
Learn to Win and Mentor Others

By Lou Tice (as seen in Personal Excellence®)

Doesn't it make good sense to change our internal picture before we go around trying to change the results we're getting?

People with an optimistic view of their capabilities out-perform those who are doubtful or simply more "realistic," even though their abilities are virtually identical. They don't give up easily or worry about obstacles because the final outcome is never in doubt – they see themselves as creative, resourceful problem solvers. They believe themselves into being more. They see themselves as winners, and they act like it.

We can feel like winners, no matter what others tell us or how favorable the current circumstances may be, but only if being a winner is consistent with our self-image. Why do some people see themselves as winners and act accordingly, while so many others don't?

Learning To Win – And Lose

Learning to see oneself as a winner and to feel like a winner happens primarily as a result of having successful experiences and thinking self-affirming thoughts. When we believe our efforts will be successful, we become venturesome and are most likely to undertake an activity or task. Because we expect to succeed, we persist until we do. This successful experience causes self-affirming thoughts, which boost our self-esteem, enhance self-efficacy, make us feel good, and lead us to believe we will do well in the future. Thus, we attempt more, and the upward spiral continues. This internal system helps us grow and develop – a natural, continuous, quality improvement program.

There is, however, an equally powerful downward spiral that can interrupt the natural growth process. If we believe we are likely to fail, we undertake activities tentatively, expecting a negative outcome. We feel anxious about our performance, and we avoid or remove

ourselves from anxiety-producing situations. When we fail, we say to ourselves, "I told you so," and make a mental note to avoid similar situations in the future.

When we are very young, we have little to say about the experiences to which we're subjected or the messages we receive from the world. The authority figures in our lives shape our early thoughts and feelings. If they abuse this power, we may be conditioned to believe that the world is not a friendly place, that we have to struggle to get our basic needs met, that we are not loved (lovable), valued (valuable) or competent. Years pass and the pattern repeats many times. It becomes part of who we are, imprinted in our brains, and our internal voice, our self-talk, takes on the sound of our harshest critics. We play out the negative conditioning without thinking about it.

Changing the Rules

As adults we can acknowledge these painful early experiences for what they are, let go of them, and move past self-defeating thoughts and behaviors. We can opt for a new and better way of life – choosing not only what we think, but also how we think and respond to our experiences.

Albert Einstein said, "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew." Using our God-given free will, we can learn to think like and be winners, even if we were taught to believe something else. And we can choose to win in a way that makes no one else a loser. To make these choices intelligently, however, we need to know what our options are, how to deal with setbacks, and where to get the tools – the information and resources – we need. Most people know that they could be living vastly more fulfilling lives, and if given the option, tools, and support they will choose to do so.

Over the years, my work has brought me into close contact with many “winners.” The common characteristic is not *what*, but *how* they think. Through a dazzling array of experiences, all of them have learned the importance of clear vision and sense of purpose or mission. They have discovered that clearly envisioned and articulate goals speed their achievement of that purpose. They have developed tremendous resiliency, great faith in their abilities, and self-talk that constantly affirms their own value. They feel deeply connected to the world in which they live and fully accountable for their actions.

The best tools and the latest information won't help us tap into our rich potential until we accept that we are ultimately responsible for who we are, what we do, and who we become. This means that we give up looking for someone or something to blame and abandon the “victim mentality.” If we think like losers (or pessimists), we unconsciously create situations that reinforce our beliefs. When we expect failure and succeed anyway, we toss it off to luck or say it's a “fluke” or “only temporary,” and hold on to our negative beliefs.

If we think of ourselves as losers or failures, we will do what we can to make sure “reality” supports our view. Even positive deviation from that picture makes us uncomfortable, producing anxiety and a desire to “get back where we belong.”

But if our picture of reality is that we deal with obstacles well and persist until we succeed, we will do whatever it takes to make that picture match the world. We will seek challenge, enlist help, solve problems creatively, and refuse to quit until we have achieved our goal. We will see change as opportunity and adapt ourselves to meet it. We become exhilarated with life. And if success eludes us, we won't interpret it as failure. Instead, we will see it as useful information about what doesn't work, a temporary setback.

Mentoring Others to Greatness

Most successful people have benefited from a relationship with an individual who served as a mentor to them. The concept has ancient roots. Mentor was the name of the advisor to Odysseus, King of Ithaca and victorious leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War. So respected was he and so valuable was his guidance that his name has been borrowed to mean any wise and trusted counselor.

I've had many mentors in life. But it wasn't until my grandchildren began to be born that I studied the mentoring process. I wanted to serve them well in this capacity. I wondered: What gives a mentor credibility? What is it that makes him or her someone you would listen to?

I discovered that three principal factors make a mentor credible to us: First, the mentor is like us in some significant way. Second, he or she has achieved a measure of personal success in a relevant field. And third, he or she has mentored or coached others to success in that field. Mentoring is more than being a credible role model. Role models are wonderful, but having someone terrific to watch and emulate won't do you much good unless you believe strongly in your ability to emulate them. We can hold up most admirable models, the highest quality benchmarks, and we can say to our children or to our employees, “Here, look at this, and be like this.” But if they can't see themselves being and doing those things, if the pictures we hold up or the examples we set aren't assimilated, no lasting change will result.

Who have your best mentors been and what have they done for you? I'll bet that that they were people who could see more in you than you could see yourself. They saw you not only as you were, but also as you could be. They didn't focus on your mistakes and shortcomings. Rather, they described to you, frequently and vividly, your strength, power, and extraordinary potential. Because they were credible, you gave sanction to their vision.

Over time, you developed a new internal standard. You said, “Yes, that's me. I am like that.” And you acted accordingly. Mentors are so

convinced that you have greatness in you – their vision of what is possible for you is so clear and powerful – that they convince you, too. And that’s why their motive must be unselfish and their methods both constructive and sound. Parents, grandparents, or teachers who mentor children so they can be proud of them or live vicariously through them are sadly misguided. Good mentors willingly put aside their own agenda to help you express your unique talents – even when your talents will ultimately take you in a different direction. They understand that they can’t motivate or change you – only help you motivate yourself, and become more fully who you most want to be.

People naturally move in the direction of praise – and away from harsh, devaluing criticism. If someone tries to motivate you by making you afraid of what will happen if you don’t do something or by continually pointing out your flaws, faults, and mistakes, you will allow them to influence you only as long as you have no other choice. At your earliest opportunity, you will be out of there. Long before you make your escape, though, your subconscious will help you get away by coming up with creative “reasons” why you can’t perform, including injuries and illness. While they acknowledge problems, good mentors help you stay focused on the solution. Activities that are reinforced (rewarded or praised) tend to be repeated, while activities that are ignored tend to disappear. Mentors are diligent observers and active listeners. They can’t praise something if they haven’t noticed it, can’t reward people appropriately without knowing what they value – what is important to them – and can’t help others over rough spots without understanding where and how they perceive the turbulence.

When you emerge from a mentoring relationship, you have enhanced self-esteem and self-efficacy. You also feel deeply humble and grateful. But you do not believe that the credit for your growth and gains belongs entirely to your mentor. You recognize that what was achieved under your mentor’s tutelage and

guidance was your own doing. And the truly great mentor will encourage you to think so.