

Bringing Out Your Personal Excellence

No matter what you do in life, doing it well reaps great rewards. Whether this concept is applied to your work or your health, your relationships or your personal goals, making a commitment to personal excellence in whatever you do virtually guarantees a life of fulfillment, success and passion.

What does excellence have to do with anything? As with most things in life, the results we experience tend to be in proportion with the quality of effort we put forth. If we give a halfhearted effort, we experience minimal results. If we give our absolute best, we always get excellent results (even if they aren't what we initially intended). Sometimes the results are BETTER than we expected.

You may wonder whether excellence really matters. Can't you do something "well enough" and call it good? Yes, and that's not always a bad thing to do. You can still get good results from good intentions and adequate efforts. But the question you need to ask yourself in every situation is, "Am I willing to settle for 'good enough?'" If not, you might want to change your approach and learn to apply your own personal excellence to everything you do.

Believing You Are Capable of More

One common reason people don't give their best effort is because they don't believe they are capable of more. Does this describe you?

- Are you more focused on getting quick results, even if they aren't the best results?
- Do you think that if a task requires too much effort it won't be worth it?
- Do you consistently avoid working any harder than you have to?
- Do you believe that massive success is only for the truly talented and lucky, so there's no point in giving your best?

If you're like the average person, you are probably capable of **20 times** more than you have achieved so far. That's at the minimum. It's probably higher than that.

Do you have trouble believing that, or do you feel a twinge in your gut that confirms the truth of that statement?

If you really don't believe you are capable of more, then you are already working at your maximum level of excellence. However, if you are willing to just CONSIDER that you're capable of more, you are in the right mind-set to change everything.

First, take a moment to think about your accomplishments thus far, and be honest with yourself about the things you could have done better. Perhaps you shied away from increased responsibility at your job and got passed over for a promotion, or you gave up on making your dream a reality because it seemed too difficult.

In order to bring out your personal excellence, you need to first acknowledge that your present circumstances are due to the actions you've taken so far, and more importantly the **QUALITY** of effort you've put forth.

This can be an uncomfortable exercise because in a sense it means acknowledging that **you** are the cause of your own stunted progress. However, only by knowing with certainty where you **ARE** can you move on to somewhere **BETTER**.

Imagine you're in a shopping mall, standing before one of those maps that state, "You are here." If you know where you are you can easily map out a route to get somewhere else.

It's important not to JUDGE yourself for your progress (or lack of) up to this point. Feeling badly about yourself accomplishes nothing. The point is to gain a clear understanding of where you are, and figure out where you want to go. Acknowledge that you did the best you could with the resources you had, but now you are ready to do better.

Finding Something to Believe In

Excellence is not so much about WHAT you do, but how you do it. However, the more time you spend doing things that really matter to you, the more naturally you will bring out your inner excellence.

What is important to you? What do you live for? What have you always wanted to do? Answering these questions will start you on an amazing journey of self-discovery and growth.

Once you know the activities that make your heart sing, the point is then to do them often, and do them WELL. Master them like you've never mastered anything before. Throw yourself into them and become consumed by them.

When we do something we feel extremely passionate about, we automatically give the best of ourselves to the task. We're not focusing on anything but the present moment which means we are able to devote our full energy and attention to NOW.

Not only do we end up enjoying ourselves to the fullest possible extent, we also lend that much more power to the end result. Halfhearted effort leads to lukewarm results, but focused, passionate action brings forth powerful results.

When It Just Has to Be Done

As important as it is to follow your passions, we all have things that simply must be done. We've got jobs, family responsibilities, mundane chores, and all types of obligations.

It's easy to slip into a mind-set of drudgery and do these things with halfhearted effort, and much of the time we do just that. But what would happen if we began giving them our full effort and attention?

First, we'd find ourselves feeling more positive about these unpleasant tasks. Rather than feeling annoyed or weary about them, we'd feel good about them. We'd start focusing more on the BENEFITS created by the work we do, rather than the work itself.

We would also gain a sense of personal mastery over everything we do. From errands to interpersonal relationships, each activity would feel like its own reward. The results gained from these activities would simply be a nice bonus – better organization, greater fulfillment, deeper relationships, and more powerful results from projects.

In general, personal excellence creates a sense of inner pride about who we are and what we do. It makes us feel more confident, happier, and focused.

Committing to Excellence

The important thing is to COMMIT to excellence with whatever you do. Don't clean out the garage because you "have to". Clean out the garage as if it were the most important thing you were doing that day. Clean it out as if a neat garage was of utmost importance in the grand scheme of things. Clean it out as if you would rather be doing nothing else in the world.

Why? What does your attitude matter when cleaning out the garage? If you approach any task with a sense of boredom or grudging obligation, a few things will happen.

- First, you won't enjoy the process at all. Your mind will be focusing only on "getting it done" and you won't be giving your full attention to what you're doing. Consequently, you end up missing out on the enjoyment of the process.
- Secondly, since you didn't pay full attention to what you were doing, your results will be less than stellar. The garage might look "okay" and you might be fine with that. But wouldn't "good" be better than "okay"? And wouldn't "great" be better than "good"?
- Finally, with a ho-hum attitude, you will also miss out on that great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that comes from a job well done.

Perhaps you think it doesn't matter, that doing a job for its own sake is fine and dandy. Sometimes that might be true. However, if you want to experience greater joy and fulfillment in your life, it makes sense that you'd want to enjoy the things you do, AND experience better results from them.

The only way to do that is to COMMIT fully to whatever you do. Focus your full attention to it and allow yourself to be immersed in the process. Give it your absolute best effort and watch how it dramatically enhances the result!

Investing in Every Move You Make

One great way to increase your personal excellence is by choosing to see your effort as an INVESTMENT in the end result.

What is an investment? In a financial context, it is money we allocate (to a fund or program) with the intention to expand and grow it (with interest or other gains) so we get more money back.

How does this apply to actions and excellence? If we see our every action as an investment, it means that we stand to gain MORE than we give.

- If we invest in our relationships by strengthening communication and spending quality time with loved ones, our relationships grow and expand into meaningful connections that enrich our lives.
- If we invest in our career by giving our best effort, continuing our education and striving for long-term advancement, we gain more money, greater job satisfaction and more opportunities for success.
- If we invest in our personal growth and development, we gain a greater understanding of ourselves, our aspirations, and our potential.

It's exactly the same for everything you do, whether you're working on your passions or your obligations.

- Would you want to have an operation done by a surgeon that was only half paying attention to what he or she was doing?
- Would you want to be driven by a taxi driver that was only half watching the road?
- Would you want to eat a meal that was only half cooked by a chef?

Granted, most of the things you do may not be as life altering as these examples. But why should your results be any less important?

Never Settling for Less

Have you ever caught yourself settling for less? Perhaps you had a big goal in mind but you doubted your ability to achieve it, so you set your sights a little lower.

I'm not referring to starting small and gradually increasing your goals as you go along. That's actually a great way to build your confidence and stretch the limit of what you believe is possible.

What I'm referring to is the person who dreams of being a best-selling novelist, but instead settles for a job writing newspaper articles because "it pays the bills". This person is not slowly working toward a larger goal; he or she has given up on the larger goal and settled for what he or she thinks is possible.

Have you written off your big dream because it seems unattainable? Maybe you still harbor a faint hope that "some day" you can have what you want, but you don't have a plan in mind. Have you simply settled because you don't see any way to get what you really want?

Settling is really a self-protection mechanism. Not having what we want is discomfoting, so we find ways to rationalize it, which lessens the pain and disappointment. Instead of fighting for what we want, we settle into a state of resignation and numb defeat – before we even TRY!

That's the funny (yet sad) thing about settling – we usually do it before even TRYING to get what we really want. We simply convince ourselves it isn't

possible and stow our dreams away in the shadowy recesses of our subconscious mind.

Yet, no matter how hard you have tried to forget your dreams, they still whisper to you, don't they? They still haunt your dreams and fill you with envy when you see someone else doing what you want to do.

Pay attention to those little whispers, because they hold an important message: You are capable of achieving anything you want, and with such a pervasive essence of excellence that it would blow your mind if you could see it now.

You just have to believe it, and commit to doing it.

When it comes right down to it, bringing out your personal excellence **REQUIRES** you to stop settling. It requires an open mind, a belief that what you want is entirely possible, and a willingness to demand nothing less than excellence from yourself – no matter what you do.

Character & Integrity

Two major components of your own personal excellence are character and integrity.

- Character refers to the traits that determine who you are at a core level.
- Integrity reveals the values you live your life by.

Character is often said to be “what you do when you think no one is watching”. What a revealing little statement that is! Most of us have done things we're not proud of; things we hope don't come back to haunt us later. These events usually take place in our younger years, when we're still trying to figure out who we are.

Once we know who we are (or decide who we want to be), we begin to understand that we are largely a product of our actions. Positive actions make us a “good person,” and a valuable member of society. Negative actions reveal a cruel, selfish or undeveloped character.

Your character will directly affect your personal excellence in powerful ways. How? If excellence is all about throwing your whole self into whatever you do, shouldn't your “whole self” be a person of great value?

Remember, your character is determined by your actions. If you consistently cheat, steal and lie to others, your inner self is diminished and therefore largely ineffective. On the other hand, if you strive to serve others, contribute something of value to others and the world, your inner self will grow and expand into something far more pervasive than you can imagine.

THEN when you throw your whole self into whatever you do, you are throwing a “bigger and better self” into the process, and your results will be that much more powerful.

Here's how to build your character in life-changing ways:

- Be the best “YOU” you can be. Don't try to emulate others, but instead look within and bring out the very best parts of yourself that are unique and special.
- Strengthen and develop the best parts of yourself until they are all-pervasive. Let them take over your personality, your work, your relationships – and every aspect of your life. Let them become the largest parts of yourself.

- Share the best parts of yourself with others. Share your strength, your ideals, your vision, your power. Be willing to show others who you truly are, and you will become a powerful magnet for likeminded people.

- Focus on what you can do for others, rather than what you stand to gain from others. Ironically, a focus on giving will also increase the amount and magnitude of what you receive. Again, don't focus on that, just focus on contributing immense value to other people, and the world in general.

- Do only that which you can be proud of. Remember, character is revealed by what you do when you think no one is watching. A good way to keep this in perspective is to imagine a hidden camera trained on you at all times. If you would feel ashamed or guilty about an activity you're considering – it's a sure bet that it will detract from your character rather than adding to it.

The Value of Integrity

Integrity is all about the values by which you live your life. A person of great character usually has a strong sense of integrity, while a person of negligible character has less (or no) integrity.

What are these values? For the purposes of this report, value is defined as “the relative worth or importance of something”. Whatever traits or characteristics you consider to be very important or valuable are your personal “values”.

Common values that you may hold:

- Honesty
- Compassion

- Fairness
- Kindness
- Respect

Integrity is simply ADHERENCE to your own code of values. That means being loyal to your own ideas of how things should be in your world. If honesty is one of your values, you would never dream of trying to cheat someone. You simply wouldn't be able to justify such an action in your own mind. If you did try to side-step your values, you'd feel so uncomfortable that you wouldn't be able to stand it. The guilt and shame would eat at you until you did what you could to make the situation right again.

Take a few moments right now and consider your own values. What is very important to you regarding your own behavior and the behavior of others? Write them down so you can explore them in greater detail later. Even if you don't know why you feel strongly about a particular value, write it down anyway. As you explore your values, you'll realize that their underlying causes can vary widely, and that's okay. The main thing is to understand why they are important to YOU.

You may be surprised to learn that many of your values were formed as a result of your past experiences. For example, you may have been cheated or lied to by someone you trusted, and the experience was so painful that you vowed never to do such a thing to someone else. Voila, your value of honesty was born. If you were verbally abused or belittled when you were a child, you may now hold a value of kindness and compassion for whomever you meet.

Once you have your list of values, compare them with your most common actions. Do you ever do things that are in opposition to your values? If you do, you'll quickly understand why this limits your personal excellence. The feelings of guilt, shame, fear and embarrassment will consistently interfere with

everything you do and diminish any sense of satisfaction you would have gained from your activities.

You can also question and adjust your values as needed; especially if you formed values as a result of childhood conditioning that are not serving you now. A good example is the child who is conditioned to believe that money is the root of all evil and selfless service is God-like behavior. This child will likely grow into an adult who resists having any more money than necessary, and struggles financially all of her life. Questioning and challenging (and ultimately changing) such a value will create a greater sense of empowerment and purpose in her life, rather than blindly living by someone else's values.

A strict adherence to your values makes for an incredible experience, provided they are values that serve your highest good, and the highest good of others. Not only are you able to feel good about your day-to-day actions, you are able to keep growing and developing as a person. In other words, **expanding your personal excellence!**

Excellence as Motivation

Striving for excellence in everything you do can motivate you in amazing ways. Consider the difference between “doing something” and “doing something better than you’ve ever done it before”. Can you feel the difference in energy in those two examples?

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ATTITUDE. If you want to feel motivated and inspired about anything, simply choose to strive for excellence. Immediately you'll find yourself standing a little straighter, focusing a little more intently and feeling eager to attack the challenge before you.

Even better, this mind-set can motivate you to higher and higher levels of attainment, and provide the determination to attempt bigger projects that you might have avoided before.

For example, let's say it's Saturday morning and you are going to do some yard work outside. You really don't feel like doing it, but you decide to motivate yourself by striving for excellence. You focus on making perfectly symmetric swipes on the lawn with the mower, gleefully attack the shrubs with the clippers, and edge the driveway and sidewalk as if your life depended on neatness and precision. A glance at your watch reveals that you were so engrossed in what you were doing that time seemed to fly by and you were finished in no time at all.

You now feel so great about your accomplishment that you decide to clean out the gutters and repair part of the roof on your house. Those projects also go well, and since you're feeling so good about them, you decide to wash your car and vacuum the inside.

I could go on, but you get the idea. At the beginning of this little example, you were feeling less than enthusiastic about doing some simple yard work. (Imagine how resistant you would have been to doing the yard work, gutters, roof, AND cleaning the car!)

However, just a simple shift in attitude - the intention to strive for excellence - serves as a powerful motivator. This same concept can apply to your work, your goals, your personal growth, or any other area of your life.

Motivating Others

Excellence is often contagious, and your commitment to excellence can motivate others in your life. This is especially true if you are a leader or coach,

either in your personal or business life. If you strive for excellence, so will your team members or employees. Conversely, if you demand excellence from others but don't strive for it yourself, you will see little benefit. Nothing creates resentment like an attitude of, "Do what I say, not what I do."

Trying to force someone to bring out their personal excellence is rarely effective. Instead, let your own actions be the inspiration. As people notice your commitment to excellence in whatever you do, they'll also feel inspired to give their best effort.

Here are some additional ways to inspire excellence in others:

- Use positive reinforcement. When your team member (or employee, family member, child, etc.) shows a commitment to excellence, comment on it! Say something like, "I admire the way you pay such close attention to detail." Or, "You're really good at organization; it makes my life a lot easier." Just mentioning your appreciation is enough to make them want to continue doing a good job.
- Create an atmosphere of cooperation. Let your team members know that you consider yourself part of the team, not just the head of it. Stress the value that each person brings to the group objective and the importance of working together. Let them know that you're available to help, or simply serve as a sounding board for ideas and problems.
- Encourage them to do better. Just like you occasionally believe you are only capable of so much, other people can also get caught up in self-limitations. You can make it your mission to help them see their greater potential, and encourage them to try a bit harder in everything they do. This can be tricky to do without sounding like you're criticizing, but by

focusing more on the positive and expressing your belief in them, you'll be able to get the point across.

When it comes right down to it, you have little control over what others do. If a person does not want to be motivated or bring out their personal excellence, no amount of coaxing from you will change that. In that case, you can only do what I described earlier – let your own actions serve as an example. As much as you'd like to see excellence in others, your real job is to see – and foster – it in yourself.

Motivation from Others

You can also seek motivation from others by reading about or observing those who strive for excellence in everything they do. These people are easy to spot because they are usually very successful and motivated. They seem to have no shortage of energy and enthusiasm, and live their lives with a “can-do” attitude.

Watch these people, and you'll begin to notice that they follow certain behaviors which you can then incorporate into your own activities. A few examples:

- They focus on one thing at a time until they master it. Only when a person reaches a certain level of confidence and competence are they able to juggle a lot of objectives simultaneously. Before that, they usually learn the importance of narrowing in on one area and sticking with it until they master it.
- They refuse to consider anything a “failure”. Instead, they simply discover one more way that didn't work, and use that knowledge to try

something else. You won't see them moping around, overcome by frustration. They roll up their sleeves and keep at it until they get the results they want.

- They refuse to settle for mediocrity. They won't accept "good enough," and instead keep working on it until it's as close to perfect as possible.
- They understand that there's no such thing as perfection. This seems to contradict the previous point above, but it doesn't. Somewhere between mediocrity and perfectionism lies a point of clarity when you know you've done your very best and you need to let go. This takes some introspection, but the more you strive for that keen awareness, the easier it gets.

What other characteristics of excellence can you think of? Write them below and begin including them in your daily habits:

Moving Out of the 'Hood

Are you familiar with a little place called "Victim-hood"? It seems like an attractive place to live, at first glance. No one blames you for anything when you live in Victim-hood, and there are plenty of nice people to express

sympathy for your troubles. They don't expect you to do much for yourself because after all, life is really hard! (They should know; they live there too.) Instead, you can snuggle down for a nice long stay and let the brave face the challenges that you don't want to face.

The problem is that once you move into Victim-hood, it's difficult to get out. Excuses grow as large as trees and block your path, and fear lurks ominously beyond the 'hood limits. Out there somewhere is a scary thing called Responsibility, and you know you'll need to shoulder some if you want to move out of the 'hood. But in order to get it, you need to build up your courage and travel away from the comfort and security of the familiar.

Does the above description sound a little sarcastic to you? Does it sound like I'm picking on victims? Don't be offended because I've spent my fair share of time in Victim-hood too. (Sometimes I still take a day trip there to visit with old friends.) I think most people have at least a mild familiarity with the place.

It's really easy to feel that the universe is picking on us sometimes. We see other people that seem to have it so easy. They're driving around in fancy cars, making tons of money, living the high life, while we struggle to make even the slightest progress. Our challenges always seem to be so much bigger than everyone else's don't they?

That's the problem: our PERCEPTION of our challenges. We feel diminished or defeated before we even get started.

Bringing out your personal excellence is dependent upon letting go of your victim mind-set. Rather than trying to wish away your challenges and obstacles, EXCEL IN SPITE OF THEM. Change your perception from, "Why is this happening to me?" to "How can I get through this most effectively?"

Just that ONE change can make such a dramatic difference in your attitude. You will naturally tap into an inner power that can propel you through ANY obstacle or challenge without a single stumble or fall.

Your Personal Excellence is the Essence of YOU

Personal excellence isn't an external trait or quality that you can adopt. It doesn't come from outside of you, it comes from within you. It IS YOU. Excellence is the very essence of who you are.

It is a process of discovering who you are and learning to be that person as effectively and sincerely as you can, in every moment of your life.

You don't have to force the process to happen, but simply LET it happen. Understand what makes you unique and valuable, and let those qualities shine. Stay in the present moment as often as possible, and give your best to each situation.

If you can do these things, you will automatically encourage your inner excellence to shine through and illuminate everything you say and do.

To your success

Iain Legg

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