

Leadership Village Press Publications

FIFTY-TWO SKIDOO FOR THE CONTEMPLATIVE

By Gary A. Crow, Ph.D.

226 Middle Avenue
Elyria, Ohio 44035
(440) 329-5333
GAC@GaryCrow.net

Table of Contents

FIFTY-TWO SKIDOO FOR THE CONTEMPLATIVE	4
Well Done Is Well Said	4
Give'em Hell	5
The Attraction We Love To Hate.....	6
Do As You Please.....	7
Are You Old Yet?.....	8
Will You Drink To That?.....	9
No Child Left Behind?	10
Believe It or Not.....	11
The Price Of Anger	12
If You Can Choose	13
I'm Sorry.....	14
Seeing Is Believing.....	15
Who Is An Artist?.....	16
How's It Going?.....	17
Wanting Doesn't Make It So	18
Your Path To Success.....	19
Does Believing Make It True?.....	20
Ah, The Bicycle.....	21
They Say	22
A Grain Of Boldness	23
Who Is Your Audience?	24
Who's Boring Whom?.....	25
Breathe!.....	26
In A Word	27
What Sells?	28
In My Opinion.....	29
The Train Of The Future.....	30
Charm School.....	31
On Civilization.....	32
Your Complaint Account.....	33
Your Horizon	34
Go Along To Get Along?.....	35
The Testing Point	36
Are You Curious?.....	37
Do You Dance?	38
Food For Thought?.....	39
Is It Cats or Dogs?	40
Sweet Dreams?.....	41
The Other Driver	42
School's Out?.....	43
Secrets Revealed	44
To Exercise Or Not To Exercise	45
The Experience Game	46

Putting Off Success	47
Failing Better.....	48
It's My Family.....	49
Bad Management & Destiny.....	50
The Peace Of The Done.....	51
Assessing Your Prospects.....	52
Wasted Potential?	53
Brothers & Sisters	54
Just Waiting?.....	55

FIFTY-TWO SKIDOO FOR THE CONTEMPLATIVE

Well Done Is Well Said

Andrew Carnegie said, “As I grow older I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do.” It really is as Henry J. Kaiser pointed out, “If your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt.” And if it doesn't, it doesn't matter what you say. When all is said and done, “People may doubt what you say, but they will believe what you do.” (Lewis Cass)

Give'em Hell

It's fun to be a winner; but losing may have it's up side too. For example, Walt Disney said, "You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you." What do you think? Was Walt right or was he just trying to rationalize those broken teeth? Woody Hayes evidently agreed with the cartoon king, "There's nothing that cleanses your soul like getting the hell kicked out of you." As tempting as it is to side with Walt and Woody, Dr. Seuss had a far better soul cleansing strategy, "I have heard there are troubles of more than one kind. Some come from ahead and some come from behind. But I've bought a big bat. I'm all ready you see. Now my troubles are going to have troubles with me!"

The Attraction We Love To Hate

At a significant level, advertising is the wind that keeps the economy moving. Even if the notion is little more than so much hype, few would disagree advertising is a powerful economic force. Given that reality, it's odd advertising has such a negative image. It may be the wind that moves the economy; but it is mostly seen as an evil wind, indeed.

“Advertising may be described as the science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from it.” (Stephen Butler Leacock) “Advertising is an environmental striptease for a world of abundance.” (Marshall McLuhan) “Advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill bucket.” (George Orwell) “Advertising is the art of making whole lies out of half truths.” (Edgar A. Shoaff)

Malcolm Muggeridge argued, “History will see advertising ‘as one of the real evil things of our time. It is stimulating people constantly to want things, want this, want that.’” Similarly, Printers' Ink reported in 1915, “When the historian of the Twentieth Century shall have finished his narrative, and comes searching for the subtitle which shall best express the spirit of the period, we think it not at all unlikely that he may select ‘The Age of Advertising’ for the purpose.”

Here, then, is the question of the day. If advertising has been getting trashed for nearly a hundred years, why haven't the ad gurus been able to develop a powerful campaign to counteract the public's negative perception and distrust of them and their work products?

Do As You Please

There is a little quirk of human nature worth a second look. We seek out advice and guidance, we consult with experts, and may even peruse a few volumes in the library, hoping for insight and wisdom. As a result, we assimilate the best, available ideas and thinking about our problem or issue.

Do we then act based on all of that fine knowledge? Well, usually we do; but the little quirk is sometimes we don't, even though we know better than we do. As Mary Wortley said, "Sometimes I give myself admirable advice, but I am incapable of taking it."

It's definitely human nature, since it's been around for at least a couple thousand years. Cicero said, "Nobody can give you wiser advice than yourself." That's why we do what we want to do, despite all that good advice from experts. It's like Erica Jong noted, "Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't;" or Charles Varlet de La Grange, *Pensées*, "When we ask advice we are usually looking for an accomplice." In the end, the famous Anon. likely has the advice we need, "The best way to succeed in life is to act on the advice we give to others;" since, as François Duc de La Rochefoucauld pointed out, "It is more easy to be wise for others than for ourselves."

Are You Old Yet?

It would be interesting to know the exact point when one becomes old. Sure, Mark Twain said, "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." Even so, Henri Amiel did have a point when he said, "To know how to grow old is the master-work of wisdom, and one of the most difficult chapters in the great art of living." Without knowing when old is, you might never get around to the master-work of wisdom. Now just how disappointing would that be, finding out you were already old and had missed out on your wisdom work?

Fortunately, there are a few hints about when old starts, although identifying the exact point may not be possible. For example, John Barrymore thought, "A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams." Oliver Wendell Holmes believed, "Old age is fifteen years older than I am." Henry David Thoreau also hinted at the answer, "None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm."

H.L. Mencken suggested knowing when to start your wisdom work may not have anything to do with old, anyway. "The older I grow the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom." Tom Wilson seemed to agree, "Wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age. Sometimes age just shows up all by itself." Sure, that's a pretty scary prospect; but Kurt Vonnegut hit on what the most alarming part of this old thing really is. "True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country." Now is that enough to leave you shaking your head or what?

Will You Drink To That?

“The harsh, useful things of the world, from pulling teeth to digging potatoes, are best done by men who are as starkly sober as so many convicts in the death-house, but the lovely and useless things, the charming and exhilarating things, are best done by men with, as the phrase is, a few sheets in the wind.” H.L. Mencken certainly laid it out drink is a good news – bad news opportunity. Sure, it depends; but there definitely are pros and cons.

The famous Anon. said, “The first thing in the human personality that dissolves in alcohol is dignity;” but Robert Louis Stevenson said, “Wine is bottled poetry.” Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller said, “When the wine goes in, strange things come out;” but Frank Sinatra said, “I feel sorry for people who don't drink. When they wake up in the morning, that's as good as they're going to feel all day.” Even Shakespeare weighed in on the thumbs down side, “O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! that we should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts;” but no less an authority than Dave Barry put in his two cents worth on the other side of the debate, “Without question, the greatest invention in the history of mankind is beer. Oh, I grant you that the wheel was also a fine invention, but the wheel does not go nearly as well with pizza.” – Let's give Homer Simpson today's last word on the topic, “Beer is the cause and solution to all of life's problems. – Cheers!

No Child Left Behind?

“I love America more than any other country in this world; and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.” These words from James Baldwin may capture the essence of being a responsible American. Adlai Stevenson added to this essence when he said, “When an American says that he loves his country, he means not only that he loves the New England hills, the prairies glistening in the sun, the wide and rising plains, the great mountains, and the sea. He means that he loves an inner air, an inner light in which freedom lives and in which a man can draw the breath of self-respect.” “How often we fail to realize our good fortune in living in a country where happiness is more than a lack of tragedy.” (Paul Sweeney)

As President Clinton observed, “There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America.” “What we need are critical lovers of America - patriots who express their faith in their country by working to improve it.” (Hubert H. Humphrey) We can start this work by focusing on the wisdom of Walter Lippmann, “We are quite rich enough to defend ourselves, whatever the cost. We must now learn that we are quite rich enough to educate ourselves as we need to be educated;” and that education must include all of our children, as they need to be educated. Only educating most of our children is not nearly good enough, especially if you are the child who is still being left behind.

Believe It or Not

“If a man is not rising upwards to be an angel, depend upon it, he is sinking downwards to be a devil.” What do you think about this pronouncement from Samuel Taylor Coleridge? If you are skeptical about this angel thing, consider what George Elliot said, “The golden moments in the stream of life rush past us and we see nothing but sand; the angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone.”

OK, you may still see nothing but sand and are too busy to rise upwards to be an angel. Besides, you’ve never seen an angel and doubt if anyone else has either. Well, it’s just like James Russell Lowell said, “All God's angels come to us disguised.” Voltaire added, “It is not known precisely where angels dwell - whether in the air, the void, or the planets. It has not been God's pleasure that we should be informed of their abode.” Nonetheless, “Angels descending, bring from above, echoes of mercy, whispers of love.” (Fanny J. Crosby) It’s like Jean Paul Richter told us, “The guardian angels of life fly so high as to be beyond our sight, but they are always looking down upon us.” “O welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope, Thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings!” (John Milton, Comus)

The Price Of Anger

There is a French Proverb that says, “Anger is a bad counselor.” Although anger compels you to action, it’s like Benjamin Franklin warned, “Anger and folly walk cheek by jowl.” Will Rogers put it this way, “People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing;” and Robert G. Ingersoll like this, “Anger blows out the lamp of the mind.”

Should a Korean Proverb be more your style, try this one, “If you kick a stone in anger, you’ll hurt your own foot.” Wherever in the world you seek your wisdom, indulging in anger is a major no-no. Even Horace gave it a thumbs-down, “Anger is short-lived madness.” Ambrose Bierce said, “Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.”

OK, go ahead and lose your temper if you must; but at least take a quick count to 10 as you “consider how much more you often suffer from your anger and grief, than from those very things for which you are angry and grieved.” (Marcus Antonius)

If You Can Choose

Douglas Adams had what was likely an important insight into the nature of free will. If you were free to do what you will, what would you choose? Before you take your pick, here is Adams' point for you to contemplate, "It is an important and popular fact things are not always what they seem. For instance, on the planet Earth, man had always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins because he had achieved so much - the wheel, New York, wars and so on - whilst all the dolphins had ever done was muck about in the water having a good time. But conversely, the dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man - for precisely the same reasons."

A particularly good time to do your contemplating is the next time you are doing the laundry or find yourself parked on the freeway during rush hour or trying to figure out how to negotiate the new login procedure for the office network. Your conclusion may be Mark Twain had a point when he said, "I have been studying the traits and dispositions of the "lower animals" (so called) and contrasting them with the traits and dispositions of man. I find the result humiliating to me."

I'm Sorry

Red Auerbach said, "The only correct actions are those that demand no explanation and no apology." Now isn't that just dandy. It likely means the key to correct actions is to never make a mistake, to never make an error in judgment, to never make a social or emotional miscalculation You get the idea.

Red may have identified the key; but using it may be a bit risky. It is the same key that locks the door to personal growth, more fulfilling relationships, and expanding opportunity. So long as you don't overdo it, an occasional apology is, as grandpa liked to say, "a good way to have the last word." Just be sure to keep Kimberly Johnson's caution in mind when you apologize, "Never ruin an apology with an excuse."

Seeing Is Believing

You may be tempted to presume self-confidence is a good quality merely because it improves your performance. People who are self-confident generally do better than those who aren't.

Feeling confident does enhance one's functioning; but that is only the half of it. As Lord Chesterfield said, "Polished brass will pass upon more people than rough gold." The point is looking confident may be as important as being confident. Niccolo Machiavelli put it like this, "Men in general judge more from appearances than from reality. All men have eyes, but few have the gift of penetration." Daniel Webster expanded on the point, "The world is governed more by appearance than realities so that it is fully as necessary to seem to know something as to know it."

Baltasar Gracian may have been excessively cynical, "Things do not pass for what they are, but for what they seem. Most things are judged by their jackets." Even so, Ivy Compton-Burnett's view is likely at least partially correct, "Appearances are not held to be a clue to the truth. But we seem to have no other." The take home point is to be sure, along with being self-confident, you also appear to be who you want others to think you are. For example, Along with feeling like a winner, you also need to look like a winner.

Who Is An Artist?

“Very few people possess true artistic ability. It is therefore both unseemly and unproductive to irritate the situation by making an effort. If you have a burning, restless urge to write or paint, simply eat something sweet and the feeling will pass.” What do you think? Is Fran Lebowitz right? Many may have a burning, restless urge but few have “true ability.”

Henry Ward Beecher said, “Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures.” Note “true ability” isn’t required. You just need to dip inside yourself and paint your nature. It’s like Isaac Bashevis Singer said, “Every creator painfully experiences the chasm between his inner vision and its ultimate expression.” Sure the chasm will be there. Still, it’s your nature; and only you know how well you have captured it.

“No great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist,” according to Oscar Wilde. As John Cheever pointed out, “Art is the triumph over chaos.” It has little to do with how others think the world is or ought to be.

George Santayana thought, “An artist is a dreamer consenting to dream of the actual world.” It’s your dream. Who is qualified to tell you that you are having the wrong dream? If anyone dares to knock your dream, remember the words of Jules Feiffer, “Artists can color the sky red because they know it’s blue. Those of us who aren’t artists must color things the way they really are or people might think we’re stupid.” If your sky is red, then red it should be. Only stupid people and non-artists would think otherwise.

How's It Going?

“The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes.” This pronouncement by William James is well worth committing to memory, although the underlying idea didn’t originate with James’ generation. Many centuries earlier, Publius Terentius Afer said, “There is nothing so easy but that it becomes difficult when you do it reluctantly.” The focus is different; but the message is the same.

Consider Katherine Mansfield’s take on the theme, “Could we change our attitude, we should not only see life differently, but life itself would come to be different.”

Sure, it’s easy for them to say; but you are the one who has to live your life. It’s also true you are in charge of your perception of the life you have to live. Perhaps you will want to align with Winston Churchill who said, “I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.” As the famous Anon. observed, “We cannot direct the wind but we can adjust the sails.” “Very often a change of self is needed more than a change of scene.” (Arthur Christopher Benson)

If that change of self feels like a stretch, ponder this insight from F. Scott Fitzgerald, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.” It really is like Art Linkletter pointed out, “Things turn out best for the people who make the best out of the way things turn out.”

Wanting Doesn't Make It So

Confucius said, "Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it." Well, it may be a bit presumptuous to disagree with Confucius; but ugly is ugly. There definitely are events, situations, circumstances, and conditions most assuredly not beautiful. Johann von Goethe said, "The soul that sees beauty may sometimes walk alone;" and if Confucius saw beauty in everything, he either spent a lot of time in the wilderness by himself or was blind to significant aspects of reality.

Leo Tolstoy said, "It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness." Combine that with Gilbert Keith Chesterton's observation, "There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect," and it's easier to understand how Confucius came to his conclusion. Wanting to see good in everything, he made the leap the good he wanted to see was also beautiful.

The point is this. Not all that is good is necessarily beautiful and not all that is beautiful is necessarily good. What's more, just as ugly is ugly, evil is evil. There certainly are people and things, circumstances and events that are malefic. Failing to appreciate this reality is to turn over our families, our businesses, our communities to people and conditions that are, as they say, ugly clean through.

Your Path To Success

Start your journey with E. E. Cummings who said, "It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are." Then invite Samuel Johnson to join your trek. He is the one who said, "There lurks, perhaps, in every human heart a desire of distinction, which inclines every man first to hope, and then to believe, that Nature has given him something peculiar to himself." You should let Friedrich Nietzsche come along too; for he said, "At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvelously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time."

Julius Charles Hare also has some advice qualifying him to serve as your traveling companion, "Be what you are. This is the first step toward becoming better than you are." It was your fellow traveler, Samuel Johnson, who said, "Almost every man wastes part of his life in attempts to display qualities which he does not possess, and to gain applause which he cannot keep."

With that in mind, find room in your party for John Mason. You need his wisdom, "You were born an original. Don't die a copy." "Rabbi Zusya said on the Day of Judgment that, God would ask him, not why he had not been Moses, but why he had not been Zusya." (Walter Kaufmann) -- Just be sure you are not asked why you hadn't been you.

Does Believing Make It True?

According to Orson Scott Card, “This is how humans are: we question all our beliefs, except for the ones we really believe, and those we never think to question.” Wonder if this is true? If so, there are things you believe just because you believe it and others you believe simply because you’ve never given any thought to not believing.

Add this to Felix Cohen’s observation, “Generally the theories we believe we call facts, and the facts we disbelieve we call theories;” and you are left with a discouraging conclusion. Most of what you think is true and factual, most of what you really believe, is little more than one more theory, just another personal opinion.

There is an important glitch here. Most everyone else also chooses belief over non-belief, subscribes to one more theory, another personal opinion. That then becomes their belief, the principle according to which they live. Of course, since you really believe, you are right and they are wrong. The way you choose to live is good and right; and the way they choose to live is wrong and unjust.

Here is a suggestion that might lessen the tendency to discount everyone else’s perspective. Pick one principle you use to govern your life. Assume you are wrong, this cherished principle is invalid. How would that change your world, your perception of you and your actions? While you are contemplating this alternative reality, keep in mind most people in the world are certain your valued principle, your most cherished belief is wrong.

Ah, The Bicycle

“The bicycle, the bicycle surely, should always be the vehicle of novelists and poets.” Christopher Morley’s point is certainly worth pondering, for as the famous Anon. observed, “It would not be at all strange if history came to the conclusion the perfection of the bicycle was the greatest incident of the nineteenth century.” It is as Iris Murdoch argued, “The bicycle is the most civilized conveyance known to man. Other forms of transport grow daily more nightmarish. Only the bicycle remains pure in heart.”

“When man invented the bicycle he reached the peak of his attainments. Here was a machine of precision and balance for the convenience of man. And (unlike subsequent inventions for man's convenience) the more he used it, the fitter his body became. Here, for once, was a product of man's brain that was entirely beneficial to those who used it, and of no harm or irritation to others. Progress should have stopped when man invented the bicycle.” (Elizabeth West)

Should you doubt, consider this from Bill Strickland, “The bicycle is the most efficient machine ever created: Converting calories into gas, a bicycle gets the equivalent of three thousand miles per gallon.” If that isn’t reason enough to recommend the bicycle, President Kennedy said, “Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of a bike ride.” Yes, “Cycle tracks will abound in Utopia.” H.G. Wells said that; and Grant Petersen added, “Think of bicycles as rideable art that can just about save the world.” Ah, yes; and the lowly bicycle is, to the surprise of many, the world’s first hybrid vehicle, easily powered by only Big Macs and you.

They Say

“May God grant you many years to live, for sure He must be knowing the earth has angels all too few and Heaven is overflowing. May the devil chase you every day of your life and never catch you; and may you get to Heaven a half hour before the Devil knows you're dead.”

“May the sun shine, all day long, everything go right, and nothing wrong. May those you love bring love back to you, and may all the wishes you wish come true! May you have warm words on a cool evening, a full moon on a dark night, and a smooth road all the way to your door. May brooks and trees and singing hills join in the chorus too, and every gentle wind that blows send happiness to you, a sunbeam to warm you, a moonbeam to charm you, a sheltering angel, so nothing can harm you.”

“May you always have walls for the winds, a roof for the rain, tea beside the fire, laughter to cheer you, those you love near you, and all your heart might desire. May you always have work for your hands to do. May your pockets hold always a coin or two. May the sun shine bright on your windowpane. May the rainbow be certain to follow each rain. May the hand of a friend always be near you. And may God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you. May flowers always line your path and sunshine light your day. May songbirds serenade you every step along the way. May a rainbow run beside you in a sky that's always blue. May happiness fill your heart each day your whole life through. And May the holes in your net be no larger than the fish in it.”

A Grain Of Boldness

You likely know Theodore Roosevelt said, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” He also said, “The unforgivable crime is soft hitting. Do not hit at all if it can be avoided; but never hit softly.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson counseled, “There is no strong performance without a little fanaticism in the performer;” and Oscar Wilde added, “Moderation is a fatal thing; nothing succeeds like excess.”

“Put a grain of boldness into everything you do.” You will do well to follow this advice from Baltasar Gracian who also said, “He who finds Fortune on his side should go briskly ahead, for she is wont to favor the bold.”

Who Is Your Audience?

“‘Tis the good reader that makes the good book; in every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides hidden from all else and unmistakably meant for his ear; the profit of books is according to the sensibility of the reader; the profoundest thought or passion sleeps as in a mine, until it is discovered by an equal mind and heart.” What do you think? Is Ralph Waldo Emerson right? Do his words resonate with your sensibility? Is there an equivalence of mind and heart between you and Emerson?

Sure, books, like painting and sculpture, music and drama, poetry and other creative endeavors, may annoy or entertain, may agitate or relax, may sedate or enthrall, may inform or merely confuse. Occasionally, though, they resonate with one’s mind and heart. It is then the mind and heart of the artist finds an audience.

If you are an artist or writer, a scholar or public speaker, an actor or guru, you have been asked, “Who is your audience?” This is a question to which you likely give an answer; but it probably isn’t the unvarnished truth. You are likely but another example of others who do what you do. They are the ones with the audience. You are just tagging along, hoping you can attract part of their audience.

If you are more than a copy of others who do what you do, the truth is you don’t have an audience. You do what you do, say what you say, write what you write. If it resonates with the mind and heart of some one, only then do you have an audience. That is as good as it gets, at least as good as it is going to get today.

Who's Boring Whom?

"I am never bored anywhere: being bored is an insult to oneself." Who do you suppose said that? Well, it was Jules Renard, who may not be bored but is certainly just a tad boring. Either that or he is an exceptional, eastern mystic who actually found Nirvana. Steven Wright was, at least, more realistic, "When I get real bored, I like to drive downtown and get a great parking spot, then sit in my car and count how many people ask me if I'm leaving."

It probably isn't P. C. to call Renard a bore; but he is also the person who said, "Some people are so boring that they make you waste an entire day in five minutes." Does "arrogant" ring a bell? Renard might benefit from a statistic from John Updike, "One out of three hundred and twelve Americans is a bore... and a healthy male adult bore consumes each year one and a half times his own weight in other people's patience."

OK, I hear you quoting Don Marquis, "Bores bore each other too; but it never seems to teach them anything." I get your point. It's like the famous Anon. pointed out, "The worst thing about a bore is not that he won't stop talking, but that he won't let you stop listening." ... 10-4

Breathe!

There is a Swedish Proverb advising, “Fear less, hope more; eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more; hate less, love more; and all good things are yours.” This is all very good advice; but for today, focus on breathing.

Svatmarama, the yogi, instructed, “When the breath wanders the mind also is unsteady. But when the breath is calmed the mind too will be still, and the yogi achieves long life. Therefore, one should learn to control the breath.”

As the famous Anon. pointed out, “A healthy mind has an easy breath.”

If you are doubting, the words of Andrea Boydston tell you all you need to know, “If you woke up breathing, congratulations! You have another chance.” Accept the wise counsel of Thich Nhat Hanh, “Smile, breathe and go slowly.” “For breath is life, and if you breathe well you will live long on earth.” (Sanskrit Proverb)

In A Word

Robert Southey said, “It is with words as with sunbeams. The more they are condensed, the deeper they burn;” and Baltasar Gracian said, “Good things, when short, are twice as good.” Shakespeare also touted brevity, “Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit, and tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, I will be brief.”

Even Thomas Jefferson joined the keep it short chorus, “The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do.” No less an authority than William Strunk, Jr. sang along, “A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.”

As surprising as it may be, Mozart, himself, warbled along, although he was definitely a bit off key, “My great-grandfather used to say to his wife, my great-grandmother, who in turn told her daughter, my grandmother, who repeated it to her daughter, my mother, who used to remind her daughter, my own sister, that to talk well and eloquently was a very great art, but that an equally great one was to know the right moment to stop.” Fortunately, Hawkeye (M*A*S*H) was at hand to save the day, “If you bring that sentence in for a fitting, I can have it shortened by Wednesday.”

What Sells?

“The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell.” You may, at first glance, assume this characterization was made by a hard-hitting, modern business executive; but it wasn’t. It came from our old friend Confucius, again dividing us into superior and inferior people.

John Egan pointed out, “The absolute fundamental aim is to make money out of satisfying customers.” How do you do that? You sell great products combined with terrific service. That is the formula for what sells. Of course, understanding that makes Egan – and you – inferior people, according to Confucius.

Alternatively, William Arthur Ward said, “Wise are those who learn that the bottom line doesn't always have to be their top priority.” Perhaps you will want to share this view with your stock holders the next time you are presenting your company’s financial statement. At least you can assure them that you are a superior person, using Confucius as your authority.

Elting E. Morison advised, “The executive exists to make sensible exceptions to general rules.” Your first sensible exception can be with Confucius’ rule about superior and inferior people. You can do this by suggesting a replacement rule, your rule. “The exceptional man, the truly exceptional executive, both understands what is right and how to sell it.”

In My Opinion

No less a philosopher than John Stuart Mill said, “We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still.” “The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.” “If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.”

You likely agree John Stuart Mill is a complex thinker. He is definitely not one who endeavors to stifle an opinion, especially his opinion. What might be easily overlooked, though, is each of us is the “minus one” in his “mankind minus one.” We are thus obligated to be sure the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle isn’t ours. You have it on the authority of John Stuart Mill stifling your opinion is “an evil still;” so the next time you’re tempted to keep your opinion to yourself, are tempted to be self-censoring, consider standing up, speaking up, and sharing your “clearer perception and livelier impression of truth.” It’s your civic duty.

The Train Of The Future

President Eisenhower said, “Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him.” Proactively boarding the train isn’t just a good idea, it’s the only ride from the past. As Confucius counseled, “They must often change, who would be constant in happiness or wisdom.” The advice was, in turn, expanded by Saint Augustine, “If you would attain to what you are not yet, you must always be displeased by what you are. For where you are pleased with yourself there you have remained. Keep adding, keep walking, keep advancing.”

You may bemoan the ever-changing, uncertainty of life; but as Bertold Brecht pointed out, “Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are.” Over four hundred years ago, Francis Bacon observed, “He that will not apply new remedies must expect new evils; for time is the greatest innovator.” He also noted, “Things alter for the worse spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly.”

There is potential good news, though. “Change always comes bearing gifts,” according to Price Pritchett. Sure, those gifts may be a mixed blessing; but as the famous Anon. suggested, “If nothing ever changed, there’d be no butterflies,” and then added, “You can avoid having ulcers by adapting to the situation: If you fall in the mud puddle, check your pockets for fish.” If butterflies and fish aren’t sufficient incentive, keep in mind, at the bottom line, John Lilly was definitely on target, “Our only security is our ability to change.”

Charm School

Consider this wisdom from Oscar Wilde, “It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious.” Which are you, charming or tedious? As you ponder the answer, keep in mind Wilde said it’s one or the other; there is no in-between.

If you can benefit from a lesson or so from charm school, Professor Henri Frédéric Amiel taught, “Charm is the quality in others that makes us more satisfied with ourselves.” Are folks more satisfied with themselves when they have an opportunity to spend time with you? If so, you may be charming.

Another charm guru, Albert Camus, instructed, “Charm is... a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question.” Do people try to please you without your doing anything specific to prompt their behavior? If so, you may be charming.

Henry Van Dyke pointed out, “There is no personal charm so great as the charm of a cheerful temperament.” Are you usually cheerful and positive about people and life? If so, you may be charming.

Marissa Crow, author of *The Friend Factory* and *The Yes Bank*, also stepped up to the charm school podium, “You treat people the way you want to be treated. Are you nice to people when you want something? Sure you are. You're also nice when you don't want anything. You're nice every chance you get... You're also friendly. You speak to people you know and are interested in them. You talk with people and care about how they feel. Here's your special secret. You take your good manners along everywhere you go.” Are you nice; are you friendly; do you take your good manners along everywhere you go? If so, you may be charming. And if not, you are, as Wilde observed, merely tedious.

On Civilization

If you are like most everyone else, you don't think much about civilization. You may know Arnold Toynbee said, "Civilization is a movement and not a condition, a voyage and not a harbor." Understanding civilization and society as equivalent concepts, "Society is a made-up formula of what we are supposed to be, kept alive by those who believe in it..." according to Christina Gerogiannis.

It may not be quite as malignant as B. F. Skinner suggested, "Society attacks early, when the individual is helpless," or as detestable as Edgar Saltus suggested, "The progress of civilization corresponds with the spread of general nausea." Nonetheless, H. G. Wells had a point, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

Alan Jay Lerner wrote, "They civilize what's pretty, by puttin' up a city, where nothin' that's pretty can grow They civilize left, they civilize right, till nothing is left, till nothing is right."

And Alfred Tennyson wrote, "'I stood on a tower in the wet, and New Year and Old Year met, and winds were roaring and blowing: and I said, 'O years, that meet in tears, have ye aught that is worth the knowing? Science enough and exploring, wanderers coming and going, matter enough for deploring, but aught that is worth the knowing?'"

Let one more observation suffice for today, "Evolution made civilization steward of this planet. A hundred thousand years later, the steward stood before evolution not helper but destroyer, not healer but parasite. So evolution withdrew its gift, passed civilization by, rescued the planet from intelligence and handed it to love." (Richard Bach)

Your Complaint Account

Samuel Johnson advised, “When any fit of gloominess, or perversion of mind, lays hold upon you, make it a rule not to publish it by complaints.” It may not be necessary to take the concept as far as William Osler suggested, “Learn to accept in silence the minor aggravations, cultivate the gift of taciturnity, and consume your own smoke with an extra draft of hard work, so that those about you may not be annoyed with the dust and soot of your complaints.” Even so, Robert Hugh Benson went a tad too far in the other direction, “I think that the insane desire one has sometimes to bang and kick grumblers and peevish persons is a Divine instinct.”

The truth is W.S. Gilbert had a good point, “Oh, wouldn't the world seem dull and flat with nothing whatever to grumble at?” Jane Wagner too had a valid point when she said, “I personally believe we developed language because of our deep inner need to complain.”

Complaining now and then is good for the spirit, if you don't overdo it. The challenge is knowing exactly how much to complain. You don't want to get carried away with consuming your own smoke with too many extra drafts of hard work or succumb to an insane desire to bang and kick grumblers. To avoid these extremes, follow this simple rule. When someone complains about you and is justified in their complaint, you accumulate one (1) complaint credit. You may then only complain when you have valid complaint credits in your account: one complaint, one complaint credit. Naturally, the more perfect you are, the smaller your account and the less you can afford to complain.

Your Horizon

Do you worry about how others see you, what they think about you? If you give the perceptions of other people more than passing attention, Olin Miller had an observation worth taking to heart, “We probably wouldn't worry about what people think of us if we could know how seldom they do.” Be that as it may, Mignon McLaughlin knew how to deal with any low opinions coming your way, “Life marks us all down, so it's just as well that we start out by overpricing ourselves.”

Sonya Friedman was definitely on topic when she said, “The way you treat yourself sets the standard for others.” As W. C. Fields pointed out, “It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to.” The famous Anon. agreed, “If you really put a small value upon yourself, rest assured that the world will not raise your price.”

Do you need more support before you take charge of your perceptions of you, of how you value you? If so, Andrew Carnegie has just the words you need, “The man who acquires the ability to take full possession of his own mind may take possession of anything else to which he is justly entitled.” As you take possession of that which is yours, follow the lead of John Powell, “A person can grow only as much as his horizon allows.”

If your horizon includes the notion everyone is progressing faster and farther than you, simply set your sights higher. When your horizon is high enough, it is yours alone, just waiting for your arrival.

Go Along To Get Along?

The famous Anon. offers what frequently passes for good advice. "Don't think you're on the right road just because it's a well-beaten path;" and "Most people are more comfortable with old problems than with new solutions." If you are holding back, are just another go-along, don't ignore Dr. Seuss' directive, "Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind."

John Locke was right when he said, "New opinions are always suspected, and usually opposed, without any other reason but because they are not already common." You may want to keep the words of Herman Melville handy, "It is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation." As Malcolm Muggeridge said, "Only dead fish swim with the stream."

Should you find yourself hassled over your views and opinions, you can quote Fritz Perls, "I am not in this world to live up to other people's expectations, nor do I feel that the world must live up to mine." Know Buddha counseled, "Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it - even if I have said it - unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense."

Should you need a closer as you walk away, try this, "My manner of thinking, so you say, cannot be approved. Do you suppose I care? A poor fool indeed is he who adopts a manner of thinking for others! My manner of thinking stems straight from my considered reflections; it holds with my existence, with the way I am made. It is not in my power to alter it; and were it, I'd not do so." (Donatien Alphonse Francois de Sade)

The Testing Point

Samuel Johnson said, "Courage is reckoned the greatest of all virtues; because, unless a man has that virtue, he has no security for preserving any other." The point was further clarified by C. S. Lewis, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point."

That testing point comes when the consequences of virtue are both certain and frightening. At that moment, "Courage," according to Ambrose Redmoon, "is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

What to do? You know what is right, what you ought to do, but are fearful, want very much to avoid the expected consequences of virtue. At the moment of indecision, follow Mark Rutherford's guidance, "When we are afraid we ought not to occupy ourselves with endeavoring to prove that there is no danger, but in strengthening ourselves to go on in spite of the danger." As Dan Rather said, "Courage is being afraid but going on anyhow."

As you take a deep breath and then do what you know you ought to do, it will help to remind yourself of Mignon McLaughlin's simple truth, "Courage can't see around corners, but goes around them anyway."

Are You Curious?

“I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” Get serious, Professor Einstein. Your humility may be charming but slips a tad in the verisimilitude department. Even so, you did say, “The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality.” It’s like Studie Back pointed out, “Be curious always! For knowledge will not acquire you; you must acquire it.”

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “I think, at a child's birth, if a mother could ask a fairy godmother to endow it with the most useful gift, that gift should be curiosity.” Fairy godmothers or not, “The one real object of education is to have a man in the condition of continually asking questions.” Bishop Mandell Creighton was of a mind with Arnold Edinborough who said, “Curiosity is the very basis of education and if you tell me that curiosity killed the cat, I say only the cat died nobly.” “I keep six honest serving-men, they taught me all I knew; their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who.” (Rudyard Kipling)

Do You Dance?

“Kids: they dance before they learn there is anything that isn't music.” William Stafford certainly makes a valid point about the spontaneous enthusiasm of children. The disappointing message here is less obvious, though. Too quickly, children do learn much of their worlds isn't music. Having learned the lesson, they gradually dance less and less and then finally just stop dancing. It's as if they never knew how.

The child-like spontaneous enthusiasm for life is little more than an abstract concept, a topic for polite conversation. They can talk about dancing but no one dances, even though, as Peter Saint James said, “Talk about dance? Dance is not something to talk about. Dance is to dance.” Samuel Beckett reinforced the point, “Dance first. Think later. It's the natural order.”

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche observed, “And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.” Stafford thought children hear everything as music; but their perception gradually changes. They evolve into those who neither hear the music nor dance; and, sooner or later, everyone evolves. There is a Japanese Proverb that says, “We're fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance.” The key is in remembering to hear the music.

Food For Thought?

It's not surprising no one takes credit for saying, "A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand." The same holds for whoever said, "I am a nutritional over-achiever." Nonetheless, Gertrude Louise Cheney was definitely on target when she said, "All people are made alike - of bones and flesh and dinner - only the dinners are different." It really is tough to argue with H. S. Leigh who advised, "If you wish to grow thinner, diminish your dinner."

The famous Anon. pointed out, "Stressed spelled backwards is desserts. Coincidence? I think not!" Life does have its ups and downs; and learning food can soothe the troubled times is hardly a new discovery. Still, Phillip C. McGraw issued an important caution, "Reality check: you can never, ever, use weight loss to solve problems that are not related to your weight. At your goal weight or not, you still have to live with yourself and deal with your problems."

Fortunately, there is more advice from the famous Anon. "Don't go out of your weigh to please anyone but yourself." Follow the counsel of Cyril Connolly, "The one way to get thin is to re-establish a purpose in life." As Julia Child said, "Life itself is the proper binge."

If you're not quite up to this high philosophical stance, perhaps you align more with Herbert B. Prochnow who noted, "A diet is a plan, generally hopeless, for reducing your weight, which tests your will power but does little for your waistline." Mignon McLaughlin likely had a point when he said, "Forget about calories - everything makes thin people thinner, and fat people fatter." Just relax and nod in agreement with Roseanne Barr who gets the final word on the subject, "It's okay to be fat. So you're fat. Just be fat and shut up about it."

Is It Cats or Dogs?

Samuel Butler said, "The great pleasure of a dog is that you may make a fool of yourself with him and not only will he not scold you, but he will make a fool of himself too." Cats, to the contrary, "...conspire to keep us at arm's length," according to Frank Perkins.

Holbrook Jackson said, "Man is a dog's idea of what God should be." Cats, to the contrary, "...have never completely got over the snootiness caused by that fact that in Ancient Egypt they were worshipped as gods," according to P. G. Wodehouse.

"In order to keep a true perspective of one's importance, everyone should have a dog that will worship him and a cat that will ignore him," advises Dereke Bruce. The important distinctions were further enumerated by George Mikes, "You can keep a dog; but it is the cat who keeps people, because cats find humans useful domestic animals." And James Gorman added, "Cats are the ultimate narcissists. You can tell this because of all the time they spend on personal grooming. Dogs aren't like this. A dog's idea of personal grooming is to roll on a dead fish."

"You own a dog but you feed a cat." (Jenny de Vries) "Dogs have owners, cats have staff." (The famous Anon.) "Dogs eat. Cats dine." (Ann Taylor) "If a dog jumps into your lap, it is because he is fond of you; but if a cat does the same thing, it is because your lap is warmer." (Alfred North Whitehead)

This could go back and forth ad infinitum; but let each side have one last turn. Roger Caras speaks for the dogs, "Dogs have given us their absolute all. We are the center of their universe. We are the focus of their love and faith and trust. They serve us in return for scraps. It is without a doubt the best deal man has ever made." For the cats, Arthur Bridges said, "A cat isn't fussy - just so long as you remember he likes his milk in the shallow, rose-patterned saucer and his fish on the blue plate."

Sweet Dreams?

“Dreaming is an act of pure imagination, attesting in all men a creative power, which if it were available in waking, would make every man a Dante or Shakespeare.” What do you think about this pronouncement from H. F. Hedge? If you think about it, while you are asleep, of course, you will conclude it’s totally terrific. As E. M. Cioran said, “Anyone can escape into sleep, we are all geniuses when we dream, the butcher's the poet's equal there.” No less a philosopher than Erich Fromm believed, “...we are also more intelligent, wiser and capable of better judgment when we are asleep than when we are awake.”

Does this temp you to take a quick nap just to sharpen up your thinking? OK, try this, “A dream has power to poison sleep.” Woops, who said that? Well, it was Percy Bysshe Shelley and he had company. William Dement thought, “Dreaming permits each and every one of us to be quietly and safely insane every night of our lives.” That may be what prompted E. B. White to caution, “Genius is more often found in a cracked pot than in a whole one.”

Perhaps Barbara Kingsolver knew all there is worth knowing about dreams. She wrote:

Codi: "So you think we all just have animal dreams. We can't think of anything to dream except our ordinary lives."

Loyd: "Only if you have an ordinary life. If you want sweet dreams, you've got to live a sweet life."

The Other Driver

Are you among those who worry the world is going down the proverbial tube? If so, you may appreciate knowing R. A. Lafferty predicted it a hundred years or so ago; and the cause may surprise you. "I tell you, it will engender absolute selfishness in mankind if the driving of automobiles becomes common. It will breed violence on a scale never seen before. ... It will destroy the sense of neighborhood and the true sense of Nation. It will create giantized cankers of cities, false opulence of suburbs, ruined countryside, and unhealthy conglomerations of specialized farming and manufacturing."

Were automobiles not themselves enough of a black mark on society, Cary T. Grayson joined Lafferty by also chastising those who stoop to drive the dastardly conveyances, "We are not proving ourselves spiritually worthy of our material progress. We have not been neighborly, courteous, and kind upon the highway. Our lack of decency toward our fellow men is a definite black mark against us."

Even Dave Barry climbed up onto that stump, adding a tad of arrogant superiority to the typical driver's lack of neighborliness, courtesy, and such, "The one thing that unites all human beings, regardless of age, gender, religion, economic status or ethnic background, is that, deep down inside, we ALL believe that we are above average drivers."

All of that notwithstanding, E. B. White had a valid point, "Everything in life is somewhere else, and you get there in a car." Unfortunately, your only choice is to slip behind the wheel, taking care to heed the advice of the famous Anon. "Never drive faster than your guardian angel can fly."

School's Out?

“Education: the inculcation of the incomprehensible into the indifferent by the incompetent.” As this pronouncement by John Maynard Keynes shows, criticism of education and the schools is hardly a new phenomenon. Even Ralph Waldo Emerson lined up to trash education, “We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation-rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing.”

G. M. Trevelyan said, “Education... has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading;” and Martin H. Fischer said, “Education should be exercise; it has become massage.” Fischer also said, “Education aims to give you a boost up the ladder of knowledge. Too often, it just gives you a cramp on one of its rungs.” Fischer hardly stopped for a breath before he expanded his indictment, “The tragedy of education is played in two scenes - incompetent pupils facing competent teachers and incompetent teachers facing competent pupils.” Either way, the process is characterized by at least 50% incompetence.

Let Richard Yates have the next to the last word on it for now, “They say that we are better educated than our parents' generation. What they mean is that we go to school longer. It is not the same thing.” Lastly, Oscar Wilde takes the closing shot for the cynics, “Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing worth knowing can be taught.”

Secrets Revealed

There is an ancient secret for success that can finally be revealed. It has been carefully guarded by the famous Anon. through the ages; and he has chosen to disclose it only to you. This is being done with the sincere belief that you will hold it dear and not let it slip out, inadvertently or intentionally, to anyone. With that stipulation in mind, here it is. "All the so-called 'secrets of success' will not work unless you do."

As you might expect, the famous Anon. did not just drop it there. He went on to say, "You cannot plough a field by turning it over in your mind." Edward H. Harriman may have been eave dropping since he appears to know the secret too. "Much good work is lost for the lack of a little more;" and J. G. Holland must have been listening-in as well, "God gives every bird its food, but He does not throw it into its nest."

It's not clear who said it first, Vidal Sassoon or Donald Kendall, but either way, "The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary." As Antonio Porchia pointed out, "No one understands that you have given everything. You must give more." Simply follow Swami Sivananda' advice, "Put your heart, mind, intellect and soul even to your smallest acts. This is the secret of success."

To Exercise Or Not To Exercise

Thomas de Quincey said, “There is a necessity for a regulating discipline of exercise that, whilst evoking the human energies, will not suffer them to be wasted.”

As you see, de Quincey was pro exercise, although he did manage to couch his support in somewhat less than unequivocal terms. He definitely supported evoking the human energies but cautioned not to suffer them to be wasted. The idea seems to be to exercise but to only do as much as is not wasteful. Following his lead, you should get up-and-moving but don't tax yourself or waste what energy you have.

Sure, the famous Anon. was right when he said, “The only exercise some people get is jumping to conclusions, running down their friends, side-stepping responsibility, and pushing their luck!” Assuredly, Marcus Tullius Cicero may not have been totally right when he said, “It is exercise alone that supports the spirits, and keeps the mind in vigor;” but he did have a point.

If you need a little help with supporting your spirits, try Marsha Doble's strategy, “I have to exercise in the morning before my brain figures out what I'm doing.” If instead, your spirits are just fine, perhaps you can relate better with Phyllis Diller. She said, “My idea of exercise is a good brisk sit.”

Especially if you are getting on a little, you can also evoke the words of Mark Twain who said, “I am pushing sixty. That is enough exercise for me.” Even if you aren't getting on yet, you can simply smile and take the opinion of Neil Armstrong as the final word on it, “I believe that the Good Lord gave us a finite number of heartbeats and I'm damned if I'm going to use up mine running up and down a street.”

The Experience Game

“Experience is the best teacher.” The famous Anon. probably said that; but he definitely said, “The trouble with using experience as a guide is that the final exam often comes first and then the lesson.” He then clarified, “Experience is what you get by not having it when you need it.” Soren Kierkegaard added, “Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward.”

You may think you would do well to avoid all of that experience stuff. Unfortunately, the experience game is the only game in town, as they say. John Gardner summarized the rules like this, “Life is the art of drawing without an eraser.”

Each person must develop his strategy and array of techniques and then make his mark. As you proceed, Alfred Sheinwold had a suggestion worth considering, “Learn all you can from the mistakes of others. You won't have time to make them all yourself.” Nonetheless, avoiding the experience game is not an option. As Laurence J. Peter pointed out, “There is only one thing more painful than learning from experience, and that is not learning from experience;” and learn you will.

So how do you proceed? How do you make the best of the experience you can't avoid? How do you develop the wisdom you need to win the experience game? Piet Hein has the answer, the key to your success. “Well, it's plain and simple to express: Err and err and err again but less and less and less.”

Putting Off Success

The famous Anon. – one of the world’s great success gurus – said, “Some people dream of success... while others wake up and work hard at it.” Abraham Lincoln was also eager to counsel you to get your get-up-and-go up and going, “Things may come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle.”

If you are tempted to yawn and put off getting going just a little longer, you may want to give Will Rogers a quick listen. He said, “Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.” Sarah Brown definitely called the question, “The only thing that ever sat its way to success was a hen.”

There is an American Proverb counseling, “Success is a ladder you cannot climb with your hands in your pockets.” Sure, John M. Shanahan was right when he said, “Doors don't slam open.” It’s like the Chinese Saying points out, “Man stands for long time with mouth open before roast duck flies in;” so are you ready to get up and going? If so, The Dutch have just the Proverb you need for your adventure, “He who is outside his door has the hardest part of his journey behind him.”

Failing Better

Few would disagree with Lloyd Jones who said, "The men who try to do something and fail are infinitely better than those who try to do nothing and succeed." The point was expanded by Elbert Hubbard who said, "There is no failure except in no longer trying."

William Strong's maxim holds a very large grain of truth, "The only time you don't fail is the last time you try anything - and it works." F. Scott Fitzgerald agreed, "Never confuse a single defeat with a final defeat," as did Henry Ford, "Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently."

According to Robert Schuller, "Failure doesn't mean you are a failure... it just means you haven't succeeded yet." It's like Mary Pickford said, "Supposing you have tried and failed again and again. You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing we call 'failure' is not the falling down, but the staying down."

George Horace Lorimer had what was likely a valid point when he said, "Because a fellow has failed once or twice or a dozen times, you don't want to set him down as a failure till he's dead or loses his courage." George Cukor may have been excessively cynical but also had a valid point, "You can't have any successes unless you can accept failure."

Robert Allen said, "There is no failure. Only feedback." Mickey Rooney added, "You always pass failure on your way to success." You can give Samuel Beckett the last word on failing, "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

It's My Family

It's easy to identify with Erma Bombeck who, when talking about her family, said, "We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together."

Kendall Hailey certainly had a point when she said, "The great gift of family life is to be intimately acquainted with people you might never even introduce yourself to, had life not done it for you."

Sure, Mignon McLaughlin was right when he said, "Family quarrels have a total bitterness unmatched by others." Even so, he was equally right when he went on to say, "Yet it sometimes happens that they also have a kind of tang, a pleasantness beneath the unpleasantness, based on the tacit understanding that this is not for keeps; that any limb you climb out on will still be there later for you to climb back."

Dodie Smith was also on point when she said, "The family - that dear octopus from whose tentacles we never quite escape, nor, in our inmost hearts, ever quite wish to." The next time you have one of those tedious, family encounters, it will help to stop to consider the words of Marsha Norman. "Family is just accident.... They don't mean to get on your nerves. They don't even mean to be your family, they just are." Still, Jane Howard was right, "Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."

Bad Management & Destiny

“Failure and success seem to have been allotted to men by their stars. But they retain the power of wriggling, of fighting with their star or against it, and in the whole universe the only really interesting movement is this wriggle.”

How do these words from E. M. Forester resonate for you? If you are scratching your head and thinking, “Huh,” perhaps Jawaharial Nehru can help clarify the point, “Life is like a game of cards. The hand you are dealt is determinism; the way you play it is free will.” It’s just like Diana Trilling argued, “There’s much to be said for challenging fate instead of ducking behind it.”

Sure, some lucky ducks were born with silver spoons in their mouths. In life's great poker game, some people get better cards than others. It is enough to make you just sit down and cry. The old law-of-averages certainly does not apply to you. You wish...; and if cows could fly and if luck were really a lady, the world would be a fairer place. Even if it were not, at least you would get better cards. Keep on wishing. Maybe your luck will turn. Then again, maybe not. That is why simply going with the cards you are dealt is usually your best choice.

William McFee knew the winner’s approach, “If fate means you to lose, give him a good fight anyhow;” and as Kin Hubbard counseled, take care to never “...confuse bad management with destiny.”

The Peace Of The Done

“This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anyone could have.” The famous Anon. cleverly makes a point worth a stop and think. It's much like that made by Adolph Monod who said, “Between the great things we cannot do and the small things we will not do, the danger is that we shall do nothing.”

J. M. Power's advice is a good starting point to make sure you don't end up as one of those who does nothing, “If you want to make your dreams come true, the first thing you have to do is wake up.” Having done that, get up and do what needs done.

OK, you get it. You see what needs done. What next? – That's easy. -- It's as simple as Vance Havner admonished, “The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps - we must step up the stairs.” Don't you love how cleverly some people clarify the obvious? As you have a little think about that one too, Julia Woodruff advises you not to hesitate as you wake up and travel “out of the strain of the doing, into the peace of the done.”

Assessing Your Prospects

Here is a little exercise you can use to evaluate where you are in terms of optimism/pessimism, faith/despair. First, get a piece of paper on which you can make a chart. Draw a line across the top and put a zero (0) on the left end and ten (10) on the right end. Next put a dot in the middle of the line and put a five (5) above the dot.

Under the 0, put the following words, listing them down the page: “Physical,” “Emotional,” “Moral,” “Social,” “Sexual,” “Economic.”

You now have a chart with six rows where you can rank yourself. “0” represents complete pessimism and despair. “10” represents complete optimism and faith in a positive future. Using the “physical” row, look down the road for yourself and judge how things will be for you “physically” five years from now. Using the scale, put a dot showing how you look at your “physical” prospects, whether you expect a positive or negative outcome. Repeat the process for the other five rows in the chart and then think about where you have put the dots. How does the future look for you?

Charles Sawyer said, “Of all the forces that make for a better world, none is so indispensable, none so powerful, as hope. Without hope people are only half alive. With hope they dream and think and work.” How hopeful are you; how do you assess your future prospects?

As you contemplate your prospects, Lillian Smith’s perspective may prove helpful, “Faith and doubt both are needed - not as antagonists, but working side by side to take us around the unknown curve.” Daniel L. Reardon likely captured the only insight you will need to make the journey, “In the long run the pessimist may be proved right, but the optimist has a better time on the trip.”

Wasted Potential?

Sometimes the truth isn't very complicated. Achieving personal excellence is a case in point. Michael Jordan said, "You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them." Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed the theme, "Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you." Bruce Barton also understood the key to excellence, "Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside of them was superior to circumstance."

Mignon McLaughlin likely took the idea too far toward universal incompetence when he said, "We are all such a waste of our potential, like three-way lamps using one-way bulbs." Even so, he did have a point. Most people stop far short of exhausting their potential. Thomas Edison was definitely right when he said, "If we all did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves."

There are doubtless many reasons for wasted potential, but "Chiefly the mold of a man's fortune is in his own hands," as Francis Bacon counseled. "Only as high as I reach can I grow, only as far as I seek can I go, only as deep as I look can I see, only as much as I dream can I be." (Karen Ravn)

Brothers & Sisters

There is a Vietnamese Proverb that says, “Brothers and sisters are as close as hands and feet.” Although this isn’t universally true, it should be. As Susan Scarf Merrell said, “Our brothers and sisters are there with us from the dawn of our personal stories to the inevitable dusk.” Marian Sandmaier added, “A sibling may be the keeper of one's identity, the only person with the keys to one's unfettered, more fundamental self.”

Yes, “Our siblings push buttons that cast us in roles we felt sure we had let go of long ago.... It doesn't seem to matter how much time has elapsed or how far we've traveled.” Despite this truth from Jane Mersky Leder, “Children of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of enjoyment in their power, which no subsequent connections can supply ...” (Jane Austen)

Even so, “To the outside world we all grow old. But not to brothers and sisters. We know each other as we always were. We know each other's hearts. We share private family jokes. We remember family feuds and secrets, family griefs and joys. We live outside the touch of time.” A warm “Thank you,” to Clara Ortega for reminding us. If this simple truth slips your mind, Pamela Dugdale is here to refresh your memory, “Siblings are the people we practice on, the people who teach us about fairness and cooperation and kindness and caring - quite often the hard way.” When all is said and done, Marc Brown was certainly right, “Sometimes being a brother (or sister) is even better than being a superhero.”

Just Waiting?

“Waiting for the fish to bite or waiting for wind to fly a kite. Or waiting around for Friday night or waiting perhaps for their Uncle Jake or a pot to boil or a better break or a string of pearls or a pair of pants or a wig with curls or another chance. Everyone is just waiting.” Is Dr. Seuss right? Are you just waiting? If so, Larry McMurtry had this observation for you, “If you wait, all that happens is that you get older.”

You may do well to recall the words of Hazel Lee, “I held a moment in my hand, brilliant as a star, fragile as a flower, a tiny sliver of one hour. I dripped it carelessly, Ah! I didn't know, I held opportunity.”

William James' advice is worth pondering since you are just waiting and don't have much to do anyway, “To change one's life: Start immediately. Do it flamboyantly. No exceptions.” So you aren't sure you want to change your life? You are fine with doing nothing? Bill Watterson (Calvin and Hobbes) has found a small glitch with that strategy. “There's never enough time to do all the nothing you want.”

Ruth Ann Schabacker said, “Each day comes bearing its own gifts. Untie the ribbons.” However you decide to deal with just waiting and its glitches, Friedrich Nietzsche was nonetheless right, “When one has a great deal to put into it a day has a hundred pockets.” Surely one of those pockets holds a special surprise, just for you.