

SESSION 11. TODAY'S GREATEST ADVENTURE

Audio Transcript

We've defined success as the progressive realization of a worthy goal. The purpose of this message is to tell you of a wonderful way to keep realizing – to keep achieving – your goals, one after another, in the years ahead.

A goal sometimes seems so far off, and our progress often appears to be so painfully slow, that we have a tendency to lose heart. It sometimes seems we'll never make the grade. And we come close to falling back into old habits that, while they may be comfortable now, lead to nowhere.

Well, there's a way to beat this. It's been used successfully by many of the world's most successful people, and it's been advocated by many of the greatest thinkers. It's to live successfully *one day at a time!*

A lifetime is comprised of days, strung together into weeks, months, and years. Let's reduce it to a single day, and then, still further, to each task of that day.

A successful life is nothing more than a lot of successful days put together. It's going to take so many days to reach your goal. If this goal is to be reached in a minimum amount of time, every day must count.

Think of a single day as a building block with which you're building the tower of your life. Just as a stonemason can put only one stone in place at a time, you can live only one day at a time. And it's the way in which these stones are placed that will determine the beauty and strength of your tower. If each stone is successfully placed, the tower will be a success. If, on the other hand, the stones are put down in a hit-or-miss fashion, the whole tower is in danger. Now, this may seem to be a rather elementary way of looking at it, but I want to make my point clear – and it's a good and logical way of looking at a human life.

All right, then, let's take it one day at a time, from the time we wake up in the morning until we drop off to sleep that night, keeping our goal in mind as often as possible.

Now, each day consists of a series of tasks – tasks of all kinds. And the success of a day depends upon the successful completion of most of these tasks. If everything we do during the day is a success – that is, done in the best fashion of which we're capable – we can fall asleep that night in the comfortable knowledge that we've done our very best, that our day has been a success, that one more stone has been successfully put into place.

This is the way to really live!

Do, each day, all that can be done that day. You don't need to overwork – or to rush blindly in to your work, trying to do the greatest possible number of things in the shortest possible amount of time. Don't try to do tomorrow's – or next week's – work today. It's not so much the number of things you do but the quality, the efficiency of each separate action that counts. Gradually, you'll find yourself increasing the number of tasks and performing them all much more efficiently.

To get the habit of success (and that's why successful people go from one success to another – because it's a habit with them), you need only to succeed in the small tasks of each day. This makes a successful day. With enough of these, you have a successful week, month, year – and lifetime.

This is why I say success is not a matter of luck – far from it. It can be predicted and guaranteed, and anyone can achieve it by following this plan. Almost before you realize it, you'll have achieved your goal. In looking back, you'll realize that your success was not attributable to any one day, week, or month. Rather, it was the consistent, unrelenting, successful succession of single days that did the trick. This is the way a skyscraper, a home, or a human life is successfully built. One successful day at a time; and each day comprising a collection of successful tasks – one successful task at a time.

To advance to the place you've chosen, two things are necessary: (1) that you keep your eye on your goal, and (2) that you continue to grow in competence and effectiveness.

Don't get impatient. Don't let hundreds of little distractions that, each day, try to get you off course bother you. Pay no attention to them. Shake them off, and stay steadily on the track. Concentrate on each task of the day, from morning to night, and do each as successfully as you can.

Know full well that if each of your tasks – or at least the great majority of them – is performed successfully, your life has to be successful. There's no other result. There's no way to avoid it.

The men and women who are certain to advance are the ones who become too big for their jobs, who have a clear concept of what they want to be, who know that they can become what they want to become, and who are determined to be what they want to be. Remind yourself at this time that people become exactly what they make up their minds to become.

Are you too big for your present job? If it's obvious to you that you are, it's obvious to others. People are not “given” promotions, as a rule. They promote themselves by becoming too big for their jobs, and by making up their minds exactly what bigger and better jobs, or incomes, they're shooting for. And this is done by taking one day at a time, one task at a time, during each day.

But how do we separate the important tasks from the unimportant ones? Did you ever hear about the single idea for which a man was paid \$25,000? It was worth every penny of it!

The story goes that the president of a big steel company had granted an interview to an efficiency expert named Ivy Lee. Lee was telling his prospective client how he could help him do a better job of managing the company, when the president broke in to say something to the effect that he wasn't at present managing as well as he knew how. He went on to tell Ivy Lee that what was needed wasn't more knowing, but a lot more doing. He said, “We know what we should be doing. If you can show us a better way of getting it done, I'll listen to you – and pay you anything within reason you ask.”

Lee then said that he could give him something in 20 minutes that would increase his efficiency by at least 50 percent. He then handed the executive a blank sheet of paper and said, “Write down on this paper the six most important things you have to do tomorrow.” The executive thought about it and did as requested. It took him about three or four minutes.

Lee then said, “Now number them in the order of their importance to you and to the company.” That took another, three, four, or five minutes.

Then Lee said, “Now put the paper in your pocket, and the first thing tomorrow morning, take it out and look at item number one. Don’t look at the others, just number one, and start working on it. And if you can, stay with it until it’s completed. Then take item number two the same way; then number three, and so on, until you have to quit for the day.”

“Don’t worry if you have finished only one or two items on your list. The others can wait. If you can’t finish them all by this method, you couldn’t have finished them with any other method. And without some system, you’d probably take 10 times as long to finish them – and might not even have them in the order of their importance.”

“Do this every working day,” Lee went on. “After you’ve convinced yourself of the value of this system, have your men try it. Try it as long as you like, and then send me your check for whatever you think the idea is worth.”

The entire interview hadn’t taken more than a half-hour. In a few weeks, the story has it, the company president sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000, with a letter saying the lesson was the most profitable, from a money standpoint, he had ever learned in his life. And it is said that this plan was largely responsible for turning what was then a little-known steel company into one of the biggest independent steel producers in the world.

One idea! The idea of taking things one at a time, in their proper order; of staying with one task until it’s successfully completed before going on to the next; of living one day at a time.

For the next seven days, try the \$25,000 idea in your life. Tonight, write on a slip of paper the six most important things you have to do. Then number them in the order of their importance. Tomorrow morning, go to work on item number one, and stay with it until it’s successfully completed. Then move on to number two, and so on. When you’ve finished with all six, get another piece of paper, and repeat the process.

You’ll be astonished and delighted by the order this brings into your life – and by the rate of speed with which you’ll be able to accomplish the things that need doing, in the order of their importance. This simple but tremendously effective method will take all the confusion out of your life. You’ll never find yourself running around in circles, wondering what to do next.

As you use this method, remember to live the best you can, one day at a time. You need not worry about tomorrow, or the next day, or what’s going to happen at the end of the month. One day at a time, handled successfully, will carry you over every hurdle; it will solve every problem. You can relax in the happy knowledge that successful tasks make successful days, which, in turn, build a successful life. This is the kind of unassailable logic no one can argue with. It will work every time – for every person.

The reason for writing down what you consider only the most important things to do is obvious. Handling each task during the day successfully is important to the degree of the importance of the

task itself. Successfully doing a lot of unnecessary things can be pretty much a waste of time. Make certain that the tasks you take time to do efficiently are important tasks – tasks that move you ahead, steadily, toward your goal.

So often, youngsters in school worry about getting a passing grade. They think of all they'll have to do before the end of the school year. Following this course of action, they can stop worrying completely and count on excellent grades.

Freshmen in high school and college are frequently plagued by doubts as to whether they'll be able to successfully complete the four years ahead and graduate. Four years seem like such a long time to them – almost forever. And this thought sometimes leads to a sort of giving up – a fear of failure.

It was the great Harvard University teacher and psychologist, William James, who said, in effect, let not students worry about the success of their efforts. If they will do each day as best they can the work which is before them, they will wake up one day to find themselves among the competent people of their generation.

Student, junior executive, homemaker, senior executive, or professional – this plan works for everybody. It removes doubt, fear, and worry, and it brings order into our lives.

All any of us needs to do is face each day as it comes in good cheer, knowing that we have only to succeed today to guarantee our future. In this way, we'll move steadily ahead – growing more competent, more confident, with the passing of every day. Others may seem to suddenly shoot up faster...and operate in spurts and fits, but it is to the steady that the rewards are eventually paid.

Saint Edmund, archbishop of Canterbury, was right when he said, "Work as though you would live forever; but live as though you would die tomorrow."

Now try writing down the six most important things you have to do tomorrow. Then number them in the order of their importance. Really do this. First thing tomorrow morning, tackle item number one, and stay with it until it's completed. If something should force its delay, move on to number two. But take your tasks in order, and finish them in order as best you can. And try not to get sidetracked by people or things.

I have glued to the wall beside my typewriter a great saying by Ernest Hemingway. He said, "Write as well as you can, and finish what you start."

There's nothing mysterious, or capricious, about achieving outstanding success. It's completely within our individual control, and it's absolutely predictable. It's simply a matter of doing certain things in a certain way, every day. That's all there is to it – as long as you have that goal to work toward. There's no valid reason on earth why you should not become really successful in your field, your home life, and your community.

Remember that everything in the entire limitless universe operates according to the law of cause and effect. There are no exceptions to this. Nothing happens by accident. For every result, there's a cause. You have only to take care of the cause; the effect will always, without exception, take care of itself. Good cause; good effect. No cause; no effect. Bad cause; bad effect. It's as reliable as the rising of the sun.

This business of living the best we can one day at a time has an almost unbelievable cumulative effect for good – for success and for the things we want.

Sometimes when we see a bricklayer starting on a building and putting the first brick in place, we're struck by the size of the job he has ahead of him. But one day, almost before we realize it, he's finished. All the thousands of bricks are in place – each one vital to the finished structure, each one sharing its portion of the load. And so should be the days of a human life. And we'll be proud and happy with the finished product.

Exercises — Write your answers in the space provided below.

1. Try the \$25,000 idea in your life: Write the six most important things you have to do each day, then number them in their order of importance. Print out this sheet. Work on item number one until it is successfully completed. Then move on to number two, and so on. When you've finished with all six, repeat the process.

2. Make certain that the tasks you spend your time on are important ones — tasks that will move you ahead, steadily, toward your goal.

List below any tasks that you might be able to delegate to others or even eliminate from your agenda — tasks that, over time, have become unnecessary or obsolete.

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3. How well do you deal with interruptions and distractions? If you are often sidetracked during your day — by nonurgent telephone calls, drop-in visitors, etc. — plan a strategy for handling those diversions.

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