

Pathways

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CONTENTS

Mentally Robust 1.....	1
Mentally Robust 2.....	2
Introspection & Retrospection	3

“They are able, because they think they are able.”

Virgil



American
Organization for
Bodywork
Therapies of
Asia

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Mentally Robust 1

Having just graduated after more than four years of the most intense studying that I have ever known, I am taking some time to reflect on what it took to get through the program.

As a professional coach I have two favorite questions:

What do you want?

What are you willing to do to get there?

Ultimately, whatever it is that we manifest in life is a function of the second question.

You can tell me all day long what it is that you want in life, but if you are not willing to do “whatever it takes to get there”, then your dreams and plans will remain exactly that...dreams and plans.

Harsh words?

Probably.

Now for some of us there are some things that we are not willing to do for what we want in life, and in a lot of ways this speaks to the values conflicts that inevitably emerge on the road of life. Say for instance I want financial freedom... the answer “whatever it takes” would necessarily include theft, extortion and any one of several other unacceptable choices. Under these circumstances, my values would not permit me to do “whatever it takes.” So we can refine “whatever it takes”, to “whatever it takes that is in alignment with my core values.”

Better.

There is a hidden trap here though...

The line presupposes that I know my true core values and live my life in alignment with my true core values. Many of us think that we know our core values, but it seems to me that it is only when we are deeply challenged that we discover the values that truly guide our ship of life. Only during the worst of the storms that life brings us

do we discover the rudder and sailing skills that will steer our ship to safe waters. Smooth sailing in calm seas is easy, you only require basic skills for that. Sailing in stormy waters requires a much deeper mastery.

The next trick is to figure out how your core values actually manifest in your life and how they affect your behaviour.

So it was not until I was nearing the end of my degree program in Oriental Medicine that I discovered exactly “whatever it takes” might mean for me on my path to graduation.

So where does that get us? Well actually, it creates clarity, resolution, commitment and tenacity.

Once you know what you want and know what you are willing to do to get there, then everything else falls away.

What remains is:

1. a clear goal,
2. an understanding of currently available resources,
3. a sense of what resources might be required that are currently either unavailable or latent within, and
4. the work to be done to achieve the goal.

Seems pretty simple...and in a lot of ways, it is. The actual doing might not be simple, but once you know that you will not compromise your goal, everything else is moot, and the outcome is assured.

Now don't get me wrong, this is not to say that the path to the achievement of the goal may not be fraught with risk and opportunity. It is merely to say that once you know what you are willing to do to get what you want, the inevitable doubts and challenges that emerge along the way are easier to navigate and survive. ☺

Mentally Robust 2

Hmm...looks like I might have several articles with the same title here.

One of the things that Toastmaster's taught me and something that was really a much earlier gift from my martial arts training as well...was that mentally robust people do three things.

1. they are willing to fail their way to success.
2. they do not dwell on past failures, except to learn how to embrace positive change.
3. they retain a clear sense of self, are committed to personal growth and are lifelong-learners.

Implied in these three statements is the idea that mentally robust people do not have a lot of time to engage in self-pity, or regret. Again, this is not to say that we may not know regret...I will tell you that I most assuredly do. What it does say, is that we can examine the events for which we might entertain feelings of regret and learn from them.

In some ways, it speaks to the notion that there are no mistakes, merely opportunities to learn. That does not imply, however, that those opportunities are always without pain...sometimes the learning and growing opportunities that we experience can be exceedingly painful in very different ways. The pain can range all the way from intense, deep emotional pain in the loss of a relationship, or the physical pain of a health challenge through to devastating financial pain in the loss of a career.

The point here is that if we are failing our way to success, then any perception of current failure is a sign post on the road, not a destination.

For some, however, failure can become a destination, a place from which we do not recover. How does that happen? I think failure becomes a destination (temporary or permanent) because we

lose focus and therefore give away personal power. Moving forward requires many forms of strength, and these forms of strength include a degree of tenacity, resolution, resilience, determination, commitment and focus. What I'm talking about here really, I guess, is self-control....not in the usual sense of the term, but maybe.

The mentally robust can go through the eye of the storm, but not give away their control, nor, by extension, their power. They know who they are, and they know that "this too shall pass."

What this says, in essence is that mentally robust people may meet failure, but retain their personal power. They retain the inner power to change, the power to become something new, the power to learn, the power to grow. If we keep these forms of power during times of duress, then we are exerting a level of self-control.

In challenging times we become capable of changing outcomes rather than being undermined by the stresses that we endure.

Ultimately then, failing our way to success involves:

1. keeping an solid eye on the future goal,
2. a firm grip on the present work that can be accomplished,
3. a willingness to be humble and learn from the past
4. and therefore retain the ability to move forward, move on, begin again. To rise from the ashes of your own fires.

There is a not-so hidden implication here...change is inevitable. None of us can stay where we are for long, no matter what we might think. We age, we have new experiences, and if we are wise, we will greet change wherever it occurs, however it occurs and in whatever guise it presents itself.

It is easy to greet change when it is easy or effortless, but the most profound and life-altering gifts of learning and growth are in the events that cause us to look deep within to find hidden resources of character. So I suppose that I am saying that mentally robust people will greet challenges with the same level of commitment and buoyancy of spirit that they do any event in life.

Kipling invites us to greet Triumph and Disaster as imposters and to treat them the same. Here then, is a key for the mentally robust.

Finally, we also know that work does not always bear immediate fruit and that a degree of patience is required before success is apparent.

We live in a world of instant gratification, so this last one is sometimes harder for us to accept. If we are mentally robust, then we do not quit too soon, we see things through, even when we are not capable of seeing the end product in the moment.

All of which brings up the need for tenacity and commitment to see things through, even though we may be working ourselves to the bone and not seeing any immediate rewards.

So what does all of that say?

Robust people believe in themselves, they trust in their work, they have faith in the outcome, and they know that any other path would be to compromise their integrity...so they keep going. Lastly, people engaged in work do not expect that they will succeed except by dint of their own efforts. The world owes them nothing. And curiously, as Goethe reminds us, it is often uncanny how the universe shifts for those who develop a major definite purpose and put all their resources behind the achievement of that purpose. ☺

“There is no present like the time”

***Quote from the movie:
The second best exotic marigold hotel***

Introspection & Retrospection

Actually, I'm continuing the same theme as the last two articles, but figured that you might like a different title.

So how do mentally robust people expend their mental energy?

I guess that the first thing is that they focus on the present, the positive and the proactive.

We have already said that mentally robust souls do not dwell on the past, which means that they do not wallow in self-pity or ruminate over past 'mistakes', they move on by learning something positive from each of their experiences and they let go of the past. In other words they do not allow the past to define the present or to exert a negative effect on the future.

Consequently, mentally robust people expend their mental energy wisely by engaging in positive thoughts...or they replace any emerging negative thoughts with positive ones...or at least ones that are more productive.

You might think that I am telling you that mentally robust people are living with some degree of denial, because they work assiduously to replace negative thoughts with positive one...not what I'm saying at all.

There is an ability to accept the feelings of the moment without being defined by them. We are all beset by stress, grief, fatigue, trauma and each of them brings with it a barrage of emotions. Mentally robust people recognize the emotions of the moment, and know that the emotions are transient and circumstantial, therefore can be seen as a response to an event, not a defining quality of the person.

Recognizing emotions as transient and ephemeral, does not make us callous, far from it; it makes us capable of choice, change and recovery during

times of stress, or trauma.

Part of that ability lies in our times of introspection. Introspection is the ability to look within and see the true core of self, the self that is defined by the values we hold and the ability to live those values on a daily basis.

As a result, mentally robust folk can be alone with their thoughts and can be comfortable with being on their own.

They can take time to reflect each day, to meditate, and to examine choices.

As a result of introspection and also the retrospection that comes with looking at previous outcomes, it becomes possible to compare outcomes and challenges to core values and life purposes. The direct consequence of such an approach is clarity, certainty and resolution. By comparing outcomes to core values and life purpose, it becomes possible to chart a course and make course corrections that are in alignment with your goals.

Lastly, mentally robust people remain buoyant and appear to remain happy despite any turmoil that occurs in life. I suspect that they remain happy because they do not indulge in the 3 C's. We have discussed the 3 C's before. Mentally robust folk do not criticize, complain nor engage in condemnation.

It is much easier to look at life with a smile when we are less apt to criticize what we see around us, complain about our lot in life, or condemn others for their choices and actions.

As individuals we are rarely in possession of all the facts about any event. The most obvious reason is that we are not all-seeing or all-knowing, even about our own selves. It makes sense then, to avoid criticizing and condemning others for their words, choic-

es or actions, because we simply do not know all the facts. Criticism and condemnation are outward focused responses. Complaining is normally an inward focused response. We complain when what we think we want is not matched by what we think we are getting. Complaining does not, however, change a darn thing. All it seems to do (for me at least) is make us (me) more miserable. Complaining generally focusses on what we don't have, rather than what we can do to achieve our goals. Complaining then, is corrosive.

Perhaps something that is even more pertinent is that complaining implies that we are capable of seeing all outcomes and are certain that the one that we think we see is the one that we don't want...so we complain about how unfair life is!

I don't know about you, but invariably when I find myself willing to complain about something, I have missed a key component of the situation. When I refrain from complaining and ask myself what I might have missed, my perspective is changed by some realization about the circumstances in which I find myself. That realization normally alters my perspective and allows me to chart a more positive course through the situation.

OK, I'm done for now...I'm feeling a bit more mentally robust than I did before I started this newsletter, because my words were a form of introspection concerning the results of my recent four years in school and a retrospective concerning what I might have learned...beyond the obvious.

It is my hope that there is something in here that is of use in your world.

☺

“Difficult roads often lead to beautiful destinations.”

Unknown

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