**2016 Motivational Minutes on Adversity**

**(Also see Attitude, Character, and Thoughts.)**

1. **Three Feet From Gold**



**Quote of the day**:

“The last dejected effort often becomes the winning stroke.” — W.J. Cameron

**Reflection:**  
  
Here is a story from the classic “success” book *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill.

*Darby and his uncle, over a hundred years ago, were caught up with "gold fever". They headed west to seek their fortune. After weeks of labor they were rewarded with an inkling of what they felt might very well turn out to be one of the richest mines in Colorado. But despite countless days digging and drilling, the profitable vein of gold ore they expected to find never appeared. Frustrated and discouraged, they sold all their equipment to a junk dealer for a few hundred dollars and headed home. The wise junk dealer called in a specialist mining engineer who advised that the project had failed because the Darby family were not familiar with "fault lines." His calculations showed that the vein of gold would be found just three feet from where the Darby’s had stopped drilling. And that's exactly where the junk dealer discovered one of the largest deposits of gold to ever be discovered up to that time.   
  
Napoleon Hill writes, "It rewarded him with millions of dollars because he knew enough to seek expert counsel before giving up."*

Don’t be too proud to seek counsel and advice from an expert, even if it is your last dejected effort. It could be the winning stroke as you may be only three feet away from realizing your dreams.

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**2. Disappointments**



**Quote of the day**:

"In every tear a rainbow hides, but only when the sunshine falls upon the crystal drop is the splendor revealed.” —J.R. Miller

**Reflection:**

Often our tragedies, misfortunes or disappointments are really for our greater good as the following story illustrates.

*Years ago in Scotland, the Clark family had a dream. Clark and his wife worked and saved, making plans for their family of nine children to travel the United States. It had taken years, but they had finally saved enough money. They got their pass-ports and made reservations for the family on a new ocean liner.*

*The entire family was filled with anticipation and excitement about their venture. However, several days before the departure, the youngest son was bitten by a dog. The doctor stitched the leg, but hung a yellow flag on the Clark's front door. Because of the possibility of rabies, the entire family was quarantined for fourteen days.*

*The family's dream was dashed. They would not be able to make the trip to America as planned. The father, filled with disappointment and anger, stomped to the dock to watch the ship leave—without the Clark family. The father shed bitter tears for their misfortune.*

*Five days later, the tragic news spread throughout Scotland and the world—the mighty Titanic had sunk. The unsinkable ship had sunk taking hundreds of lives with it. The Clark family was to have been on that ship, but because their son had been bitten by a dog, they were left behind.*

*When Mr. Clark heard the news, he hugged his son, and gave thanks to God for saving his family and turning what was believed to have been a tragedy into a blessing.*

Are there any disappointments in your life you need to view differently?

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1. **Hang On a Little Longer**



**Quote of the day:**

“Many of life's failures are those who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.” — Thomas Edison

**Reflection:**

*In 1952, Florence Chadwick stepped off Catalina Island, California, into the waters of the Pacific Ocean, determined to swim to the mainland. An experienced swimmer, she had already made history as the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. The weather that day was foggy and chilly; Florence could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still, she swam steadily for fifteen hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water, her mother, in a boat alongside her, told her that she was close and that she could make it. But Florence, physically and emotionally exhausted, stopped swimming and was pulled into the boat. It wasn’t until she was on board that she discovered the shore was less than half a mile away. At a news conference the next day, she said, “All I could see was the fog*—*I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it.”*

Sometimes we are in a fog and feel like giving up when actually if we hold on a little longer the fog will lift and we can make it. Is there something in your life that you are in the fog about? Keep holding on a little longer.

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1. **Never Give Up Hope**



**Quote of the day:**

“Before everything else, getting ready is the secret of success” -- Henry Ford

**Reflection:**

Here’s a story that illustrates that quote.

*A mother of several children was committed to keeping her family together when her husband died. She worked at several jobs doing menial tasks, everything from cleaning offices to delivering coal. Eventually, she took the civil service exam and became the chief bookkeeper for the city treasurer. She used her strength and love to hold her family together and to raise her children.*

*One of the kids, though small, wanted to play football, but none of the colleges of any size offered him a scholarship. He played for a small college and excelled. Then his dream was to play in the NFL. He tried out for the Pittsburgh Steelers, which was his home team, but he was cut from the team in short order.*

*Next, he found a job in construction and helped build some of the skyscrapers seen today in Pittsburgh, but he held onto his dream. He did not see himself as a victim of circumstances, but as a person that would succeed despite his size.*

*What he did was look at his options and decided he would start anywhere. He played in a little league that paid him $6 a game and was able to improve his already considerable skills. He continued to stay in contact with NFL teams in hopes that somehow he would be noticed. After seven months of trying, he received an invitation to try out for the Baltimore Colts and made the team. His name was Johnny Unitas and has been inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame.*

The moral of the story is to never give up hope on your dreams, do what you can to get ready while you’re waiting for the opportunity to present itself.

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1. **Don’t Let Failure Stop You**



**Quote of the day**:

“Nature gave us two ends: one to sit on and one to think with. Ever since then, man's success or failure has been dependent on the one he used most.”--Robert Albert Bloch

**Reflection:**

*Gail Borden was once on board a ship home from England, were he saw children die as a result of drinking contaminated milk. The experience so impacted his life he dedicated the remainder of his life to finding a way for humans to safely drink milk. His experiments with condensed milk failed, but then one day he saw how the Shakers in New York condensed their maple sugar in a vacuum-sealed pan. His success led to the safety of milk in a non-refrigerated world, began the modern dairy industry, and launched a multibillion dollar company. On Gail Borden tombstone are encouraging words of perseverance: “I tried and failed. I tried again and succeeded.”*

A true story of one man’s not giving up or letting his failures stop him from succeeding in his goals.

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1. **Misfortune or Good Fortune?**



**Quote of the day:**

“Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant.” — Robert Louis Stevenson

**Reflection:**

***An old man who lived in a small village owned a beautiful white horse. The man was poor, but he never sold the horse. One morning he found the horse was gone from the stable. The whole village gathered and said, “You foolish old man! We knew someday the horse would be stolen. You should have sold it. What a misfortune!” The old man replied, “That’s not necessarily true. The horse is simply not in the stable. This is the fact. Everything else is a judgment. Who knows if it is a misfortune or a blessing?”***

***People laughed at the old man. They knew he was a little crazy. After fifteen days, the horse suddenly returned. He had not been stolen, but had gone visiting. Not only that, a dozen wild horses returned with him. Again the people gathered and said, “Old man, you were right. The disappearance of your horse is not a misfortune. It has indeed proved to be a blessing.” The old man said, “Again you are going too far. Just say the horse came back. Who knows whether its return is a blessing or not? The people did not say much, but they knew he was wrong. After all, twelve beautiful horses had come.***

***The old man’s only son started to train the wild horses. But a week later he fell from a horse and broke his legs. The people gathered and again they judged. “You’re right! Getting twelve horses was a misfortune. Your son, who is your only support, has lost the use of his legs. Now you are poorer than ever.” The old man said, “You are obsessed with judgment. Only say my son has broken his legs. Nobody knows whether this is a misfortune or a blessing. Life comes in fragments and more is never revealed.”***

***After a few weeks the country went to war. All the young men in town were forced into the military. Only the old man’s son was left, because he was crippled. The whole town cried because they knew most of the young men would never return. They said to the old man, “You were right. This is a blessing. Your son may be crippled, but he is still with you. Our sons are gone forever.”The old man said again, “Nobody knows! Say only this: Your sons have entered the army and my son has not. We can’t know whether it is a blessing or a misfortune. Stop judging or you will always be obsessed with fragments and live in faulty conclusions.”***

We never know if a situation will bring forth a misfortune or blessing. So let us take a lesson from the old man and wait for the outcome before judging a situation.

**7. Making Sweet Music**



**Quote of the day:**

“Indifference never wrote great works, nor thought out striking inventions, nor reared the solemn architecture that awes the soul, nor breathed sublime music, nor painted glorious pictures, nor undertook heroic philanthropies. All these grandeurs are born of enthusiasm, and are done heartily.” – Author unknown

**Reflection:**

Many of us find ourselves living in uncongenial conditionsin which we must stay, at least for the time being but, whatever the circumstances, we can live an honorable life. It makes no difference what situation we find ourselves in; there is always room to grow. Restraints, when used correctly, only help to make our life more earnest and beautiful.

*Just like musical string instruments, it is because the strings are tied at both ends, and must vibrate in limited measure of distance, that music comes forth. Cut the string(s), and let it fly loose, and it no longer gives out musical notes. The melody depends upon the restraints.*

So it is with many human lives; they become capable of giving out sweet notes, only when they are compelled to move in restraint such as misfortune, adversity, or sorrow. The very difficulty in our situation is what brings out the best qualities in us, and produces the finest results in character and achievement.

Remember this, and make sweet music out of your adversity.

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1. **Harry Potter**



**Quote of the day:**

“When you reach for the stars, you may not quite get one, but you won't come up with a handful of mud either.” —Leo Burnett

**Reflection:**

Theresa Koltes sent me this post to share with you.

*We all have an idea. Maybe a couple of stars kept in a jar, afraid to break free. But consider those people who open the jar and let the stars out so they can fly.*

*When I think of people who turned their stars into something extraordinary, I think of people like J.K. Rowling, the authoress of the novel series, Harry Potter. She didn’t start out easy. After a difficult and painful divorce, she struggled as a single mom, living off of welfare benefits in an apartment rampant with mice.*

*But what is extraordinary is that someone surviving off of the government can go on to be an award winning novelist and one of the richest people in the world. J.K. Rowling is acclaimed as one of the five self-made female billionaires. Harry Potter is now a global, worth $15 billion, and has sold 350 million copies in 55 languages.*

*Once upon a time, when Rowling was a child, she wanted to be a writer. But she received little support from those around her*—*her parents thought that studying French was more useful than English and writing. Her childhood friend was the only one who told her she was destined to be a successful writer, and she chose to believe it.*

*One day as she was on the train from London to Manchester, the story began unfolding in her mind. The train was delayed for a few hours, and bit by bit the details, characters and plot of the unborn Harry Potter danced into her imagination. It took Rowling a year to complete the book and find a publisher. It was five more years before the first book was finally published.*

*But within only a few weeks of publishing, the book went wild. She received a grant from the Scottish Arts Council, which enabled her to quit her job and write fulltime. Two years later, Warner Bros secured the film rights for the books with a seven figure estimate, delivering the books into film succession.*

*Today Harry Potter is one of the most known media products worldwide. And it all started with one thought, one idea, one ambition.*

Take your stars out of the jar and lay them out. Who knows where they will fly to?

**9. The Primrose Fable**



**Quote of the day:**

“Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.” —Helen Keller

**Reflection:**

There is no haphazardnessin this world. Every tree, flower and plant is placed in just the right spot. One tree grows best in the sheltered valley, another by the water's edge, another on the bleak mountain-top swept by storms. Every tree or plant is found in the location where the conditions for its growth are best. And so it is with us as well.

*There is a little fable which says that a primrose growing by itself in a shady corner of the garden, became discontented as it saw the other flowers in their mirthful beds in the sunshine, and begged to be moved to a more conspicuous place. Its prayer was granted. The gardener transplanted it to a more showy and sunny spot. It was greatly pleased—but there came a change over it immediately. Its blossoms lost much of their beauty and became pale and sickly. The hot sun caused them to faint and wither. So it prayed again to be taken back to its old place in the shade.*

Although we all have different experiences in life, wherever we may find ourselves it is the right place to be and the perfect place to grow into our potential. Some of us require the *fierce storms*, some will only thrive in the shadow of *worldly adversity*, and some come to ripeness more sweetly under the soft and gentle influences of prosperity.

Don’t bemoan your lot in life, but use whatever situation and experiences you find yourself in to grow and blossom.

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**10. The Canary Bird**



**Quote of the day**:

“The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. The hilltop hour would not be half so wonderful if there were no dark valleys to traverse.” — Helen Keller

**Reflection:**

We are all sent here to learn certain things and some of those lessons can only be learned in darkness. It reminds me of the story how they used to teach canaries to sing.

*When the canary bird is to be trained, each bird is put in a little cage, with only a small hole to give them just light enough to see to eat and drink. These cages are then put in a room from which there is no light, and their teacher gives the birds a lesson every two hours. First they get a lesson on the flute, then on the violin, then on bells, and last of all a nightingale is brought in to sing its wonderful notes to teach the birds to sing at night.*

The point is, that the canaries must learn their lessons in the darkness. They cannot learn them as well, if at all, in the light. So it is the same with many people. There are certain songs we cannot learn to sing in the sunshine. So the great Teacher calls us apart and shuts the door in order to keep out the light and exclude the world's clamor and noise, and then teaches us songs of peace, of joy, of trust, of love. Thus the painful things of this world have their place in the divine training of our lives.

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**11. Just One More Time**



**Quote of the day:**

“Never give up, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.” — Harriet Beecher Stowe

**Reflection:**

We have no idea whether the following story is true, but the message is powerful. It reportedly took place in 1942. According to the account:

*Rafael Solano was physically exhausted and defeated. As he sat on a boulder in the dry river bed he announced to his companions, "I'm through. There's no use going on any longer. See this pebble. It makes 999,999 I've picked up without finding one diamond. One more pebble makes a million, but what's the use? I quit!"*

*The exploration crew had spent months prospecting for diamonds in a Venezuelan watercourse. Their efforts focused on finding signs of valuable diamonds. Mentally, physically, and emotionally they were exhausted. Their clothes were tattered and their spirits weak.*

*"Pick up one more and make it a million," one man said. Solano consented and pulled forth a stone the size of a hen's egg. It was different than the others, and the crew soon realized they had discovered a diamond. It is reported Harry Winston, a New York jewel dealer, paid Rafael Solano $200,000 for that millionth pebble. The stone was named the Liberator and to date is the largest and purest diamond ever found.*

This story brings to mind the words of another famous character in history, Sir Winston Churchill, who said, “Never, ever, ever, ever, ever give up”. Think about it!

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**12. Phosphorescent Waters**



**Quote of the day:**

“I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.” —Mark Twain

**Reflections:**

There is a story of a shipwreck, which yields a good illustration of the quote above:

*Crew and passengers had to leave the broken vessel and take to the life-boats. The sea was rough, and great care in rowing and steering was necessary in order to guard the heavily-laden boats, not from the ordinary waves, which they rode over easily—but from the great cross-seas. Night was approaching, and the hearts of all sank as they asked what they would do in the darkness—when they would no longer be able to see these terrible waves. To their great joy, however, when it grew dark they discovered that they were in phosphorescent waters, and that each dangerous wave rolled up crested with light which made it as clearly visible as if it were mid-day.*

So it is that life's dreaded experiences, when we meet them they carry the light which takes away the peril and the terror. The night of sorrow comes with its own lamp of comfort. The hour of weakness, brings its own secret of strength.

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**13. See the Goal Clearly**



**Quote of the day:**

“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” —Henry Ford

**Reflection:**

*At a full-contact karate meet the contestants were asked to break two 1-inch-thick boards to demonstrate their punching power. However, one contestant’s boards didn’t break, but his knuckle did. He had practiced this routine before and we had seen him break one board of this thickness, but not two. We thought he might give up, but he didn’t. On the third try he was successful. Backstage he was asked what had gone wrong. He quickly replied, "I made a great mistake. Instead of looking through the boards at a point beyond, I looked at the boards. To do it right you have to imagine a point past the point of impact."*

This lesson is a good one for all of us. Look past the obstacles in life, not at them. We are only set back when we take our sights off the goal! As the contestant found out, reaching the goal may involve pain, even broken bones and broken dreams. How much better to see goals clearly, to make full contact with life, to break through every barrier and to not give up until you make your dream a reality.

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**14. Live in Victory**



**Quote of the day:**

“You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”— Christopher Robin (Main character in Winnie the Pooh by A. A. Milne.)

**Reflection:**

This is a great quote by Christopher Robin. The following story about a young man with extraordinary athletic skill and ability goes right along with it.

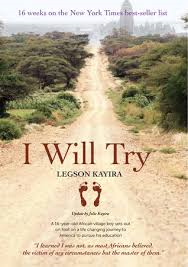
*At just nineteen years of age, Rafael Nadal already knew he wanted to be a world champion tennis player. The year was 2005, and having won his first Grand Slam title and charged up to No. 2 in the ATP rankings. He seemed poised to scale the heights of greater success. However, after experiencing several weeks of discomfort in his left foot, the doctors discovered he had been born with a rare foot disease. The condition caused one of the bones in his foot to swell and inflict frequent intense pain, with the potential to halt his entire career overnight.*

*This twist of fate tore through Rafa’s youthful aspirations. Unable to walk, much less play tennis, he slipped into a dark spiral of depression. He spent hours lying on the sofa staring into space, or sitting in the bathroom weeping. “I didn’t laugh. I didn’t smile. I didn’t want to talk. I lost all appetite for life,” he said later. At that point, Rafa had to make a pivotal decision: He could give up or go on. He could choose the easier path, but forfeit the potential rewards on the rugged way. He chose to press ahead, to focus on victory, even if he only saw and felt defeat. It was not an easy choice; he continued to suffer injuries and difficulties with his foot problem, but his determination paid off when, three years later, he stood as the world’s number one tennis player.*

There are times when life deals us a harsh and bitter hand. Our dreams are broken, our hope is gone, and we are lost in despair. But even if all circumstances point to defeat, we can choose to live in victory. We can choose to hold on day-to-day, hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment. We can choose to get up and try again, even if we are afraid of failing. We can choose to love again, even if we have been hurt. We can choose to give, even if we have suffered loss. We can choose to believe that one day we too will emerge from our dark nights into a brilliant sunrise.

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**15. I Will Try**



**Quote of the day**:

“Build this day on a foundation of pleasant thoughts. Never fret at any imperfections that you fear may impede your progress. Remind yourself, as often as necessary, that you are a creature of God and have the power to achieve any dream by lifting up your thoughts. You can fly when you decide that you can. Never consider yourself defeated again. Let the vision in your heart be in your life’s blueprint.” — Og Mandino

**Reflection:**

Here is one of my favorite inspirational stories.

*A young African boy crossed over 3,000 kilometers of hostile jungle territory on foot because he had vision and determination. Legson Didimu Kayira was born in the 1940s to a life of total poverty in the Tumbuka tribe, Malawi, yet he dreamed of studying in the United States. When he was 16, he decided to make his way on foot to Egypt and find work on a ship sailing to the U.S. He left home with only a small ax, a blanket, a map of Africa, a map of the world, and two books—a Bible and a copy of The Pilgrim’s Progress. Fifteen months later, Legson arrived in Kampala, Uganda, where he came across a directory of American colleges. He wrote to Skagit Valley College in Mount Vernon explaining his situation and asking for a scholarship. The dean was so impressed he granted him both admission and a scholarship, while the student body collected $650 to cover his fare. In December 1960, Legson finally arrived at Skagit Valley College, still carrying nothing but what he’d left home with two years before. Later, Legson became a professor at Cambridge University and authored six novels and the prizewinning autobiography, I Will Try.*

This young man didn’t let his circumstances, lack of money or anything else stand in his way. It was not easy, and it took time, but he found a way to follow his dreams and was rewarded for it.

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**16. Life Is Thick With Thorns**



**Quote of the day:**

“Life is thickly sown with thorns, and I know no other remedy than to pass quickly through them. The longer we dwell on our misfortunes, the greater is their power to harm us.” —Voltaire

**Reflection:**

I’m always inspired with stories of people overcoming adversity. Here is one such story.

*In 1938, Soichiro Honda began developing a new piston ring, which he dreamed of selling to the Toyota Corporation, but it was rejected. He went back to the drawing table, and two years later he had a new piston ring. This time, he won the contract with Toyota, but he had no factory, and concrete was rationed due to WW2. Undaunted, Mr. Honda invented a new formula for making concrete and got his factory built. Unfortunately, it was bombed—twice—and finally leveled by an earthquake. After the war, Japan suffered a gasoline shortage. Mr. Honda couldn’t afford to drive his car, so he attached a small engine to his bicycle. His neighbors were soon asking him to make “motorized bikes” for them too and encouraging him to build a plant to manufacture his engines. Because he had no capital, he wrote all 18,000 bike shop owners in Japan a personal letter, explaining his vision and asking for financial contributions. Five thousand of them agreed to advance him capital for his invention … and the rest, as they say, is history.*

What this man, and others like him have in common is that they all refused to let the limitations of their circumstances limit their dreams. Take a lesson from Mr. Honda, and don’t let the supposed “limitations” of your circumstances hinder your dreams.

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**17. Persist No Matter What**



**Quote of the day:**

“My learning disability gave me certain advantages, because I was able to live in the moment and capitalize on opportunities I spotted.” — Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko’s

**Reflection:**

Have you ever heard of Kinko? If not it is a chain of photo copying shops in the US. Here is the story behind the shop.

*When Paul Orfalea was a kid he acquired the nickname “Kinko” referring to his head of wild, curly, red hair. But teasing about his kinky hair was the least of his problems as Paul Orfalea struggled with severe dyslexia and ADHD—flunking second grade twice, graduated from high school at the bottom of his class, and eked through college with a “C” average. He had a hard time sitting still, and could barely read or write. No one ever voted him “most likely to succeed.”*

*Paul applied for jobs and managed to get hired twice—but neither job lasted longer than a day. It was clear he wasn’t cut out for traditional employment in a 9 to 5 world. He knew he was different and that somehow he’d have to find his own way in the world.*

*In 1970, living in a small college town near Santa Barbara, California, Paul noticed that there were always long lines at the copy machines. “Too many students and not enough copiers,” he thought to himself. So he borrowed $5000 and opened his own copier business in a tiny little 9×12 foot storefront close to campus. His space was so small that he had to move the copy machine out to the sidewalk to use it. He hawked pens and pencils from his backpack as he stood outside drumming up business.*

*People told him that he was crazy, but he’d been hearing that his whole life so he just ignored them. He knew his idea was a good one—he had the determination, energy, and persistence to pursue it despite what anyone said.*

*He worked long and hard, and within a year, he had made enough money to expand. Ten years later, there were 80 Kinko’s stores in college towns all around the country. And in another ten years (1990) that number expanded exponentially to 420 stores—and doubled in another seven years to 840 stores!*

*This curly-headed kid with severe learning disabilities had built himself a hugely successful business simply by seeing a need and filling it. He understood his limitations, so he hired great people to do all the things he couldn’t. He was the idea man—he hired others to execute his plans. Finally, in 2004, Paul sold Kinko’s to FedEx for $2.4 billion.*

Paul didn’t let his disabilities stop him from doing something. Take a lesson from this story and don’t let your circumstances stop you from doing what you can.

**18. Follow Your Dreams**



**Quote of the day:**

“Once you make a decision, the Universe conspires to make it happen.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Reflection**:

This is a touching story of how one man followed his dreams and the results.

*“I had seen that man before and now he was sitting in the snow outside the stadium [in Madrid]. I asked him what he was doing there. He said he’d been there for five hours, hoping for a chance to see the game, but his money had run out. That’s when I knew I had to help.” This is how José Mourinho, then coach for Real Madrid football (soccer) team, described his meeting with Abel Rodríguez, a Mexican- American who waxes floors in Los Angeles. Rodríguez had first met Mourinho in the U.S. several years earlier when Real was on a training campaign and needed a volunteer to carry water for the players. It wasn’t a paid task, but Rodríguez was happy to help, and that’s when he decided he had to see a real game. He saved money for the plane fare, flew out, and hoped for the best.—And it was “hope,” because he neither had a ticket for the match nor anywhere to stay. It paid off. After their encounter, Mourinho put up Rodríguez in the same hotel as the players, all expenses paid. He proceeded to give him a paid job as kit man for an upcoming Champions League match against Manchester United, which meant Rodríguez flew with the team to England as a staff member. “We must help each other to live our dreams,” said Mourinho.*

I’m not suggesting we recklessly do something rash to follow our dreams, however, if you put yourself out there the Universe often takes us up on our challenge.

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**19. Never Accept Defeat**

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**Quote of the day:**

“I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life; I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.” —Theodore Roosevelt

**Reflection:**

I read this adapted article by Marie Boisjoly in the *Motivated* magazine that I thought was very inspiring.

*I’m an avid reader, and I always keep some uplifting reading material on my bedside table. One of my favorites is a collection of short biographies and quotes from great men and women—not that I aspire to such greatness, but I find their examples a source of strength to meet life’s daily challenges.*

*What made these people great? Some of the qualities most often cited by both historians and their peers were their foresight, moral character, selflessness, and perseverance in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. I’m sure that each of those great men and women had other intangibles, but for one man in particular it was his faith and tenacity. His name was William Wilberforce (1759-1833).*

*During his 18-year parliamentary campaign to abolish the slave trade throughout the British Empire, his first 11 bills were defeated. At times, the political hostility against him erupted into personal hatred, insult, slander, and even a threat on his life by a sea captain involved in the slave trade. But he never accepted defeat.*

*Biographers may not agree on every detail of his experience, but all credit his faith with fueling his fire. All the while, he also contended with debilitating health problems. His eyesight was so bad that he once wrote, “I can scarce see how to direct my pen.” Bedridden for weeks at a time, he also suffered from curvature of the spine (one writer of his day likened him to a “human corkscrew,” and he wore an iron corset for 15 years), an ulcerated colon, and a severe bout of influenza from which he never fully recovered. Had Wilberforce given up his fight, others would have quickly excused him for health reasons, if nothing else. But he was looking for change, not excuses.*

*The Slave Trade Act was passed into law in 1807, and in 1833, three days before he died, he received word that enough votes had been secured to ensure passage of the Slavery Abolition Act, and the emancipation of slaves.*

William Wilberforce, didn’t give up what he believed in and felt was right, in spite of his weaknesses and the bill not being passed 11 times. He kept at it and finally the bill did get passed. Wow! What perseverance in the face of adversity. Are you persevering in spite of obstacles?

**20. Bees, Ants, and Spiders**



**Quote of the day:**

“History has demonstrated that the most notable winners usually encountered heartbreaking obstacles before they triumphed. They won because they refused to be discouraged by their defeats.” —B.C. Forbes

**Reflection:**

This story is a little longer than usual. Nevertheless I want to share it, as I’m pretty sure this has happened to all of us at one time or another, in one way or another. If it hasn’t happened to you, it still has a good lesson.

*I had been working for weeks to secure a deal that would give me a nice commission. I picked up the phone and called the customer to get the deal finalized, only to hear that all purchases were put on hold. I had so concentrated on this deal that I had not worked much on my other customers, and knew that instead of getting a big fat paycheck I’d be having one of the smallest ones I had ever received. I just couldn’t stay at my desk. I got up and went to get some coffee. The cleaning lady was just washing the vending machine. I slumped to a chair and felt awful.*

*“Bad day?” she asked. Startled, I looked up. The cleaning lady was looking at me. “You could say that again,” I sighed. “What is the matter?” she asked. I suddenly found myself telling the whole pitiful story to her. She listened intently.*

*“Your situation reminds me of my own father,” she said. “He was also a salesman, but not lucky enough to be able to sit in one office. He was a traveling salesman. You know, big suitcases and all. Vanished for weeks sometimes and came back with an empty bag, pay check, and a big hug for us kids and mother.” I looked at her, not knowing where she was going with this. “There was a time when he also lost a big sale. It was just before the holidays and he had to tell us children that there would be very few presents. We were disappointed, but he gathered us around him and told a story, I never forgot.*

*“First, he asked us which animals we liked best. My answer was cats. My older brother liked dogs and my younger brother loved ponies. Then, he asked if we wanted to know which animals he admired the most and, of course, we did. The bees, the ants, and the spiders, he told us.”*

*“Now, of course, we did not agree with him but he explained it to us and what he told us has guided me ever since. “He said he liked the bees because if a bear breaks their nest and steals their honey, they keep on building their honeycombs, making more honey. He liked the ants because if the same bear destroys their nest, they also immediately start building their nest anew, working together for a common goal. And he liked the spiders because if their webs are destroyed, they start repairing the damage right away—or building a whole new, better one.*

*“He said that the lesson he had learned from these little insects was that the world may surprise us sometimes by destroying even our most carefully-built plans, but if we choose to be ready to start all over again, no matter what, we eventually will see great results. We just have to start again, one step at a time.”*

*At that, the cleaning lady nodded to me and pushed her cart out of the room. I sat there for a while, thinking of what she had said. Then, I got up, walked back to my desk, and started to build my next paycheck, one customer at a time.*

Let’s take heart to this wise advice from a traveling salesman. Remember that if disappointments or surprises come your way that destroy even your most carefully-built plans—choose to start all over again, no matter what, and eventually you’ll see great results. Just start again, one step at a time.

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