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Principle 7: Build a Positive Mental Attitude

Join the 2 Percent Club

A positive mental attitude is the single most important principle of the science of success. You will depend upon it in everything you do. You cannot get the maximum benefit out of the other sixteen principles without understanding and employing PMA.

The Choice of Two Envelopes

At birth you arrive figuratively clutching two sealed envelopes. One is labeled “Rewards,” and the other “Penalties.” The first envelope contains a list of all benefits you will enjoy from taking possession of your own mind and using it to get what you want. The second carries a list of the consequences that will befall you if you neglect controlling your mind and directing it toward a worthwhile goal.

Read that paragraph again. Now read it once more. Its message is that important. This chapter will open those envelopes for you and reveal their specific contents. You will see that these envelopes are real, that the rewards and penalties they contain are real. Nature abhors two things: a vacuum and idleness. If you do not use a muscle, it will wither and become useless. If you do not use the powers of your mind, they will do the same thing. Your brain and your life will become subject to every passing influence, unable to resist them or to act positively—unless you fix your mind on the object of your desire and create and act upon a plan for attaining it.

You’ve probably heard something like that old saying “Success attracts success while failure attracts more failure.” Nothing could be more true. Striving for success makes you better able to attain it. Doing nothing and accepting failure only bring more failure your way. If you put your mind to work with a positive mental attitude and believe that success is your right, your belief will guide you unerringly toward whatever your definition of success might be. If you adopt a negative mental attitude and fill your mind with thoughts of fear and frustration, your mind will only draw those same things to you. That is the power of mental attitude. Why not make yours positive?

The Rewards of a Positive Mental Attitude

If you take possession of your mind and direct it toward desirable goals, you will enjoy:

1. Success consciousness, which attracts only the circumstances which make for success
2. Sound health, both physical and mental
3. Financial independence
4. A labor of love in which to express yourself
5. Peace of mind
6. Applied faith, which makes fear impossible
7. Enduring friendships
8. Longevity and a well-balanced life
9. Immunity from self-limitation
10. The wisdom to understand yourself and others

The Penalties of a Negative Mental Attitude

If you neglect taking possession of your mind and directing it toward a worthwhile goal, you are doomed to:

1. Poverty and misery your entire life
2. Mental and physical ailments of all kinds
3. Self-limitations which trap you in mediocrity
4. Fear and all its destructive consequences
5. Hatred of the means by which you support yourself
6. Many enemies and few friends
7. Every brand of worry known to humanity
8. Being a victim of every negative influence you encounter
9. Subjection to the will of others
10. A wasted life which does nothing to better the human condition

Which choice will you make? If you do not make the first one and embrace it wholeheartedly, the second will be forced on you. There is no halfway point, no compromise. Which choice will you make?

How to Develop a Positive Mental Attitude

You must have a positive mental attitude to make life pay off on your own terms. Nothing great has ever been achieved without PMA.

Recognize that your mental attitude is the only thing over which you--and only you--have complete control. Exercise that control, and direct it by using PMA. Realize, and prove to your own satisfaction by making it so, that every adversity, sorrow, or defeat, whether or not you caused it to happen, contains the seed of an equivalent benefit which you can nurture into a blessing that soars above the disaster that brought it. Learn to close the door of your mind on all failures from your past. Clear your mind of any influence which does not support a positive mental attitude.

Find out what you want most in life, and go after it. Do it right now by helping others to acquire similar benefits. This way you put the principle of going the extra mile into action. Select the person who, in your opinion, is the finest person in all the world, past or present. Make him or her your pacesetter for the rest of your life, emulating him or her in every possible way. Determine what kind of resources you need, set up a plan for acquiring them based on the idea of not too much, not too little. Don't think small, but remember, greed more than anything else has destroyed ambitious people.

Form the habit of saying or doing something every day which will make someone else feel better. You can do this with a phone call, a postcard, or a simple act of kindness. Give someone a good inspirational book, for instance, and you give that person something that will work wonders in his or her life. One good deed a day will keep old man gloom away. Make yourself understand that what whips you isn't defeat, but your mental attitude toward it. Train yourself to look for the seed of equivalent benefit in every disappointment you face.

Ascertain what you like best to do, and do it as a labor of love with your heart and soul. Perhaps it will simply be a hobby. That's fine. Just remember that an idle mind quickly becomes a negative mind; it's called brooding. Understand that often when you have searched in vain for a solution to a problem, you can find it by helping someone else solve his or her problem. By the time you have solved the other person's problem, you will have the insight to solve your own. Study Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Essay on Compensation" once a week until you understand and have assimilated it. This powerful work will convince you of the benefits you will derive from PMA.

Take a complete inventory of every asset you possess. You will discover that your greatest asset is a sound mind with which you can shape your own destiny. Communicate with anyone you know whom you have unjustly offended and offer sincere apologies. Ask for forgiveness. The more bitter this assignment is, the more you

will be free of negative mental influences when you have completed it. Acknowledge that the space you occupy in this world is in exact ratio to the quantity and quality of the service you render for the benefit of others, plus the mental attitude in which you render it. Break bad habits. Abstain from your vices one at a time for a month until you show yourself who is boss. If you need help from a counselor or a support group, get it. Don't let your pride master you. Comprehend that no one can hurt your feelings, make you angry, or frighten you without your full cooperation and consent. Close your mind to anyone who wants to exert a destructive influence.

Perceive that self-pity is an insidious destroyer or self-reliance. Believe that you are the one person on whom you can and should depend at all times. Relate to every circumstance in your life as something that has happened for the best, for it may be that your saddest experience will bring you your greatest assets if you give time a chance to mellow your distress. Divert any urge for control over others. Squelch it before it destroys you. Channel that energy into better control over yourself.

Occupy your mind with doing what you want to do so that no time will be left for it to stray to the things you do not want to do. Attune your mind to attract the things and situations you desire by expressing in a daily prayer your gratitude for what you already have. Demand a reasonable amount of dividends from life every day, instead of waiting to receive them. You will be surprised to learn how many of the desirable things in life are already yours, even though you have not noticed them. Live in a style that suits your physical and spiritual requirements, and don't waste time keeping up with the Joneses. Refuse to heed anyone's advice--unless that person is willing to give you satisfactory evidence of the soundness of his or her counsel. You will save yourself from hucksters, the misguided, and fools.

Discern that personal power does not come from the possession of material things alone. Mahatma Gandhi led his nation to freedom without a fortune. Exert yourself so that you keep your body in shape. Mental ailments can easily spring from physical ones, and your body, like your mind, must be kept active to remain positive. Reinforce the habit of tolerance, and keep an open mind on all subjects and toward all people no matter what their race or creed. Learn to like people just as they are, instead of demanding that they be just as you want them to be.

Admit that love is the finest medication for your body and your soul. Love changes the entire chemistry of your body and conditions it for the expression of a positive mental attitude. It also extends the space you occupy in the hearts of others. The best way to receive love is to give it. Return every benefit you receive with one of equal or greater value. The Law of Increasing Returns will operate in your favor, and eventually--or perhaps very soon--it will give you the capacity to get everything you are entitled to. A positive mental attitude works both ways. Avoid the fear of old age by remembering that nothing is ever taken from you without being replaced by something of equal or greater value. Youth, for instance, is replaced by wisdom.

Trust that adequate solutions can be found for all your problems, but accept the fact that the solutions may not always be the ones you want. Rely on the examples of others to remind you that any disadvantage can be overcome. Thomas Edison had only three months of formal schooling, yet he was the greatest inventor who ever lived; Helen Keller was without sight, hearing, or speech, yet she inspired millions. A definite major purpose is stronger than any limitation.

Welcome friendly criticism instead of reacting to it negatively. Embrace any opportunity to learn how others see you, and use it to take inventory of yourself and look for things which need improvement. Do not fear criticism; encourage it. Create a mastermind alliance with others dedicated to the principles of success.

Discuss your progress and insights and gain the benefit of a much wider range of experience. Always keep these meetings on a positive plane. Grasp the differences between wishing, hoping, desiring, and having a burning desire to achieve your goal. Only a burning desire gives you a driving motivation, and it can be fueled only by a positive mental attitude.

Abstain from negative conversations, especially carping, gossip, or tearing apart other people's reputations. These activities condition your mind to think negatively. Discipline your mind to shape your destiny toward whatever purpose in life you have chosen. Seize every one of the benefits in the rewards envelope and make them yours. Be yourself at all times. Neither you nor anyone else trusts a phony. Say nothing that does not reflect your positive mental attitude. Believe in the existence of Infinite Intelligence, which makes it possible for you to draw on all the power you need to take possession of your own mind and direct it toward whatever you choose.

Believe in your ability to become free and self-determining, and put that belief to work by acting upon it. Do it now! Believe that the American form of government guarantees you the freedom and privileges necessary to pursue your definite major purpose. Work to defend those freedoms as needed. Believe in the people you are associated with, and recognize that if they are not worthy of your belief, you have the wrong associates. And finally: read this lesson once a week for six months. You will so thoroughly indoctrinate yourself with these habits and mind conditioners that your mental attitude will become and remain positive at all times.

The 2 Percent Who Succeed

The overwhelming majority of people never recognize the difference between wishing and believing. They never take six steps that will help them use their minds to attain their desires. These steps are summarized below, along with my observations, based on a lifetime of study, of the percentage of people who attain each one.

1. Most people go through life merely *wishing* for things. These wishes are as fleeting as the wind. They have no power to shape anything. The number of people who stop here: 70 percent.
2. A much smaller percentage develop their wishes into desires. They want the same thing constantly, but that is the end of their commitment. They represent 10 percent.
3. A still smaller percentage develop their wishes and desires into hopes. They dare to imagine, from time to time, that they might get what they seek. I estimate they constitute 8 percent.
4. An even smaller group translates that hope into belief. They expect what they want will actually happen. These people number 6 percent.
5. 5. A smaller group of people crystallize their wishes, desires, and hopes into belief, then into a burning desire, and finally into faith. They constitute 4 percent.
6. 6. Finally, a very few people take the last two steps and then make a plan to get what they want and carry it out. They apply their faith with positive mental attitudes. This group is only 2 percent.

The outstanding leaders in every walk of life are the people in the sixth group. They recognize the power of their own minds; they seize that power and direct it toward whatever they choose. When you take this step, the word "impossible" will have no meaning for you. Everything will be possible for you, and you will manage to get it.

Join the 2 Percent Club

Here are the requirements for membership in the 2 Percent Club. Only you will measure your success in meeting them.

1. Adjust yourself to other people's states of mind and peculiarities so that you can get along peacefully with them. Observe a dog, and learn the art of self-control by watching how quickly it adjusts itself to its master's moods.
2. Ignore trivial circumstances in your relations with others; do not let them become controversies. Big people look past small slights.

3. Establish control of your mind at the start of each day, using the techniques for building a positive mental attitude. Maintain that attitude throughout the day.
4. Learn the art of selling yourself indirectly, by persuasion and example rather than by the hard sell.
5. Develop a hearty laugh as a means to release anger.
6. Analyze all your setbacks and determine their causes. Discover the seed of equivalent benefit in each circumstance.
7. Concentrate your mind on the can-do portion of the tasks you face. Don't worry about the cannot-do portion unless and until you meet it face-to-face. By that time the can-do portion will have shown you the way to success.
8. Turn all unpleasant circumstances into opportunities for positive action. Make this an automatic habit, and your success will multiply.
9. Remember that no one can win all of the time, no matter how much he deserves it. When you do not get exactly what you wanted, maximize your gain by increasing your understanding of yourself.
10. Look on life as a continuing learning process, and even bad experiences will become good ones.
11. Remember that every thought you release comes back to you multiplied in its effect. Monitor your thoughts, and make sure you send out only those whose fruits you are willing to receive.
12. Avoid associates with negative mental attitudes. Their attitudes will rub off on you and poison every effort you engage in.
13. Be aware of the dual nature of your personality. You have a positive side with a great capacity for belief and a negative side with an equal capacity for disbelief. Exercise the first, and the second will wither away.
14. Recognize that prayer brings the best results when you have sufficient faith to see yourself already in possession of the things you are praying for. This calls for a positive mental attitude of the highest order.
15. You can see how a positive mental attitude relies upon and reinforces so many of the principles crucial to personal achievement. You need a definite major purpose, applied faith in that purpose, and the personal initiative to act in ways that express your PMA. The next two chapters will teach you more principles that both support and sustain your PMA. The cultivation of success is a complex, organic process; whenever you advance in acting on one of its tenets, you advance in others.

Use Positive Self-Talk Statements

One day the great black educator Booker T. Washington was walking down a city street with a white friend.

A man approaching from the opposite direction saw them, scowled, uttered a racial epithet, and obstructed their path forcing them to walk around him.

His friend, outraged, turned to Washington and stormed, "We can't let him get away with that -- aren't you furious enough to do something?"

Washington smiled and replied, "I refuse to let any man make me hate."

His response was the ultimate triumph-retaining control of his own inner self and not letting the bigot corrupt his mind and heart.

Author Shad Helmstetter in *The Self-Talk Solution* agrees there are times "when the best thing you can do is to protect your own 'good' attitude from being influenced by the 'bad' attitude of the other person."

If you feel you've suddenly stepped in front of a target at which someone is shooting verbal arrows, what you tell yourself at that moment will determine how deeply the arrows will pierce.

Napoleon Hill reminds us that "no one can hurt your feelings, make you angry, or frighten you without your full cooperation and consent."

It's your mind the arrows are aimed at, and it's your self-talk that will either throw them to the side or let them hit home.

Self-talk is especially necessary when arguments erupt because people are tired from stressful experiences that occurred before they ever got together.

This happens when a couple gets home after both have had a hard day at work, or when overextended coworkers must collaborate quickly on a complex project.

Fighting back at such times by responding out loud to the person, or with silent negative thoughts, only creates more anger and stress. Instead, arm yourself with clear, simple, self-talk statements that build peace within you and between you and other people.

First, tell yourself, as Helmstetter suggests: "I alone am responsible for what I think. The negative thoughts from someone else only serve to remind me of my own winning healthiness -- and I always feel good about myself."

Next, add this bit of self-talk: "I understand -- he has programming of his own. It may not be the best, but it is the only programming he has."

This isn't belittling the other person. It's recognizing that he is doing no more than acting out the programming that directs his life.

Self-talk -- autosuggestion -- is an excellent way to remain in charge of your own attitudes-and invulnerable to the negative attitudes of others.

Points to Ponder: Principle 7

1. A positive mental attitude is the single most important principle of the science of success, without which you cannot get the maximum benefit from the other sixteen principles.
2. Success attracts success, and failure attracts more failure.
3. Your mental attitude is the only thing over which you, and only you, have complete control.
4. Every adversity, sorrow, or defeat, whether or not you caused it to happen, contains the seed of an equivalent benefit.
5. You are the one person on whom you can and should depend at all times.
6. A positive mental attitude attracts opportunities for success, while a negative mental attitude repels opportunities and doesn't even take advantage of them when they do come along.
7. A positive mind finds a way it can be done; a negative mind looks for all the ways it can't be done.
8. All things are possible to the person who believes they are possible.
9. No one has ever discovered the limitations of the power of the mind.
10. Your mind belongs to you alone. Take possession of it, direct it to specific usage, and make life pay off on your own terms.
11. Your true age is determined by your mental attitude, not on how long you have lived.
12. Your mind is your own, and so is the responsibility as to how you use it.
13. A positive mental attitude is an irresistible force that knows no such thing as an immovable body.
14. The only limitations you have are those in your own mind.