



NAPOLEON HILL

Principle 11: Control Your Attention

Points to Ponder

1. Thoughts have power, are under your control, and can be used wisely or unwisely.
2. Accurate thinking is a moral duty.
3. Nothing great can happen without accurate thinking.
4. Accurate thinkers accept no political, religious, or other type of thought, regardless of its source, until it is carefully analyzed.
5. Accurate thinkers are the masters of their emotions.
6. Accurate thinking calls for the highest order of self-discipline.
7. Accurate thought involves two fundamentals. First, you must separate facts from information. Second, you must separate facts into two classes, the important and the unimportant.
8. It takes concentration to control your attention and focus it on a problem until you have solved it.
9. Turn on the full power of your mind, and control your life.
10. Your power of thought is the only thing over which you have complete control. To use this power effectively, you must think accurately.
11. Accurate thinkers allow no one to do their thinking for them.
12. Accurate thinkers know that emotions are not always reliable.

Controlled Attention at Work

By adopting a definite major purpose, you have selected an object on which you have to focus your controlled attention. Forget the old saying "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." You have to put all your eggs in one basket and concentrate your attention on protecting that basket and getting it to the market. Controlled attention is the act of coordinating all the faculties of the mind and directing their combined power to a given end. It is both an outgrowth of many of the other principles of success and an important aid to them.

The Power of Controlled Attention

Concentration upon a single idea has been the hallmark of success for countless people and organizations. Intel is a manufacturer of computer chips. By concentrating its energy on building better chips, in less than a decade it has more than quadrupled the speed at which computer processors can deal with information. The rate at which it is able to design and introduce even speedier chips grows faster every year. This happens because Intel concentrates its attention on microprocessors and doesn't worry about other things like software or modems. Donna Karan is a premier designer of women's professional clothing. Her company dresses more female executives than any other.

Because Karan doesn't spend her time coming up with a line of designer jeans or swimsuits, she dominates a lucrative market through controlled attention. Henry Long's paint-manufacturing company, Keeler & Long, concentrates its attention on producing industrial paints. You probably haven't heard of Keeler & Long because it doesn't bother with the sort of paint you use in your home. Instead it makes paint that can withstand a nuclear meltdown or last for years on electrical transformers, and it is recognized as the best paint manufacturer of its kind. Even the White House has been repainted with its product.

Marcel Proust concentrated his attention on a single massive work, *Remembrance of Things Past*, a series of novels that cemented his reputation as one of the major novelists of the twentieth century. Mother Teresa has concentrated her attention on relieving the suffering of the poor in India. From a single mission she expanded her efforts to more than two hundred sites around the world and won the Nobel Peace Prize. The scope of her plan grew, but she has never wavered in the attention she pays to it.

Whatever your enterprise, concentration on your definite major purpose is essential. It projects a clear picture of your definite purpose upon your conscious mind and holds it there until it is taken over by your subconscious and acted upon.

Controlled Attention and the Other Principles of Success

What I call the Law of Harmonious Attraction means that forces and things which are suited to the needs of one another have a natural tendency to come together. As you master the principles of success and apply them, you will find that you benefit from the Law of Harmonious Attraction. You will condition your mind so that it will attract only the things you desire, and since you will be eliminating from your mind all conflicting emotions, such as fear, envy, greed, hatred, jealousy, and doubt, you will not be distracted by anything they might attract. Thus you will be in an even better position to control your attention.

Here is how the different principles strengthen and benefit from controlled attention:

Definiteness of Purpose

Deciding on what you want, creating a plan for getting it, and carrying out that plan obviously will require you to concentrate the major portions of your thoughts and efforts toward the attainment of that end. You need an object upon which to concentrate your attention, and once you have selected that object, it will grow closer--and your view of it will grow clearer--the more you concentrate your attention upon it.

The Mastermind Alliance

Forming a mastermind alliance is one of the first effects of controlled attention, since you must do so with care. In turn the alliance intensifies your concentration by creating a mass psychology which increases your faith, self-reliance, imagination, creative vision, personal initiative, enthusiasm, and will to win. You will keep moving toward your definite major purpose when you are surrounded by others who lend you aid and encouragement, whereas if you work alone, you will be inclined to slow down, become discouraged, and quit.

Applied Faith

When you adopt a definite major purpose and surround yourself with a mastermind group, you demonstrate faith in your ability to attain your objective by persistent endeavor. Your controlled attention has given faith space in which to take root and grow. Likewise, it is much easier to concentrate your attention on something you believe will happen than it is to focus on an event which seems unlikely. Thus the power of your faith is combined with the results of your controlled attention, giving it tremendous power.

Positive Mental Attitude

By the time you have taken the previous basic steps, your mental attitude will already have become predominantly positive. Many of the self-imposed limitations of fear, doubt, and discouragement will have disappeared because you are already seeing evidence of what you can accomplish. You will have no room left in your mind for thoughts of failure.

You will be so busy carrying out your definite major purpose that you will have no time for hesitation or procrastination, nor any desire to do either.

Going the Extra Mile

Applying this principle requires continuous action since it must be a part of everything you do. Your concentrated attention in applying it adds momentum to your efforts and inspires enthusiasm and faith in your mastermind allies, as well as in others you encounter. This, in turn, increases your positive mental attitude, making it even easier to control your attention.

Personal Initiative

Applied personal initiative organizes your plans for attaining your definite purpose, then, with the aid of your mastermind allies, tests those plans for soundness. As with going the extra mile, controlled attention to the results of your initiative is crucial, and every positive thing that happens as a result of that initiative strengthens your will and thus your controlled attention.

Self-Discipline

Self-discipline harnesses and controls all emotions, both positive and negative, allowing you to guard against the dissipation of energy through either expressing your negative emotions or neglecting to use your positive ones. Your emotional power is available for the concentration of your attention. At this point your mind is beginning to function like a well-constructed machine, with no wasted motion and no energy-sapping friction. You have acquired the skill of transmuting your emotions into a powerful driving force for attaining your definite major purpose.

You have also begun to acquire control over your willpower. Your willpower brings all the departments of your mind under complete control and puts them to work in attaining your definite major purpose.

You are now approaching the apex of efficiency in controlled attention.

Creative Vision

Your imagination will already have been greatly stimulated by the previous steps. Your subconscious mind, impressed with the object of your definite purpose, will swing into action on its own, rendering up ideas, plans, and hunches whose clarity and applicability will surprise you. You will notice new opportunities for attaining your definite major purpose. Friendly forms of cooperation from others will present themselves. Everything you touch will become a tool in your hands to promote your success. Even the laws of averages and luck will operate in your favor. But don't be mistaken. In back of these lucky breaks is a definite cause that you have brought into being: controlled attention.

Accurate Thinking

Long before you have reached the point of actively cultivating accurate thinking, you will have stopped guessing and started making your plans on the basis of known facts and sound hypotheses. But as your plans begin to take effect, accurate thinking becomes a necessity. Controlled attention hones your thinking, and accurate thinking means that your attention is applied only where it is needed.

Learning from Defeat

When setbacks occur, you will use your controlled attention to find, examine, and nurture the seed of equivalent benefit that comes with every unhappiness. Defeat will be nothing but a signal for greater and more determined effort. It will be fuel to feed the fires of your willpower. You will also learn to delve into your memory to examine defeats that occurred before you selected your definite major purpose. Controlled attention makes every moment of your life valuable to you.

Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm takes the drudgery out of your work and makes it a labor of love. Your enthusiasm for something automatically leads to your concentrating your attention on it, and it impresses your dominating thoughts on your subconscious. Controlled attention directs your enthusiasm to definite ends, and the nearer you come to those ends, the more your enthusiasm grows.

Attractive Personality

By developing an attractive personality, you remove much of the opposition you may face from other people and replace it with the cooperation of allies in addition to your mastermind group. Controlled attention helps you improve those elements of your personality that require discipline and gives you the resolve to remove bad habits. In return, your attractive personality provides more opportunity for the use of your controlled attention through increased influence and opportunity.

Controlled Attention and Autosuggestion

The chapter on self-discipline underscores the influence of your daily environment in your struggle for success. One of the most effective ways to shape this environment to your benefit is the process of autosuggestion. Autosuggestion occurs both consciously and unconsciously. Every thought you have, every word you speak are recorded in your memory, whether those thoughts and words are positive or negative. The objects on which you deliberately concentrate your attention become the dominating influences in your environment. If your thoughts are fixed on poverty or the physical signs of poverty, these influences are transferred to your subconscious by autosuggestion. If you continue to concentrate on poverty, you will condition your mind to accept poverty as an unavoidable circumstance, and you will eventually become poverty-conscious. This is how millions of people condemn themselves to lives of poverty.

The principle of autosuggestion works in precisely the same manner when your dominating thoughts are fixed, through controlled attention, upon success and security. This habit leads to the development of a success consciousness.

When you voluntarily fix your attention upon a definite major purpose of a positive nature and force your mind, through daily habits of thought, to dwell on that subject, you condition your subconscious mind to act on that purpose. Controlled attention, when it is focused on the object of your definite major purpose, is the medium by which you positively apply the principle of autosuggestion. There is no other way to do this. The difference between controlled and uncontrolled attention is great. You can feed your mind on thoughts which will produce what you desire, or you can neglect your mind, allowing it to feed on thoughts that will produce results you don't desire. Your mind is never inactive, even in sleep. It constantly reacts to the influences which reach it. The object of controlled attention is to keep your mind busy through thoughts which will be helpful in attaining the object of your desires. If you neglect controlling your attention, your mind will become fixed on negative influences.

Controlled Attention at Work

Chemistry teaches us that individual elements can combine to form new substances that are very different from the components that constitute them. Water is a simple example: Both oxygen and hydrogen are gases, but when two oxygen atoms combine with one hydrogen atom, they form a liquid-and a highly useful one at that. Sodium and chlorine are volatile and dangerous in their pure states, but when one atom of each forms a pair, they become ordinary table salt. The same is true of thought. Thoughts of one nature can combine with those of another sort, and controlled attention is the means by which you decide the process. If your child is threatened by an oncoming car, fear for his or her safety and love for him or her will combine into thoughts of action, leading you to pull the child out of the way. Both the initial thoughts are strong, but it is the combination of the two that is strongest and most effective at preventing harm. Observation and experience have taught me that the following principles of success, when combined in your mind, can produce power bordering on the miraculous:

1. Definiteness of purpose
2. Self-discipline through emotional control
3. Autosuggestion applied to attaining your purpose
4. Willpower actively engaged and directed toward your purpose
5. Controlled attention
6. Personal initiative
7. Creative vision
8. Applied faith

Here's example of these combined principles at work. Suppose you are faced by a common problem: You need a sum of money for a specific purpose, and you need it by a certain date. There are two ways to deal with this. You can worry about it but do nothing to raise the money. Or you can go after it in earnest by combining the above principles. If you know how much money you need and make up your mind to get it on time, you have definiteness of purpose. When you put your mind to work to devise and carry out a plan for getting the money, and you exclude all other thoughts, you are exhibiting controlled attention, applied through personal initiative.

Your mind is cleared of all fear and doubt. That is self-discipline working through willpower, expressed in applied faith, and acted upon through autosuggestion. This combination of forces will stimulate the imagination and cause it to create the means through which the money can be procured. Once this happens, of course, it is still up to you to act on that plan to the best of your ability.

You can draw on any of the seventeen principles in this process, although the major ones are listed above. The two constants in any combination must be controlled attention and definiteness of purpose.

Thomas Edison once wrote:

The most important factors of invention can be described in a few words. They consist first of definite knowledge as to what one wishes to achieve [definiteness of purpose, creative vision]. . . . One must fix his mind on that purpose with persistence and begin searching for that which he seeks, making use of all other accumulated knowledge on the subject [mastermind group, controlled attention]. He must keep on searching no matter how many times he may meet with disappointment [willpower]. He must refuse to be influenced by the fact that someone else may have tried the same idea without success [self-discipline, applied faith]. He must keep himself sold on the idea that the solution of his problem exists somewhere, and that he will find it [autosuggestion]. When a man makes up his mind to solve any problem, he may at first meet opposition; but if he holds on and keeps on searching, he will be sure to find some sort of solution. The trouble with most people is that they quit before they start. In all my experiences, I do not recall having ever found the solution to any problem connected with my work on my first attempt. And one of the most surprising things is the fact that when I have discovered the thing for which I am searching, I generally find that it has been within my reach all the time; but nothing except persistence and a will to win would have revealed it. Such is the power of controlled attention. It harnesses many of the other principles, heightens their power, and, in turn, is increased itself. Are you ready to concentrate your attention on the task at hand?

Napoleon Hill Revisited: On Controlled Attention

Concentration on one's major purpose projects a clear picture of that purpose on the conscious mind, and holds it there until it is taken over by the subconscious and acted upon. This is controlled attention.

Controlled attention is the act of coordinating all the faculties of the mind and directing their combined power to a given end. It is an act that can be achieved only by the strictest sort of self-discipline. Attention that is not controlled and directed may be nothing more than idle curiosity. The word controlled is the key to thought power.

The most successful people in all callings are those with a so-called one-track mind -- that is, a mind that is controlled and concentrated upon one thing at a time. It is this trait that manifests itself as a fixed habit of turning on more power instead of quitting when the going becomes hard and defeat seems imminent.

Development of this habit begins with the adoption of a definite purpose fanned into a white heat of enthusiasm through accurate thinking, applied faith, and self-discipline.

Henry Ford's success was largely due to the fact that he concentrated all of his resources -- spiritual, mental, physical, and financial -- behind his definite major purpose: the manufacturing of a low-priced, dependable automobile.

His dogged determination was illustrated when he ordered his engineers to cast an automobile engine block in one piece instead of two, as had formerly been the practice. When the engineers told him it was impossible, Ford exploded. "You use that word too loosely," he said. "Go ahead and try."

When nothing happened in a month, once again Ford summoned his engineers and said, "Gentlemen, if I don't have a satisfactory cylinder block cast in one piece within one week, there will be a new staff of engineers here to take your place." He got his new cylinder block.

Comic Danny Thomas tried for years to find a way to stay in show business and yet come home to his family each night -- two seemingly conflicting goals that were impossible to resolve. By concentrating his mind on that purpose in a spirit of intense applied faith, he found the answer to his desire through television work.

When Martin W. Littleton was a young lad living in a small town in Texas, he went into the general store where some of the local townspeople were warming themselves by the stove. "Martin," one of them jeeringly asked, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" Looking the jester squarely in the eye, Martin replied, "I'm going to be the best lawyer in the United States."

By concentrating on the study of law, Martin did go on to become one of the highest-paid lawyers of his day, and was retained by many of America's largest corporations.

F. W. Woolworth concentrated on five-and-ten-cent stores and made himself fabulously rich. Marconi concentrated on the study of wireless communication and lived to see his efforts lay the foundation for radio, television, and radar. Noah Webster concentrated on words and gave us the modern English dictionary.

The list goes on and on. The range of purposes on which man can successfully direct his mind, through concentration, is limitless.

Perhaps you have been in an emergency situation that required quick thinking and decisive action. By controlling your attention, and focusing it on the problem at hand, you were able to effectively deal with the situation. Thus, it would seem that controlled attention is more effective when one is forced to concentrate his thoughts upon a definite problem.

This may be true, because controlled attention has great power when it is motivated by fear, but this sort of power seems to be limited to the medium of physical expression. When a man is frightened, he may develop great physical strength because he concentrates all his efforts in some particular direction. This sort of power is infinitesimal, however, when compared with the spiritual power that becomes available through the application of faith.

James J. Hill, founder of the Great Northern Railway system, said: "The man who spreads his energies and his attention over many different enterprises resembles the man who shuts his eyes when he aims a gun at an object and fires. He may spread his shot in many different directions without hitting his target. Controlled attention has been my greatest asset. I have used it during the major portion of my adult life, and particularly in building the Great Northern Railway."

John D. Rockefeller also bore testimony to the effectiveness of controlled attention: "From the very day that I began my first job as a bookkeeper until I this very moment, I have followed the plan of concentrating my attention on one thing at a time. Controlled attention places one in contact with a source of power which gives him what amounts to a sort of super wisdom in the management of his affairs.

"I have invested large sums of money in many different businesses and industries, but I earned this money in the business which represented my definite major purpose, the oil business. No part of my attention has been given to any of the other industries in which I have investments. My capital works for me in those industries, but my personal attention has always remained in my original business."

These highly successful men, who gave controlled attention top position among their rules for individual achievement, dramatically illustrate that it provides the way to personal power of outstanding proportions. Try it yourself. It works.

From *PMA Advisor*, Vol. 3., No. 12, December 1984. Copyright 1984 Napoleon Hill Foundation

Let it Be

Focus your energy and efforts on what you want, not what you don't want. It's the best technique to reshape your life. When you take steps forward in self-improvement, you can focus on stopping a harmful behavior or starting a positive one.

The second approach is better. "Starting" is more productive. Even if something seems to be holding you back, "Let it be," says the Rev. Terry Cole-Whittaker.

Say you're out of shape, or you procrastinate important work. First accept yourself as you are. Choose to face the truth, and allow yourself to be perfect exactly as you are.

You might look back at your life and recall the time and place when you first decided not to exercise, or to put something off. Doing so may have made sense then, but not any longer.

After you've accepted yourself as you are, then decide to do something else. Choose afresh what you want now. Put your energy into creating what you want, not into fighting with what you don't want.

Whenever you fight something, you give it power. Your "inner enemy" flourishes as a result of your attention. Your avoidance of exercise and procrastination grow when you struggle with them.

So does any external problem. If you spend your life trying to stop criticism of you, you're, in effect, letting your critics run you.

If you dread someone leaving you, you live in fear, and that fear can actually drive that person away. By dwelling on what you don't want, all you stop is yourself from having what you truly want.

The truth is, Cole-Wittaker says, "you already have what you want -- love and capability. God loves you, the universe supports you, and everything is here for you. Only you can deny it by making up an enemy...."

To get rid of what you don't want, be willing to see it for what it is -- nothing. Without you to battle it, the enemy disappears. It takes two to make a battle. Withdraw and your enemy will too.

Simply let some situations be. Even allow people to play themselves out. Declare the truth -- no one and nothing can stop you from living your life fully.

This doesn't mean being a doormat. If you really don't want something, simply stop creating it. Do that by devoting your attention to achieving what you do want.

Points to Ponder

1. Keep your mind on the things you want and off the things you don't want.
2. It is much easier to focus your attention on something you believe will happen than on something you believe is unlikely.
3. Controlled attention is the act of coordinating all the faculties of your mind and directing their combined power to a specific end.
4. Defeat should be nothing but a signal for greater and more determined effort.
5. Autosuggestion occurs both consciously and unconsciously.
6. You can be your greatest friend or your greatest enemy.
7. Your mind is never inactive.
8. Success only comes after much concentration.
9. Positive and negative emotions cannot occupy your mind at the same time.
10. Independence starts with self-dependence.
11. Thoughts are contagious; be careful of the thoughts you release.