

SESSION 7. IT'S EASIER TO WIN

Audio Transcript

All kinds of studies have been made on the factors that motivate people to live as they do. In this program, we have already covered enough ground to establish the fact that people are responsible for their personal lives, barring some act of God or government – catastrophe or war – that might intervene to change things, permanently or temporarily. For example, a lot of my friends – many of them, very good friends – were killed during World War II, when they were in their 20s and 30s. The lives of others have been unalterably modified by injury or serious illness.

But most of us have our health, which is the natural inclination of all nature, and we have our lives to live. Sometimes, believe it or not, that's a personal handicap. It often takes the physically handicapped to demonstrate for us the options, the unlimited possibilities, that exist for those who are willing to set goals and stay with them until they're achieved. The healthy among us often take the path of least resistance.

I think it was Bill Veeck who, when he owned the Chicago White Sox, said, "I don't want the natural athlete. I want a guy who'll go after the hard ones." The people in this world who are willing to go after the hard ones are the people who achieve greatness. They are motivated (there's that word again) to give the last ounce of themselves in the achievement of their goals.

Now, let's look at some facts of life. Only about 5 percent of people achieve unusual success during their lives. These are the people who earn larger incomes, live in better neighborhoods – in better, larger homes – have better educations, enjoy more of the good things in life, and make correspondingly larger contributions to their communities. They tend to speak better English and send their kids to better schools.

There are always exceptions to any rule, and there are many exceptions to this 5 percent group. I know a man who is head of one of the largest, best-known companies in the United States, and who can hardly put 10 words together in their proper order. If murdering the English language were a crime, he would be on death row. Yet he has mansions, yachts, private jets – the works.

Why, with no more than perhaps a sixth-grade education, and the apparent determination to assiduously avoid any improvement on it, has this man enjoyed such spectacular financial success? Answer: he knows how to serve the people. His organization serves millions of people every day of the week. He has worked hard all his life to build the great organization he heads, and he has done a fine job of it. So he can buy \$3 million yachts and pay cash for them. And when he wants to get someplace in a hurry, there's his Gulfstream III, warmed up and ready for him when his chauffeur takes him to the airport.

But most people in that top 5 percent fit the earlier description. Many of them are not rich by the standards of our megamillionaire friend, but their earnings fall into the top 5 percent of American incomes. They're set for life, and they, as a group, tend to enjoy themselves very much. They play a better game of golf or tennis than most of the country's duffers or hackers, and they love their lifestyles.

Now, a child is born in the United States. According to the statistics we've been talking about, the odds are 95 to 5 that he will not be born in the top 5 percent. Like most children, he will soon take his environment for granted. Let's assume he's a boy – although it works the same way for a girl. (It will save my having to say “he or she” all the way through this interesting example.) He grows up accepting his environment, his world – and his world is his environment – as it is. Without his giving it a single thought, his environment becomes a natural part of him. Everything in his environment is a conditioning factor. The speech of his parents, relatives, and neighbors becomes his speech. What he learns in school will have very little effect on it. That's why you hear grown-up men and women who have gone through the American school system saying things such as “ain't” and “Where's it at?” They didn't learn those locutions in school; they were the habitual patterns of speech they had heard in their environment. (I know an attorney who still says, “Where's it at?”)

Anyone's speech habits are an immediate tip-off as to his upbringing. The only reason mine tend to be rather good is because from the time I was a small child I wanted to be a writer, and words were of great interest to me. Words are the tools of a writer's trade, and a good writer will have a decent inventory of them and tend to keep them well-oiled and shining. I was the only person in our family so affected. The rest had other interests – education not being one of them.

If the statistics were reversed, it would be wonderful. If 95 percent of people were successful to the degree the 5 percent are, the odds of a child's being raised by the right group would be reversed. But that's not the case. So our typical young man grows up to mirror his environment. He thinks as the people in his environment think. He takes that life for granted. All the people he loves are in that group. It's his group, too. And if he doesn't come across some unusual motivation along the way, he will become an indistinguishable part of it. He does that because it's the perfectly natural thing to do. Their goals (or lack of them) become his goals; a nice house on a nice street; a steady job of some kind; a good, steady income; a good wife and good kids. And so the story goes.

He operates on minimums all the years of his life. Except for times when he's engaged in sports or getting ready for a date, he never gets out of low gear. It isn't necessary to do so in the United States. This country is so affluent, so vital, and so perennially booming, that people don't have to shift into second or third gear to meet average requirements. And neither do most of the people throughout the world. Nor should they have to, if they don't want to.

His wife, while their children are small, is the hardest-working human being in our society. She doesn't have an eight-hour day or a five-days-a-week system. She works 16 hours a day, seven days a week. And according to a recent survey, if she had it to do all over, she would think twice about it. More than 50 percent of her number also hold down a regular paying job. She doesn't know about the 5 percent either.

No one ever said to this young man or to this young woman, “Now, look here: There two very distinct groups of people in our society. They are in different layers of this socioeconomic pyramid.” And here, the parent, or a teacher, would have sketched a pyramid. “There is the top 5 percent, who live and work in this top section here,” and the person would have drawn a line under what represents the top 5 percent of the pyramid. “Now, here is what we call the great middle class in America. It's divided into two main groups: the upper middle class” – another line would be

drawn on the pyramid – “and the lower middle class. The United States has the largest middle class of any country in the world. And then, down here at the bottom – in these few lower layers – are the people who, because of a thousand perfectly good reasons, need to be helped by all the rest of us. They have difficulty coping. Many of them are too old or sick to help themselves. We have some 25 million functional illiterates,” and so on.

So these young people would see, very clearly, their options. It would be made clear to them that, thank God and our forefathers, they have the freedom to choose. They have the option, if they so choose, to live and work on virtually any layer of that pyramid. And it should be pointed out to them that “The higher up on the pyramid you climb, the better the view, the fresher the air, and the smaller the crowd.” That’s important to know. “But it takes more effort to climb higher on a pyramid. It’s much easier to settle for these lower layers. You don’t have to learn so much,” and so on.

“Now,” the parent might continue, “we live right here, at this level on the pyramid.” And then the parent might say, “It’s not in the higher levels, but it’s certainly not in the lower levels, either. It’s where I wanted to be; your mother and I have been quite happy here....”

Well, I hope you get the picture. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we would be shown that pyramid when we’re about 12 or 13 years old? Wouldn’t it be great to see that pyramid and know we have that option?

This program is for the people who want to be in the top 5 percent, and it contains a great deal of what we need to know to get into and stay in the top 5 percent. And while getting into the top 5 percent may be one’s goal, it’s good to remember that, like any destination on planet Earth, there are a million ways to get there. Any road will do, any calling will do, if we go about it in the right way. We can get rich hauling garbage, and many have already done so. It’s a vital service to a community. But we have to go about it in a certain way.

This young man and, now that we’ve brought his wife into the picture, this fine young woman, because of their past environment – their conditioning – come under the statistics of “average Americans,” for they live their lives in an average way. But, of course, they are not really average people. With the right motivation, they could become very uncommon people and do very uncommon things. They could render much greater service to their community, and reap a much more abundant harvest as a result, if they knew what we’re talking about on this program.

What are the odds that they will ever come across Brand Blanshard’s advice about happiness? Do they know what happiness is and where it comes from? Has either of them ever truly explored his or her potential strong point?

What does your original genetic pattern make you especially qualified to do, young man or young woman? What do you most want to do? What brings you the greatest joy? Do you know that your rewards, all the years of your life, will be determined by the extent of your contribution – your service to others? Do you know why some people are paid \$20,000 a week, while others are paid the minimum wage? Bill Cosby earned \$12 million in 1986. Do you know why? It’s because of the people he serves. There’s an investment banker in Los Angeles who earns about \$40 million a

year. Do you know that, as far as is known, there is no limit on earnings? What would you like to earn? How about \$1,000 a week – that’s \$52,000 a year – or twice that? That’s not all there is to living, by any means – far from it. But it does pay the bills. And if you earn an income that places you in the upper 5 percent of the population, there you are, in that top 5 percent of the pyramid that the sun hits first as the earth does its daily roll-over act. And the sun is still shining on it later in the day, when the rest of the plane is dark. It’s nice up there. And shooting for it will bring out the best that’s in you. You’ll do more for others; you’ll make a greater contribution; you’ll give more to charities; you’ll help more people. So how about it?

There’s a talk I’d like to give to young people. Some would say I’d stir discontent among them, but I’d reply that discontent is the greatest motivator of all. And it’s responsible for every great boon to humankind, from running water and the indoor toilet to the supermarket. A little discontent is a good thing – especially when it’s discontent with ourselves.

The effect of environment is an incalculably powerful force. The deepest craving of young people in school is to be liked by their fellow students. Acceptance and esteem in the eyes of their contemporaries is their deepest craving. So they begin to do what the other kids are doing, and the other kids begin to do what they are doing, and everyone acts just like everyone else. They dress alike; they talk alike; they laugh at the same things – even when it isn’t funny.

It’s at this critical age that they begin to play a game called follow the follower (not follow the leader – that would be all right). Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, these young, wonderful, impressionable people conform to one another. They never ask, “Are the people to whom I’m conforming qualified to lead me?” What’s important is belonging – belonging to the group.

And that’s the subtle trap that gets practically everybody. If we don’t break out of that trap, sooner or later, we will end in it. Millions – no, billions do. It’s astonishing how many adults never break out. We see them in their 50s and 60s, still playing to the wrong crowd, still trying to be one of the gang.

Do you remember what Willy Loman said in Arthur Miller’s great play *Death of a Salesman*? He said, “The important thing is to be liked.” Willy Loman never grew up. He never knew who he was. His story is a modern tragedy. It’s always been a tragedy. It’s the story of the mob....

When a person has no identity of his own, that person will seek to find his identity in a larger group. That’s why joining groups of various kinds is so popular. In that way, we get a badge, a label, that tells us what we are. Now we are properly labeled. This is not to say that successful men and women do not belong to organizations. They certainly do, and they make major contributions to their organizations. But they don’t need the organizations for identity. They are quite aware of who and what they are. And if their organizations did not exist, they would be successful, independent performers in society. They would never feel lost.

Successful people follow independent paths. This is the important point to remember. At some point in their lives, they break away from the crowd and start on a path of their own. That’s the adult, the intelligent thing for human creatures to do. In striking off on an independent path, they are not necessarily alone. It’s just that they join a much smaller group of like-minded people. We can’t take the whole crowd into that top 5 percent.

The ancient Romans had their circus; modern Americans have their television. It’s far superior to the old Roman circus, and they don’t even have to leave the comfort of their living rooms. It’s true that there are many wonderful

things on television, and an eclectic approach – that is, selecting those programs in which you’re really interested – makes sense. But millions of families have their television sets on all day. They are mesmerized by them. And when one thinks of what they could be doing with some of that time, it makes one realize that “It’s much easier to win.”

One of the best things about getting into that top 5 percent is that as we get older, life need not become less interesting for us, or more laborious. We can become more productive as we approach our 60s and 70s and often many years beyond. And it’s nice to grow older with all the goodies of life; it’s more comfortable. One can spend one’s winters in Florida, or somewhere south of the equator, and one’s summers in the cooler, healthier climates. And one can enjoy all the benefits of the good life. But, perhaps most important of all, one can say, “I gave it my best, and I’m not through yet. It’s been a wonderful experience, this holiday on earth. And I’ve enjoyed it very, very much. Now, let’s see what I can do with the rest of it. Yes, I think it’s actually easier to win. There’s less competition up there, where the view is so much better, and the air is so fresh and clean.”

And it’s almost never too late, for with a purpose – a worthy goal – and the motivation to reach those upper layers on the pyramid, a person can travel farther in a few years that he might otherwise travel in a lifetime.

Like most writers, when I see something I wrote 10 years ago, I invariably see ways it could have been improved. I didn’t see those possibilities 10 years ago, but it’s easier to see them today. It means that I’ve grown as a writer – that I’m better, that I’m a more effective writer today than I was 10 years ago. I’m worth more today. And if I continue as I have been doing, I will be much better and worth a lot more 10 years from now.

Exercises — Write your answers in the space provided below.

1. Our environmental conditioning teaches us to conform, to play it safe. It's an easy trap to fall into — one that all of us fall into to some extent. In adulthood, do you ever find yourself playing the game Earl Nightingale calls “follow the follower”?

2. Analyze the key people in your environment, those who have an important effect on you in your family, in your community, at work, and socially. Who possesses qualities you want to emulate?

3. How can you improve your “human environment”?