

ON GENUINE SUCCESS

8 Brief Lessons for Big Change

There are probably as many definitions for success as there are people who want to succeed. And the targets for our efforts are many. We want to succeed in business. We want to be successful husbands and wives and parents. We want to whittle that golf score down to size. We want to be successful students, whether we are nineteen trying to decide on a major, or 45 trying to master that new computer program, or reaching for that promotion. More of us than ever, want to be successful entrepreneurs, doing what we love and praying for all we are worth that some money will follow. We even want to succeed spiritually --- that is, we want to effectively apply what we believe deep in our hearts to our day to day lives. Whatever your definition for success, wherever your sights are set, here are eight brief, but powerful lessons that will improve your chances of hitting the mark.

LESSON ONE: Forget about Control.

One of the keys to success is accepting full responsibility for ourselves. Accepting this responsibility, contrary to popular belief, has nothing to do with being “in control.” There is a major distinction to be made between being “in control” and accepting the responsibility of being “in charge.” I wouldn’t dare claim to be in control of all of the various aspects of my life, but I do acknowledge that I am the one in charge of my life.

Simply put: I have nothing to say about which cards are dealt me, but everything to say about how I will play those cards.

Be “in charge” but forget about being “in control.” Big difference.

LESSON TWO: Reject the Victim Within.

To accept full responsibility for ourselves is to renounce victimization. Victimization is a state of mind in which we believe that how we are doing in any particular moment is determined more by the circumstances beyond our control than by how we choose to respond to those circumstances.

A victim will blame the dealer of the cards, or blame the person who taught him how to play cards, or maybe even the cards themselves. A victim may even take refuge in blaming himself, not understanding that there is an important difference between “assigning blame,” and “taking responsibility.” To admit that things are not going well in my life because I am a worthless piece of crap is not accepting responsibility. It is quite the opposite. Hiding behind self-blame, and drowning in the resulting shame is one of the most efficient --- not to mention prevalent --- ways for us to avoid personal responsibility.

Being a victim is an indulgence I cannot afford.

LESSON THREE: Recognize the Continuum.

None of us are totally immune to victimization. At one time or another, we all think and act as victims, and we all think and act responsibly. It would be a mistake to claim that you are always a victim, or that you accept full

responsibility for yourself all of the time. Think of responsibility as a continuum along which you move back and forth, depending on any number of variables.

To enhance your chances for success, you will do well to perceive yourself in realistic terms along this continuum, and focus your efforts toward accepting full responsibility one day at a time. Remembering that you are in constant motion all along the continuum is a powerful antidote for that pesky perfectionism.

Change is constant. I am always in motion along the continuum.

LESSON FOUR: Let Go of Perfection.

To be successful you must become both optimistic and realistic. This requires that you come to terms with your own human imperfection. To pretend that your very real human flaws do not exist is certain self-sabotage, as is thinking of yourself as nothing by flaws.

Contrary to popular opinion, striving for perfection is not productive; it is destructive --- at its worst, suicidal. By constantly expecting the impossible of ourselves (perfection), we are set up to fail, over and over again. A perfectionist is not someone who does things perfectly; a perfectionist is someone who believes she is “supposed to” perform perfectly. Perfectionism is a condition of constant pain, and self-absorption.

Do the very best you can, even challenge yourself to stretch beyond your current level of competence, but do not expect perfection.

Perfectionism is a state of constant self-victimization.

LESSON FIVE: Disagree with Your “Shoulds.”

In our efforts (imperfect efforts) to recognize that perfection is not even one of our choices, we come face to face with perfectionism’s energy source: self-criticism. You must learn to identify and reject the highly negatively biased view associated with your self-critical thinking.

Imagine yourself as a separate person from your self-critical thoughts. Experience yourself not as the one doing the criticizing, but as the one being criticized. Although this is never much fun (standing in the line of self-critical fire), separating from those predictable “should monsters” in our heads will create a place for “your own opinion.” It takes some time, but with practice you will learn to remain separate from self-critical thoughts, and ultimately to form your own, more realistic, more positive opinions of yourself.

The bad news is that you can’t just make those negative, toxic thoughts go away. Here is the good news: You don’t have to make them go away. You just have to disagree with them.

Say to your inner Should Monster: I see you, I hear you & I disagree with you. Always reserve the right to disagree with yourself.

LESSON SIX: See the Greater Possibilities.

Any motivational speaker will tell you that in order to succeed, you need to be open to the positive. Learn to see and seek the greater possibilities. Take the time to develop clear images of your goals. Take the risk (and it will feel risky) to practice expecting positive outcomes. When necessary, utilize a simple slogan heard repeatedly in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous: fake it 'til you make it.

Too often, we know much more about what we don't want than what we do want. If we stop there, we will not have any idea how to change, and frequently we will return to the safe haven of the familiar, those old patterns of thinking and behaving that we have already proven to be ineffective. Set your sights on specific goals, your specific goals.

Once you identify something you don't want, put into words
& create a visual image of what you want instead.

LESSON SEVEN: Remain an Independent Thinker.

Trust no one who will tell you they have THE answer, THE way, THE plan, THE diet, THE anything. There are probably as many different approaches to genuine self-improvement as there are people, or at least as many different approaches as there are hucksters (like me) on their soap boxes telling you how to do it.

This lesson is a word to the wise. Take in the information --- from this article and from any other sources that seem potentially credible --- as raw material, raw material to be processed by your own good judgment. Accept nothing at face value. If an idea, a method or a technique appears to have value for you, take it off the shelf, hold it in your own hands, examine it, try it on, or try it out. Make adjustments according to your own good thinking. Accept it as your own "by decision," not "by default." Use the line-item veto; you never have to accept anything all or nothing.

I respect your opinion. I trust my judgment.

LESSON EIGHT: Work from the Inside Out.

To insure that I am pursuing a path of personal responsibility that will lead me to the success I seek, I keep this slogan in mind: "The first part of any conflict that I must solve is that which is between me and me." This is not to say that I will not have legitimate "external" problems with you, or my wife, or boss, or colleague. And this is not to encourage the old codependent (and self-victimizing) approach of habitually opting for self-blame. When I remember to begin by resolving what is between me and me, I am effectively practicing the principle Stephen Covey emphasizes, "First Things First" (Covey, 1989), and being congruent with the simple and powerful truth that growth always moves from the inside out. Growth in its literal sense is expansion. Expansion moves from the inside out.

Consider the ripples in a pool of water when a pebble is dropped in. Now picture it this way: The pebble is dropped in the water, and somewhere far away from the pebble, slight ripples begin to form, moving inward toward the point where the pebble was dropped. The ripples become more and more prevalent as they move in toward the center point where the pebble hit the water.

It is a strange image, isn't it? It is an image that will make no sense to us because it is not based on reality, or at least any reality that we know of yet. We can agree that to expect the ripples to move from the outside in is ridiculous, and yet that is exactly what we are expecting when we wait for others around us, or for our circumstances, to change before we do.

The change I seek always begins with me.

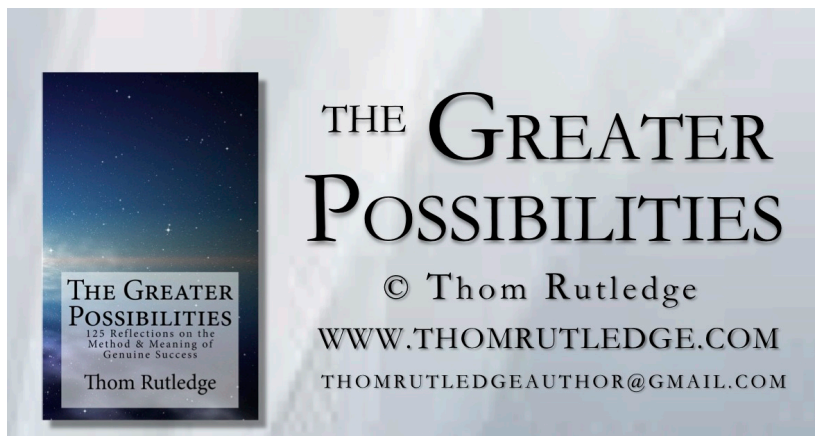
AND ONE TO GROW ON

Put any or all of these eight lessons into practice in your life, and I will guarantee that you will see a change for the better. But give the lessons time to work. One problem that most of us ---if not all of us --- face from time to time is impatience. Remember that perfection is out of the question as long as we are walking around in this human skin. Remember also that there are more often than not many ways to "get it right."

Then, to quote an old Roger Miller song (You Can't Roller Skate in a Buffalo Herd): "All you've got to do is put your mind to it, knuckle down, buckle down, do it, do it, do it." Therein lies the ninth of these eight lessons, and very likely the most important lesson of all: In the end, it is persistence that will always pay off.

NEXT consider your relationship with fear. Who we are, individually and collectively is ultimately determined by one thing: how we relate to fear. Read Thom's article [Let Fear Be Your Teacher](#).

Thom Rutledge is a psychotherapist and author of several books, including *Embracing Fear*, *The Self-Forgiveness Handbook* and *The Greater Possibilities*. For more information about Thom's work, visit www.thomrutledge.com. Or contact Thom directly at thomrutledgeauthor@gmail.com.



The Greater Possibilities is now an inspirational new book. If your organization would like to bring Thom to your next event, contact thomrutledgeauthor@gmail.com.