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A LITTLE SOMETHING ABOUT LIFE

Life is really a very interesting phenomenon. However, usually we are too busy living or worrying about it to really understand its importance. From time-to-time, we need to stand back and take a look at where we've been in our lives in order to understand and appreciate the lessons that we've learned thus far. In turn, doing that helps us to better understand where it is that we are going in the future.

For instance, if we're very aware of our lives, we'll find that life tends to send repetitive messages or lessons to us almost on a daily basis. If we're not aware, it will seem that these repetitions are all new but, in fact, they tend to be the same message in different forms. The more aware we can become of what these messages are trying to "tell us", the more value we can place on them and on how they might help us in given situations. We may not be aware of them the first time, the fiftieth time but...the one hundred-and-first time it may "hit us" so that we now can retain what it is that we've learned now...and for future reference as well.

An example of this is when we're experiencing pain of either a physical or emotional type. Our tendency might be to view whatever the pain might be as lasting "forever". But, of course it doesn't. When our perception is that it will last, our ability to deal with it effectively may be hampered and so we are increasing the suffering that we're experiencing. However, placing it in its proper perspective...namely, that there is a beginning and end to everything in life...our energy isn't wasted worrying about something that won't happen. We become more aware of the fact that healing is part of the total experience and that we will move into that phase soon enough. Apart from the need for patience, our awareness of this reality is very important as a useful tool.

These lessons are meant for us to understand what we've accomplished thus far in our lives. So, when the next lesson comes upon us much like a "test", we can look back and realize that there is a similarity between this new lesson and previous ones that we've encountered and successfully learned and completed. This is the primary and important reason why life is referred to by many as a "process" or a "journey" and not just a series of happenings that occur.

In this process, we can then call upon those factors that occurred in the preceding lesson(s) and use them in the lesson that presents itself now. The more we're able to reflect on what we've already accomplished, the less fearful, doubtful and worrisome we will be which, in turn, allows us to be more receptive to new lessons. Then, we can begin to identify and assess our strengths and weaknesses and apply the necessary remedies to our lives based on that awareness.

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on our perspective, we can't predict the future. However, we can still call upon the past in order to deal with the present. In that way, we can take the most positive, successful and effective outcomes from our lives and build upon it right now. And remember, although we can't predict the future, today is only tomorrow yesterday. Here are some points that you might consider:

- Instead of just taking things that occur in your life as they come, try to be more consciously aware of whether there may be a connection to what has occurred previously;
- Don't be afraid to ask those close to you if they notice patterns in your life;
- Keep a journal of daily events so that you can go back and determine whether there may be certain patterns occurring.

Above all, enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly by always having something to look forward to, bringing as much humor and love into your life as you can,

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DOUBTING SUCCESS

I'm sure that you can remember a time in your life when you were very much afraid of doing something or about what was about to happen to you. It was terrible, wasn't it? Your anxiety level went way up and your pulse quickened its pace. You may have felt flushed or even "woozy". Your heart was pumping such that you didn't know if it would explode out of your chest. You may have tended to doubt whether you were going to be able to handle whatever the incident or situation was. You doubted yourself to the point of almost "caving in" to the fear. But instead, something very different from what you may have expected happened. It was like a shot of adrenaline was introduced and you "blocked out" the feelings of fear and replaced them with a sense of "having to do what you had to do". You didn't think about it...you just DID IT! Somehow you managed to gain the presence of mind and the courage to deal with that situation probably in a manner which surprised but later gratified you when you took the time to realize what you had accomplished.

Another situation that might have presented itself had to do with your having succeeded in doing something that was exemplary. In effect, you outdid yourself to the extent that you were surprised that you could do so well. And then, at another point in time, perhaps some while after that incident, you were faced with a challenging task that tended to overwhelm you because of its complexity. In fact, the task in some respects was very similar to the successful completion noted above. However, you tended to doubt yourself and your abilities. You felt overwhelmed and unsure of yourself so much that you backed away from tackling the project. You experienced defeat even before you made your first try at dealing with it.

But perhaps you've forgotten about both of those episodes and put them, in the back of your mind. However, apart from the incidents, there were certain feelings associated with both of those examples. I'm sure that there are other situations that arise present day which bring about those very same feelings. There's something about our feelings and minds that most people don't realize. Once we've experienced something and handled it successfully, if you can recall the feelings that allowed you to accomplish whatever it was, you'll be able to "reconstruct" those feelings, bring them back and call upon them once again. Although your mind may experience doubt over your abilities, that recollection can change the course of your mind taking you down that frightened, negative, doubtful, unconfident road. Instead, you can become successful once again and add to your already growing repertoire of successes.

Probably one of the reasons you can't recall your feelings very easily is because you weren't taught about the importance of feelings in dealing with your life. Rather, you were taught to THINK. In fact, some of the "messages" that you received may have taught you to disregard your feelings altogether in deference to your thinking. But now, you may realize that you have another tool...a tool that will never desert you because your feelings are able to be trusted. At first, you may have a hard time doing that but with practice, it will become easier and, ultimately, become "second nature" and you won't have to doubt your success again.

Here are some points that you may want to consider:

- Think back to a time ... an experience ... in which you were very successful in your dealing with it; try to remember the feelings that you had and experience them once again;
- Think back to a time or experience when you felt overwhelmed but somehow found the strength and courage to deal with it successfully. Remember the feelings and reconstruct them so that you might use them in dealing with the present situation that is overwhelming as well.
- Think of your feelings as being a “tool” that you can use to handle difficult situations that will result in a successful outcome.

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SOME THOUGHTS ON STRESS

During the Katrina Hurricane disaster, I read about a couple who migrated from Louisiana to the State of Florida. They were very fortunate that their home and cars were untouched but because of the threat of disease, they were forced to leave. The husband, a Navy man, packed what belongings they could salvage to stay with a friend. Their car was parked in a lot within view of their motel dwelling unit. The next morning, the wife noticed that their car containing over \$10,000 worth of belongings was missing. Although it was later found, their belongings were stolen. He was beginning to feel angry but realized that he could do nothing about the occurrence. He realized that he needed all the energy he could muster to do what was needed for his wife and children.

A “double whammy”! How much stress can people endure? In my research and work with people to help them manage the stress in their lives, I was always amazed at the resilience of the human spirit in the midst of misfortune. Although they are hard pressed to realize it because of the trauma of whatever befalls them, people demonstrate amazing strength and endurance. It seems that the thrust of the stress enables them to gather their resources to deal with whatever the circumstances might be. It might be after the fact that they will feel very vulnerable and incapable of functioning for a time but not during the episode.

I remember a time when, as a new parent, I heard my son thrashing in his bed shortly after his bedtime. I ran up the stairs to find him having a convulsive seizure. I had never experienced anything like this but somehow remembered reading about placing the child in lukewarm water. My wife followed me and although she was a nurse, she panicked. I told her to hold the child while I drew the bathwater. Then I placed him in the tub, splashing the water over his body. In the meantime, after running to a neighbor’s for help and returning, my son was fine and I handed him over to my wife who had since calmed down. As I sat on the tub’s edge, I felt faint and my neighbor grabbed me and stabilized my balance preventing my fall into the tub.

I don’t know how I remembered reading about treating a convulsive reaction but it was some time previous to the incident. I don’t know how I had the presence of mind to calmly implement the solution in the midst of the frightening episode but I did. I don’t know why my wife was prone to panic while I was calm and why I “folded” when she recovered but it all happened as I described it. Now, I know that the endorphins that come into play offer a physiological explanation but there is also a psychological element that takes over enabling those kinds of reactions as well.

I would define stress as *the result of an event that occurs over which we have little or no control*. It would seem that the keyword here is “control”. The more that we need to maintain our need to be in control, the less able we are to deal with whatever the stress is that might come our way. The reason for this is that our control tends to make us tense and limits our ability to accept what has happened and go on from there. The reality of an occurrence is very difficult to accept. However, *it did happen!* Once we can accept reality for what it really is, we can then begin to apply whatever remedies to the occurrence that might be necessary. Many of us experience difficulty accepting reality and try to change it in order to feel better

otherwise called *avoidance*. It's like a "temporary fix" that helps us to feel better for a period of time. Although avoidance is a normal and natural phenomenon allowing us to recover from certain traumas but if it becomes a way life, it will interfere with our ability to adjust by taking care of whatever the stress might be. Avoidance doesn't change reality but it can give us time to recover from trauma so that we can "take care of business".

Here are some points to consider:

- Remember a time when you calmly dealt with a stressful situation and what the outcome was;
- Remember a time when you over-reacted during a stressful situation and what the outcome was;
- Try to determine what the differences were between the two examples;
- Remember a time when you had a tendency to avoid a situation but instead decided to deal with it forthrightly.

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WHY THE TITLE “CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN”

Several years ago, I had a close friend who invited me and my family to go to his cabin and spend a few days exploring nature. The cabin was located some distance outside of Buffalo, NY in the beautiful rolling hills of Cattaraugus County. I remember deciding one day to take a hike with my family up the mountain that was adjacent to the cabin using a well-marked path. It was a very hot and humid August day and the mosquitoes were in abundance as we started our climb. My children were quite young back then so we proceeded slowly to accommodate their smaller steps. Of course, the occasional stopping to throw some stones at a target needed to be a part of our climb as we made our way to the top. We stopped for cold water by a natural spring's spout on the mountainside while the children drenched themselves in order to cool off their bodies. Those were days when contamination was not a concern and the trust that the water was pure and safe was without question.

From time-to-time we would stop to rest as needed. For the most part, the climb was quite steep although there were rest bits of level ground that gave the opportunity for us to “catch our breaths”. The flora and fauna were simply gorgeous and we would stop to examine some of the beauty more closely as my camera did its work for posterity. Part of the mountainside contained sweet wild grapes and berries which we ate with gusto. We even saw some wild animals ... large and small ... which infatuated all of us except my wife. Unfortunately, we didn't reach the pinnacle of the mountain because some of us were quite tired, hot and thirsty so we started our descent but took another path so that we could experience a different view from our climb. We reached the cabin around dinnertime which was resplendent with all of the stories and excitement that our experience had provided in our climb. Those stories were combined with the insect bites, scratches and sprained ankles that some of us sustained which made the recounting all the more exciting. The experience still lingers in my memory to this day.

My experience was the basis for my naming my article *CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN* which is also the title of my monthly Newsletter, which, by the way, I'd be happy to send to those interested if they would supply me with their e-mail addresses. In many respects, life is like climbing our own individual and unique mountain containing steep and level areas that we must maneuver. Certainly there are stressful and precarious times that we all experience but there are also successful encounters that keep our spirits alive allowing us to keep on going.

As there might be some rest bits that we might take on the climb, there is also a need for creating intense energy to maintain our purpose, balance and footing. It certainly can be a difficult climb at times. Discouragement and elation are both partners in our climb and the farther we climb, the more we learn about ourselves, life and the world around us. Even looking back at some of the seemingly negative experiences can provide a sense of excitement and realization that our strength of purpose might be much stronger than we had thought.

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN will deal with everyday life, business philosophical, positive and negative issues...all of which are encountered while proceeding up the mountain. It is my hope that my series of articles might help readers to make their climb easier and more productive. The nature and subjects contained in the articles will hopefully help people deal with their lives more effectively in order to create a happier lifestyle pattern. ENJOY!

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EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

As we all might listen to the nightly news the reports of our youth holding up old ladies, robbing convenience stores, beating up on other young people and even pre-meditated murder has become a commonplace part of our listening and viewing experience. As old as it seems to be getting, I still become very upset to hear about our future generation making some of the serious mistakes that tend to label them and characterize them as evil, irresponsible and lazy. The problem with those characterizations is that we tend to place all of our youth into that category.

But this article isn't about misguided youth. In fact it concerns my involvement with young people who offer a sense of pride and hope for the future of our world. I will offer only two of many examples. The first is my work with a group of young athletes who were aspiring to becoming a part of the NFL Draft. Previous to working with them around how to gain focus and self-confidence in their competitive sport of football, I took the time to go to their training facility called Optimum Performance Training Institute. The very hard work that they were required to perform in order to qualify for the "combine" was something that most lovers of the game ever witness. Their coach, Rich Lansky, was relentless in his expectations of these young men at times to the point of exhaustion. What I noticed was that they were not fazed with those expectations. It was clear that they had a sense of purpose ... namely of proving themselves both to themselves as well as to their counterparts who were training with them.

Their look of determination stemmed from a dream that I later found out each had since they were young children of playing football professionally. Some had a college degree and others not. They worked together as a team ... encouraging each other to overcome the exhaustion their training forced in favor of reaching the next plateau of performance. Upon meeting these young men and coming to know them personally, I found a sense of sincerity and gentlemanliness that was the underlay to their tough exterior. They were sensitive and very involved in what little I had to offer them and their interest suggested that they would use mental methods that were part of my training for their going to the Draft. They were genuinely grateful for my involvement and some even asked to maintain contact with me beyond the training session.

The second example is that of a young lady with whom I've consulted who is an outstanding athlete and scholar with a 4.0 average in her high school studies. She is aspiring to both an athletic as well as an academic scholarship to college and plans to finish her high school studies early in order to apply to college. She has a remarkable confidence about her along with a pleasant sense of humor and a good deal of sensitivity while yet being strong of mind, body and character. Although very attractive, she doesn't flaunt her qualities. She has a deep sense of purpose that is characterized by her saying that she "hates procrastination" and prefers to attack whatever her responsibilities might be instead of putting them off or trying to skirt them.

She demonstrates a sense of maturity that belies her age and it is clear that she has become a model for many of her peers who both look up to her as well as seek her out for

her opinion and advice. She isn't afraid of hard work and is willing to do her best even with those elements in her sport and academically that bore her to death. There is a sense of balance and perspective that she embodies that is truly admirable and enviable. She aspires to becoming a physical therapist in order to help other athletes just as her injuries were helped by professionals allowing her to continue in her sport. Her dedication and strength shine through the moment anyone would have a conversation with her. Hard work, not drugs, are her key to success and there is little doubt or question that she will achieve most anything to which she puts her mind and efforts.

And so, we have young people who demonstrate the opposite of what we might see on TV. These are young people who are talented but whose hard work has brought them to the success levels that they've achieved. Nothing was handed to them. What they have achieved is what they have deserved. All of them demonstrate a welcome EXCEPTION TO THE RULE. There are many more of these young people out there. Seek them out and don't be overcome with the negativity you see on the nightly news. They are right in your Community.

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POSITIVE THINKING ... MYTH OR REALITY

I suppose that just about everyone who will be reading this article is familiar with the name Syesha Mercado. For those who aren't she is one of three finalists in the American Idol singing contest on TV and hails from the Sarasota area of our State. Actually, I wasn't that interested in the program but my wife is and the more she talked about it, the more I paid attention and especially because of Syesha's climb into the final three. I was not only impressed with her melodic capabilities but I noted how positive she was despite criticism from one of the judges. Instead of wavering as a result of that criticism, she just sang all the better in subsequent appearances. It was clear that it wasn't others upon whom she was focused but on herself and what she KNEW that she could do based on her belief.

This morning, on my way back from the gym, I listened to an interview that she had with some local morning show hosts. She talked about how her entrance into the American Idol contest occurred in stages and each stage was not successful. But she kept on trying for one simple reason. She indicated that despite her past difficulties, someone told her "this is going to be your year". She believed that and based her sense of continuing on that belief. She also talked about how frightening it was when, in the contest, she started to lose her voice. And then she said that subsequently she sang her "heart out" and gave the best performance of her career. She said that she sang for her survival in the contest and remained a contestant as a result.

Now, I've written many articles on the power of positive thinking as it can affect any and all areas of our lives. Sports, business, relationships, adventures all can be affected by positive thinking. And yet, there is a sense of skepticism that prevails on the part of some who cannot believe that, for instance, if you envision and focus on your next shot in golf, the chances are very great that it will occur as you envisioned it. That is nothing more than positive thinking in a golf game. Let me try and explain why this skepticism might exist.

Whether people admit it or not, there is an element of superstition that tends to influence our thinking. We often talk about good and bad luck as being something over which we have no control. Actually, when I was coaching losing teams in sports, I would invent superstitions to bring "good luck" to those kids who had lost faith in their ability to win. I remember in hockey our team was at the "bottom of the barrel" and one day I suggested that the players could not wear any other under shorts or socks than the ones they had on (although they could be washed). Believe it or not, they began to win a few games and so the superstition stuck. However, what I was trying to promote was that they not focus on losing but on their ability to win which is what superstition is really all about. If we believe in ourselves and our abilities as the primary consideration in whatever we do, our focus will bring out the best and, not unusually, result in a successful outcome.

And so, Syesha, I really don't have to wish you the best of luck. You have a secret that I can only write about but that you will experience. And win or lose the contest, you will

have won if you know that you have done your level best by focusing on what you CAN DO instead of depending on the good wishes of those who admire your talents.

Here are some points that you might want to consider:

- Confidence is believing in yourself AND believing that what you believe IS TRUE;
- Your ability comes from within so if you are accustomed to looking to others for support, try focusing on what you have already accomplished and repeat it;
- Bad luck is nothing more than ONE FAILED ATTEMPT. However, there are many more tries that you can make that could be successful.

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