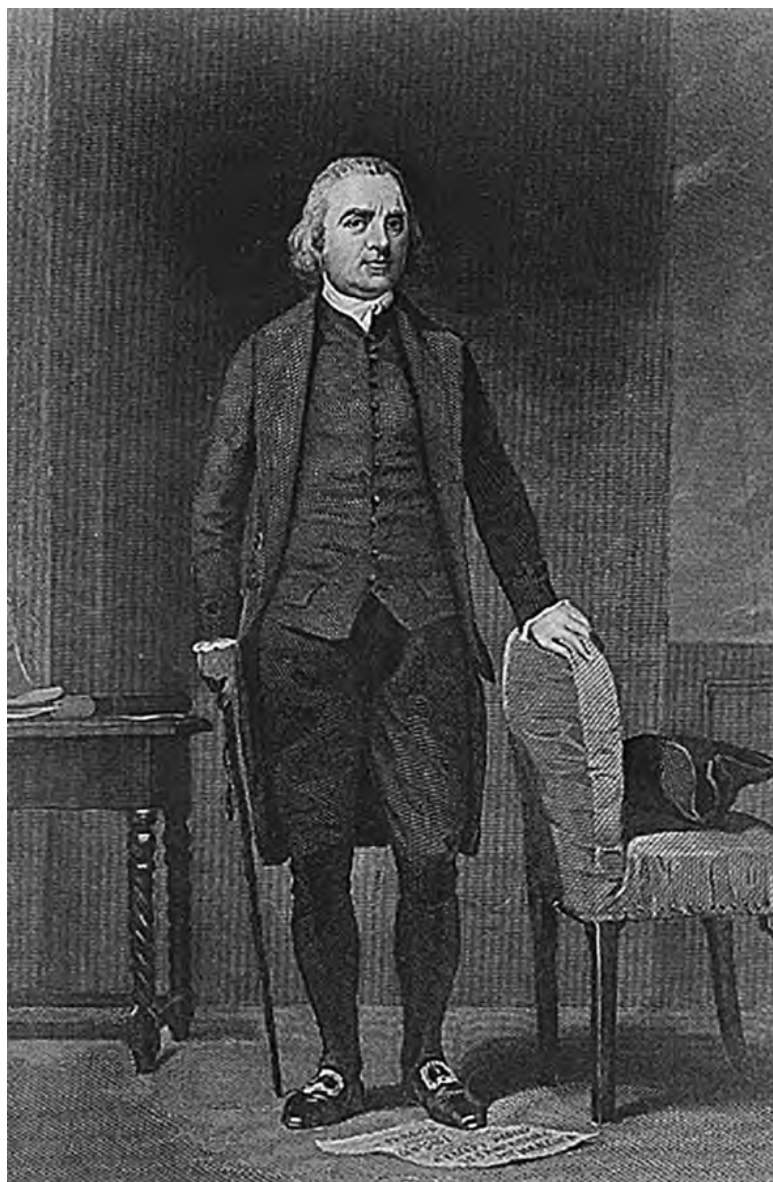


Figure 26. Thomas Paine, engraving by George Romney
Source: images of American Political History, National Archives and Records Administration.

man and woman.” It is not a long pamphlet, but the sentiment, in addition to the above discussion about smiling, is particularly apt here: “I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength in distress, and grow brave by reflection.”⁵ I know from experience that this type of person becomes the rock to which everyone else clings to get through a tough situation. Gallows humor can seem quite dark at times to those outside the situation, but making people smile in tough circumstances is one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of a leader.

George Washington exhibited these characteristics and, perhaps as a result of Paine’s pamphlet, he decided to cross the Delaware River again and make a surprise attack on the Hessian garrison in Trenton, New Jersey, on 26 December. These troops originated from one of the German states (Germany was not unified as a country until 1871) that the British had hired to help them suppress the colonial rebellion. They were particularly unpopular with Americans due to their brutality and the mercenary nature of how they came to fight in the colonies. The attack was launched late in the day on Christmas and went well into the next morning as the Revolutionary Army took hours to cross the Delaware River and then march many kilometers south along the New Jersey side of the river to enter Trenton during a driving rain and sleet storm. As they were crossing the Delaware River, General Washington, knowing how tense everyone was, decided to lighten the mood by joking with his chief artillery officer Colonel Henry Knox. Knox weighed almost 300 pounds and, when he got into the boat with Washington, the general quipped that Knox might sink their boat. Troops in the boat heard the lighthearted jest and shared the humor along the lines, likely lifting spirits in the face of the coming battle.⁶ This desperate and dar-

⁵ Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, published 13 volumes between 23 December 1776 and 19 April 1783.

⁶ Benton Rain Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis: The Battle for America, 1775–1783* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004), 85.



Figure 27. *Washington Crossing the Delaware*

Source: oil on canvas painting by Emanuel Leutze, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

ing attack achieved total surprise on the Hessians and may have been the victory that saved the patriot cause.⁷

Dale Carnegie also understood the value of a smile. He was born in the late 1880s and lived until 1955. As a writer and lecturer, Carnegie was strongly devoted to self-improvement. He is best known for his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and the belief that it was possible to change people's behavior by altering how one behaves toward them. The poem below highlights this concept and why he believes a smile is one of the most important ingredients for positive interpersonal relationships:

The Value of a Smile

It costs nothing, but creates much;

⁷ For more on the battle and the events that would follow, see Benson Bobrick, *Angel in the Whirlwind: The Triumph of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

It enriches those who receive, without impoverishing those who give;
It happens in a flash, and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever;
None are so rich they can get along without it, and none so poor but are richer for its benefits;
It creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in a business, and is the countersign of friends;
It is rest to the weary, daylight to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and nature's best antidote for trouble;
Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or stolen, for it is of no earthly good to anybody until it is given away;
Nobody needs to smile so much as those who have none left to give.
Smile, smile, smile.⁸

Smiling also has positive physical effects on the person smiling. *Forbes* columnist Ron Gutman once wrote in "The Untapped Power of Smiling" that

Smiling stimulates our brain's reward mechanisms in a way that even chocolate, a well-regarded pleasure-inducer, cannot match. In a study conducted in the UK (using an electromagnetic brain scan machine and heart-rate monitor to create "mood-boosting values" for various stimuli), British researchers found that one smile can provide the same level of brain stimulation as up to 2,000 chocolate bars; they also found that smiling can be as stimulating as receiving up to 16,000 Pounds Sterling in cash. That's a 25 grand smile . . . it's not bad . . . at

⁸ Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936).



Figure 28. Dale Carnegie, ca. 1936

Source: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

400 daily smiles quite a few children out there feel like Mark Zuckerberg every day!

And unlike lots of chocolate, lots of smiling can actually make you healthier. Smiling has documented therapeutic effects, and has been associated with: reduced stress hormone levels (like cortisol, adrenaline, and dopamine), increased health and mood enhancing hormone levels (like endorphins), and lowered blood pressure.

If that's not enough, smiling also makes us look good in the eyes of others. A recent Penn State University study confirmed that when we smile we not only appear more likeable and courteous, but we're actually perceived to be more competent. . . .

So now, whenever you want to look great and competent, improve your marriage, or reduce your stress . . . or whenever you want to feel as good as when you've enjoyed a stack of high quality chocolate without incurring the caloric cost, or as if you randomly found 25 grand in the pocket of a jacket you hadn't worn for ages . . . or when you want to tap into a superpower and help yourself and others live longer, healthier happier lives . . . SMILE :-)⁹

Last, in a sermon the other day, the priest said something that really struck home. He was thinking about when he was young and saw pictures of Mother Teresa. No matter what the circumstances were in any of the pictures he saw of her, dealing with desperately sick and needy people amid unimaginable squalor, she was always smiling. She had virtually nothing that most of us would consider something to smile about, but she smiled. All he could say about it was that what-

⁹ Ron Gutman, "The Untapped Power of Smiling," *Forbes*, 22 March 2011. Smiley face emoji in original.

ever it was that made her smile all the time, he wanted some of it. It had to be powerful.

Questions to Consider

1. When was the last time you saw someone sad or angry and smiled at them, changing their mood and enabling them to smile as well?
2. Have you ever been lifted out of a bad mood by someone smiling at you?
3. Do you try to start every greeting and/or meeting with a smile? Watch the effect that it has.

Suggested Further Study

Bobrick, Benson. *Angel in the Whirlwind: The Triumph of the American Revolution*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

This is not a widely known book, but I found it to be very good in its depiction of how desperate a move crossing the Delaware and taking Trenton was for Washington and the ragtag remnants of his army. It can be argued that had he not made this move, the war would have been over.

Carnegie, Dale. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936.

This is a classic, but it never seems to go out of date. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* focuses on the art of human relations.

Paine, Thomas. "Common Sense." In *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol.

1. Edited by Moncure Daniel Conway. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894.

As stated in the chapter, these pamphlets passed for blogging at the time. Paine had such a way with words that he rallied many people to the revolutionary cause. It is short, but well worth the read even today.

———. *The American Crisis*, 13 vols. Philadelphia, PA: Styner and Cist, 1776–83.

Same with this work; written at the worst time in the revolutionary cause, it stirred enough people to continue to fight, and maybe for Washington to take the chances he did at Trenton, that it can be said it is partly responsible for our eventual victory against the British . . . seven years later.

Teresa, Mother. *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Life*. Compiled by Jaya Chalika and Edward Le Joly. New York: Penguin Compass, 1996. Another book that helps the reader arrange their priorities in life.

Chapter 14

MENTORING

I think I saved the best for last—mentoring. We all recognize that it is a valuable skill, but so few people take the time necessary to do it correctly. It is time consuming, requires patience and perseverance, and is not always rewarded by the mentee actually following the advice provided. The young do not always see the value in a mentor, so they do not seek one out, or at least I did not. We believe we have all the answers and then realize over time that we do not. As we get busier in life, the time to conduct this activity for oneself or others evaporates unless it is specifically placed on the schedule and held there in spite of other items attempting to crowd it out. As we advance in our careers, there are “gatekeepers” who prevent people from gaining access to us when they might really need it. Because of these factors, those who hold the bulk of the corporate knowledge for their organization often wonder why those new to the work make the decisions they do—some of which seem to be completely counterproductive. If we have not taken the time to sit down with them and explain the

finer points of the job, what works and what does not after a lifetime of experience, should we be surprised at the results? This is assuming they will listen, of course.

The formal definition of the term, *mentoring* (v.), refers to a reciprocal learning relationship between a mentor and mentee who agree to a partnership, where they work collaboratively toward mutually defined goals that will develop a mentee's skills, abilities, knowledge, and critical thinking/decision making.¹ What does mentoring involve? Time and the ability to listen objectively without harshly judging the mentee. It also requires patience, wisdom, and maybe most importantly empathy. In effect, it requires many of the things discussed in this book. It also requires the right fit—mentor and mentee—with regard to personality types and values. When the fit happens naturally, the relationship can be fantastic and productive for both. A mentoring relationship without the fit never really comes to fruition. If we can find the fit and use the skills mentioned above, we can achieve what is perhaps one of the best definitions of mentoring that was provided by Oprah Winfrey in a television interview in 2002: “A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself. A mentor is someone who allows you to know that no matter how dark the night, in the morning, joy will come. A mentor is someone who allows you to see the higher part of yourself when sometimes it becomes hidden to your own view.”²

We should always seek to mentor those coming along behind us and it should not always be through the spoken word—personal interaction. The mentor should not do all the talking. Some call this lecturing, and it simply does not work in this environment. It may also be the least effective way to truly mentor someone. Benjamin Frank-

¹ “What Is Mentoring?,” Association for Talent Development, accessed 16 August 2022.

² Oprah Winfrey, interview with WCVB-TV 5 News CityLine, Boston, MA, 13 January 2002.

lin is often credited with saying, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.”³ The essence is that we need to determine what works for those we seek to mentor and find a way to inspire them. If we can kindle in them the desire to be the best human they can be, nothing can quench that fire or do more to maintain the drive and momentum to sustain it for the years required to come. This intrinsic motivation comes from each person’s internal satisfaction in contrast with the extrinsic motivation that is driven by the need for external reward.⁴ It can also encourage them to be inspired to mentor those new to an organization or industry. I have often mentored younger Marines, and the only thing I ever ask from them is to pay it forward by doing the same for others.

A word of caution here though. If we are honest in our intent as we mentor those around us, we must accept it when they do not follow the advice given. It is their choice as to what they do with the information they are offered. Mentoring should not be an attempt to make another version of yourself. As Steven Spielberg said, “The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.”⁵ In essence, the goal is to shed a little light on the path of life ahead for them based on our own knowledge and experiences. Since it is their life, it is entirely up to them what they do with that knowledge. Andrew Marshall was exceptionally good at mentoring those around him, and the

³ There is no real evidence that Benjamin Franklin ever said this publicly. The earliest partial match to the overall meaning can be seen in the writings of Xunzi, a Confucian philosopher who lived in the third century BCE. Several English versions have been published as well. See Xunzi, “The Achievements of the Ru,” in *The Complete Text*, trans. Eric L. Hutton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁴ For more on the differences between these motivations, see Steven Reiss, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation,” *Teaching of Psychology* 39, no. 2 (April 2012): 152–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628312437704>.

⁵ Richard Corliss and Jeffrey Ressler, “Peter Pan Grows Up: But Can He Still Fly?,” *Time*, 19 May 1997, 81.

number of prominent figures in recent history who can be considered Marshall's protégé's is astounding, including Richard B. "Dick" Cheney, Donald H. Rumsfeld, and Paul D. Wolfowitz.⁶

Another aspect of mentoring that is often overlooked is the example that we set for others in how we live. How do we treat others? What is important to us as demonstrated by how we spend our time? Do the words we speak, especially when mentoring someone, match the actions that we take? Nothing kills a mentoring message faster than when we demonstrate the adage, "do as I say, not as I do."⁷ We must live up to the words we use for them to have their best effect, especially on those we mentor. When I was a young company commander, my battalion commander was one of the most professional people I have had the privilege of working with and he inspired me to be a much better professional through his words and actions. The officer who took over the battalion after him was just as good, if not better. Both went on to become four-star generals and achieved amazing success during their careers. Both were constant examples of living up to the requirements of being a member of the profession of arms.

We should also be open to being mentored as well, regardless of age or rank, as it is better to learn from what others have done than to learn by personal trial and error. This old proverb has been attributed to many different people, but it fits well here. It says a wise man learns from other people's mistakes, while an average man learns from his own. A fool learns from neither.⁸ Learning from past mistakes re-

⁶ Douglas McGray, "The Marshall Plan," *Wired*, 1 February 2003.

⁷ This idiom first appeared in print in John Selden, *Table-Talk, Being Discourses of John Seldon, Esq, or His Sense of Various Matters of Weight and High Consequence, Relating Especially to Religion and State* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1654).

⁸ This old Stoic proverb has often been attributed to Otto von Bismarck in *Bismarck Intime: The Iron Chancellor in Private Life*, trans. Henry Hayward (New York: D. Appleton, 1890). The oldest written reference comes from Seneca the Younger. See Katja Vogt, "Seneca," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 15 January 2020.

quires humility though, and as stated earlier, that can be difficult, especially for those who have achieved much in their career or life. No matter how old or experienced, however, someone has been there before us and we can learn from them, even if it is only as an example of what not to do.

Denzell Washington, in my humble opinion, is both a fantastic actor and, from all I have read about him, a wonderful human being. He is in high demand as a motivational speaker, and one of the things he talks about frequently is the role of mentors in his life. He discussed this at length in an article on the website Guideposts:

One of my favorite verses of the Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”⁹ Powerful words, aren’t they? They remind me of how important it is to give children a firm foundation. Show me a successful individual and I’ll show you someone who had real positive influences in his or her life. I don’t care what you do for a living—if you do it well, I’m sure there was someone cheering you on or showing the way. A mentor. I’ve had that push in my life, going back as far as I can remember. Here’s how mentors can make a difference. Here’s what they did for me. . . .

My second go-round at Fordham [University] I switched to the school’s midtown [New York City] campus where they had a real drama program, and I became passionate about acting. Bob [Robert W.] Stone, my English teacher, was involved in the theater program and knew his stuff. He’d been on Broadway with stars like Paul Robeson and José Ferrer and had accomplished a lot. I told him I was serious about

⁹ Prov. 22:6.

becoming an actor and he encouraged me. More than that, he believed in me.

After I appeared in a student production of *Othello* he wrote a letter of recommendation for me to grad school. What he basically said was, “If you don’t have the talent to nurture this young man, then don’t accept him.” I must’ve read that letter a hundred times. Each time I thought, *Wow! If he thinks I’m that good, then I’m going to have to live up to those words.* He put a fire under me.

For years I kept that letter in my pocket—still have it. Whenever things became tough, I read it. There were times I wondered if I’d ever catch my first break, but Bob’s words kept me going. I kept telling myself, *It’ll all work out; something big is coming.* Yes, I worked hard, I made some sacrifices until I finally made it. Yes, you could say I had some luck.

But I also had tremendous help along the way. That was a huge blessing from God. Behind every great success there’s someone and often more than one person. A parent, teacher, coach, role model. It starts somewhere. As the Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” There’s no reason it can’t start with you.¹⁰

The focus of this chapter is that we are indeed our fellow human’s keeper. We are responsible for those around us whether we take on that responsibility or not. At some point, we will no longer be around and will leave the business end of this life to those coming along behind us. If we do not like what they are doing now, we can influence it while we are still here. Once we have retired or departed, our influ-

¹⁰ Denzell Washington, “Guideposts Classics: Denzel Washington, Inspired to Be Great,” Guideposts, January 2007.



Figure 29. Denzel Washington during 2018 interview
Source: courtesy of MTV United Kingdom.

ence drops considerably. I frequently told my Marines that we get the kind of Marine Corps that we expect, enforce, supervise, and mentor. If we do not like how things are going, we have only to look in the mirror to find the source of the problem. Clearly, this applies to any walk of life as well.

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) understood this responsibility clearly when he wrote the poem “If—.” Kipling was famous for his stories of India as well as many other adventures, but “If—” highlights this chapter on mentoring because he wrote it to impart wisdom and help the young men of his time to live up to the ideals of manhood as he saw them:

If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: “Hold on”;

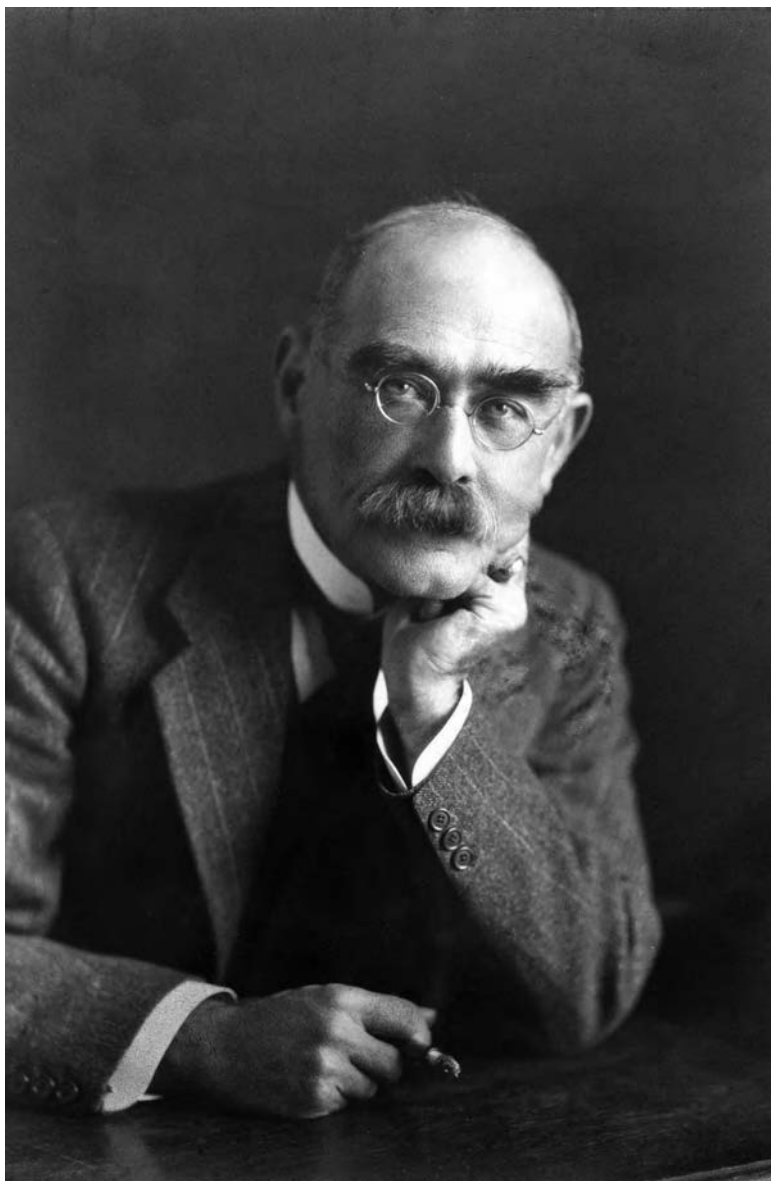


Figure 30. Rudyard Kipling, ca. 1900
Source: silver print, courtesy of Elliot and Fry.

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run—
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!¹¹

Questions to Consider

1. Do you take the time to understand those around you and help them to succeed if they need it?
2. Do your actions match the words you speak?
3. Are you open to being mentored yourself?

Suggested Further Study

Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Edited by Frank Woodworth Pine. New York: Henry Holt, 1916.

One of our Founding Fathers and an incredible person in his own right. Extremely intelligent and accomplished, this autobiography is amazingly humble and well written. Franklin talks about the system he used for personal self-improvement and I found that especially valuable.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Collected Stories of Rudyard Kipling*. New York: Penguin Random House, 1994.

Kipling was an amazing storyteller and poet, though a good bit of his work would not be considered politically correct by today's standards, the basic tenets he presents offer lessons to be learned.

¹¹ Rudyard Kipling, "If—," in *Rewards and Fairies* (New York: Doubleday, 1910), 181–84.

Washington, Denzell. "Guideposts Classics: Denzel Washington, Inspired to Be Great." Guideposts, January 2007.

Washington is one of my favorite actors and this particular post shows him to be a good person as well.

Parting Thoughts

In the end, it is up to each of us to do the best we can to help each other and to make the world around us better because we are present in it. We often underestimate the impact that we can have, but we should not. Leo F. Buscaglia was an American author, motivational speaker, and bestselling author. He died in 1998, but his message of what is truly in the realm of the possible remains poignant even today: “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”¹

I have always been a collector of quotes as sources of inspiration and, as I have said previously, I keep them in my “Wisdom for the Ages” file. The one I have always tried to live by, and which encapsulates the larger message in the preceding chapters, has been attributed to Dr. John Walter Wayland who taught history and ethics at what

¹ Leo Buscaglia, *Love: What Life Is All About* . . . (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

was then State Normal School in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and organized what would later become James Madison University. He wrote prolifically, including song lyrics and more than 30 books. The essay below was submitted to the Baltimore *Sun* in 1899 as an entry in their competition for the best definition of a true gentleman. The submission was far and away the winner and is something all of us can live by no matter who we are:

The true gentlemen is the man whose conduct proceeds from good-will and an acute sense of propriety, and whose self-control is equal to all emergencies; who does not make the poor man conscious of his poverty, the obscure man of his obscurity, or any man of his inferiority or deformity; who is himself humbled if necessity compels him to humble another; who does not flatter wealth, cringe before power, or boast of his own possessions or achievements; who speaks with frankness, but always with sincerity and sympathy, and whose deed follows his word; who thinks of the rights and feelings of others rather than his own; who appears well in any company, and who is at home what he seems to be abroad—a man with whom honor is sacred and virtue safe.²

Last, though we are only exposed to a portion of Robert Duvall's speech in *Secondhand Lions*, I would like to think that the rest of it is not too far off from what I have written here. We only get one shot at this life, and as we age we realize how fragile and fleeting it is. We cannot afford to waste it, so we need to be the best person we can be, regardless of what others are doing with their life or saying about ours. Take ownership of your lives and make the choices that enable us to

² The original print of this 1899 contest was not available, but archived copies of the *Sun* can be found at the Library of Congress. The poem was later reprinted in *Commercial Law League Bulletin* 28, no. 1 (January 1923): 8.

look in the mirror without flinching from what is reflected. To do anything less is to allow others to control our lives and to give up on the most important race we will ever compete in—the human race.

To conclude this book and offer a final thought that should linger well after you close the pages, consider the poem written by Robert J. Hastings that offers a reminder of what is really important in life.

“The Station”

Tucked away in our subconscious minds is an idyllic vision. We see ourselves on a long, long trip that almost spans the continent. We’re traveling by passenger train, and out the windows we drink in the passing scene of cars on nearby highways, of children waving at a crossing, of cattle grazing on a distant hillside, of smoke pouring from a power plant, of row upon row of corn and wheat, of flatlands and valleys, of mountains and rolling hills, of biting winter and blazing summer and cavorting spring and docile fall.

But uppermost in our minds is the final destination. On a certain day at a certain hour we will pull into the station. There will be bands playing, and flags waving. And once we get there so many wonderful dreams will come true. So many wishes will be fulfilled and so many pieces of our lives finally will be neatly fitted together like a completed jigsaw puzzle. How restlessly we pace the aisles, damning the minutes for loitering . . . waiting, waiting, waiting, for the station.

However, sooner or later we must realize there is no one station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The true joy of life is the trip. The station is only a dream. It constantly outdistances us.

“When we reach the station that will be it!” we cry. Translated it means, “When I’m 18, that will be it! When I buy a new 450 SL Mercedes Benz, that will be it! When I put the last kid

through college, that will be it! When I have paid off the mortgage, that will be it! When I win a promotion, that will be it! When I reach the age of retirement, that will be it! I shall live happily ever after!”

Unfortunately, once we get it, then it disappears. The station somehow hides itself at the end of an endless track.

“Relish the moment” is a good motto, especially when coupled with Psalm 118:24: “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” It isn’t the burdens of today that drive men mad. Rather, it is regret over yesterday or fear of tomorrow. Regret and fear are twin thieves who would rob us of today.

So, stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles. Instead, climb more mountains, eat more ice cream, go barefoot oftener, swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more and cry less. Life must be lived as we go along. The station will come soon enough.³

³ Robert Hastings, *The Station: A Reminder to Cherish the Journey* (Golden Valley, MN: Tristan Publishing, 2003).

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About the Author

Major General Bill Mullen was an infantry officer and served 34 years in the Marine Corps. He led platoons as a lieutenant and commanded Fox Company, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, and returned to that battalion to command it as a lieutenant colonel. He also commanded the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group as a colonel. Mullen participated in contingency operations in the Philippines, in the former Yugoslavia, and counternarcotics operations in Arizona, Texas, and California. He served three tours in Iraq, two in Fallujah, and one in Baghdad. He served in Fallujah as the operations officer for Regimental Combat Team 8, then as the commanding officer of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines. He served in Baghdad as the deputy commanding general for operations and the director of the Combined Joint Operations Center. Nonfleet tours included serving with the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team-Pacific; inspector-instructor duty in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Marine aide to the president and as an action officer and executive assistant in the J-3 (Operations) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mullen at-

tended the Advanced Artillery Officer Course, the School of Advanced Warfighting, and the Naval War College. He also earned a master's in national security studies from the Naval War College and a master's in political science from Marquette University. He is the coauthor of the book *Fallujah Redux: The Anbar Awakening and the Struggle with Al-Qaeda* (2014). As a general officer, he served as the president of Marine Corps University and commanding general of Education Command, the director of the Capabilities Development Directorate, the commanding general of Marine Air-Ground Task Force Training Command and of the Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms, California, and lastly as the commanding general of Training and Education Command. He and his wife Vicki have three adult children and three grandchildren. After retirement, they settled in Arvada, Colorado, where Mullen teaches at the University of Colorado Denver and at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

What It Means to Be a Man was written with the Marines the author cares about so much always in mind—young Marines who are the most important asset in the Corps. Realizing his own imperfections, the author has always worked to be a better person based on a lifetime of personal experience as well as thousands of years of vicarious experience gained from reading. The author uses a good bit of both in writing this book in the hopes that it will benefit all those Marines coming along behind. General Bill Mullen retired from the Marine Corps but still cares a great deal about the strength of the Service and the Marines and sailors who continue to serve in it. This book is for all of you—semper fidelis.



Major General Bill Mullen dedicated 34 years of service to the Marine Corps. He served in many different capacities during those years and the thing he misses most about having taken the uniform off is the Marines and sailors he served with. Leading and working with them is a highlight of his life. There are few professions where someone, once finished with it, would say that they would do it all over again. Though filled with plenty of ups and downs, Mullen can truly say that, yes, he would do it all over again. He considers it an honor and a privilege to have served the United States Marines for so long.

Cover image: Official U.S. Marine Corps photo
by Sgt. Melissa Marnell, adapted by MCUP.



Marine Corps University Press
2044 Broadway Street
Quantico, VA 22134
www.usmcu.edu/mcupress

