

Seize The Day

Danny Cox and John Hoover

- We do what we are. We are what we think. What we think is determined by what we learn. What we learn is determined by what we experience and what we experience is determined by what we expose ourselves to and what we do with that experience.
- People represent endless possibilities. Within each individual there is tremendous power waiting to be unleashed. It's possible for anyone with a big enough heart to accomplish unbelievable results.
- "People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them." -George Bernard Shaw.
- An individual with a high sense of personal ethics and integrity in his or her professional life will have the same ethics and integrity in his or her personal life. The same holds true of enthusiasm, drive, goals and general initiative. Different people may demonstrate their performance in different ways, but, in the end, high performance is a way of life.
- No organization can rise above the quality of its leadership. Everybody is his or her *own* leader, plain and simple.
- The success or failure of individuals within an organization depends largely upon each person's willingness to adopt the vision and commitment of the organization's leadership. One of the primary challenges of leadership is to market its vision to the individuals in the organization and entice them to embrace the vision as their own.
- Anyone determined to focus on negativity has an addiction to life-strangling habits that block personal productivity.
- Self-imposed barriers take over where natural barriers leave off. Most people never know the difference between the two and, therefore, erroneously assume that their lack of achievement is someone else's fault. In most cases where someone is not performing up to his or her ability, it's a direct result of a self-imposed psychological barrier.
- If a barrier is truly self-imposed, it can be self-deposed.
- More than anything else, *growing confidence* is the most visible evidence of a hot personality.

- Repeating yesterday is a time-honored technique for getting from the cradle to the grave without experiencing anything really bad, or really good. In today's fast-paced business world, there's no future in that kind of thinking. People who repeat yesterday are in motion but not in *direction*.
- Low performers don't tend to leave organizations as often as high performers.
- The best view of ourselves is usually through someone else's objective eyes. That's why mentors are invaluable.
- One of the first things you learn in studying the lives of high performance people is that they didn't plan every step on their road to success. However, each and every one of them had a strong sense of who they were and what their mission in life was.
- Even if you begin in a limited, non-threatening way, it's critical that you begin to *act*.
- The people I respect most each have a *uncompromising integrity*.
- High-performance people are high-energy people who refuse to get bogged down in unimportant matters.
- "*Don't walk away from negative people... run!*"
- High-performance people know how to work priorities.
- If fear calls the shots in your life, your life will be spent in hiding. High-performance people make a point to do the things that they fear.
- Don't confuse workaholicism, which serves to avoid personal responsibilities, with genuine enthusiasm.
- High-performance people are unorthodox and have an urge to create.
- Learning from failed efforts means that the effort was not a total failure.
- Goals need to precede self-discipline, not the other way around. Many people use the excuse that they're not ready for goals because they lack structure in their lives. Goals and the need to focus on something beyond yourself are invaluable to creating and maintaining structure and order.
- High-performance people have inspired enthusiasm. Enthusiasm, whether it's present or absent, is contagious. People around you get what you've got. That's what determines whether people want to be around you or want to avoid you.
- High-performance people know that mistakes happen. They're aware that people frequently fail to do what they say they'll do. They understand that circumstances

change and that life is not always fair. Nevertheless, they accept those things that can't be changed and move forward in spite of them. Life may not be perfect, but human beings, guided by immutable principles, have a tremendous capacity to adapt in an ever-changing environment. Finally, high-performance people have a *desire to help others grow*.

- "Once you discover that you've only living half a life, the other half will haunt you until you develop it."

Step One. Your Moment of Truth: Selecting the Desired Rewards.

- The quality of our lives is a direct result of the choices we make. That makes how we go about making choices very important.
- What scares most folks is that they must also bear responsibility for the wisdom or folly of their decisions.
- *"Not to decide is to decide."*
- High performance people are people who have definite intentions about life and how they want to live it. They weren't necessarily born that way, but somewhere along the line they decided to take charge of their lives.
- Observing children reveals much about human character that adults have become too adept at hiding.
- Our decision-making courage or cowardice is measured by the potential downside consequences of our decisions. When I observe someone add up the positives and negatives, contemplate the consequences and then boldly make a decision, I'm impressed. I'm impressed by people who aren't afraid to ask the hard questions.
- Your personal success depends upon your total commitment.
- Until he pointed it out, I hadn't realized how often we ask ourselves probing questions without listening to the answers. The answers are always there when we engage in self-inventory. Unfortunately, we simply ignore them most of the time or note only the portions that don't present a major personal threat. The questions always seem harmless enough, it's the answers that are scary.
- *"Wouldn't it be Hell if someday God showed you what you could have done with your life?"*
- Identifying what you want and making sure that everything you do moves you closer to that goal takes much of the chance out of your personal success equation.
- While it's irresponsible to set goals without considering the negative implications, it's

just as irresponsible to misrepresent the potential liabilities of positive action.

- If you've decided that you're willing to pay the price to achieve your desired rewards, then what could possibly make delay worth while? The future is nothing more than a series of nows approaching you, all in a row. Sure, if you miss the present now, there will be another right behind it. But what's the point of letting any of them go by without enriching them with positive, progressive action?
- The only place we can act is in the now. If the price is worth paying, it's worth paying now.
- When I asked my friend how big my goals should be, he answered, "big enough to turn you on."
- Behavior speaks louder than words. Our stated intentions might be very admirable. However, it's what we actually do that reveals our real priorities.
- Change is seldom comfortable, especially if it's taking you into unfamiliar territory. However, it is always exciting.
- *"The reason a lot of people do not recognize opportunity is because it usually goes around wearing overalls looking like hard work."*

Thomas Edison

- Worry itself is a goal-setting process. It's the ability to create vivid mental pictures of things not wanted but will no doubt be achieved because of misguided concentration.
- If you're thinking about anything at all, it's got to be something you want or something you don't want. Make it your personal rule to concentrate on what you want. Focus on the positive.

Step Two. Developing Strengths.

- As much as we would like to believe that the mere act of setting goals will be attained, it doesn't work that way. That's probably why most diets fail. It's not the intention to do, but the doing itself that gets the job done. Intending is always easier than doing. Just willing something to get done won't budge the real world one inch.
- Although none of us looks forward to adversity, 99 times out of 100, every one of us is emotionally stronger for it in the end.
- There is always luck to contend with. Just don't count on it. Like J. Paul Getty's formula for success:
 1. Rise Early
 2. Work Hard
 3. Strike Oil

- Even more than training, it's experience that makes you good.
- Do the very best that you can with the strengths available to you. Anything less is unacceptable.
- Recipe for failure and frustration: Undeveloped strengths mixed with laziness.
- No one can guarantee success. However, no effort to determine or develop personal strengths, usually out of laziness and/or lack of motivation, will virtually guarantee failure and frustration.
- *"Everybody is a damn fool for fifteen minutes every day. The trick is to not exceed your limit."*

Elbert Hubbard

- Curiosity and courage are the batteries that power your inner searchlight. Curiosity asks, "What have I not yet developed about myself that would benefit me?" Courage empowers you to use your new information once it's discovered.
- One of the signs of maturity is the ability to shift through the maze of contradictory thinking and develop a personal world view and set of priorities. This is one of the reasons that I urge people to read and study as much as possible.
- It's not the situations you find yourself in as much as it's what you choose to do in those situations that tells you what you're made of. It's how you behave in life that reveals to what degree you've allowed thinking to stifle talent or vice versa.
- It's what you do and not what you say that opens the book on who you really are.
- Where there is a lack of enthusiasm, all of your best-laid plans will get all dammed-up behind the slightest obstacle.
- Enthusiasm carries with it a healthy dissatisfaction with the way things are. Enthusiasm is the antidote for procrastination.
- Attitude is the leading edge of how effective you are in life. If your attitude is such that you blame everyone and everything else for what happens to you, you're destined to fly in circles for the rest of your life.
- Other people can do many things for you, but they're powerless to determine how you're going to feel about it.
- It's not what you're doing that makes you miserable, it's not investing enough of you that makes whatever you're doing unattractive.
- Creativity is the opposite of conformity. There is a time for both.

- Whatever responsible balance you achieve, weight it on the side of creativity. If for no other reason, being creative and a bit unorthodox will make you more entertaining and fun person for the rest of us to be around.

- It's better to say this is where he turned and ran rather than this is where he died.

- **On creativity**

"The man who follows the crowd, will get no further than the crowd. The man who walks alone is likely to find himself in places no one has ever been before.

"Creativity in living is not without his attendant difficulties, for peculiarity breeds contempt. And the unfortunate thing about being ahead of your time is when people finally realize you were right, they'll say it was obvious all along.

"You have two choices in life: You can dissolve into the mainstream, or you can be distinct. To be distinct, you must be different. To be different you must strive to be what no one else but you can be."

-Alan Ashley-Pitt

- **Characteristics of a creative person**

1. Creative people have a curiosity and a childlike sense of wonder.

2. Creative people are open to as many alternatives as possible.

People who are closed off to new ideas and suggestions don't make many friends. They also don't make good bosses, employees, spouses, parents, teachers, etc. High-performance people are never threatened by new ideas.

3. Creative people constantly search for alternatives.

4. A creative person is eager to test new ideas.

5. Creative people develop comparisons to illustrate points.

6. Creative people stay flexible at all times.

Part of becoming flexible is the willingness to abandon an idea if it proves unworthy of further development. Forcing a square peg through a round hole for the sake of pride is not the kind of attitude you'll find in a truly creative person. Creative people don't think in terms of failure, but in terms of learning from every experience. To the creative person a failed idea represents knowledge gained.

- **Becoming more creative**

The first step to becoming more creative is to *spend more time alone*. Spending time alone is the best way to distance yourself from the contamination of interruption and distraction.

Step two is to *dream with a purpose* during the day.

Step three is to *be gullible*. Be willing to stay with each new idea until you have a good, solid reason to reject it.

Step four is to *allow yourself emotional conflict*. Emotional conflict or uncertainty is the genesis of creativity. When something makes you uneasy, it's time to do something about it, not ignore it.

Step five is to *assume that illogical thoughts have credibility*.

- Creativity should be a way of life.
- It's all too common for creative impulses to be criticized and even punished. The pattern often begins at home in early childhood and then continues through school and into the work place. There are times to conform and times to be creative. However, the balance between creativity and conformity can be tilted too far in favor of conformity if the parent, teacher or business manager seeks to *maintain order* at all costs.
- Children should be rewarded when they discover a new and better way of solving a problem or accomplishing a task.
- In fact, *new and never done before* is a good definition for creativity.
- When creativity is part and parcel of your everyday affairs, life is never dull and it's usually much more productive.
- Behavior that's rewarded tends to be repeated.
- No matter how many rigid rules and procedures an organization adopts, real life doesn't obey strict rules and regulations.
- When someone's efforts don't produce desired results, go ahead and let that person know how much you appreciate the *effort*.
- A simple, three-step examination that Walt Disney used is all you need to indicate whether a new idea should be taken to the next level. The three criteria are:
 1. A successful idea must be unique.
 2. A successful idea must have an element of proprietary interest.

Word-of-mouth recommendations are called the best possible type of advertising because a personal recommendation is genuine and not a ploy for commercial gain.
 3. A successful idea must have a flair factor. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing *big*, it's worth doing *right* and it's worth doing *with class*.
- There are four steps to the *creative process*.

Step one: Preparation. Thomas Edison saw no value in repeating mistakes that others had made before. Edison saw more value in making new and creative mistakes that brought him closer to success. Preparation means research.

Step two: Incubation. The incubation phase of the creative process is a time for patience as you observe how the various elements react to one another when combined at certain temperatures and in various proportions.

Step three: Insight.

Step four: Verification. A verification process is a good safeguard against premature implementation and, possibly, the wasting of a good idea. Will the new idea remedy the problem, be a *stop-gap*, or a permanent solution?

Hearing negative feedback should be considered beneficial. Negative feedback gives you information that will help you *tune* the idea before it's put into motion.

- Roadblocks to creativity:

Roadblock 1: Habit. "*But we've always done it this way.*" People defend traditional and time-honored methods *even when the methods don't work!* Human beings are creatures of comfort and comfort can be found in what's *familiar*.

Roadblock 2: Fear. Where fear is left in charge, everything everyone does becomes avoidance. You need to acknowledge those things that make you afraid. Either you do the things you fear or fear is in charge.

Roadblock 3: Prejudice. The prejudging of ideas without considering their individual merit. Rigid and inflexible thinking, designed to preserve the established order of things is prejudicial thinking.

Roadblock 4: Inertia. A good rule of thumb: *If it's been done one way for two years, there's an 80-percent chance there's a better way of doing it.* The constant flow of new information isn't going to slow down any time soon.

- There is always some positive energy in negativism. The challenge is extracting it.
- As Thomas Edison said, "*The answer is out there. Find it.*" I say there's a great deal more inside of you that you're aware of. Find it.
- One of the personal characteristics we most mourn the loss of is the optimism and upbeat, never-say-die attitude of youth. You feel increasingly cynical about life as you grow older, it's because you've grown tired of the bumps and snags. It's easier to build up a callous around your heart than to continue risking rejection for the sake of some elusive goal.
- How many of your hidden strengths ever see the light of day is up to nobody but *you*.

Step Three: Planning for Performance

- "Many people fail in life, not for lack of ability or brains or even courage, but simply because they have never organized their energies around a goal."

- Elbert Hubbard

- Many people do unimportant work very efficiently. Unimportant things are the enemy of focused productive energy.

High performance people know the difference between what's truly *important* and merely *interesting*.

- Getting caught up in minor, inconsequential stuff makes it *appear* as if we're engaged in work of tremendous importance when in fact we're merely busying ourselves with low-risk activities. Low risk because, the more inconsequential the issue, the less anyone cares about the outcome.

- When we procrastinate, we're avoiding responsibility for *succeeding*.
- The fact that people who aren't very visible don't get shot at very much encourages us to lay low.
- Most people want the rewards of productivity without the risk.
- A fantasy is not a goal. By definition a fantasy is imagination unrestrained by reality. A goal is a fantasy with a concrete, measurable, realizable plan for achievement.
 - It's the combination of desired rewards and a plan to achieve them that makes a goal worth your energy and attention.
 - A purely motivational presentation without redeeming substance will wear off by the time most people get to the cars in the parking lot and certainly by the time the audience wakes up the next morning.
- As long as an intended goal remains a fantasy, excitement and enthusiasm will turn into frustration and disappointment.
- Remember that a goal needs to be attainable. Plans of any length need to be thought of in daily increments.
- Dedication, discipline and vision must all work harmoniously if you expect successful goal attainment.
- W.C. Fields said, *"If at first you don't succeed, try again. Then quit, there's no use being a damn fool about it."*
- *Celebrate the achievement of a goal and immediately replace it with a new goal.*
- Without something to look forward to, there isn't much to be excited about.
- Step out of your comfort zone and experience new things.
- The best way to minimize anxiety when boldly taking your life to another level is to do your homework. Be prepared. Expecting the unexpected makes the unexpected less of an unsettling surprise when it occurs. Preparation reduces the risk.
- *"It's okay to have the tiger by the tail- if you know what to do next!"*
- You have no control over the past. You have no control over the future. You only have control over the present.
- Some people feel too guilty to relax. Don't confuse emotionally driven workaholism with high performance.

- The disciplined habits you acquire today insure that whatever you encounter in the future won't be as threatening or potentially devastating as it would be to an unprepared person.

Time Management

- Time management step 1: Record your time. To get an accurate picture of how conscious you really are when it comes to time, keep a log of how you spend your waking hours. I guarantee that you'll be surprised.

Time management step 2: Manage your time. Time is like the ocean. The only decision left is whether to sink or swim in it.

Time management step 3: Consolidate your time.

- It's impossible to lead a successful life. It's only possible to lead a successful *day*.
- Thomas Edison said: "The world pays big prices for [those] who know the values and satisfactions of persistent hard work."
- Never dive into your list at number two, three, four or below. Never be caught working on your number-two, three or four priority while the big number one is still sitting up there at the top of the list. When the number-one item is dispatched, then number two becomes the new number one. That way, you're never making a second or third-priority effort. You'll always be working on your top priority.
- Procrastination is a subtle enemy that sneaks up on you in a variety of insidious ways.
- Not listening is an incredibly obnoxious time waster.
- You must be able to say "no."
- Invariably, the most respected workers are those who have a helpful spirit, but do not allow themselves to be exploited.
You must have the right to delegate. Doing things that someone else in the group is better-suited for or can do with less drain on the organization's resources is selfish at best and ultimately unfair to everyone in the company.
- Chatting on the telephone is a favorite distraction for most people who find it entertaining.
- Remove obstructions to progress.
- The intent to organize your life is different than actually doing it. Intent has no positive benefits.
- It's impossible to be efficient without being effective. Busying yourself with task after

task without regard for how those activities propel you toward the accomplishment of your documented goals is like rowing a boat with one oar, You can keep yourself mighty busy just going around in circles.

"It's more important to do the right thing than to do things right."

- Peter F. Drucker

The amount of planning and energy you invest in an activity should be directly proportionate to the value of the outcome.

Laying out a Daily Plan

- 1) The first thing to do in laying out a daily plan is to consider priorities. Distinguish between urgent and unimportant tasks.
- 2) When laying out your daily plan, allow 10% more time for each task than you initially estimate it will take.
- 3) Strive to make the first hour of your day the most satisfying. Do the three things you want to do the least in your first hour.
- 4) Schedule your most important creative work during your personal best time of the day.
- 5) When a problem pops up, step back.
- 6) Prior to each task, take a 30-second test.
 - a. Why is this task being done?
 - b. Can it be eliminated?
 - c. How is this task helping me achieve my goals?
 - d. Based upon what I've scheduled myself to earn (accomplish) this month, am I the one who should be doing this task?
 - e. Based on my established priorities, is this the most important task for me to be working on right now?
 - f. Is there a better way to do this task? How can I improve on the traditional method?
- 7) Never commit to a future assignment unless you have time for it now.
- 8) Don't beat yourself up for not completing your priority list each day.
- 9) Carry pen and paper with you at all times. You never know when a good idea might hit.
- 10) Use your daily planner, to-do list and project sheet. Use the following code system to indicate what the priority ranking is for each item you list on your planning

documents:

- 1) Do immediately
- 2) Do by the end of the day
- 3) Do today if possible
- 4) Delegate

- One of the primary reasons for scheduling margins in your day of 10 percent or more is to accommodate unscheduled activities.
- When other people determine how your time is spent, you lose control.
- High-performance people accept that interruptions are bound to occur and they anticipate them.
- Realistically, not every task can be completed in one effort before going on to the next. If that's the case, put a red dot in the upper right-hand corner of the paper each time you set it down. The red dots will give you an instant assessment of how often you're returning to that task to make progress.
- Brevity is the essence of good communications.
- Be prompt. Don't keep people waiting. Being respectful of other people's time will always be appreciated.
- Because promptness is as much a benefit to you as it is to the other party, it makes sense to be prompt with anyone, not just those people you feel are important.

Step Four: Launching the Plan

- "All things come to those who wait provided they hustle while they wait."
-Thomas A. Edison
- As you launch your plan into action, the plan must remain your central focus and purpose.
- Thinking and planning are one thing, but actually getting up and *doing* is something else. There is little threat of anything changing in your life if all you do is sit around and think about things.
- Both low achievers and high achievers talk to themselves. The difference is what they say.
- Your self-image controls your performance level- that is, how well you do your job.
- Encouraging yourself rather than beating yourself up will produce remarkable results as far as self-image and personal productivity are concerned.

- When you're under tremendous pressure, listen to yourself. When you score a victory, listen to yourself. Just after someone ticks you off or when you really do something stupid, listen to yourself.

If what you hear is negative, tell your internal voice that negativity isn't going to make anything better.

- Nobody knows better than superstar performers that self-talk is the control point for performance.

- Motivation is so overused and improperly used that it's become synonymous with hype.

- To motivate is to provide with a motive- a *reason* to do something. Motivation is the by-product of desire.

- If we don't have what we want, it's probably because, in reality, we don't want it as badly as we say we do.

- There are four levels to motivation.

Level one (lowest): Compliance. Do it or else. Few people enjoy working under these conditions.

Compliance is the least productive form of motivation and the most resented. Character is not built at the compliance level. However, resentment flourishes.

Level two: Goal identification. If you want to generate animosity and resentment, operate on level one and demand compliance. If you want to begin building character, move up to level two where the objective is identification with the goal. Napoleon said, "A great leader is a merchant of hope."

Level three: Commitment. The only way personal motive can become stronger than identifying with a goal is to internalize the goal. A goal is never more enthusiastically pursued than when it becomes part of you.

Level four (highest): Self-motivation.

- Each of the four methods of motivation has an accompanying *mental mood*.

Level one mental mood: Despair. When you're operating at the compliance level of motivation you tend to feel helpless or powerless. The resulting emotion is despair. Without vision, there can be no goals.

Level two mental mood: Reason. When you identify with a goal, attaining what you want becomes more believable and justifiable.

Level three mental mood: Intuition.

Level four mental mood: Self-confidence. You can't operate out of a more confident emotional position than to be self-motivated.

- I was going out to see if I could get lucky. He was going out with a purpose.

- "Never work hard to pay bills. Work hard to have fun with the money. Otherwise, you won't have enough to do either one."

- As the "want" gets stronger, the "how" gets easier.

- **Laziness.** Laziness is not a cause of reduced productivity, but a *symptom*. The real reason we all tend to procrastinate can be broken down into three parts:

- 1) The inner fear of making a mistake.
- 2) Reluctance to shoulder an obligation.
- 3) The desire to avoid criticism.

- **Mistakes.** Somewhere in our childhood, each of us learned that mistakes get frowns while victories get smiles of approval.

If you go through life trying to avoid frowns, you'll never try anything. If you never try anything, the only *big* mistake you'll make will be not to try anything.

- **Obligations.** Making a commitment means to accept responsibility for the outcome. As long as you can avoid obligations, you can avoid mistakes. As long as you can avoid mistakes, you won't be criticized.

- **Criticism.** It's somewhat comforting to know that only people who are not willing to take risks criticize others.

Noting who around you is quick to criticize and who is quick to encourage is a fast way to separate low achievers from high-performance people.

- **Fear.** If you can successfully deal with fear, you can successfully deal with procrastination. Ask yourself if self-confidence does more for you than fear and the answer will be, "Yes."

That leads to the next question, "*Which voice am I listening to right now, fear or self-confidence?*" The answer to that question is critical to your personal performance.

Usually, fear speaks with a louder voice than self-confidence. That's because fear has become a habit. Listening to self-confidence can become a habit too, if you work hard enough.

- **Four commitments for launching your plan**

1. Honesty
2. Courage
3. Determination
4. Conviction

Honesty with yourself means that taking initiative to look at things realistically.

It takes *courage* to set goals realistically high. Just because you can't do everything your heart can dream of doesn't mean you shouldn't try *anything*. The higher you reach, the farther you have to fall.

Determination to put the plan into action is fueled by desire.

Conviction that goals can be reached means believing that success is attainable. Your firm belief that your desired rewards are within reach is essential to your success.

- Learn to talk to yourself in definitive action terms.

- Holding something back is a way of preserving an *out* more than a way to preserve energy. If their attempt falls short, they can always tell associates, friends and family that they didn't give it their best shot. The implication is that their best shot would have assuredly succeeded.
- If you're going to fall, fall *toward your goal*. Big effort will beat small effort over time.

Step Five-Problem Solving: Expecting the Unexpected

- Edison never trusted his voice-recording invention for the simple reason that it worked the first time he tried it.

Of the thousands of inventions Edison brought into our world, he fully expected to fail numerous times before he made any progress. He was a visionary who anticipated a difficult process every time. In other words, Edison knew that problems were part of life--and especially part of the creative process.

- Experience is another word for mistakes.
- The answer is always out there if only you work to find it.
- Virtually everything worth having in life comes with problems attached. Your progress and personal growth will never come without the need to resolve problems along the way.
- As you approach problems more aggressively, they'll appear far less intimidating.

- **Preparation for problem-solving**

1. Stay calm and keep the problem in perspective.
2. Be aware of your self-confidence.

"You can tell the character of the person by the choices made under pressure."

-Winston Churchill

- Dr. Norman Vincent Peale said, "You're only as big as the problem that stops you."
- Right after you say to yourself, "Stay calm," ask yourself, "Is this problem more than I can handle?"
- Every step you take toward solving the problem will increase your confidence.

3. De-confuse the problem. Define and break it down to its component parts on paper.

4. Use creativity, personal experience and/or the experience of others to solve the puzzle from start to finish, from finish to start, or begin in the middle.

Great people become known for the way they managed to deal with problems--and even turned problems into opportunities.

If someone says, "This is as bad as it gets," don't count on it.

5. Use relentless, dogged determination until the solution is in action.
Solutions really aren't solutions until they're in action.

- **The problem-solving process**

1. *Identify the problem.*

Being clear about what the problem is and what the problem is not will save you time and energy as you seek solutions.

2. *Gather all relevant information.*

3. *List all possible solutions.*

4. *Test possible solutions.*

Only test those that hold the most promise and can't be clearly eliminated by pondering.

5. *Select the best solution.*

Whatever solution you choose, make sure you go with it 100 percent.

6. *Get the solution into action.*

There is an element of risk. Go back and dig into some of the courage, determination and conviction and DO IT!

- Remember, a problem between two people is not solved until there is agreement. Just having a great solution in mind isn't enough. Effective communication is critical to the problem-solving process.

- Edison liked to say, "There's no extreme to which a [person] won't go to avoid the labor of thinking."

- We create some problems for ourselves. Any problem that's due to an error should only appear once.

- Peter F. Drucker says, "A crisis must never be experienced for the second time."

Step Six: Keeping Morale High

"Keeping away from people who try to belittle your ambition. Small people always do that, but the really great people make you feel that you, too, can become great."

-Mark Twain

- Loss of morale is an insidious, creeping menace that will quietly eat at you like cancer.

- A. M. Maslow developed the *four levels of learning*. I've added a fifth level:

Level one: Unconscious incompetence

Unconscious incompetence would be described as messing something up without even knowing you're messing it up.

Level two: Conscious incompetence

When you become aware that you don't know what you're doing.

Knowing your limitation will help you to handle your new endeavor more responsibly.

Level three: Conscious competence

Conscious competence means you can do something correctly as long as you think about what you're doing.

Operating at level three requires intense focus on your project. When you're keenly conscious of your skills, you tend to appreciate them more.

Level four: Unconscious competence

When you first parked your car, got out and began to walk away without thinking about what you had just done, you had crossed the line into level four, unconscious competence. It no longer required intense focus nor produced a feeling of accomplishment.

Level five: Conscious of unconscious competence

"Do I want to stay here and grow or go somewhere else and do what I did here?"

If you stay and make what you're doing more challenging and fulfilling, you have no choice but to grow as a human being and increase your personal productivity. To move laterally to another position means you can keep doing the same old stuff over and over. The only difference is the scenery.

If you aren't growing as a person and pushing back your threshold of undeveloped strengths, you're bound to eventually stagnate anywhere you go.

There is no one alive who has maxed out his or her productivity potential.

Unconscious competence is terrific as long as you are functioning in an energized state of conscious competence.

- When you first try something, it's likely that you'll set yourself up for some disappointing results. Unrealistic expectations are common to new efforts.
- You're never the only person who can do well and other people don't appreciate being told that you are.
- Part of keeping morale high is remembering where you came from and how much progress you've made.
- "You'll be dead unless you have a feeling of accomplishment on a daily basis."

• **15 steps for keeping morale high**

1. Lay out a new list of goals.

Improving your situation on a daily basis gives you the feeling of accomplishment necessary to sustain life.

2. Go for a walk.

3. Buy (and read) several books on various topics.

4. Get away for a weekend to a luxury hotel or spa.

The important factor here is to be pampered. If you're used to working and driving hard, why not let someone wait on you for a couple of days?

5. Get in better physical condition.

How you feel physically has a profound effect on how you feel emotionally. The reverse is also true.

6. Buy something you've always wanted.

The point of buying something you've always wanted is to combine personal reward with personal effect.

7. Invite interesting people over for dinner.

Sharing relaxing, nonwork time with stimulating people, especially those who are not in the same field you are, is another way to open up parts of your brain that otherwise tend to stay locked up. Hearing other people's perspectives can't help but to widen yours.

8. Listen to good music.

Taking your mind in a direction it wouldn't ordinarily go has an incredible calming and rejuvenating effect.

9. Organize your home and office.

When your home and office are cluttered, you feel as if you're out of control.

10. Go see a funny movie or comedian.

In other words, LAUGH. There's nothing like laughter to remind you that life isn't to be taken too seriously. When you lose perspective, it's usually because you're giving too much consideration to something that would be better off with a more balanced approach.

11. List your assets and achievement.

12. Talk to someone who always makes you feel good.

Preferably someone outside of your field. Too many people are hesitant to ask for help.

13. Develop a hobby.

14. Give help to someone who needs it

There's no more effective way to climb out of your personal emotional rut than to get outside of yourself and help somebody else.

15. Make someone else happy.

Step seven: Your Personal Plan for Growth

- "Every person has two educations; one which he receives from others and one, more importantly which he gives to himself [or herself]."

-Edward Gibbon

- You must find what timeless contribution you can make to the human race and keep that contribution in sight at all times.

Ed Hubbard said: "We were not put here to keep things the same, but to make things better."

- If what you're doing isn't making things better, then what are you doing it for?
- The difference between you now and the way you were before is how much you know about your personal value in the scheme of things.
- Hopefully, you're through trying to be what other people think you should be.

- As the saying goes, youth is wasted on the young. Unless you know the value of strength and energy, you'll probably waste it.
- If you could spend 10 days alone asking questions of 10 great people, living or dead (one person per day), who would they be?
- If you could spend 10 days alone asking questions of people who are living only (no duplications from the first question), which 10 would they be? These questions reveal who your living heroes are.
- If you were given 28 hours per day for the rest of your life instead of the 24 hours you now have, what would you do with the four extra hours?
- The answers speak volumes about your personal values.
- Can we get better off? Of course. But the goal is not to pretend you're someone other than yourself, but to get better at discovering and developing your own personal strengths.
- Great football and basketball coaches don't say there wasn't enough time to win the game when the final gun or buzzer cuts short the big come-from-behind rally. More effective use of regulation time would have made the difference between victory and defeat.
- It's safer to have an enemy, confident in his or her true identity than to have a friend who doesn't know who s/he is. Never approach a bull from the front, a horse from the rear or a fool from any direction and always ride on the high side when the folks around you refuse to declare their intentions.