

Positive Attitude

The more you seek to achieve, the more likely you are to encounter obstacles.

Every day of your life you'll have to cope with problems: big ones, small ones, urgent ones, ones you hope will just go away. Once you accept this and get on with dealing with them, you'll be fine. Things will get better and better. It's when you start hoping that tomorrow will be problem-free that you are really in trouble.

Negative events, difficulties, and arguments are inevitable in day to day life. It's not a question of dodging them as much as coping with them, even enjoying their challenge.

President Nelson Mandela said, "I would like to be bitter, but there is no time to be bitter, there is work to do."

The world wants problem solvers and problem preventers, too. This is not a phrase you hear very often, but prevention is better than cure.

If faced with a problem, the first question I ask is: 'How can I turn this state of affairs to my advantage?'

Your future success is the best revenge on those who doubted or scorned you.

Choose your battles carefully, because they can take a lot out of you. Don't be afraid to withdraw from a conflict situation so that you can live to fight another day. Beware those battles you could win if you wanted to, but with only a hollow victory because the cost to you would be too great. Battles like that are self-destructive.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Handling conflict & negotiation**
- **Renewing your energy & enthusiasm**
- **Don't wait to be taught**

Different thinking techniques

How you set about thinking can make a world of difference to what thoughts you actually end up with.

Often, hard work alone won't get you through, but thinking cleverly will. And thinking cleverly requires you to take time out just to sit and think more clearly and to think differently.

Question received opinions and traditional routes to see if they still hold water and are still the best way of doing things. They may have hidden pros or invisible cons. Hunt for the rewards that innovation can bring.

Be prepared to challenge the very premise of what's going on, to make sure that what you are trying to achieve is what you should be trying to achieve. This takes bravery, independence, deep thinking, and hard work, but that's why 98% of people don't bother to do it.

Inert intelligence, which is the knowledge of facts and figures, is not even a quarter of what you need for problem solving. You need to analyse material, generate ideas for possible solutions, and then generate a plan for putting those solutions into practice. This requires different types of thinking and it helps to be very consciously aware of what type is being used.

We have to ask "*What are we trying to do?*" rather than hurrying too quickly into "*How can we do something?*"

Making ideas work is every bit as important as having the ideas in the first place.

Actively seek out evidence or information that might contradict the received opinion or your point of view. Most people are very reluctant to do this, but failing to do so simply postpones the realisation that they were wrong.

The best ideas are sometimes rather bizarre or different. Resist the pressure to make new ideas conform to the same pattern as existing ones. The lack of belief in your original idea, or dilution of the essence that so excited you, are the enemies of success.

It is a mistake to think of one solution and then go with that. Give yourself time and put in the trouble to come up with some more ideas. Ask your trusted friends to come up with some, too. Don't stop 'till you've got a whole range of possible solutions to choose between.

Brainstorming is a good way of generating possible solutions to a problem. Scribble down ideas as they come to you on a blank pad of paper, including the crazy ones! You can always reject them later, though maybe you'll find they weren't so crazy after all. It is even better when there's more than one person. Use a big flip-chart so you can all see the possible solutions being volunteered, and this will prompt further suggestions.

When I need to sort out the priority of things, I use sticky bits of paper up on a wall so that I can change the trial order as easily and as often as I like. It has the benefit of staring you and everybody else right in the face. It sounds like such an obvious trick, but people so rarely bother to do it.

There are no right or wrong answers, you're simply looking for explanations with higher predictive and explanatory powers.

It was Charles Darwin who said, "I cannot remember a single first-formed hypothesis which has not after a time to be given up or greatly modified."

Reading good novels can develop not just your facility with language, but also an ability to employ different styles of thinking.

If you come across some aspect of reality or some evidence that contradicts what you thought was the case, *don't ignore it*. Find out what's going on. It's the pursuit of the truth - an explanation of how things really are, rather than how we assume they are - that distinguishes the very best thinkers.

Being intelligent has very little to do with a good memory, and a great deal to do with being able to bring different types of thinking to bear on a problem, such as: creative, lateral, logical, analytical, deductive and intuitive. The ability to manipulate a problem with these different tools will help you arrive at powerful solutions, but it takes a very conscious effort to develop such a range of thinking-styles in your armory.

Top performers regularly create things: reports, projects, plans, models of how things work, events, think-tanks, action groups, and relationships. Many people are very good at consuming information and digesting facts and ideas, but the rare and valuable exception is the person who can actually initiate something and make things happen so as to invent and bring into being an original and usable tool, idea or experience.

Athletes who take the psychological side of what they do seriously, will progress from their sport with something of great importance: skills for living a higher quality of life.

Dividing the world up into discrete subjects might be convenient, but it's counter-productive in the long run, because ideas from one sphere can turbo-charge ideas from another. What can biology learn from mathematics, what can history learn from psychology?

Almost every significant breakthrough, no matter what field of endeavour, has been brought about by a break with tradition - a cutting free from old ways of thinking. Newcomers are well placed to make such breakthroughs, particularly if they bring specialist knowledge or skills from some seemingly unrelated field.

The more you can make use of your unique strengths and experiences in solving a problem, the more likely you'll arrive at an approach that holds special and unanticipated promise.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Developing through new experiences**
- **Handling conflict & negotiation**
- **Like yourself or change yourself**

Learning from others

Don't just listen to advice, actively seek it out. But at some point on any issue, you will need to have the courage of your own convictions and to follow your own star.

Ask all the questions other people might be embarrassed to ask. Assume you know nothing and listen to the experience of others.

Don't ask people if they agree with you or if they like something, ask them how they would improve it. This gives them permission to help you without fear of hurting your feelings.

It's helpful to ask yourself the key questions first, then dare to ask these same questions of people you respect, so as to compare your answers with theirs.

Know-how is all the 'tricks of the trade' that is never formally or systematically taught, but is vital for getting a job done well. In the early years, specific know-how - for instance how to do

well in friendships, schoolwork, exams, sport - is most often passed on from parents, older brothers and sisters, or particularly good teachers. The sooner students can start searching it out for themselves, the better.

It's not surprising that many people simply don't know how to achieve their goals. The problem is that they're unaware of the gaps in their knowledge, they *don't know* that they don't know, which means they plough on in earnest ignorance completely unaware of their limited chances of success.

Find ways to spend time working with people older and more experienced than yourself, rather than being with people of your own age and experience all of the time.

Moderate and under-achievement is sometimes a result of individuals simply not knowing how to reach their well-intentioned goals. Indeed, it seems that much of the learning that matters to success in real-world pursuits, happens in the absence of formal instruction. This means you have to ask seasoned professionals for pointers on what's required.

Studying other people's lives in detail is one way to acquire know-how. It helps you to see that the course of a life is something potentially explainable - and even improvable. Making sense of the lives of others can help you see how you can control your own destiny.

The increasing popularity of films, videos and television, rather than novels, is effecting people's source of detailed know-how. Films tend to leave out the details of life, such as an explicit explanation of a character's motivations or thinking processes. Novels, on the other hand, often fill in the step by step gaps in explicit detail, and so provide more useful insights. Good novels are often a great source of insight into how people think and how lives work.

Us old people sometimes have trouble hearing and we don't always know all the new lingo. But, don't think we've lost our marbles just because we ask you to repeat something or we get the wrong end of the stick because you mumbled out some garbled message. If you've got a bit of patience, we Grans and Grandads would be pleased as punch to chip in a bit of advice or encouragement.

Ask other people how to do things, how to cope. That's not to say you have to do it the way they say, but no harm in having their opinions. Their way may not work for you, but it might prompt something that will.

Try to learn from several key figures in your life, by observing their successes and their failures so as to help design your own mix and match strategy. Unless you're a mind-reader, be prepared to ask them why they do particular things so that you get a good grasp of their tactics.

You might well start off copying other people you admire, but eventually you're likely to find your own style and uniqueness.

When you've got problems - share them! Bottling things up is the worse thing you can do.

You've got to know how to *network*: who could you call if you needed to hear an informed opinion on one subject or another? Who do your friends know who might be willing to help because you're the friend of a friend? That's networking!

Make sure you find yourself at least one person who is rooting for you. You have to have someone who knows what you're trying to achieve.

Young men make things hard for themselves by getting tangled up in macho notions of 'being independent' when they should be asking for help.

The Catch 22 of being successful is that when you are, you get half the support but twice the expectations that you'll do even better next time.

Ask people you respect to give you feedback. And if they only tell you what you're doing wrong, make them tell you what you're doing right. However tough we like to think ourselves, we all need a little bit of praise now and then.

If someone doesn't know you, then their approval or disapproval of you is irrelevant. Who are they to judge? If they do know you, then you should be asking yourself whether you respect their judgement on the matter in hand. Only if the answer to that is yes, and they still disapprove of your behaviour, should you reconsider it.

Bear in mind that someone else's view can, on occasion, be uninformed, malicious, distorted or serving their own agenda.

Keep hustling for support, and make sure the weight of others' expectations doesn't push you off in the wrong direction.

Some personal problems can be a taboo, even among your closest friends, which makes them very difficult to confront and conquer. A problem shared is indeed a problem halved, all the more so if you can share it with someone with the professional skills and experience to help you get the better of it. Don't suffer in silence, pick up the phone and improve your life. The pain of that difficult phone call will be rewarded time and again in the future.

It's too easy to say: 'Oh well, at least I asked.' But it's not over just because you asked. You can't go through life not getting answers, not daring to say 'I'm sorry, I still don't get it.'

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- **Teamwork & leadership**
- **Considering sex**
- **Making the most of college**

The problem with solutions

Most solutions create new, unforeseen problems - this is the law of *unintended consequences*.

Try not to merely think about things, but to think *through* them - all the way through to what their likely effects would be. It's physically more tiring doing this type of thinking, because you're having to generate all the possibilities and the mental images to match, but it's going to save you a lot of time in the long run.

Don't just look at what could go right for you, however nice it is to do that. Dare also to look for the traps, ask the awkward questions, probe the areas where things could go wrong, or are already going wrong.

Try to think of the unexpected, then test your ideas out as cheaply and quickly as possible. The best minds are unstoppable experimenters.

You should implement your problem-solving solution and then keep an eye on things to see how well the solution is working. Prepare to modify it or scrap it altogether if needs be.

Ideas are ten-a-penny until you have to put them into action for yourself. So you've thought of something? But can you do it or get it done? Ideas should be live ammunition.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Handling conflict & negotiation**
- **Setting your goals**
- **Renewing your energy & enthusiasm**

Coping with crises, set-backs, mistakes & regrets

Individuals who are really going places in life have setbacks, but it's how they handle the setbacks that decide how far and how fast they travel. It isn't the setback which is dangerous, it's their response to it, their attitude to 'what next?'.

The way individuals respond to setbacks, failures or crises tells you more about them than how they are in the easy times.

It takes great strength and dignity to admit you've made a mistake.

You have to learn to cope with whatever comes your way, with wherever you end up.

Success is often a matter either of being brave enough to hang on after others have let go, or of being brave enough to let go as early as possible, so that you can go and do something else you'll enjoy much more.

If you don't generate a reasonable number of mistakes, you're probably not trying hard enough or courageously enough.

You will make many big mistakes along the way, behave foolishly and embarrass yourself. Everybody does, *we all do*. But it's the ability to face up to those mistakes and to put them right as best you can which distinguishes the best people.

When you make a blunder, you've got to turn it to your advantage somehow. By all means spend the morning beating yourself up over it, but then stop at lunchtime and never look back again. Forgive yourself for your errors and get back in the game.

When we're angry, we often withdraw rather than express it. What we should be doing is channeling the anger into solving the problem constructively and positively. That way, the anger can quickly be transformed into a sense of accomplishment.

Faced with a crisis, *don't* focus on yourself and how you are feeling. Pour as much attention as possible into constructive, positive things you can do to at least stabilise the situation. Then take time out to refresh yourself so that you can make a plan of action, preferably with someone at your side checking that your thinking is reasonable and rational. Choose that person for their calm-in-a-crisis quality. Some friends are of the 'Oh my God!' type, others of the 'How can I Help?' variety.

Give yourself time to think. In a sticky situation, it's too easy to feel as if you have to act here and now. Resist that urge. Take 5 minutes out and think it through, make a call, even give the problem the overnight test, if at all possible. If you think hard about it and get some advice, you'll never regret whatever you go ahead and do. You almost certainly *will* regret charging in before you've given yourself a chance to bring your best mental artillery to bear.

I keep a mental list of all the times I've triumphed in tricky situations. It serves as a useful morale-booster next time the going gets tough.

It's easy to lose heart at the very last moment when you are most exhausted. In fact, you're probably on the verge of victory, even though you may think you've lost. Bridge that final gap and you can win your struggle. They say 'quitters don't win and winners don't quit'.

Whenever I am feeling bad in the present, I cheer myself up by making clear and positive plans for the future.

Every endeavour will meet with a mixture of failure and success. You just have to make sure the successes outweigh the failures.

In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out where the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumphs of high achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither defeat nor victory."

High-achievers can often be very fragile in the face of failure which is to them a rare or new experience, and so they need to be taught coping mechanisms ahead of time, because they might not develop their own. I'd say you're rather incomplete as a person if you haven't had to overcome some disadvantage, some disability.

Unless you've experienced bitter disappointment, there can be little or no pleasure in being successful.

A difficult upbringing is just as strong a base for a good life as a good one.

Numerous success stories have overcome adversity in the growing-up years: either family financial hardship, emotional upset, long-term poor health, a physical or social stigma, or the early loss of one or both parents. Take heart from their experiences.

It is not stress that determines our psychological and physical health, but rather how we cope with it.

Happiness in life comes down to how you deal with failure. If you can take a fall, pick yourself up and move on, joy will be yours.

Sometimes, when a project goes wrong, it's not a question of trying something less ambitious next time, but of trying something even more ambitious and exciting. Something that will pull even *more* commitment from you, and even more support from other people. Expand the idea and grow out of trouble rather than shrinking in the face of failure.

Mucking things up can make a huge contribution to your overall performance in the long run, but only if you learn from the error.

Coping with difficulties, like problem-solving, is a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it gets. Use it or lose it.

Don't dwell on the past. Learn from it by examining what you did right and wrong. In the aftermath of success or failure, it's too easy to want to crack on with something else, but you need to make time to absorb every last ounce of learning from the victory or defeat.

Every setback is a learning opportunity with clues to how you might proceed all the better in the future.

Rather than denying or trying to hide your mistakes, study them thoroughly - learn everything you can from them. When you've learned all you can, put them away, forget about them, and push on with your next endeavour.

Help others who have faced the same problems as you. As well as being very satisfying, you'll realise what you've learned from difficult experiences.

You haven't got to suffer to learn great lessons, but you can learn great lessons from suffering.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Changing direction**
- **Communicating your emotions**
- **Developing through new experiences**