

# Today Matters

## 12 Daily Practices to Guarantee Tomorrow's Success

by John C. Maxwell

[Fertig Notes]

- Everyone wants to have a good day, but not too many people know what a good day looks like – much less how to create one. *The way you live today impacts your tomorrow.*
- There are so many diet books on the best-seller lists and so many management fads employed in corporate offices each year. The problem is that we want the rewards of success without paying the price. There is no magic solution to success.
- The 57 Rules of Success #1 Deliver the goods #2 The other 56 don't matter
- John Wooden says, "When opportunity comes, it's too late to prepare."
- Growth comes from making decisions *and* following through on them.
- It may sound trite, but today is the only time you'll have. It's too late for yesterday. And you can't depend on tomorrow. That's why **today matters**. Most of the time we miss that. Why? Because...  
WE OVEREXAGGERATE YESTERDAY The older I am, the better I was. Maintain the right perspective concerning yesterday. "Yesterday ended last night."  
WE OVERESTIMATE TOMORROW Many people just figure that tomorrow is bound to be better, but they have no strategy for *making* it better. They have the lottery mind-set.  
WE UNDERESTIMATE TODAY **The secret of your success is determined by your daily agenda.**
- Benjamin Franklin: "One today is worth two tomorrows; what I am to be, I am now becoming."
- You will never change your life until you change something you do daily. The way you live your life today is preparing you for your tomorrow. "You can pay now and play later, or you can play now and pay later. But either way, you are going to pay." The only adequate preparation for tomorrow is the right use of today.
- John Kotter, Harvard Business School professor: Most people don't lead their own lives – they accept their lives.
- If you're proactive, you focus on *preparing*. If you're reactive, you end up focusing on *repairing*.
- *The first* ingredient of success – making good decisions – has no real value without the second, which is practicing good discipline. Decisions help us start. Discipline helps us finish.
- Successful people form the habit of doing things unsuccessful people do not like to do.
- If we've made a decision to try to be healthy, but we put off exercising, it's true that we avoid thirty minutes of unpleasantness. But then we feel guilty. On the other hand, when we do practice the discipline of exercise for thirty minutes, we feel good about ourselves *the entire day*. That's a great trade-off. We get sixteen hours of positive feedings about ourselves for half an hour of work.
- Someone once defined hard work as the accumulation of the easy things you didn't do when you should have.
- Getting started is often the hardest part of making changes in your life.
- The greatest gap in life is the one between knowing and doing.
- Most people can make good decisions once they know what the issues are. But character and perseverance determine what happens *after* the decision is made.
- What I do in the future depends on what I already am; and what I am is the result of previous years of discipline.
- John Wooden: Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.  
Today's **ATTITUDE** Gives Me Possibilities
- Where it is possible for people with great talent or drive to achieve with a bad attitude, it doesn't happen very often, and it takes an incredible amount of effort. And even if they do achieve some degree of success, they aren't too happy. (And they make the people around them miserable too.) Most often, people with bad attitudes don't get very far in life. On the other hand, even barely average people can do great things when their attitudes are great.

- YOUR ATTITUDE AT THE BEGINNING OF A TASK AFFECTS ITS OUTCOME MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE. All's well that begins well! When you approach a task, focus on the possibilities, not the problems.
- YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHERS OFTEN DETERMINES THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD YOU. "Did you see that dirty look she gave me?" "She didn't give it to you, you had it when you went in!"
- YOUR ATTITUDE - NOT YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS - GIVES YOU HAPPINESS. The thoughts in your mind will always be more important than the things in your life.
- YOUR ATTITUDE IS CONTAGIOUS. When you spend time with others, do they walk away feeling better or worse? Watch how people respond to you, and you'll know which kind of person you are. The bottom line on attitude is that a good one helps to increase your possibilities.
- There are things in your life you cannot choose, such as your parents, where you were born, or your race. But your attitude is something you can change.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson: What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.
- One of the secrets of maintaining a good attitude is valuing people. You can't dislike people and have a good attitude at the same time.
- John Wooden: Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.
- Include positive comments in every conversation with others.

#### Today's **PRIORITIES** Give Me Focus

- Focused concentration is one of the keys to success.
- Your priorities determine how you spend your time, and time is precious.
- Have you ever found yourself thinking, *I need more time*? Well you're not going to get it. Since you can't change time, you must instead change your approach to it.
- The wisdom of life consists of the elimination of nonessentials. You can have anything you want, but you cannot have everything you want. Excellence comes from doing the right things right.
- *Prioritize your life and give focus and energy to those things that give the highest return.*
- If you do only what you must and what is effective, you will be highly productive, but you may not be content. It's also important to consider what gives you personal satisfaction. No one can be successful who doesn't possess the discipline to take care of the first two areas before adding the third.
- William James: The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.
- People don't pay for average.
- Asking others to evaluate your effectiveness is not always fun, but it is always helpful.
- According to a survey taken by Day-Timers, Inc., only one-third of American workers plan their daily schedules. And only 9 percent follow through and complete what they planned.
- Goethe: Things that matter most should never be at the mercy of things that matter least.
- How do you find the right standard for delegation? If someone else can do a task I'm doing 80 percent as well as I do, then I hand it off. I've handed off responsibilities using that standard, and after a while, the person who's taken on the job has gone on to do it much better than I could.
- Peter Drucker: No executive has ever suffered because his subordinates were strong and effective.
- We spend priority time with problem people when we should be spending it with potential people.

#### Today's **HEALTH** Gives Me Strength

- It's always easier to maintain good health than to regain it.
- People are funny. When they are young, they will spend their health to get wealth. Later, they will gladly pay all they have trying to get their health back.
- When you have something to live for, not only does it make you desire a long life, but it also helps you see the importance of the steps along the way. It's hard to find motivation in the moment when there is no hope in the future.
- One of the greatest causes of debilitating stress in people's lives is doing jobs they don't enjoy.
- Dr. Joyce Brothers: It's no exaggeration to say that a strong positive self-image is the best possible preparation for success in life.
- If you laugh at yourself loudly and often, you will find it liberating.

- A hundred years ago, most causes of illness were related to infectious disease. Today, they are related to stress.

#### Today's **FAMILY** Gives Me Stability

- A good family is an incredible advantage in life. Some people's families don't build them up; they tear them down.
- The family wanted its history written up so they hired a professional biographer to do it. The family's black sheep, Uncle George, had been executed in the electric chair for murder. "No problem," said the biographer. "I'll say that Uncle George occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution. He was attached to his position by the strongest of ties, and his death came as a real shock." While you can't do much about your ancestors, you can influence your descendants greatly. You determine how *you* treat *your* family.
- People have to deal with a lot of pressure these days. Where can a person find shelter in such a climate? If it's not at home, then it probably isn't anywhere.
- To grow, you have to know yourself. You must know your weaknesses and your strengths.
- The applause of others would never replace the appreciation of my family.
- People should try to leave the world a better place than they found it.
- Expect problems, stay committed, and develop a strategy for getting through the rough times.
- What makes families happy isn't receiving things. It's doing things together.

#### Today's **THINKING** Gives Me an Advantage

- To succeed, we must do our own thinking. It doesn't matter what profession a person pursues, thinking precedes achievement. Poor thinkers are frequently at the mercy of good thinkers.
- It's a real mistake to believe there is only one kind of thinking. It can cause a person to value only the kind of thinking in which he excels and to dismiss all other types of thinking. Some academicians fall into this trap. Most people are naturally good at a few skills and weak at others. So what do you do about your weaknesses? Gather people around you who are strong in those areas. Not having to rely on myself when it comes to thinking has been a real advantage for me.
- ***Every day I will set aside a time to think, and I will determine to think on the right things.***
- Any place (is) a good thinking place as long as I don't have to deal with interruptions. Find a thinking place. Where you go doesn't matter as long as it stimulates your thinking. (And) as important as finding the right place to think is carving out the time.
- If you don't write down your ideas, there is a great danger you will lose them.
- Author Alfred Montapert: "Every time a person puts an idea across, he finds ten people who thought about it *before* he did – but they only *thought* about it." Ideas, put into action, give an advantage.
- You can quickly improve your thinking if you do the following on a daily basis: **Focus on the Positive. Gather Good Input. Spend Time with Good Thinkers.** What you do every day in the area of thinking really matters because it sets the stage for all your actions, and it will bring you either adversity or advantage.
- *You want to clear your mind and stimulate thinking at the same time. That will bring clarity to your thinking.*

#### Today's **COMMITMENT** Gives Me Tenacity

- It's a tragedy anytime someone neglects his potential and misses many of the possibilities life has to offer.
- Do you believe you have a purpose or a destiny? If so, will you fulfill it? To become the person you have the potential to be, you will need great tenacity. That quality comes from commitment. If you want to change, you must embrace commitment.
- Success is generally due to holding on and failure to let go.
- Many people see commitment as an event, something that is done in the moment. They say "I do" in a wedding ceremony. They shake hands to close a business deal. They buy a treadmill in order to exercise. But the commitment doesn't end with the decision; it's just getting started. And you better believe that any time you make a commitment to something, it will be tested. That happens in any number of ways: **Experiencing Failure. Having to Stand Alone. Facing Deep Disappointment.**
- Abraham Lincoln: Always bear in mind that your own resolution to success is more important than any other thing.

- A great craftsman wants you to inspect his work, to look closely at its finest details. In contrast, sloppy people hide their work. And if anyone finds fault with it, shoddy workers find fault with their tools.
- ***Every day I will renew my commitment and think about the benefits that come from it.***
- EXPECT COMMITMENT TO BE A STRUGGLE – Anything worth having is going to be a struggle.
- DON'T RELY ON TALENT ALONE – If you want to reach your potential, you need to add a strong work ethic to your talent.
- FOCUS ON CHOICES, NOT CONDITIONS – Your choices are the only thing you truly control. You cannot control your circumstances, nor can you control others. By focusing on your choices, and then making them with integrity, you control your commitment. And that is what often separates success from failure.
- BE SINGLE-MINDED
- DO WHAT'S RIGHT EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT – Nothing is easier than saying words. Nothing is harder than living them, day after day. Ken Blanchard: When you're interested in something, you do it only when it's convenient. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results.

#### Today's **FINANCES** Give Me Options

- The average American is busy buying things he doesn't want with money he doesn't have to impress people he doesn't like.
- Money won't buy happiness but it will pay the salaries of a huge research staff to study the problem.
- We are better paid, better fed, and better educated than ever. Yet the divorce rate has doubled, the teen-suicide rate has tripled, and depression has soared in the past 30 years. Modern research simply confirms something said nearly two thousand years ago by the Roman philosopher Seneca: "Money has yet to make anyone rich."
- You are what you are – no matter how much or how little money you have.
- When a person has no money, he has few options. ***We will sacrifice today so that we can have options tomorrow.***
- Put the value of things into perspective. People tend to value money and things over what's really important in life: other people.
- Every person in debt is suffering from some type of depression. It is truly one of the deep dark secrets that people have. It robs them of their self-worth and keeps them from achieving dreams.
- The difference between the rich and the poor is that the rich invest their money and spend what's left, while the poor spend their money and invest what's left.
- Boxer Joe Louis: I don't like money, actually, but it quiets my nerves.

#### Today's **FAITH** Gives Me Peace

- Everything I know about leadership I learned from The Bible. I sincerely believe that faith holds the key to life's meaning.
- Teilhard DeChardin: We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.
- A study from Purdue University found people who practice their religion regularly develop only half as many medical problems as nonbelievers. The researchers concluded that religion kept people's stress down and their sense of well-being up because their faith added meaning and perspective, as well as valuable social networks.
- Faith gives a person power. Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.
- When you believe in something, you have something to live for. And that keeps you going, even under extremely difficult circumstances.
- True leadership starts with the heart – with character. The underlying message is not to act honestly, but to become an honest person. The honesty will be at the core of your leadership style. It will be at the core of your life.
- Faith is at the heart of life. You go to a doctor whose name you cannot pronounce. He gives you a prescription you cannot read. You take it to a pharmacist you have never seen.. He gives you a medicine you do not understand and yet you take it. We all have faith. Every day we act on beliefs that have little or no evidence to back them up.

- Your goal should be to align your beliefs with the truth. Seek the truth.
- Faith gives you peace and strength only if it's not superficial. The deeper the faith, the greater its potential to carry you through the rough times. Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl said, "A weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them."

#### Today's **RELATIONSHIPS** Give Me Fulfillment

- All the significant accomplishments in the history of humankind have been achieved by teams of people. Most of life's great moments – the ones that resonate in our hearts and minds – involve other people. Rarely do we experience these times alone. And even when we do, our first inclination is to share them with others. Life's best comes when you initiate and invest in solid relationships.
- If you like people, then no matter where you go, you'll meet a friend.
- Natural talent, intelligence, a wonderful education – none of these guarantees success. Something else is needed: the sensitivity to understand what other people want and the willingness to give it to them. Worldly success depends on pleasing others. No one is going to win fame, recognition, or advancement just because he or she thinks it's deserved. Someone else has to think so too.
- Any organization that succeeds does so because of its people.
- You can't make the other fellow feel important in your presence if you secretly feel that he is a nobody. The solution is to place a high value on people.
- If you respect yourself, respect others, and exhibit competence, others will almost always give you respect.
- Good relationships require a lot of effort. Put others first.
- Adding value to others is the greatest thing we can do in this life. The best way to help people is to see the best in them.
- Xerox did some research and found that "totally satisfied" customers were six times more likely to repurchase Xerox products over the next year and a half than customers who described themselves as merely "satisfied." You have to build relationships.

#### Today's **GENEROSITY** Gives Me Significance

- Don't you have the right to keep whatever money you earn – or inherit for that matter? Of course you do. But what you have the *right* to do isn't the point. What would be *best* for you to do? No one likes to be around people who think only of themselves. In contrast, nearly everyone enjoys being around people who are giving. Generosity can be described very simply as changing one's focus from self to others.
- One of the most significant things a person can do while on this earth is help others.
- When you add value to others, you do not take anything away from yourself.
- You have not lived a perfect day unless you have done something for someone who will never be able to repay you.
- What do people often value more than your money? Your time and attention. Think about it. What takes greater effort: writing a check or giving your time?
- My desire is to be the kind of person *I* would like to be around.
- **Value People:** This means treating everyone with respect. **Know What People Value:** This means listening and seeking to understand others. **Make Myself More Valuable. Do Things That God Values:** Since He unconditionally loves people, so must I.
- D. L. Moody: Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, in all the ways you can, as long as you can.
- Martin Luther King: Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are we doing for others?"
- Dave Thomas: Everybody only lives so long. The one thing people remember about you isn't how much money you made or the deals you swung. What they remember is if you were a nice guy.

#### Today's **VALUES** Give Me Direction

- Parents have taught their children for eons that if you are in a tight spot, lying is not the way out. Lying is an act with profound consequences.
- How do you make good decisions during life's inevitable rough times if you don't have values? When you have strong values, you have something that holds you steady, even when the weather gets nasty.
- Practices always change according to the situation. Values don't.

- If you want to be proactive in the way you live your life, if you want to influence your life's direction, if you want your life to exhibit the qualities you find desirable, and if you want to live with integrity, then you need to know what your values are, decide to embrace them, and practice them every day.
- Comedian Fred Allen: You only live once. But if you work it right, once is enough.
- When Roy Disney was asked about the secret of Disney's success, he used to say that the company was managed by values, which led to ease in good decision making.
- Albert Einstein: Try not to become men of success. Rather, become men of value.
- If you focus on your values, success is likely to follow anyway.
- Managing your life according to your values isn't easy. Because your values will be tested daily by those who do not embrace them.
- The gap between knowing and doing is significantly greater than the gap between ignorance and knowledge. A person who identifies and articulates his values but doesn't practice them is like a salesman who makes promises to a customer and then fails to deliver. He has no credibility. In business, the result is that the person loses his job. In life, the person loses his integrity.
- To be successful, my values – not my feelings – need to control my actions.
- By choosing to embrace and practice good values every day, you choose the higher course in life. And your life goes in a direction that you will always feel good about. You may not always *get* what you desire, but you will always *be* the person you desire to be.

#### Today's **GROWTH** Gives Me Potential

- People who stand for mediocrity don't stand out. Their stories don't get told. When someone misses opportunities for growth and improvement, he may feel regret. If he goes long enough without growing, he begins to feel he's had an unused life. And that's not unlike an early death.
- Robert Louis Stevenson: To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end in life.
- Growth is not automatic. Personal growth works exactly opposite to compounding interest in a bank account. If someone deposited a sum of money into an account when you were born, the way to make it grow is to not touch it. But when it comes to your potential, you *must* tap into it to make it grow.
- When an archer misses the mark he turns and looks for the fault within himself. Failure to hit the bull's-eye is never the fault of the target. To improve your aim, improve yourself.
- The Tarter tribes of central Asia spoke a certain curse against an enemy. They didn't hurl words calling for their enemy's swords to rust or for their people to die of disease. Instead they said, "May you stay in one place forever." If you don't try to improve yourself every day, that could be your fate.
- The greatest handicap a person has is not realizing his potential. The gap between your vision and your present reality can only be filled through a commitment to maximize your potential.
- The only thrill worthwhile is the one that comes from making something out of yourself. To make something out of yourself, you need to be willing to change, for without change, there can be no growth. The problem most people have is that they want things to stay the same yet also get better. If you truly want to grow, then commit yourself to not only accepting change, but seeking it.
- Peter Drucker: The only thing that is universal is incompetence. Strength is always specific. Nobody ever commented that the great violinist Jascha Heifetz probably couldn't play the trumpet very well.
- Earl Nightengale: If a person will spend one hour a day on the same subject for five years, that person will be an expert on that subject.
- Whenever I spend time with great people, I expect to learn great things from them.
- Don't waste your time on anything of low value. If what you're learning can be used in some way to help and improve you or others, then it is worth the effort.
- The greatest of all miracles is that we need not be tomorrow what we are today. The greatest of all insights is that we cannot be tomorrow what we do not do today. That is why today matters.
- The people you spend the most time with greatly impact your outlook and direction. If your closest associates are hungry to grow and trying to reach their potential, it will rub off on you. If they have no interest in growing, they will influence you in that direction.