



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

GOOD MONKS, BAD HABITS

This week I was treated to a presentation by management trainer Andrew Cope all about the art of being yourself... brilliantly.

The essence of Cope's message was that roughly 98% of the population exist way below their optimum levels of positivity and happiness. Only the remaining 2% are doing things differently, exploiting the upper level of how fantastic they could feel. They have boundless energy, optimism and a passion for life. Their enthusiasm is as infectious as their smile. They are the brilliant ones and they do 5 key things; choose to be positive, understand the impact they can have on others, set huge goals, display resilience and take personal responsibility.

As Mr Cope explained, none of this is new and certainly not revolutionary.

I have read loads of motivational success literature over the years, from Stephen Covey to Tom Peters, even the now almost old fashioned Dale Carnegie, although I am told he's making a comeback, quite impressive considering he died in 1955! Although the authors have different angles on their philosophies, at the end of the day there is really not that much that separates them. The difference from being ordinary to extraordinary or, using Mr. Cope's word, brilliant, depends on how much you are prepared to drop old habits and adopt new, more positive ways of doing things.

You see if you read between the lines of all success literature the real secret lies in diligence, hard work and consistency – and putting in all of those, day in, day out. It is not easy. For me Stephen Covey encapsulates it perfectly when he says the difference between successful people and unsuccessful people is that successful people do the things that unsuccessful people don't want to do. They don't particularly like doing it either but their dislike is subservient to their desire to succeed.

For the rest of us it boils down to simple laziness and lack of self-control. It's easier not to push yourself, in much the same way that we don't warm up before exercising, eat things that are bad for us and buy things on credit – idleness and the desire for instant, as opposed to delayed, gratification. All the things Cope proposes require patience, effort and waiting to reap the benefits – the exercise of willpower and the ability to wait patiently in order to obtain something that one wants.

Daniel Goleman, the founder of emotional intelligence has suggested that this waiting is at the cornerstone of emotional intelligence and maturity. control. I remember watching a documentary called 'The Marshmallow Experiment' an exercise conducted at Stanford University in the 1960s to test the concept of delayed gratification. A group of four-year olds were tested by being given a marshmallow and promised another, only if they could wait 20 minutes before eating the first one. On film you can see the children squirming, kicking, hiding their eyes -- desperately trying to exercise self-control so they can wait and get two marshmallows. Some could, some couldn't. The researchers then followed the progress of each child into adolescence, and demonstrated that those with the ability to wait were better adjusted, more dependable and scored significantly higher on school aptitude tests, They got into better colleges and had, on average, better adult outcomes. The children who 'failed' the test were more likely to become bullies, received worse teacher and parental evaluations 10 years later and were more likely to have drug problems.

This exercise, along with everyday experience, tells us that self-control is essential. Young people who can delay gratification can sit through sometimes boring classes to get a degree. They can perform rote tasks in order, say, to master a language. They can avoid drugs and alcohol. For people without self-control skills, however, school is a series of failed ordeals like teenage pregnancy, drug use, gambling, truancy and crime.

Yet simple self control on its own is not enough. Abstinence and asceticism might make you a good monk but they won't turn you into Bill Gates or Richard Branson, two obvious two-percenters. Motivation plays a huge role. How much do you really want the two marshmallows? And that is why most training programmes fail because often it's either the self- control or self-motivation after the course that are the problem. It's also a potential interview pitfall if we don't find a means to pick out the self-motivators, the ones with the willpower to stay the course.

So should I suggest at HRMC that alongside testing adults for success in our assessment centres we also bring in all the 4 year olds in the country, conduct the marshmallow test and use that as our data in the future? Okay we won't get the rewards now but we will be able to accurately predict who will be successful later on. The question is, can we wait that long for our second marshmallow too?

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