



ALL THINGS MEN

PRESENTED BY ROBERT CAFFREY, LPC, JD

“All Things Men” was a weekly column by Bob Caffrey, LPC, JD about what it means to be a “successful” man in our complex, modern world. Although it’s about men, it’s for anyone who seeks to improve the quality of their life. It focuses on the “success” we create when we commit ourselves to designing a life of purpose and meaning. It will explore both the modern and ancient methods that you can use to create a life that you can take pride in; a life that reflects a commitment to resilience, integrity, honor, service and courage.

January 2016 – “If I Don’t Feel it, I Won’t Have to Deal With It” and other coping strategies, guaranteed to MESS UP YOUR LIFE!

Emotions, also known as “feelings,” have a bad reputation in our culture, especially with men. Many of us try to avoid feeling emotions we deem bad or unpleasant.

The belief seems to be if I don’t “feel” I won’t have to “deal.” Presto! Problem solved, right?

Not so much.

Emotions are a critical part of our human survival system. They are essential to our effectively functioning in our lives. They provide us with information about our environment that alerts our brain to pay attention.

Case in point, if you’ve been in danger you probably felt uneasy or frightened before you were exactly sure why. When the boss is hacked off, your feeling of anxiety, annoyance, or anger lets you know it’s going to be “one of those days” before he or she ever says a word.

In each of these instances, ignoring how you felt could have led to problems you’d like to avoid.

Here are 2 tips to help you “feel” so you can “deal” with life more effectively.

All feelings are created equal.

Feelings are information about our body’s reaction to what we’re experiencing in our environment. Think of them as a body centered data stream about whether we like what’s happening or we don’t.

Because emotions are just your body’s assessment of what’s happening, they are neither good nor bad. They can be comfortable or uncomfortable, but that just means we’re okay with what’s happening or we’re not.

The more you notice what you’re feeling, especially a feeling you’re not comfortable with, the more accurate your assessment will be of what’s happening in a given moment. The more your inner perception matches reality, the more effective you are in life.

Trust but verify

Emotions first register as a physical pattern in our body. We feel our face get hot, and we know we’re angry. A knot appears in our stomach, and we know we’re frightened.

Our body never lies to us. Our emotions are always telling us something about the environment we are in.

It's important to determine, however, whether the feelings are about the "here and now" or the "there and then." When we feel angry because someone in this moment is acting inappropriately, that's a problem that needs to be addressed right here, right now.

On the other hand, when we feel angry but nothing is happening in the present moment that explains it, then our body is telling us that something or someone present now reminds us of what made us angry in the past, the "there and then."

Again, in neither instance is the anger bad or wrong; it's just giving us different information about the environment we're in and how we should handle it.

So trust your feelings, just be sure what's causing them happened "now" or "then."

February 3, 2016 – Finding Clarity in Times of Chaos

Chaos is the experience of a seemingly orderly world coming apart at the seams. It can appear in one of any number of areas of our lives with devastating impact and precious little warning.

Too much information is coming at us too fast when chaos rears and it can leave us paralyzed. Part of us wants to run, part of us feels like we are frozen, and deep inside we know we have to find some way to deal with what's happening proactively or things will get a whole lot worse.

And we know at some very deep level that children and adolescents run from trouble, but adults don't! In a way, it is the essence of what we call "manhood" to face that which is frightening and stand our ground.

So how do you find clarity when chaos arrives at your door?

Breathe, feel the fear and press on!

You're going to be afraid, and if you're not you simply aren't paying attention. Fear isn't a problem; it's just information from your body that you can use in the crisis.

Acknowledge its presence, feel your feet on the ground, breathe slowly and deeply and notice what happens. You'll probably notice that the fear ebbs and flows like all feelings do. The more you breathe and the less you fight it, the more quickly fear will dissipate.

Now PRESS ON! Fear that's resisted can put our brains into vapor lock. We can literally paralyze ourselves with worry about what "might" happen.

But we can't control outcome, just effort. Focus on what you can do, what you do know and on the "here and now." We can't change the past, we can't control the future, but we can take action in the present moment.

Remember all battles are fought and won in the here and now!

Collect the dots so you can connect the dots

Not knowing is chaos's most potent weapon. What we don't know frightens us and we can become paralyzed by the complex nature of what we're up against.

The more we can think in a structured even handed way about the problem, the better our analysis, and the more we know the more and better action we can take. So here are 5 questions that can be helpful in bringing structure and clarity to chaos:

What am I certain has actually been done?

Why was it done?

What was it supposed to achieve?

How was it implemented?

What were its consequences, in fact?

The more you can focus on facts and not speculation or conjecture, the more you are able to assess the problem and act decisively. But you have to know before you do. Obtaining accurate information (“collecting the dots”) is a prerequisite to effective decision making (“connecting the dots”).

Ultimately, victory is measured by our ability to be in the chaos without becoming part of it.

February 11, 2016 – Fear: Getting to Know It and Making Friends With It

For a lot of us men, talking about our fears is something we seldom, if ever, do. Fear is construed as a form of weakness. We deny it, we ignore it, and by doing so we perpetuate a myth as old as civilization itself, that the brave feel no fear.

If you study warrior cultures for over 30 years as I have, however, you will discover that our society is horribly confused about fear. This can have horrific consequences personally, professionally, and for our nation as a whole.

So let’s talk of fear, but let’s do so from the perspective of those who really know and understand it; history’s professional warriors.

“Untutored courage is useless . . .”

Gen. George S. Patton once remarked that “Untutored courage is useless in the face of educated bullets!” Warriors understand brave is good, smart is better. Fear informs you when things are going bad and requires you to reassess your tactics and perhaps even your strategy.

In ancient warfare the consequences of failure were not just death, but the destruction of your culture and enslavement of those you loved and were trying to protect. Reckless gestures to prove one “wasn’t scared” when the stakes were so high were the actions of a fool then, and they are today as well.

The first responders I have worked with understand this better than most. Gestures of bravado to prove “fearlessness” are scorned. As one law enforcement officer put it, “When your job is to save as many lives as you can, dying trying to prove you’re not scared is pretty stupid. A corpse never saved anybody.”

“Courage . . . is . . . mastery.”

Mark Twain wrote that “Courage isn’t the absence of fear, but its mastery.” Fear is a biological response to the belief that we are in danger. Fear lets us know that there is something or someone in our environment that we need to pay attention to **RIGHT NOW!** Fear requires us to take action.

It doesn’t differentiate between big dangers or small ones. If it’s ignored, it yells louder. It is automatic, it is powerful and it helps keep us alive.

Doing away with fear (even if that were possible) creates a warrior who lacks the capacity to evaluate or assess risk. Better to think of fear as ancient warriors did; as a trusted advisor standing by one’s side and whispering in one’s ear when things didn’t feel quite right.

Mastery of fear is simply the willingness to acknowledge that we’re frightened and tolerate those uncomfortable feelings for just a second longer; then another second after that.

The brave feel fear, they're just willing to feel it longer so they can do what needs to be done. They know that it's living every second with integrity that is what, truly, makes us brave.

So commit to living each second well!

February 18, 2016 – “Don’t Invite the Vampire In” and Other Strategies to Help Hold Your Personal Boundaries

Boundaries are our rules for how much of ourselves we are comfortable sharing in any relationship. They govern the level of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual intimacy we have with others.

Each individual can set their boundaries at whatever level of closeness they wish. Those choices, however, are strongly influenced by culture, family, and our life experiences. A good boundary lets me know where your rights, obligations, life choices end, and mine begin.

When appropriate boundaries are in place, we feel physically comfortable and there is an absence of confusion about who has the right to know, say, and do what.

And then there are those other times when . . .

We get an uncomfortable feeling that someone wants information from or about us, but the request or the information sought doesn't feel appropriate.

Or we get an awkward feeling that another adult expects that what we think or feel has to be justified to them.

Lastly, a person seems to want our help. We pull out all the stops to “save” them, and they thank us profusely as they defeat all our attempts to help!

What's going on? Life is giving us a crash course in boundaries and their violation. Here are some things to consider as you navigate these waters.

Know your own story

Look at what you were taught by parents or others about having boundaries. Have you adopted those rules as your own out of conscious choice or simply habit?

If not by choice, then you may end up repeating the same problems. Avoid this trap by consciously selecting your own relationship rules about what feels okay and what doesn't.

Otherwise if you simply do what “they” did, you'll probably get what “they” got!

Your boundaries, your rules

I don't have to like your rules around boundaries, but I do have to respect them! If I can't, won't or don't, you don't have the problem. I DO!

People who don't respect your boundaries should be promptly shown a new and exciting invention. It's called the door!!

Don't invite the Vampire in!

According to legend you're safe from a vampire while you are in your home unless, of course, you invite them in. People with bad boundaries are, literally, like vampires; you're safe from them unless your lack of boundaries invites them in.

So when you meet someone who can't refrain from sharing information about their life or other people's that is inappropriate, or someone who just can't understand why you don't see things the way they do, or who makes it clear that they and their happiness are your responsibility, the vampire has come a-knocking!

This is not someone to take into your confidence, to try to reason with, or to try to rescue from their present circumstances.

This is the vampire. Don't invite them into your life!

February 22, 2016 – “Bowling to the Shark”

Someone once said, “It's not when my problems come one at a time that I have difficulty. It's when they travel in a pack that things get out of hand!”

Challenges test us. There is no doubt about it

Study after study, however, suggests that it's how we make meaning of what is happening that governs how well we manage the impact of hard times. People who are the most resilient, who manage stress the best, view challenges as an unavoidable aspect of life, not a sign that the universe has it in for them.

It is the ability to make meaning, to influence how we think about a challenge, which can determine how successful we are in dealing with life's adversities. Often, if we believe that we will grow and be strengthened by challenges, we can see the wisdom that we have gained (about life, and perhaps about ourselves or others).

One of my favorite illustrations of this is the Zen story of the pilgrim and the shark. Once a devout pilgrim took a sea voyage to visit a famous temple, hoping to have one of the priests enlighten her as to the reasons for suffering in the world.

The ship was caught in a terrible storm, and all the crew and passengers except for the pilgrim were lost at sea. After the storm passed, the pilgrim saw a distant island and began to swim to it, but tired and became convinced she would drown before she reached safety.

Wondering why she had been so harshly treated despite being so devout, she prayed to be saved. Suddenly the fin of a great white shark broke the water's surface.

Terrified at the horrible prospect of being attacked by the shark, she began to swim furiously towards the island. Several times she tired and became convinced she would drown, but each time the shark's fin broke the water's surface and she would once again swim determinedly for shore.

Eventually she reached the island and safety. Once on the shore, she turned to the ocean and intended to curse both the shark and her deity for treating her so maliciously.

But the pilgrim paused, and realized her prayer had been answered; she had been saved. Reflecting further, she realized that had it not been for the shark and the fear it caused in her, she would have drowned long before she could have reached the island. In that moment the pilgrim realized that but for the shark, a thing she had at that time deemed to be the worst thing that could possibly happen to her, she never would have survived.

Understanding this truth, the pilgrim bowed to the shark as its fin slowly headed back out to sea, thanking it for the gift of her life.

May we all have the wisdom to “bow to our sharks,” as they appear in our own lives.

March 1, 2016 – “To Keep All Safe ‘til My Return”: The Importance of Mentoring

In Homer's “Odyssey,” when Odysseus was called upon to join the Greek armies in their battle with Troy, he left both his kingdom and his new born son, Telemachus.

To protect and guide his son, Odysseus asked a warrior companion to assume those obligations. The charge he gave to this guardian was simple but profound: “I entrust my family to you and charge you to keep all safe until my return.”

The warrior’s name was “Mentor.”

As the legend suggests the obligation to mentor the young and the responsibilities that role entails are weighty indeed. The failure of those qualified to assume them, however, ultimately leads to a youth that lack guidance and protection (and a kingdom that lacks leaders who will lead it properly).

Here are 3 principles to help you be a better mentor, or to know a true mentor when you see one.

(1) Wisdom is an earned commodity.

Mentor was a wise and seasoned warrior. He knew what he was talking about because he had lived it.

Wisdom is not simply information or knowledge, but the ability to apply that information and knowledge in a successful manner.

Wisdom is earned, and it often is earned at the cost of a few scars. Mentors share their scars in the hope their charges will learn from their hard won understanding.

True mentors don’t need you to be impressed; they know who and what they are and that’s enough.

(2) In a 2-dimensional world, mentoring is a 3-dimensional job!

We love our devices’ screens. The problem with screens teaching us things about life, however, is that life is 3-dimensional experience and screens only give us a 2-dimensional focus.

Screens give us height and width, but no depth!

Mentoring is about the depth.

Good mentors model the behaviors other seek to learn. They “walk the walk,” so the 2-dimensional skill of “talking the talk” is rendered mostly irrelevant. Mentors don’t tell you how to know what they know; instead they help lead you to find your own answers. To teach this type of integrity, the mentor must be willing to be present in all of his or her humanity, and let go of any need to be a two dimensional cut out of Superman or Superwoman.

(3) The kingdom’s future will rise or fall on the quality of its mentors.

As go the young, so goes the kingdom.

Mentoring is a duty we owe to our young and ourselves. Those who have survived life’s challenges and difficult times possess hard won wisdom. It needs to be shared.

To ensure our society grows, improves, and becomes a better and more just place for those who follow in our footsteps, we must all be willing to be Mentor . . .

. . . To keep all safe. . .

. . . Until the King’s return!

March 7, 2016 – Courage is a Learned Skill

Mark Twain wrote, “Courage isn’t the absence of fear, but its mastery.” All of us strive to act with courage, honor, and integrity. Yet we often judge ourselves harshly for those moments when we needed courage and found it lacking.

In the world most of us grew up in courage, like other virtues, was a quality we were either born with or not. We were lucky or not so lucky, but either way we couldn't change who we were.

The truth is that courage is a skill like any other skill. It is a conditioned response to an environmental stimulus: perceived danger. It is our nervous system being able to tolerate the stress and fear we feel, and still allow us to perceive what is happening accurately, and respond appropriately.

So how do we learn the skill of courage? The first step is to realize that fear is a constant and natural response to changing conditions in the environment. Our nervous systems are "wired" to perceive change as threatening. It's how our species survived. Fear is immediate feedback about danger: either the danger that is actually present, or the danger that was present in the past.

The second step is to become acquainted with what we fear and why. All of our fears have a story. We must know these stories to gauge how they are impacting our behavior in ways that don't serve us. As we say in the martial arts, "Awareness must precede control."

Thirdly, we have to learn to breathe and become acquainted with how we experience the feeling of fear in our body without needing or trying to change it. It's not a problem. It's there for a reason. Normalizing fear and understanding its' appearance allows it to become an ally that serves you, not an enemy bent on defeating you.

Finally, we have to place ourselves in situations where we can practice bravery. Like any other skill, start small and build your capacity with time and repetition. Maybe it's introducing yourself to someone you don't know, or going someplace new or different, or speaking up when you would normally remain silent.

Like anything else, "what" you do is less important than "that" you do. Acting with courage is not an event, it's a process. It's the result of seeing what needs to be done and then doing it in either small or large ways as circumstances dictate, time after time.

The opportunity to show courage also often presents itself around issues involving right and wrong. It is in those moments, when we act with integrity for integrity's sake, that our "practice" pays off and we see ourselves acting as the best people we can be.

So I invite you to come to know what every warrior culture understood; the essential truth of courage is that without fear, there can be no courage. So to learn courage, make friends with fear.

March 16, 2016 – Finding a Way or Making One

In 219 B.C.E. the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, confronted a daunting task. He had been ordered to lead his army into Italy to attack Rome. The only way to achieve surprise and do so quickly was to cross the Alps. No army had done that before.

His subordinates argued against it. It was impossible. It had never been done before. His army was too small to defeat the Romans, even if they did survive.

Hannibal was undeterred. He knew that he would surely fail if he hesitated. He knew, even if he didn't know how to move, that he had to move!

Knowing this, his orders were simple and direct. "We will find a way, or we will make one." He successfully crossed the Alps, and defeated one Roman army after another sent against him.

By the time we reach adulthood, we've fashioned powerful beliefs about the world ... who we are. . .what we are capable of ... and what is outside our grasp. We often believe that we are simply being logical and listening to our wise and rational brain. The things we wish we could change are immutable. . .unbendable. "It's just the way things are." The strange thing is that we can change our brain, even as adults ... and ... when we do. . .we can change our world.

More and more scientific studies confirm that our brains remain open to change throughout our entire life, and well into our adult life span. Known as "neuroplasticity" our brains continue to change in response to things we can influence or effect.

Studies show the neural circuitry of our brains change and adapt, creating new neural patterns, in response to the thoughts we think, the people we are in relationship with, and what we focus our attention on. Meditation, mindfulness practices, and developing the skills of self-observation and emotional awareness one can learn in counseling, all can help us to literally "rewire" our brains.

Much as it was with Hannibal, it is belief that often controls what we will do. . .what we will dare. Change happens when we believe in the possibility of change and then, most importantly, take the actions to bring it about.

So we have to embark on our sometimes frightening journey of growth as did Hannibal, with a trust and a belief that, come what may, we are all always capable of finding a way. . .or making one!

March 21, 2016 – Defending North Fork

We are compelled daily to confront the evolving role of men in our culture. As we try to come to grips with who we are and would like to be, we run into the expectations of others, and who they wish us to be, or in some cases, not be.

We confront the questions that arise on this journey.

What does it mean to be a good man?

How do I live my life as a man of courage and honor?

Our society emphasizes individual achievement as the primary measure of masculine success. But sometimes individual success can bear little relationship to a sense of true purpose in life.

One of the unique insights ancient warrior cultures possessed, was that individual accomplishment by a warrior meant nothing if it didn't better the lot of the community at large. The code of the warrior was about service to others. The Japanese word "samurai," in fact, does not mean warrior but, rather, "one who serves."

It was in the service of the greater good and not individual glory, that a man could find true satisfaction and peace. Known as the warrior's "transpersonal commitment," this was the recognition that we all must be committed to something greater than ourselves. Service to others, the family, the clan, or the community he came from, was ultimately what gave his life and his sacrifice meaning.

This understanding of the role men play in serving the community, known as "generativity," appears as we reach our 40's, 50's and 60's. We recognize how important it is that we, in some way, try to make things better for those who will "follow on behind us."

Ultimately, as we become mature men, we realize that there are things in life worth defending. One of my favorite examples of this is found in the old 60's western television series "The Rifleman."

Set in the 1880's in the fictional town of North Fork, New Mexico, it tells the story of a widowed rancher, Lucas McCain and the young son he raises, Mark. Lucas is a renowned expert with his specially modified rifle, but he ultimately wishes to simply live his life and raise his son in peace.

Unfortunately, he is often called upon to battle those who would threaten community. The series emphasized a truth I believe all men know. Our communities, our families, and our society are best served when men commit themselves to improving and defending them.

Much as did our warrior forefathers, our sense of ourselves as men of true strength and power comes only when we serve others as well as ourselves, as both guardians and nurturers.

So when men have that feeling of something missing, they often find that they're just looking for their North Fork . . . and when they find it, they know where they belong, and they know what's worth defending.

Good luck in finding your North Fork and, when you do, defend it well.

March 30, 2016 – HOW DO YOU CLIMB MT. EVEREST?

7 Steps to Meeting Life's Challenges

It goes without saying that life is challenging. Some challenges we seek; some find us all by themselves. Dealing with them effectively determines the quality of our life.

Much as succeeding in life, getting to the top of Mount Everest requires the ability to meet and respond to what can seem insurmountable. Everest stands 29,028 feet, 5 and ½ miles above sea level and, much as life can be, it's not "user friendly" for the unprepared. Here are 7 steps to surmounting all the "Everests" in your life:

(1) Prepare mentally and physically for your climb. Life and climbing both require mental and physical stamina and endurance. Of the two, the mental part is the most important. Focus on what you want and not what you fear.

(2) Find a good guide. Find someone who has made "the climb" and knows the way there and the way back. A good guide, in climbing and in life, helps you develop the skills you need so you'll be able to do it on your own in the future. The challenges we face in life are like the weather on Everest. It's neither for you nor against you. Mother Nature's neutrality, however, is unforgiving. Life's challenges can be the same way. They are merciless with those who fail to adapt!

(3) Plan a way there. Moving without thinking can be disastrous. Know your destination, and plan a process to get there. Proper planning prevents poor performance.

(4) Plan a back-up route. If Plan A doesn't go the way you expect, and always assume that it won't, have a "fall back" plan. Studies show that our decision making isn't as effective when we are trying to make decisions under stress. Don't try to "wing it" when the clock is ticking.

(5) Sometimes to go up you first have to go down. Always keep your focus on the goal you've set. All that matters is that you get there and back safe and sound. Don't get hung up on it looking or being a certain way.

(6) Listen to the mountain. Any challenge forces us to be more flexible and creative in our response. Pay attention to what your efforts are creating. Life is like the mountain, it gives you immediate feedback about what's working and what's not. Feedback that something's not working isn't failure. It's knowledge and applied knowledge is POWER!

(7) One step at a time! You reach the top of Mount Everest, and you surmount any of life challenges, by taking it "one step at a time." Hard times, like a hard climb, can be tiring and we can try to speed up the process by hurrying but this often just wears us out. Challenges require us to call upon reserves of stamina and endurance we didn't realize we had, but each step brings us closer to our goal.

April 7, 2016 – Relationship and Choice

Relationships are the foundation of our lives. We have relationships with other people, with organizations and with ourselves. Some we choose, others were chosen for us. We can be happy with the ones we have, or want new and better ones.

Sometimes the hard part for us to remember is that as adults, we ultimately have choice in all our relationships. As children we often lacked the power to decide for ourselves who we would be, or who we would be with. That feeling of having no choice can linger as we grow older. But we always need to remember, as adults in relationship, "I can't" is often used as an explanation for not choosing. "I didn't" or "I won't" are more often the answer.

Whatever relationships we are in, we have to ask ourselves do they help me to be the best person I can be, or do they hold me back. The answer to this question can often be frightening or painful. If we are willing to risk our relationship as it is, however, we create the possibility that it can become something else.

Something more.

Something better.

The choice is always ours.

April 15, 2016 – 12 Steps to Making Sense Of Your Story

In order to change something in our life, we have to come to grips with how it got there. It can be helpful to remember that as human beings, we are always trying to find the meaning of what happens in our lives, and why. We are "meaning creating" beings. The more we understand how we create meaning, the more we can understand the story of our own life.

I've found these 12 steps helpful in understanding how and why certain events, people, places and beliefs helped shape the story of my life, and the lives of my clients.

We have certain innate, inborn characteristics. Others develop over time.

Our goal is always to preserve our life at the safest level possible.

To be safe, we seek to avoid pain and promote pleasure. When given a choice between the two, the desire to avoid pain will be stronger.

We strive to find some way to live in balance with our environment (family, job, relationships, or any group we are a part of).

We survive because we are able to adapt to our environment.

Our behavior always moves with a purpose or a goal. It is a response to some stimulus in our environment. But we may not always be consciously aware that we are reacting to a stimulus.

Our behavior is dynamic. No single act, thought or choice can be understood unless we understand the story that drives it. It is part of the overall story we have learned to tell ourselves about who we are, how life is, and how we can expect the world to treat us. Defenses are the ways we learn to protect ourselves from forces in our environment that feel unsafe, or actually are unsafe. These patterns become ingrained if repeated often enough. They become the bedrock of our story: what we fear, what we avoid and what worries us most.

Once we recognize a pattern has been formed, we have to replace it with another, more positive pattern in order to change it. Left alone or unchallenged, our old pattern will usually reemerge. We will do what we have learned and know how to do.

These patterns, or “habituated responses” are often triggered by events, feelings, the behavior of others, and even our own thoughts and beliefs (some of which we may consciously understand the reason for, and others not).

Some memories are conscious (explicit) and we have actual, movie-like recall of persons, places and events. Others return as feelings, intuition, or a sense of something happening again (implicit). Implicit memories don’t have a “movie” that we can associate them with. Both types are real and both drive our story.

You are the most powerful and final author of your story. Change your story and you change your life. Change your life and you change your world.

May 2, 2016 – 5 Tips to Surfing on the Power of Positive Thoughts – Part I

What do we know about the power our thoughts have to impact the quality of our life? Simple. “As a person thinks, so shall they be.” (Proverbs 23:7)

We can ride the positive power of our thoughts like a surfer rides a wave. When we do that consciously, we can use that power to get to where we want to go.

“Surfing” the waves of our negative thoughts, on the other hand, will usually get us pounded by the surf at best, or completely under the waves at worst. And negative thoughts often come upon us like a powerful wave does at the beach, before we realize it’s on us!

We can spend a lot of time thinking about what’s wrong in our life; what we don’t have, can’t find, don’t deserve, and will never know.

And what is the impact of all of our negative thinking? Sadly, it’s once again simple. Negative consequences, unhappiness, and feeling defeated by life are the predictable results.

That’s the bad news. The good news is positive thoughts have exactly the opposite effect. Studies indicate that people with positive attitudes live 10 years longer on average than their more negative contemporaries.

More importantly, an analysis of all the studies done of positive thinking and its impact, involving more than 275,000 people, showed that positive thinking not only reflected success in life but helped produce it as well!

So, to help you ride the surf, here are 5 tips to catching the waves of your thoughts and harnessing your power of positivity.

Know when you’re going negative. As we say in the martial arts “awareness precedes control.” To change something, you have to first be aware you are doing it. Monitor your

self-talk. Pay attention to what you say, both out loud and in your head, and how you say it. Harness your power to choose what you focus on and use it to imagine solutions.

2. See it, but don't judge it.

Observe negative thinking but don't judge yourself for it. It's not about perfectly succeeding or never failing; it's about knowing what you do and how you do it.

Develop a neutral, unemotional and nonjudgmental curiosity about your negative thoughts. Rather than get upset when you realize a negative thought has cropped up, what if your response was "Isn't that interesting? I wonder where that came from and why it's here now."

Energy spent in "judging" is not promoting "learning."

3. Know "negative" when you see it!

There are certain ways of going negative and we all use one or more of them. I won't go into great detail here, but a quick run through the top 10 will suffice:

All or nothing negativity: It's "always" bad, because it's "never" good.

Overgeneralization: One problem is actually a million just waiting to get me.

To be continued next Monday, May 9 with Part II.

May 10, 2016 – 5 Tips to Surfing on the Power of Positive Thoughts – Part II

Mental filter: Why see anything good when there is so much bad to look at?

Disqualifying the positive: Good things are just a fluke, the true nature of the universe is bad things happening!

Jumping to conclusions: Why wait for the evidence, go negative early and often!

Catastrophizing: It is and always will be the worst it can possibly be!

Emotional reasoning: Why do I need facts or context? I feel a certain way so that is obviously the "TRUTH"!

"Should" statements: Things, people, and places should be a certain way, whether that makes sense or not.

Labeling/Mislabeling: People and events are labeled as being all one way.

Personalizing: It's entirely your fault, it's entirely my fault, but no matter what, someone is always totally to blame!

(4) Bring your surf board to the beach!

Negative thinking is a learned behavior. To replace it with a better habit takes conscious focused practice over time. Trying to positively think, however, when you're in the throes of a negative meltdown it is like trying to find a board after the big wave hits you.

In short, good luck!

Try this as a way to prepare for the wave before it hits. Take a half hour of quiet time during the day and take a sheet of paper and on the left write out one or more of your most frequent negative thoughts. This can be hard, but be patient and really try to not only think about but feel how that negative belief affects your body.

An example of a negative thought might be, "I'm really stupid and I can't figure anything out."

Now write an equally powerful positive response next to it on the right hand side. Make sure it's one you truly believe and have an emotional connection to, or at least find plausible. If you get stuck, sometimes talking to someone you know and can trust can

help you come up with a more positive response, especially if the negativity is about some unhelpful thing you say about yourself.

So a positive response to the above negative thought might be, “If I take my time and practice, I can figure a lot of things out.”

Now you have your response. Keep it with you at all times, and continue to write it down daily if you need it. Repeat it to yourself every day. Shoot for 60 times a day for 21 days. Studies show that for most of us, if we do something 60 times a day for 21 days we create change in our behavior.

(5) Better Surfing = Practice + Patience

To master anything, we need to be patient and know that repetitive focused effort always yields result.

Trust the process.

Good luck.

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