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## Dress for Success

Coming close to reaching a long-standing goal can often cause unexpected problems. We might, for example, prevent ourselves from finishing by tripping ourselves up just as we're sprinting toward the finish line.

The causes for this may differ. There is always the risk that we begin to celebrate our victory prematurely and therefore lose concentration and stumble right before the finish. Victory slips from between our fingers. The scent of victory can also bring with it an anxiety that makes it difficult to make it to the end.

But coming close to reaching our goals can also trip us up another way. As we get closer, we sometimes start debating if we really want to attain what we have so long been striving for. Perhaps we become suddenly aware of what the consequences of this particular success will mean to us.

Every success or victory brings change to a person's life, and in cases of great success, it is easy to let the positive aspects blind us. People usually say that when bad things happen, there is ultimately some good that comes from it. I believe that the opposite is also true, that whenever good things happen to us, there is always a questionable side.

Human development moves haphazardly. Unfortunately, many of us have the misconception that our development should follow a perfectly straight line or a beautiful curve on a chart. In truth, our lives have a tendency to move forward in jumps and starts. Sometimes we are jerked this way, sometimes that way.

Every great change in a person's life, whether predominately positive or negative, puts the person in a new situation. Both fortune and misfortune therefore often create confusion. We find it difficult to negotiate our way through

these new circumstances. That is why we rarely experience a positive life change without also to some degree experiencing anxiety, fear, insecurity or other unpleasant feelings.

But we can prepare ourselves for the difficulties that will come with our successes. We don't have to see everything through rose-colored glasses. We can try to get a clear picture of what each life change can involve.

We often dream about our future successes as a way of escaping the tediousness of our "real" life. We like to think that everything will work out as soon as we meet Mr. or Mrs. Right, or as soon as we get our degree or that dream job. But it usually doesn't work out this way. I see myself as having experienced some great successes in my life. Yet I think that life has always felt more or less the same after each success as before it. From some events we experience euphoria, of course, but that euphoria usually disappears quickly.



Some people spend their lives chasing after these emotional peaks. Perhaps they fall in love but break off the relationship as soon as the first rush of feelings begins to fade, and then they look for the next person to fall in love with. Just last night I was talking to a close friend who is newly in love but who is not experiencing an exaggerated sense of euphoria. He finds it a relief. He also believes that this gives the relationship good prospects of lasting.

We need to keep our successes in the right perspective. This doesn't mean that we should stop enjoying them or that we should lose our passion for working toward them. Striving towards something we really want to reach gives us the enthusiasm and the energy to continue. Just having these goals creates excitement. But that doesn't mean life turns into one big party the moment we reach one of our goals. Much will remain the same as it was before, and we need to come to terms with this. We need to learn to enjoy our daily life for what it is.

What will your life look like in five years?

What will you be working with?

Where will you be living?

Tell a friend these things as if you were living it today. Then have your friend tell you the same for his or her life. This exercise can help you get used to how your life will feel when you realize a certain goal.

Success then can be as difficult to handle as failure can. This is because success forces us to find new ways of looking at ourselves. Success is often something that we have long hoped for but have not been completely convinced that we will attain. We often create goals for ourselves that we are not completely sure we will ever reach. And that is just as it should be – for our long-term goals at least. They should be right at the edge of what we know we're capable of, or a bit beyond that, so that our capabilities are forced to grow. This is true for individuals as well as for companies.

As soon as we reach one of our more difficult goals, we see that it wasn't unattainable at all. From this point, our self-concept may begin to waver for awhile. A child who has just learned to ride a bike might begin questioning if he really has just learned to ride a bike, and while thinking about it can fall down.

Expansion is often followed by contraction. Increase is often followed by decrease. I believe it is good to keep in mind that everything in the universe strives to maintain a balance. By this I do not mean that children should stop learning how to ride bikes or that you should stop working toward your goals.

It is also good to keep in mind that reaching one goal does not mean that your development is going to surge forward. You are likely to run into setbacks, and it is wise to have alternate plans ready for this.

One way to reduce the difficulty of a setback before you run into it is to think through how it would feel to reach a specific goal. How will it feel a month later? What new challenges will I have to face because of this? What will I have to continue working on within myself and in my life situation? What new goals will I have to create?

Finally reaching a goal that you have long struggled toward can leave you with a keen sense of purposelessness. This is also a difficult situation to find yourself in. It is easy then to lose your sense of meaning and to become apathetic and unproductive. Although such times are usually viewed negatively, I believe that we need periods like this in our lives. We need a breather from time to time so we can regain our strength and begin moving forward again.

Our lives have a certain rhythm. That rhythm incorporates both inhaling and exhaling. It incorporates both effort and relaxation. It includes expansion and contraction. I don't believe that non-stop exertion leaves anyone feeling well.

Another way to diminish the anxiety we can feel when nearing a difficult goal is to strengthen our self-respect. By doing this, we can easier see that we are worthy of success. If we see the importance of our lives, then we will also see that we deserve to have a life of quality. But this never needs to be at the expense of anyone else. Finding the good in your own life should never be an excuse for selfishness. I do not see selfishness as being compatible with healthy self-respect. Instead, self-respect is something that goes hand-in-hand with respect for others.

Inherent in healthy self-respect is the ability to see one's own role in creating a good life. There is therefore no need of discrediting others. I am convinced that when we look down at others, it is almost always because we believe that we are not going to have our own needs met. Fear is the source of this kind of attitude, as is the habit of belittling our own ability. If instead we assume that we will succeed in creating the lives we want, then we will have no need to discredit other people. This is what I mean by healthy self-respect. It can be of great support those times we draw near to one of our meaningful goals.