

The Common Denominator of Success by Albert E.N. Gray

“Several years ago I was brought face to face with the very disturbing realization that I was trying to supervise and direct the efforts of a large number of people who were trying to achieve success, without knowing myself what the secret of success really was. And that, naturally, brought me face to face with the further realization that regardless of what other knowledge I might have brought to my job, I was definitely lacking in the most important knowledge of all.

Of course, like most of us, I had been brought up on the popular belief that the secret of success is hard work, but I had seen so many people work hard without succeeding and so many people succeed without working hard that I had become convinced that hard work was not the real secret, even though in most cases it might be one of the requirements. And so I set out on a voyage of discovery which carried me through biographies and autobiographies and all sorts of dissertations on success and the lives of successful people until I finally reached the point at which I realized that the secret I was trying to discover lay not only in what people did, but also in what made them do it.

I realized further that the secret for which I was searching must not only apply to every definition of success, but since it must apply to everyone to whom it was offered, it must also apply to everyone who had ever been successful. In short, I was looking for the common denominator of success. And, because that is exactly what I was looking for, that is exactly what I found.

But this common denominator of success is so big, so powerful, and so vitally important to your future and mine that I'm not going to make a speech about it. I'm just going to “lay it on the line” in words of one syllable, so simple that anybody can understand them.

The common denominator of success - the secret of success of every person who has ever been successful - lies in the fact that, “THEY FORMED THE HABIT OF DOING THINGS THAT FAILURES DON'T LIKE TO DO.”

It's just as true as it sounds and it's just as simple as it seems. You can hold it up to the light, you can put it to the acid test, and you can kick it around until it's worn out, but when you are all through with it, it will still be the common denominator of success, whether we like it or not.

It will still explain why people have gone into a business or profession with every apparent qualification for success and have been nothing but disappointing failures, while others have achieved outstanding success in spite of many obvious handicaps. And since it will also explain your future, it would seem to be a mighty good idea for you to use it in determining just what sort of future you are going to have. In other words, let's take this big, all-embracing secret and boil it down to fit you.

If the secret of success lies in forming the habit of doing things that failures don't like to do, let's start the boiling down process by determining what are the things that failures don't like to do. The things that “failures” don't like to do are the things that you and I and other human beings, including successful people, naturally don't like to do. In other words, we've got to realize right from the start that success is something which is achieved by the minority of people... and is therefore “unnatural” and not to be achieved by following our natural likes and dislikes nor by being guided by our natural preferences and prejudices.

The things that failures don't like to do, in general, are too many and too obvious for us to

discuss them here, and so, since our success in every endeavour lies in our ability to persuade others to do what we would like them to do, let's move on to a discussion of the things we don't like to do. Here, too, the things we don't like to do are too many to permit a specific discussion, but I think they can all be disposed of by saying that they all emanate from one basic dislike common to all of us. We don't like to talk to people about something they might not want to talk about. Any reluctance to approach someone, to suggest a change in their activity, to persuade them to take a new approach is caused by this one basic dislike.

Perhaps you have wondered what is behind this peculiar lack of welcome on the part of those we're trying to persuade. Isn't it due to the fact that our prospects are human too? And isn't it true that the average human being is highly resistant to change even when it's for their own improvement, and is therefore prone to escape our efforts to persuade them to do something they don't want to do by striking at the most important weakness we possess: namely, our desire to be appreciated?

Perhaps you've been discouraged by a feeling that you were born subject to certain dislikes peculiar to you, with which successful people are not afflicted. Perhaps you have wondered why it is that those who accomplish most seem to like to do the things that you don't like to do.

They don't! And I think this is the most important and encouraging statement I have ever offered any person. But if they don't like to do these things, then why do they do them?

Because by doing the things they don't like to do, they can accomplish the things they want to accomplish. Now let me repeat that: Successful people are influenced by the desire for pleasing results. Failures are influenced by the desire for pleasing methods and inclined to be satisfied with such results as can be obtained by doing things they like to do.

Why are successful people able to do things they don't like to do while failures are not? Because successful people have a purpose - strong enough to make them form the habit of doing things they don't like to do in order to accomplish the purpose they want to accomplish.

Sometimes even the best producers get into a slump. When a person gets into a slump, it simply means that they have reached a point at which, for the time being, the things they don't like to do have become more important than their reasons for doing them.

Many people with whom I have discussed this common denominator of success have said at this point, "But, I have a family to support and I have to have a living for my family and myself. Isn't that enough of a purpose?"

No, it isn't. It isn't a sufficiently strong purpose to make you form the habit of doing the things that you don't like to do for the very simple reason that it is easier to adjust ourselves to the hardships of a poor living than it is to adjust ourselves to the hardships of making a better one. If you doubt me, just think of all the things you are willing to go without in order to avoid doing the things you don't like to do. All of which seems to prove that the strength that holds you to your purpose is not your own strength but the strength of the purpose itself.

Now let's see why habit belongs so importantly in this common denominator of success.

People are creatures of habit just as machines are creatures of momentum, for habit is nothing

more or less than momentum translated from the concrete into the abstract. Can you picture the problem that would face our mechanical engineers if there were no such thing as momentum? Speed would be impossible because the highest speed at which any vehicle could be moved would be the first speed at which it could be broken away from a standstill. Elevators could not be made to rise, airplanes could not be made to fly, and the entire world of mechanics would find itself in a total state of helplessness. Then who are you and I to think that we can do with our own human nature, what the finest engineers in the world could not do with the finest machinery that was ever built?

Every single qualification for success is acquired through habit. People form habits and habits form futures. If you do not deliberately form good habits, then unconsciously you will form bad ones. You are the kind of person you are because you have formed the habit of being that kind of person, and the only way you can change is through changing habits.

The success habit for any area of achievement can be divided into four main groups:

1. Contacting habits
2. Calling habits
3. Persuading habits
4. Working habits

Let's discuss these habit groups in their order.

Any successful person will tell you that it is easier to persuade someone to a particular course of action than to find someone who already wants to do it, but if you have not deliberately formed the habit of contacting those who need what you're offering regardless of their wants, then unconsciously you have formed the habit of limiting your contacts to those people who already want what you have to offer; and therein lies the one and only real reason for a lack of interested contacts.

As to calling habits, unless you have deliberately formed the "habit" of calling on people who are able to do what you want them to do, but who may be unwilling to listen, then unconsciously you have formed the habit of calling on people who are willing to listen but unable to do what you want them to do.

As to persuasion habits, unless you have deliberately formed the habit of calling on people determined to help them see why it is in their best interest to take a particular course of action, then unconsciously you have formed the habit of calling on people while you are in a state of mind in which you are willing to let them make you see their reasons for not going along with you.

As to working habits, if you will take care of the other three groups, the working habits will generally take care of themselves because under working habits are included study and preparation, organization of time and efforts, records, analyses, etc. Certainly you're not going to take the trouble to learn the best approach to your presentation unless you're going to use it. You're not going to plan your day's activities when you know, in your heart, that you're not going to carry out your plans. And you're certainly not going to keep an honest record of things you haven't done or of results you haven't achieved. So let's not worry about the fourth group of success habits, because if you are taking care of the first three groups, most of the working

habits will take care of themselves.

But before you decide to adopt these success habits, let me warn you of the importance of habit to your decision. I have attended many sales meetings and rallies during the past years and have often wondered why, in spite of the fact that there is so much good in them, so many people seem to get so little LASTING good out of them. Perhaps you have attended sales meetings in the past and have left these meetings determined to do the things that would make you successful or more successful, only to find your decision or determination waning at just the time when it should be put into effect or practice.

Here's the answer. Any resolution or decision you make is simply a promise to yourself that isn't worth a tinker's dam until you have formed the HABIT of making it and keeping it. And you won't form the HABIT of making it and keeping it unless right at the start you link it with a definite purpose that can be accomplished by keeping it. In other words, any resolution or decision you make today has to be made again tomorrow, and the next day, and the next, and the next, and so on. And it not only has to be made each day, but it has to be KEPT each day for if you miss one day in the making or keeping of it, you've got to go back and begin all over again. But if you continue the process of making it each morning and keeping it each day, you will finally wake up some morning a different person in a different world, and you will wonder what has happened to you and the world you used to live in.

Here's what has happened. Your resolution or decision has become a habit and you don't have to make it on this particular morning. And the reason for your seeming like a different person living in a different world lies in the fact that for the first time in your life, you have become master of yourself, and master of your likes and dislikes by surrendering to your purpose in life. That is why behind every success there must be a purpose and that is what makes purpose so important to your future. For the last analysis, your future is not going to depend on economic conditions or outside influences or circumstances over which you have no control. Your future is going to depend on your purpose in life. So let's talk about purpose.

First of all, your purpose must be practical and not visionary. Some time ago, I talked with a man who thought he had a purpose that was more important to him than income.

He was interested in the sufferings of his fellow man, and he wanted to be placed in a position to alleviate that suffering. But when we analyzed his real feelings, we discovered and he admitted it, that what he really wanted was a really nice job dispensing charity with other people's money and being well paid for it, along with the appreciation and feeling of importance that would naturally go with such a job.

But in making your purpose practical, be careful not to make it logical. Make it a purpose of the sentimental or emotional type. Remember that needs are logical while wants and desires are sentimental and emotional. Your needs will push you just so far, but when your needs are satisfied, they will stop pushing you. If, however, your purpose is in terms of wants and desires, then your wants and desires will keep pushing you long after your needs are satisfied and until your wants and desires are fulfilled.

Recently I was talking with a young man who long ago discovered the common denominator of success without identifying his discovery. He had a definite purpose in life and it was definitely a sentimental or emotional purpose. He wanted his boy to go through college without having to

work his way through as he had done. He wanted to avoid for his little girl the hardships that his own sister had had to face in her childhood. And he wanted his wife to enjoy the luxuries and comforts, and even necessities, which had been denied his own mother. And he was willing to form the habit of doing things he didn't like to do in order to accomplish this purpose.

Not to discourage him, but rather to have him encourage me, I said to him, "Aren't you going a little too far with this thing? There's no logical reason why your son shouldn't be willing to work his way through college just as his father did. Of course he'll miss many of the things that you missed in your college life and he'll probably have heartaches and disappointment. But if he's any good, he'll come through in the end just as you did. And there's no logical reason why you should slave in order that your daughter may have the things which your own sister wasn't able to have, or in order that your wife can enjoy comforts and luxuries that she wasn't used to before she married you."

He looked at me with rather a pitying look and said, "But there's no inspiration in logic. There's no courage in logic. There's not even happiness in logic. there's only satisfaction. The only place logic has in my life is in the realization that the more I am willing to do for my wife and children, the more I shall be able to do for myself.

I imagine, after hearing that story, you won't have to be told how to find your purpose or how to identify it or how to surrender to it. If it's a big purpose, you will be big in its accomplishment. If it's an unselfish purpose, you will be unselfish in accomplishing it. And if it's an honest purpose, you will be honest and honourable in the accomplishment of it.

But as long as you live, don't ever forget that while you may succeed beyond your fondest hopes and your greatest expectations, you will never succeed beyond the purpose to which you are willing to surrender. Furthermore, your surrender will not be complete until you have formed the habit of doing the things that failures don't like to do.