
A STRATEGY FOR DAILY LIVING

“Several years ago, a young businessman visited my office with an unusual request. He wanted a set of guidelines to follow that would let him function without professional help, in the face of considerable confusion and despair caused by serious personal problems.” Thus writes psychiatrist Dr. Ari Kiev in the preface of the book that ultimately resulted from the young man’s request. “What I have set out to do here is to describe a day-by-day strategy that will help make each day more worthwhile than the one before, and will help maximize the potential you possess. A successful life does not result from change, but from a succession of successful days. This book will help you plan, rather than merely await, such days.”

Excerpted from the book
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In my practice as a psychiatrist, I have found that helping people to develop personal goals has proved to be the most effective way to help them to cope with problems. Observing the lives of people who have mastered adversity, I have noted that they have established goals and sought with all their effort to achieve them. From the moment they decided to concentrate all their energies on a specific objective, they began to surmount the most difficult odds.

The English author Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton wrote: “The man who succeeds above his fellows is the one who early in life clearly discerns his object and toward that object habitually directs his powers. Even genius itself is but fine observation strengthened by fixity of purpose. Every man who observes vigilantly and resolves steadfastly grows unconsciously into genius.”

The establishment of a goal is the key to successful living. And the most important step toward achieving an objective is first to define it. I am sure you have at least 30 minutes a day in which to list your thoughts about possible goals. Set aside such a period each day for a month. At the end of that time, choose from the possible objectives you have listed the one that seems the most important, and record it separately on a single card. Carry this card with you at all times. Think about this objective every day. Create concrete mental images of the goal, as if you’ve already accomplished it.

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Don't be afraid of failure. As Herodotus wrote: "It is better by noble boldness to run the risk of being subject to half of the evils we anticipate than to remain in cowardly listlessness for fear of what may happen."

You can determine your special talents or strengths in a number of ways, ranging from psychological tests to an analysis of the unexpressed wishes in your dreams. No one method works for everyone. You might start, for example, by clipping and pasting newspaper articles that interest you. After 30 days, see if there isn't some trend suggestive of a deep-seated interest or natural inclination. Keep alert to the slightest indications of any special skills or talents, even when they seem silly or unimportant.

From this exercise, you should be able to get some sense of potential strengths. Whenever you discover strength of talent, think of five possible ways to develop it. Write these down on a card as well, and check them periodically to keep them fresh in your mind.

Focus on one objective at a time. Like a servomechanism, the brain, set on a target, will call into play those mental processes that will bring your efforts to fruition. Your actions will conform to your expectations, thereby bringing about the event. If you believe that you will reach your objective, you will continue to work at a task until you have accomplished it.

Always have the next goal in the back of your mind, since the most satisfaction comes from pursuing a goal, not simply from achieving it. Above all, don't be impatient about reaching your objectives. It may be that at first you can devote only one hour a day to the activity that really matters to you. But even one hour a day can mean seven hours a week, 3650 hours in ten years. You can accomplish much in that period of time—take a course, write a book, paint a portrait.

Five Enemies of Peace. The more you break tasks down to their elementary components, the more readily you will be able to accomplish the more difficult and complicated tasks. The belief that you can't do something is merely a rationalization for unwillingness to take a risk.

According to Ernest Newman, the English music critic, "The great composer does not set to work because he is inspired, but becomes inspired because he is working. Beethoven, Wagner, Bach, Mozart settled down day after day to the job at hand with as much regularity as an accountant settles down each day to his figures. They didn't waste time waiting for inspiration." An overriding goal governed the activities of these composers, and others, enabling them to overcome the most extreme handicaps. Activity itself generates the impetus for further activity.

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Be aware of situations that generate the five great enemies of peace: avarice, ambition, envy, anger and pride. Petarch said: "If those enemies were to be banished, we should infallibly enjoy perpetual peace."

Avarice comes from believing that you need certain things when you probably don't, and from the feeling that what you depend on will be taken from you.

Ambition arises from dissatisfaction with yourself and your activities. It's fine to set up challenges and to want to succeed. But excessive ambition can lead you to set unattainable goals. Pursue your objectives at a pace suited to your temperament. Concentrate on your efforts, not on the results.

Envy comes from an irrational comparison of what others have achieved and what you have achieved. Lack of what others possess does not cause frustration, but failure to develop your assets does.

Anger can envelop you and destroy your incentive. Whenever you become angry, review what has happened. Has somebody ignored or criticized you? Should that bother you? Must you depend on others' opinions? Have you allowed others to impose their expectations on you or to control your behavior?

Pride develops from a need to impress yourself and others with qualities you lack. The mature individual acknowledges his limitations, acts humbly, and tolerates differences with others. Your distress will vanish when you admit your fallibility.

Strategies for Stress. Self-reliance comes from two separate acts: a positive orientation toward goals, and a reduction of unnecessary and inhibiting dependency patterns. Trying to meet the expectations of others in order to be accepted by them creates a compulsion to act in certain ways which limit your own ability to fully express yourself. This is dependency.

Many people become oversensitive to the non-verbal—and often unconscious—attitudes of criticism, hostility or rejection of others. If you find yourself reacting to real or imagined slights, don't argue with people over your impressions. Accusing others of ambivalent feelings or lack of interest in you may frustrate you, foster conflict, and may provoke the very response that you anticipate. Avoid any inclination to respond to sarcasm or innuendo. Acknowledge that everyone has a right to think for himself and close the discussion. Maintaining a positive attitude will, in the long run, draw positive responses from others.

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Focus your attitudes toward other people. Are you too concerned about what they think of you? Does your perfectionism mask an underlying depression? Are you afraid of criticism? If these patterns sound familiar, you should take stock and define goals more compatible with your interests, needs and skills.

Ask yourself, "What factors in my life are draining me? To what extent am I neglecting my own needs?" Are you known as someone with strong shoulders, willing to assume all kinds of burdens? Are you too easy to approach, so that friends, relatives and others feel no hesitancy about imposing on your time? Positive gratification from this must be weighed against the negative price you pay in giving up free choice.

Don't worry about refusing requests that seem to be demanding of yourself. It is better over the long haul for family and friends to know that what you do for them you do willingly, because you want to, and not because you hadn't enough courage to say no.

The ability to withdraw into solitude will increase your faith in your capacity to achieve objectives. It will also give you strength to endure frustrations and uncertainty. Learn to listen to your own thoughts. This will help you to learn more about your inner self and your real goals. Spend some time along each day, familiarizing yourself with your thoughts. You can do this while walking outdoors or relaxing at home, in a church or synagogue, or even in the public library. Solitude will provide you with an opportunity to become comfortable with your feelings and thoughts, and to assess the strategies for reaching your objectives.

The Rewards of Service. Confucius wrote: "He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own." There is a direct link between service to others and rewards in life.

Whom can you serve? Where can you make a contribution? Look at the people around you, your family, friends, co-workers, customers, others whom you meet in daily life. To the degree to which you contribute to their welfare you will be rewarded.

If you wish others to respect you, you must show respect for them. To achieve this, you may want to try a special program. For a month, approach everyone you meet as if he or she were the most important person in the world. Everyone wants to feel that he is important to someone; invariably, people will give their love, respect and attention to the person who fills that need. Remember that there is something to be learned from everybody. Each of us has a story to tell and a unique perspective. The way to try to understand the world is to see it from as many different viewpoints as possible.

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Light Your Own Fire. According to lawyer John Foster, “One of the strongest characteristics of genius is the power of lighting its own fire.” Those who accomplish much have a unifying purpose to their life and express themselves inn whatever manner is necessary to achieve their purpose. Call it simplicity, humility or self-sufficiency. A

You may believe that a Stravinsky, an Einstein or a Picasso has, by his genius, earned the right to be eccentric, idiosyncratic, self-willed. I contend that it was the decision to become master of their own fate that gave them the courage to try new things.

The willingness to think the unthinkable requires courage to spend time along, to run the risk of ridicule. Not everyone is a Picasso, but everyone can consciously distinguish himself from the world around him. Swift said: “Although men are accused of not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps few know their own strength. It is in men as in soils, where sometimes there is a vein of gold which the owner knows not of.” The time you are wasting thinking about your inadequacy could be spending searching for that vein of gold in your activities and yourself.

Light your own fire. Pursue your own objectives without fear of failure, censure or criticism. This will free that unique combination of factors that lie buried beneath your social self. Your mental activity is as much a part of you as your heartbeat, your respiratory rhythm. You will find peace of mind when you determine and act in terms of your own nature and your own goals.