

LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS

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THE BASICS

Do everything you do with style, on time, every time, on purpose.

Do you know someone who is a certifiable class act? Sure you do. Maybe you are a class act yourself. If so, you have three techniques down pat. First, you are an original. Your style and approach with people and situations are your trademark. Second, you are not on-again, off-again. you are always uniquely you. Third, and here is the key, it's no accident. To most people, you make it seem easy and natural; but there are those special few who understand and appreciate how hard you work at it.

Only follow the lead of people for whom integrity is a bottom line commitment.

The leadership elite provide a value-added benefit for their followers they can't get from the merely competent. Others may have their occasional flashes of brilliance; but the creme de la creme work their wizardry consistently, creatively, and in virtually every situation. Of course, there is their uncanny ability to anticipate problems and opportunities and their simply taking it for granted their followers are trying to do what's right; but their secret ingredient is always remembering and owning everything they say, agree to, and do.

Always be willing to at least try.


It doesn't matter what your particular challenges and opportunities are. The question is, "Are you up to it?" If so, you have avoided being caught in the vicious circle trapping some people. They think they can't do it, so they don't try. Since they don't try, they fail; and their lack of success proves they can't do it.

They are caught in a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I can't, therefore I don't, therefore I fail, which proves I can't," and around-and-around they go. If they can't, they can't; but....

Your success is best served by helping others succeed.


Imagine your future as you hope it will be, your vision for yourself. Can you get there on a "do it yourself" basis? If not, your challenge is to get the aid and support you need from those who can contribute to your success.

Your best strategy over the long-haul is to understand where they want to go and help them get there. You do this by talking with them about what aid and support they need from you and being sure they get it. It may seem more expedient to charge full-speed-ahead and others be dammed; but being too self-serving ends up, in the long run, serving no one.

 **"Did that help?" is the question to ask.**

You ask, "How can I help?" No matter how well-intentioned, your offer to help is usually turned down or the response is, "I will let you know." If your offer to help is sincere, don't ask what you can do to help or wait to be asked. Think about what the person's problem is or what they want to accomplish and then do something helpful.

Pro-actively helping is most always much more helpful than help merely offered though it does take a little more time, a little more thought, and a little more effort.

 **Know when your turn is and then be sure you take it.**

Finding ways to help and then helping include being sure you are holding up your end of things, day-to-day, every day as you live and work with other people. This starts with understanding keeping track of your turn matters a lot. You may belatedly have this brought home to you when you find yourself saying, "Did you expect me to do that?" or "I thought someone else was taking care of it." or maybe "No one told me I was supposed to handle it."

At home, at work, and most everywhere else, people are counting on you.

 **Don't just leave it to luck when it comes to your family and other things that really matter.**

Holding up your end and Pro-actively helping are important but aren't enough. This reality can jump out at you whenever you tinker with this or adjust that until it's hopelessly messed up. This is the "I'll fix it myself principle." It applies to unimportant stuff but also applies to marital problems, troubles your children are having, and to other difficulties inevitably coming up at home, at work, and most anywhere else you happen to be. You say, "I'll fix it myself. I don't need anyone messing in my business." Suit yourself and tinker away. You may get lucky; but then again....

 **Don't passively stand by and let anyone screw things up.**

Have you ever gone to a lot of time, bother, and effort to do something that didn't work, only to learn later a co-worker or someone in your family knew you were going to do it and knew it wouldn't work?

An even more important question is, "Have you personally ever watched someone making a mistake but didn't say anything?" When asked, "Why didn't you say something?" saying, "It was none of my business," or "I figured you would ask if you wanted my two-cents-worth," won't cut it.

✚ When you drop the ball, don't assume others are all that understanding or forgiving.

Do you forget things or frequently overlook important details? Do you often just not have your act together? Life is a juggling act and it's hard to keep organized, remember everything, and keep all your balls moving. Nonetheless, you promised not to drop the ball. People were counting on you and now have to deal with the consequences of your not having your act together.

You can let a ball bounce now and then if you are careful you don't actually drop any.

Does keeping every ball in the air every time seem impossible? Is everything happening at once? Are things piling up? Is there too much to do and too little time? Are you juggling faster-and-faster and still barely keeping all the balls up and moving?

If you are saying "Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" here is some great news. Carefully examine your balls. Some are glass and some are rubber. You can't drop any of them; but you can let the rubber ones bounce a couple of times now and then. You don't have to keep them all in the air at once.

✚ Unless you have something to do that is truly important and really urgent, a little R/R is often your best choice for what's next.

When you are having trouble deciding what's next, make a list of the top ten things you have to do. Now put an X beside any that are actually important and a Y beside any that have to be done right now. Next, make a list of the X-Y things to do. Since they are all important, do the most urgent one first; and if there are no X-Y's on your to-do list right now, it may be time to kick back and relax.

✚ Bring the same level of energy and commitment to whatever you are doing, whether things are going sour or going great.

Can you tell how things are going simply by people-watching? You don't have to actually know whether projects are on-track or activities are going well. It's enough to see how people are acting.

High energy levels and smiles mean things are going fine. Tension you can cut with a knife and a halfhearted approach to most everything mean all isn't well; but you know that. The real challenge is setting the emotional pace for those around you.

A Special Six Pack

Wow! The "basics" can get a bit heady. How about a six pack for a change of pace? Maybe you have a six pack of your own that is a little more quenching, so to speak. If so, pop a

top and relax; and if a cold brew is not your style, a tall ice tea works just as well. You need only get comfortable, open your mind to the possibilities, and drink it in. This six pack's for you.

✚ Always be as dependable as you are capable of being.

Slot one in this special six-pack is reserved for dependability. If you tell someone they can depend on you, does that mean your commitment to them is as if you made it to yourself? If so, people need only watch you to see how well you take care of yourself. That is as dependable as you are capable of being; so there you go.

✚ Be energetic and ready to fly at a moment's notice.

Slot two is reserved for energy. If you were born tired and haven't rested up yet, you may as well hang it up; but if you are energetic and prepared to give every opportunity your best, you may be ready to join the ardent high-flyers.

✚ Seriously consider what is important to other people.


Slot three is set aside for consideration. If you are ready for the give-and-take of living and working with people, you always take their needs and interests, goals and motivations into consideration. You don't reflexively defer to their values and beliefs, want to's and got to's; but you put them into the equation as you set your priorities and make your plans.

✚ Put being honest with yourself as priority No. 1 and consistently apply the principle.

Slot four is for honesty. Sure, you are as good as your word; and when you make a commitment, people can take it to the bank, as they say; but this version of honesty isn't for other people. It's for you. Are your motivations as pure as you say they are; are you as committed as you claim; are you as interested in others as you seem; are you being as straight-up and forthcoming as you profess to be? It's a fact you can fool some people all the time and most everyone now and then; but fooling yourself is worse than foolish. It's taking dishonesty to a new and often irreversible low.

✚ Sustain your positive approach every time, with everyone.

Slot five is saved for the positive approach. This is not the pasted on smile, glad hand, and "Isn't everything wonderful?" phoniness some slick types try to pass off as the genuine article, just as it isn't some kind of nonsensical philosophy like, "Some good comes out of even the worst experiences." Rather, it's believing there is a way out of the darkest forest and you will find it. It's remembering the good news in your life as you receive the bad. It's hanging in there with yourself and with others when a lesser spirit would hang it up.

 **Be consistently and genuinely reliable.**

Slot six finishes up this six-pack. Make a list of people and things you have found to be reliable and then think about what their common ingredient is. Your list depends on your personal experience; but here are a few examples of reliability serving the immediate purpose. Sharp knives cut better than dull ones; cats don't like having their heads held; Mom makes the best raison cake in the universe; if you are running late, something comes up to make you later; and Santa Clause still believes in you even if you stop believing in him. What is the common ingredient? Everything on the list is reliable, the way it is, always that way. The same is true for reliable people. They are not on-again off-again, up-and-down, one way with you and another with other people, erratic and unpredictable. Reliability is indeed their trademark; and an hour with them is as was an hour yesterday and as will be an hour tomorrow.

 **Stick with the Simon who got you there.**

Finally, know where you are headed and whose company you are keeping. You can't go any which way, with whomever happens along.

Simon says, "Take two steps to the left." Well, okay. This time you don't follow old reliable Simon; and this time you give that new Simon a try; and this time you end up somewhere you certainly don't want to be. Playing follow-the-leader can indeed be a risky business. Next time, if you get a next time, and if old reliable Simon chooses to forgive and forget, you swear the Simon you follow will be the real Simon, the same Simon you know and trust; and since you are in a swearing mode anyway, you might as well swear no matter how tempting it may be to go with the latest example of glitz and smooth talk coming along, you are resisting the temptation.

HANGING TOUGH

 **Don't let people mess with your monkey.**

Making nice and being the Good Samaritan aren't the only skills you need in your interpersonal repertoire. Sure, those skills are essential for success; but you also have to hang tough at times. For example, is there someone driving you up the wall with their suggestions, advice, and superior attitude? They have solutions to problems you don't have, answers to questions you didn't ask, and suggestions for how to handle things you are handling just fine. Their favorite sport is nosing into your business.

Instead of seething inside or giving into the urge to tell them what they can do with their suggestions and opinions, next time, smile and say, "Isn't that my monkey?" Whatever their response, say, "Thank you; but my monkey gets upset if anyone but me tries to handle him."

 **Consider the advice before discounting the advisor, read the message before turning away the messenger.**


The expertise and insight of the know-it-alls of the world are boundless; and the K-I-A's are ready to provide advice and input anywhere, anytime, for anyone. A K-I-A was there to point out to Noah there may be a flood, to T. Edison playing with electricity might be shocking, and to Neil Armstrong pulling off his helmet and yelling, "Where's the party?" could take his breath away. There may have even been a K-I-A around to tell Moses to be sure to get it in writing.

The K-I-A openings have an annoyingly familiar theme: "Have you thought about...?" "Did you notice...?" "You may want to...," and the old stand by, "If I were you...." Well, thank you very much; and while you are getting the inflection on your sarcasm just right, don't forget W. Churchill's admonition "Even a fool's right sometimes."

 **Whether you have a chance to explain your reasons or can only walk away, don't let arguments get out of hand.**

Do you sometimes find yourself in the middle of intense arguments quickly getting nowhere? If so, the instant you realize what's happening, stop talking, wait five seconds, and then calmly ask, "What do you want the outcome of this conversation to be? What is your goal?"

Ask a few more questions to be sure you understand and to help you determine whether you can support the goal. If so, explain how. If not, say, "Your goal isn't one I can support. If you want, I will try to help you understand why I can't." If the person wants to listen, state your reason as clearly and as briefly as you can. If not, let it go.

 **Stand up, speak up, shut up, and sit down.**

It's important to know how to make your point when that is what you have to do. A good way to see how to say what you have to say is seeing how you shouldn't say it. For example, this isn't the way to go.

"This may sound stupid, but...." What a way to inspire confidence! Nonetheless, if you think it may be stupid, everyone needs to give it the stupid test before giving you and what you say any serious consideration. Starting with, "As A. Einstein once said....," is probably going too far in the other direction; but at least you and your comments don't have to pass the stupid test. Better is to succinctly make your point and then let it stand on its own.

 **Be sure all deals you make are two-way-streets.**

Hanging tough means you deal assertively with people who thoughtlessly make unnecessary work for you, don't do what they agree to do, or repeatedly interfere with your activities. Tell them, "I didn't understand our deal. Your behavior tells me our deal is to do whatever we want to do. Now that I understand, I'll quit considering your feelings, your interests, and what you want. If you'd like to renegotiate our deal, I'm open to talking but not optimistic about the outcome." Now, keep the deal you just made.

🚧 Don't let having followed the book excuse anyone from personal responsibility.

An assertive approach is certainly appropriate with people who always play it safe and take no personal responsibility for anything. They don't care whether problems are avoided or projects succeed so long as they can say, "It's not my fault. I did it by-the-book. I did it right; but it just didn't work out."

Instead of pulling your hair out, the next time say, "My problem is this. We got the wrong outcome. How will you achieve the right outcome?" Now, hang tough until things turn out right.

🚧 Don't buy into or react to other people's bad attitudes.

A special approach works best with Doom and Gloom masters, people whose reaction to winning the lottery would be, "Now I have all those taxes to pay." D/G masters have nothing nice to say about anyone, talk only about why things won't work, and quickly point out whatever they don't like; and they like virtually nothing.

If you are fed up with their negativity, smile and say, "You probably would describe the tooth fairy as a thief." Now, no matter what the D/G master says next, don't respond. The game is over; and you won.

🚧 Hold yourself and others to at least as high a behavior standard as you hold for children.

Attitude pollution often comes up with people who are inflexible, unwilling to compromise, and certainly not team players. Whatever they call it, bull-headed is bull-headed; but it gets worse. At least people who clearly say, "No!" and hang tough are being up-front with you.

Much harder to deal with are those wimps who say, "Yes," and then contaminate everything with their negative attitudes. In a five-year-old, whining and pouting are irritating but understandable. Fortunately, most parents insist on their children's behaving more socially appropriately.

🚧 The solution to the problem merely changes the problem.

An especially annoyingly negative type is into, "Problems, problems, nothing but problems. It's one damn thing after another. Things aren't ever going to straighten up around here."

You can say, "Maybe you just don't get it. Problems reproduce; and solutions are the aphrodisiac. Solving a problem merely creates a new problem with its own set of circumstances

and unique opportunities. That arouses the solution glands and stimulates the problem solving urge; and the cycle repeats itself. It's one of those erotic compulsions that has to be satisfied."

✚ Don't let other people turn their poor planning into your emergencies.

An especially frustrating version of driving you up the wall is played out by types who try to pass off their problems as your emergencies. "We have an emergency!" You ask, "What's the emergency and why do we have it?" With heightened urgency you are told, "It's a long story. I don't have time to give you all the gory details right now; but You have to...."

With only slight skepticism, you ask, "Is this the same kind of thing that was the big emergency last week and two weeks before that?" "Well, sort of like that; but...." You then say, "Your lack of planning doesn't make this my emergency. Your plan, if you had one, was figuring I'd cover your backside."

✚ Leave no doubt in anyone's mind faultfinding won't cut it.

You may have come across a totally exasperating type who delights in pointing out someone else screwed up? They like saying things like, "If things were done right the first time, we wouldn't have to waste our time straightening out other people's messes." Their favorite sport is to Faultfind about something, anything, and then criticize someone, anyone.

The next time you have to deal with one of these irritating types, say, "Whether you are right or wrong, what will you do about it today? Right now, what I need from you is a solution."

✚ Simply tell warriors what you think the outcome will be, don't be intimidated, and let the chips fall where they fall.

There are inevitably those days when the warriors are doing their share of pushing you to pulling out your hair, if you still have any after the last time they drove you up the wall. They are ready to go to war over anything and would, as Grandpa used to say, argue with the good Lord himself (or herself, depending on your point of view). Get the picture? Though they would never admit it, the truth is they are afraid, insecure, and driving harder-and-harder to keep anyone from finding them out.

If you can see this fact, wait for an opening and say, "My point is...; so if you persist, I think the result will be...." That's it. Arguing it more gets you no where.

✚ Simply tell committee types what you expect and then hang tough until you get it.

Committee types are afraid and insecure but use an unusual strategy to protect their egos. These charmers bend over backward to avoid offending you. They blow with any breeze coming along and won't actually take a position on anything. Wishy-washy? Well, maybe, you could look at it that way, but then again....

Be prepared, though. When you call them on their behavior, and you must call them, a flood of self-righteous indignation and resentment will come pouring out since they take anything negative as an assault on them personally and maybe even on Mom, baseball, and apple pie.

✚ Don't let people explain away their incompetence as just one of those things.

Hanging tough is critically important with people who just dive into things before checking with anyone about what is expected. They figure they can do any job whether they have a clue how to do it or not. They like to refer to their style as "winging it." If all goes well, all goes well; but if not, it's other people's mistakes, extenuating circumstances, unavoidable conditions, and maybe even acts of God. "I did a great job; but you know how it goes."

Sure you know how it goes. It's going down the tube. That is why you leave no doubt in their minds you only accept excuses you can verify factually and their performance must stand up to objective evaluation.

✚ You sometimes need to just turn the page and get on with getting on.

There are those infuriating types who only have your best interest at heart. They are only trying to help, or so they would have you believe. They say really helpful things like, "Don't cry over spilled milk and what's done is done and you have to just suck it up and do what you have to do and don't forget it's too late to shut the barn door...."

If you find their sensitive advice less than totally supportive and helpful, say, "Sure, right! Thank you very much. That's just the right advice to sooth the troubled mind. You have apparently overdosed on the reality therapy you have been getting from that psychiatrist you obviously should keep seeing. Maybe you can reduce your sessions to three times a week."

A Special Six Pack

Since hanging tough can get exhausting as you turn the page and get on with getting on, here is another six pack to help smooth out the rough spots along the way.

✚ Only pursue your rights and your interests within the context of the rights and interests of others.

The first slot in this six pack is reserved for assertiveness. There are those people who try to pawn off their bad attitudes and ugly tempers as assertiveness. They may even use the principle to justify their juvenile efforts to get their own ways, be the center of attention, and to disguise their self-centeredness and insensitivity. "I'm just sticking up for myself, for my rights;" but their ingenuousness is transparent. Their goal is to get theirs whether you get yours or not. In fact, they will be most satisfied if along with getting theirs, they get yours too. Authentic assertiveness is sticking up for yourself and your rights, sure enough; but it's also being sure you are not hanging tough, no matter what and at someone else's expense.

✚ Play fair as you play to win every time.

Slot two is reserved for fairness. Now, this isn't one of those "Let's all be nice little ladies and gentlemen and be sure everyone gets a piece of the cake," kind of thing. Not everyone wins; life didn't come with a guarantee; and if you voluntarily climb into the ring with a six hundred pound gorilla, don't blame the gorilla for what happens. Nonetheless, even a six hundred pound gorilla needs to keep his punches above the belt and be ready to shake your hand when you win by a TKO in the ninth.

✚ Be reasonable as you stay open to alternative ideas and points of view.

Slot three is for reasonableness but definitely isn't a "roll over and play dead" approach. When people say, "Please be reasonable," as often as not they want you to accept their ideas, buy into their points of view, give more consideration to what they are saying than to what you think. Reasonableness means no more and no less than being open to reason. It means you listen to other people's ideas, take time to see things from their points of view, see their needs and interests as important, as valuable. Having done this, you then develop your ideas, form your unique point of view, make well-considered decisions, and come to what you believe are the correct conclusions, all things considered.

✚ Keep your sights on your goals but remain flexible.

Slot four in this six pack is reserved for flexibility. You already know you don't just blow with the wind, hop on whatever train happens along, and chameleons may have a good thing going for themselves but certainly won't win the day in the great shootout at The OK Corral. You also know you stick to your guns, take a stand, and do not let people push you around. All that is true; and equally true is the fact single mindedness eventually turns into bull-headedness, an unwillingness to compromise turns into a "win at any cost" mentality, and sticking to his guns is how the cowboy ended up shooting himself in the foot. It's also how people miss great opportunities, lose friends, and never have any new ideas or interests.

✚ Move ahead cautiously and patiently but move ahead.

Slot five is for patience. This doesn't mean you sit on your thumbs until something or someone better comes along or opportunities are necessarily like good wine needing time to mature; but it does mean most things are easier to screw up than straighten out. Act too quickly, rush in blindly, not give people a chance to work things out, push most anything or anyone too hard or too fast and you blow it, you turn a slow win into a quick loss.

✚ Reach down deep inside and find the tolerance to hang tough when hanging tough is what you have to do.

The last slot in this six pack is reserved for tolerance. Sure, you are tolerant of other people, other ideas, and other points of view. When compared to this brand of tolerance, though, those brands are easy. The tolerance in this slot is very personal and extraordinarily challenging. It's the tolerance to hang tough when every fiber of your being is screaming to you to aggressively lash out or run away and hide, to walk away when the adrenaline rush is urging you to give that deal just one more throw of the dice, to handle life's anxieties and ambiguities, to hang tough with firmness and sensitivity as people press you to your limit.

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

✚ The value factor is the key to your healthy bottom line.

Have you ever had it stuck to you by a hit-and-run type whose motto is "Business is business." Their trick is to never depend on return customers and to never try to do business tomorrow where they setup shop yesterday. It's a strategy best suited to those whose bottom line is merely the bottom line.

If instead, your bottom line depends on long-term relationships with your friends and family, neighbors and co-workers, be sure they consistently get what they value and value what they get from you.

✚ Plan on how you will get out of the muck before diving in.

Planning and foresight are highly valued by most everyone. This is painfully obvious when business deals go sour, partnerships fall apart, old friends have serious misunderstandings, people accumulate too much debt, conflicts escalate, and when the bottom falls out. Failure simply doesn't play nearly as well as success.

Avoiding failure isn't always all that easy, though. Nonetheless, it will improve your odds if you keep in mind most any mess is easier to get into than out of. If your personal experience doesn't have you saying, "Ain't that the truth!" you have lived a charmed life or are a saint, complete with robe and halo, or maybe you just don't get it. For we mere mortals, though, "What the hell happened and more importantly, which way's out?" aren't uncommon questions. "I should have known better," and "I didn't see it coming," aren't much help when you are stuck in the muck, with no way to escape.

 **Always go with the cards you are dealt.**

"But...", says Doubting Thomas. "Anyone can have a run of bad luck and some people have all the luck," he adds.

Sure, some lucky ducks were born with silver spoons in their mouths; and in life's great poker game, some people get better cards than others. It's enough to make you just sit down and cry. The old law-of-averages certainly doesn't 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 weren't, at least you would get better cards. Keep on wishing. Maybe your luck will turn; but then again....

 **Figure out what you have to do to improve your success odds and then do it.**

Life's a roll of the dice and you can't do much about that fact. Well, maybe you can't but, then again, maybe you can.

It was bright-and-early one morning when Grandpa found an exceptionally fine sea shell on the beach. I flippantly commented, "That was just dumb luck, your finding that shell." He smiled and replied, "Yes, it was dumb luck for a guy who was already on the beach and looking before 6:30."

Sure, luck and maybe even dumb luck at times play a big part in a lot of things. Things happen and you can't control everything; but you can make a point to be on the beach before 6:30 and can make the extra effort it takes to improve the odds for your success.

 **Do what you say you will do when you say you will do it.**

You know you have to be there at the crack of the bat, on time, every time; and you know the early bird catches the worm, you have to strike while the iron is hot, and you shouldn't keep opportunity waiting. It's timing, timing, timing, no doubt.

"But...", you say. Well, okay. "Every time" may be a bit much to expect. Still, if you ask a shrink about this being on time thing, you will learn if you are early, you are anxious; if you are on time, you are compulsive; and if you are late, you are resisting; but if you ask the people who have been waiting on you, they will simply tell you your being late is wearing very thin.

 **Be neither the dog that gets eaten nor the dog that has the meal.**

You most assuredly should know a couple of things you may not have been told about Little Red-Ridinghood. Picture Little R-R out there where any 1990s woods walker with half a brain would go prepared, ready to deal with wolves, big, bad, or not. Predictably, B-B-Wolf walks up to R-R and says, "I'm having you for lunch!" R-R says, "Oh! Don't take advantage of poor little me."

A lesser wolf would smile and say, "It's a jungle out here and anyone who can't handle it is out of luck;" But with incredible self-control, B-B-Wolf says, "Okay, but you better be prepared next time. I can't guarantee you another free-pass."

As Snoopy might have put it, "it's a dog-eat-dog world, Charlie Brown;" but....

✚ **Only repeat things you hear about others you would feel okay about if someone were to say them about you, under the same circumstances.**

Joe says, "I'm not comfortable with it yet." Sam says, "Joe says he doesn't like it." Bill says, "I hear it's over Joe's dead body." Ann says, "I can't believe Joe is being so unreasonable." Mike says, "Joe goes around acting like a little dictator." Carol says, "There is no point in talking to Joe about anything. You can just figure he's already made up his mind and you are not going to change it;" and so goes the rumor-mill, with the rumor-millwrights busily mongering and Joe serving as the grist.

✚ **"They" embraces everyone, including you.**

You may hear about better communication being the cure for the rumor-mill contagion; and though that is possibly true, beware. Listen in and draw your own conclusions.

"Our problem around here is communication. No one knows what's going on." But didn't you get the message? "What message?" It was in an email sent out last week. You should have gotten one in your in-box. "I don't have time to keep checking my in-box every five minutes. No one reads those stupid emails anyway. Someone should have told me." I see what you mean. Communication is a big problem **they** have. **They'll** have to get it straightened out if **they** expect us to get anything done.

✚ **Know when and why it was your fault and step up to accept responsibility.**

A project crashes, a solid relationship fails, an experienced employee screws up, or something else goes sour. You can't anticipate everything and no one is perfect. That is life, sure enough; but is it really?

The truth is, short of an act of God, there were people who weren't observant enough, clever enough, persistent enough, people who didn't have enough hindsight, insight, and foresight to prevent what happened. Certainly they are only human; and equally certainly, a better outcome was their responsibility.

✚ When you've got to, there is no choice but to take a deep breath, plunge in, and do what has to be done.

Do you ever have to step up and make decisions without the clear authority to make them, knowing people won't like it; or do you occasionally have to do something that gets people upset? Well, you have to do what you have to do; but how can you deal with it when you are asked, "Just who do you think you are? Who put you in charge?"

You can say, "I, me, a committee of one. It's a collaborative thing." Give Red Skelton credit for the I, me, committee of one, since he said it first but then don't hesitate.

✚ Be a master at getting others to help you, if you are a model for others to follow.

Most assuredly, taking care of business is everyone's business and we all have to hold up our end of the deal; but everyone wasn't created equally. Even if they were, they certainly don't act like it. Some are a pleasure while others.... Well, there is no need to go into that.

The secret is to see how the exceptional few do it. They exemplify appropriate demeanor and behavior, high personal standards and ethics, professional development and quality performance; but their real secret is they ask people to help solve their problems instead of trying to get them to accept their solutions.

✚ Trust people enough to let them make the decisions they need made to do their jobs.

Getting others to follow you can be a tricky business. For example, "Can I do that?" I will check with the boss. "I thought you were the boss." I can't make this decision. "What can you decide?" I decide whether you are doing your work or not. "I see. The time clock tells on me if I don't show up and you rat on me if I screw up." You've got it; so get back to work.

If you get fed up, and you likely will, be sure your new boss can independently make the decisions you need made to do your job. Better yet, find a quality employer who will empower you to make those decisions yourself.

A Special Six Pack

Taking care of business doesn't start or end with believing people are basically trustworthy. You will see this as you consume another six pack.

✚ **Conscientiously work at being truly trustworthy.**

The first slot in this six pack is for trust; but the question isn't, "Who do you trust?" It isn't, "Who trusts you?" either, since even world-class scoundrels likely are trusted sometimes by someone. The question is, "Is there any good reason why anyone should trust you?"

Now that gives it a whole new perspective. You say, "You can trust me; you have my word on it." Well, okay, but so what? Seeing is believing, show me, talk is cheap, time will tell, and all that. Your being trustworthy isn't one of those things you can just proclaim and think that is the end of it. It's not something you tell people about you; it's a judgement other people make about you. As one or another of those very wise souls puts it, **"Your reputation is created when you are not there."**

✚ **Be candid, every time, with everyone.**

The next slot is reserved for being candid. Actually, it's a double slot, with being trustworthy and being candid sitting side-by-side, since you can't have one without the other.

Consider someone who is blunt, direct, frank, and straight forward. There is someone who is candid, sure enough. Got the picture? Okay, erase that picture and consider someone who is neither blunt, direct, frank, nor straight forward. Is this someone you are going to trust? Not likely!

Now picture someone who is authentically candid and who combines their candor with trustworthiness, genuine sincerity, and a liberal splash of sensitivity. Wow! there is someone who is truly exceptional.

✚ **Take care of business by focusing on business.**

Being focused fills the next slot in this six pack. Taking care of business can get very complex and complicated; and if you don't stay focused, it will soon be all she wrote, as they say. While you are in the heat of the game, though, it's not enough to simply keep your eye on the ball. You have to keep it on the other players too; and since they have all got balls of their own, you also keep your eye on their balls. The super-stars at taking care of business are the players who have the uncanny ability to focus on their ball, the other players, and the other players' balls simultaneously -- or at least that is how it looks to the unsophisticated observer. Strictly on a "from my mouth to your ear" basis, it ain't necessarily so. The high flyers have mastered a secret technique. They only focus on one ball or one player at a time and never on a player and a ball at the same time. Now, that is focus! but there is more.

Players ready for the first-string can predict from other player's moves where their balls are going; and since they know where all the balls are headed, they don't have to know where other players or their balls actually are. Do you get it? You don't keep track of or worry about

other players. The key to taking care of business is keeping focus on the balls and knowing where yours is in relation to where the other balls will end up.

If you don't quite get it yet, focus on your ball, your business. Next, locate the other balls in the game and predict where they are going. Your objective is to move your ball in relation to where the other balls are headed. Focusing on the other players in the game, including those on your team, only serves your interest in knowing where the other balls will most likely end up so you can keep your ball where you need it to be: headed toward your goal. If you now see being focused means you attend to all the balls and all the players, one ball at a time and one player at a time, you've got it.

Commit yourself to a moral approach to taking care of business.

Slot four is reserved for a moral approach to taking care of business. This doesn't mean people who don't take a moral approach are bad or evil people, though they may be. It simply means they don't take a moral approach, i. e., they don't take a principle-centered, value-centered approach to business.

Having principles directing your actions and values forcing your choices says, For example, "I never knowingly give a customer a product or service below the standard I promised." That means you do it right, the first time, on time, every time. Now there is a principle to live up to, one that certainly directs your actions.

What principles direct your actions, direct how you take care of business? If you have three or four clear, non-negotiable principles by which you always do business, you are up there on the moral high ground where most people you do business with spend little time.

Values follow principles; but they are not simply a list of things you like. For example, your principle is you do the right things right, the first time, on time, every time; but what are the "right things?" Perhaps they are products that reliably do what they are supposed to do or services that consistently accomplish what they are intended to accomplish. You value products and services that work, the first time, every time. Having that "value" then forces many choices you make about products and services, about how you use your resources, and about people who produce or use those products and services.

✚ Predictably and consistently pursue your principles and values.

Slot five holds predictability and works best as a double slot with a moral approach to taking care of business. There certainly are those unscrupulous types who are totally predictable: you can simply assume they are only taking care of No. 1 and they will screw you every chance they get. If predictability is joined with moral principles and values, though, it is indeed a pleasure to experience. People don't always know what you are going to do or how you are going to do it; but they always know why you do it: you are following your principles and values. You are innovative, original, creative, and uniquely you, sure enough. At the same time, you are predictable and anyone who understands your principles and values knows it's so.

✚ Persistence, persistence, persistence.

The final slot in this six pack is reserved for persistence. Being worthy of trust, candor, staying focused, taking the moral high ground, and predictability are honorable and worthwhile pursuits; but none of them are easy, automatic, or guaranteed paths to success. Rather, they are sometimes slow and often tedious, personal commitments.

✚ It may be time to put the old dog in the truck and call it a day.

Finally, suppose you are hot on the trail of a great deal, a resolution to a nasty conflict, an answer to a tough question; but it suddenly all goes sour. Have you been there, up close and personal? Sure you have. It's frustrating to say the least and is usually down right maddening. The nearly irresistible temptation is to poke at it just one more time, take just one more shot.

Sure, the problem with resisting temptation is this may be the only chance you get; it may be now or never; and everyone knows winners never quit and quitters never win. At the same time, though, K. Rogers in *The Gambler* advises, "You got to know when to hold them, know when to fold them, and know when to walk away." Actually, it's the knowing when to walk away that may not be the key to success but certainly is an effective way to cut your losses; and as Grandpa says, "Winners don't win more; they just loose less."

Special People And The Loving Touch

✚ Pass IT on very carefully, especially to young people.

Do you know what IT is and are you passing it on? IT was passed on to you when you were a kid; and now it's your turn. The youngster may live at your house, deliver your paper, be playing across the street, or just walk by; but pass IT on you do.

Is IT warm and gentle, friendly and accepting? If so, IT feels like acceptance and being valued, inclusion and being important. If IT's cold and indifferent, detached and suspicious, IT feels like...; well, you know how IT feels.

✚ Give more emphasis to being a better model for kids than to molding them.

As you pass IT on, remember you are the model. To be a great model, you walk the walk, talk the talk, have all the right moves, and amaze your fans. If you have kids or hang-around with someone who does, you have already got an enthusiastic following; and follow you they do.

Given time, they will walk your walk, talk your talk, and your moves will be theirs. You are the model and they are your work-in-progress.

✚ Take care of your stuff.

There is stuff others expect you to do, stuff you are responsible for, and stuff unexpectedly coming up from time-to-time only you can handle. If you are too busy, too tired, or over-committed elsewhere to attend to your stuff, don't expect much from your family and don't be surprised if they aren't there for you when you need them.

✚ Mom isn't conveniently in the next room, ready to clean up your tooth paste or any other messes you make.

How I got the tooth paste all over me and my new shirt doesn't matter anymore; but even at six, I knew I couldn't get it back into the tube before my mother... Call my dilemma The Toothpaste Principle. It also applies to harsh words, bad decisions, little things getting out of hand, and a lot of other opportunities coming and going, not to return. You can't undo what is already done; and it's no longer your mother you have to account to.

✚ Taking the first step with people who are special to you best serves your interests.

Think about someone special to you with whom you aren't getting along very well. Now, consider taking personal responsibility for your side of the relationship. You do this by being interested in and valuing the other person's ideas, point of view, and activities.

Listen to what the other person has to say, ask questions about what they have been doing, find out what is important to them, and remember what they have shared with you. You are making it easier for them to have a better relationship with you.

✚ When people share their troubles, listen to the feelings, offer a little empathy, and follow up with tangible help.

Listen to the feelings instead of only hearing the words. For example, "I'm about to lose it, going to school, my job, the kids, and everything."

Responding only to the words, you might say, "If I were you, I'd..." The exact advice doesn't matter, since you likely wouldn't appreciate or follow the same advice anyway, especially if it came from someone else.

Instead, you respond to the feelings, "That's rough; but I am helping you."

✚ Don't repeat what you hear about other people; don't repeat personal things others tell you about themselves; and only share private matters with people who have proven themselves to be trustworthy.


When you listen to other people's feelings and share yours with them, there is a secret the truly trustworthy take for granted. They simply assume little people talk about other people, medium-size people talk about things, and the big-guys talk about ideas. Ben Franklin or some other certified big-guy probably said that first; but once little people have let the cat out of the bag, even Ben himself couldn't put it back. Let this serve as a wake-up call warning you to never be the one who frees the cat.

 **Within the loving touch, life is at its fullest reality.**


There are private matters and then there are private matters; and the loving touch certainly qualifies as a private matter coming in many flavors. A sentimental card or candy in a pretty box may be today's flavor as may be an expensive present or a warm embrace. Flowers and a romantic dinner may at times work as well. Whatever form it takes, the loving touch means it's an uncommon moment, a moment for special friends and lovers.

But alas, the cards are read and the candy eaten, expensive presents discarded and sincere words forgotten. In time the flowers wilt and the romantic dinner is but yesterday's fond memory. Something more is needed: a loving touch not to fade, not to be forgotten. This touch lasts longer than the day and keeps reminding, keeps saying, "I love you."

This spirit is hard to capture in a well-intended gift or simple verse. It isn't found in things you touch and hold. Rather, the spirit of the loving touch is in the bond between friends, within the tie that binds. It is hard to define but impossible to miss.

 **To give the loving touch that lasts, the kind that keeps saying, "I love you," fill it with added value lasting far beyond the moment.**

What are the extras making the loving touch linger past the moment? The added value includes affection any time your beloved needs a hug; and just as your beloved accepts you, warts and all, it's a two-way-street; but there also are ingredients far less adult, far less mature. They are playful and gentle, spontaneous and mischievous. They are full of fun and good times, private games and warm summer evenings. These ingredients are for you and your beloved and for all the little kids like you who have to sometimes act your age, be adults, take care of business, and do what you have to do as best you can.

 **Your saying, "I love you," means you can be entrusted with the key to your beloved's heart.**

The tie that binds is more than the entwining of lover and beloved. Being friends and being partners are equally important ingredients in the glue forming the bond.

Think of your relationship as a triangle with lovers, friends, and partners as its sides. Love, then, is the force binding the sides together, the key to richness and risk, danger and opportunity; and you are the guardian of the key.

✚ If your friendship's going down the tube isn't anyone's fault, then nurturing your friendship wasn't anyone's responsibility.

What happened? You used to be happy, knew what kind of reactions you were going to get from each other and how things would go. Your world wasn't always rosy; but the two of you could handle it.

When things weren't going well, you talked about it. You worked it out; but lately both of you are tied up in knots. You are always on edge; and you could cut the tension with a knife. Any more, you don't even go through the motions of caring about each other's feelings or acting like you care what is being said. It's just one of those things.

✚ When either of you gives up on your partnership, that is all she wrote, as they say.

Your partnership is a shared responsibility and can quickly go down the tube; so what happened? You used to be great partners, would talk and decide together what was important, what your priorities were. You were always up-front with each other about what you thought about things and were open to the other's ideas and opinions. You didn't always agree but it worked.

If there were problems, you worked them out and didn't blame or accuse or threaten. You were a team, always found a solution you both could live with; but you were trying a little harder, gave a little more, and were more responsible than your partner. That wasn't fair and is why you quit trying. Oh well, it's just another one of those things.

✚ When you feel the magic slipping away, concentrate more on being a better lover than on being loved better.

It may be all she wrote for your being lovers. You know how it goes. It's just one of those things. Sure, it used to be magic. You and your lover each knew what the other wanted, how to scratch the itch, so to speak. Love making was passion at its best and most intense. You were considerate of each other's feelings, each other's needs. No one was in charge, no one gave more or got less. It wasn't that kind of thing anyway. It was magic and you took turns being the magician; but one thing lead to another and then to another and it was gone; but now you finally get it, even if a bit late. Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, love is in the heart of the one who is loved.

A Special Six Pack

There is just enough time for one last six pack. This one is special for its six slots contain special ingredients for special people. By this time, you can handle the whole six pack at once and it's good you are ready to go for the gusto since you are about to learn the secret recipe for creating the loving touch. this special recipe for lovingly combining the time-tested ingredients has been protected and tenderly passed down, hand-to-hand, through the generations.

✚ **Share the loving touch with people who are special to you every chance you get.**

Acceptance is the first ingredient in the loving touch. It lets special people know you accept them as is, don't want to change them, don't want them to change. You then blend in **affection**, knowing "too much" applies to many things but never to affection sincerely offered.

As you mix the ingredients with love and sincere good will, **gentleness** is the secret technique the masters have perfected and you refine in ways conveying the uniqueness of your loving touch. It's the perfect complement to being fully involved in the moment, without distraction, without reservation.

You have almost got it just right, are nearing perfection; but it still needs a dash of this and a pinch of that: the special spices bringing out the rich flavor of the loving touch. They are **spontaneity** and **playfulness**. Your loving touch is always there, only awaiting a gesture, a feeling, the slightest of signs it's wanted and valued. It sparkles with joy, enthusiasm, and that indescribable but familiar extra in a child's laughter, a lover's smile, in the magical connection when special people share the loving touch.

SELF-CHECK

Below are twenty statements, each of which incorporates one of **Life's most important lessons**. Think about each statement and about how true it is for you, every time, in every way, with everyone. If it's true for you most all the time, put a "3" beside the bullet. If it's usually true but sometimes isn't, put a "2" beside the bullet. If it's sometimes true but usually isn't, put a "1" beside the bullet. If it's seldom to never true for you, put a "0" beside the bullet. If you can't decide about a specific statement, ask someone who knows you well to rate you. Whatever their rating, put that number beside the bullet.

3 = Most always

2 = Usually

1 = Sometimes

0 = Seldom to never

- I do everything I do with style, all the time, on purpose.
- I succeed by helping others succeed.
- I ask people, "Did that help?" instead of "Can I help?"

- I bring the same level of energy and commitment to whatever I'm doing, whether things are going sour or going great.
- I don't let people mess with my monkey.
- I stand up, speak up, shut up, and sit down.
- I don't buy into or react to other people's bad attitudes.
- I don't let people turn their poor planning into my emergencies.
- I make sure people value what they get and get what they value from me.
- I plan on how I will get out of the muck before diving in.
- I do what I say I will do, when I say I will do it.
- I don't join in with the rumor-millwrights.
- I know when and why it's my fault and step up to accept responsibility.
- I'm a master at getting others to help me.
- I know when it's time to put the old dog in the truck and call it a day.
- I give more emphasis to being a better model for kids than to molding them.
- I take the first step with people who are special to me.
- When people share their troubles with me, I listen to the feelings, offer a little empathy, and follow up with tangible help.
- When I say, "I love you," it means the key to my beloved's heart can be entrusted to me.
- When I feel the magic slipping away, I concentrate more on being a better lover than on being loved better.

This is how to rate yourself.

First, total the numbers you put beside the bullets. Your total score will be from 0 to 60. Once you have your total, This is how to interpret your score.

46 to 60 You are definitely at the top of your game and show signs of becoming a superstar, a certified member of the personal excellence creme de la creme.

31 to 45 You are not yet setting the standard for others; but you are showing real promise. You may be tempted to concentrate your efforts on the principles where you gave yourself a "0" or a "1;" but that would be a mistake. Give your best effort to raising the "2" principles to "3." Spend more effort getting great at the things you are already good at than on improving those things you don't manage very well.

16 to 30 Give yourself credit for at least being willing to complete the self-check. You are likely a latecomer who is unfamiliar with **life's most important lessons**. Nonetheless, you may have what it takes. Work at it, every day, in every way. Also, identify a personal mentor whose style and approach you respect and appreciate and then consider emulating the example being set for you; identify a Simon worthy of being followed and then follow your leader.

0 to 15 Well, what can I say? It doesn't matter much anyway since you don't care what others think about you and your behavior. You are certainly your own person, sure enough; and ain't that a relief! At least those of us who are committed to doing it right, the first time, on time, every time won't have to spend much time hanging around with you and your friends, if you actually have any.

Yes, you are right. It's true. There are a lot more of you than There are of us; but our numbers are growing; and as unlikely as it may seem today, even you may one day decide to join us in our pursuit of personal excellence.