FINANCES | PERSONAL GROWTH | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | VALUES

Life is a Game of Choice, Not Chance

Life's greatest risk is depending on others for your security, which can really come only by planning, acting, and making choices that will make you independent.

by **Denis Waitley**

1914 words | 7 pages

If getting rich depended on luck, Las Vegas would be a ghost town!

Are you waiting for success? If you are, it will never arrive. Success is who you are and what you are doing each day and night. It is not a reward, destination or jackpot. Success is a way of thinking, doing and being. We hear the success stories every day:

- “He was at the right place at the right time.”
- “Her timing was perfect.”
- “It was an idea whose time had come.”
- “He’s the luckiest person I know.”

For the most part, these statements apply to others. Rarely do we direct them toward ourselves. But what if we could say honestly and proudly:

“I placed myself at the right place at the right time.”
“My timing was right on.”
“It was my idea whose time had come.”
“I chose to make my own luck.”

The great French philosopher, Voltaire, likened life to a game of cards. Each player must accept the cards life deals him or her. But once they are in hand, he or she alone must decide how to play the cards in order to win the game. The writer, John Erskine, put it a little differently when he wrote: “Though we sometimes speak of a primrose path, we all know that a bad life is just as difficult, just as full of work, obstacles and hardships as a good one. The only choice is the kind of life one would care to spend one’s efforts on.” Whether you have a high or low standard

of living, you can look in the mirror, taking the credit or the blame for your place in life. You took over control from your parents when you were very young and have been in the driver's seat ever since.

"Have-To's" are Choices

In his blockbuster best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey writes that "Highly proactive people recognize responsibility. They do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior. Their behavior is a product of their own conscious choice based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feeling."

Everyone likes to talk about freedom of choice. After all, that's one of the principles on which our nation was founded. But we often tend to feel that much of what we must do in life has been forced on us. Is that true?

Must you go to work, for example? The ultimate answer is no. You can choose to lie in bed, fake an illness, move in with someone willing to support you or apply for long-term government assistance. Must you pay taxes? Not really. You can earn too little to qualify, try to fool the IRS, give up your citizenship, go to prison, or invest in tax deferral programs that last until your death – after which your heirs can pay your taxes. Do you have to work late tonight? Not exactly. You don't *have* to. Many people feel compelled to work late at the office. However, those who understand positive self-determination, *choose* to do that occasionally because they make commitments that require important things to be accomplished. Real wealth achievers realize that working forty hours a week is about enough to make a living – and also understand that their success depends on a good deal more.

We really don't have to do much of anything. We choose to do the things we do because they're profitable to us and the best choices among the alternatives.

People who feel they *must* do things usually forfeit many available options and alternatives, losing control of their lives in the bargain. But those who are aware that they have the power of decision - that they

exert control over what happens to them -- can choose more effective responses to change and to life's offerings. Incidentally, the second category of people is also generally happier.

Unfortunately we're living in an age of eroding responsibility. Although most people are willing to fight for the credit when good things happen, fewer and fewer want to accept responsibility for their own actions.

The "Why me?" so often heard today should be "Try me!" "Try me, I can handle it." "Give me the chance and I'll do the job." Blaming others -- parents, bosses, companies, immigrants, fate, weather, bad luck, the government, or the horoscope -- is a mark of a juvenile mind.

> ***The mature mind asks what is within me that caused this to happen. "What did I fail to consider? What can I do better next time?"***

Instead of contemplating what's ticking inside them, blame-fixers focus on what's going on around them. It's always easier to assume the faults lie elsewhere.

Rather than remorse and apology or determination to face the consequences, the common response to lapses and failures is to blame one's upbringing or other circumstances. Today's philosophy often seems to be, "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you place the blame!" In our age of euphemism, the drug addict has become "chemically dependent." The delinquent is suffering from "a behavioral disorder caused by preexisting conditions." And ever-greater numbers of murderers plead insanity, convincing ever-greater numbers of juries.

But one way or another, our actions cause consequences. "To every action," as Sir Isaac Newton observed, "there is always opposed an equal reaction." Good begets good and evil leads to more evil. This is one of the universe's eternal, fundamental truths: the law of cause and effect.

It means that every cause (action) will create an effect (reaction) approximately equal in intensity. Making good use of our minds, skills, and talents will bring positive rewards in our outer lives. Assuming the

personal responsibility to make the best use of our talents and time will result in an enormous gain in happiness, success, and wealth. This is true of everyone.

> ***The truly successful leaders, those who have built financial empires or accomplished great deeds for society, are those who have taken personal responsibility to heart and to soul.***

By being true to themselves and others, they achieve success, wealth, and inner happiness. In the end, we ourselves -- far more than any outsider -- are the people with the greatest ability to steal our own time, talents, and accomplishments. They are responsible for their present actions and future *behavior,* although they need not be hung up on the past.

Looking for the Goat

Alcoholics Anonymous and other recovery programs recognize that an individual must admit that there is a problem before he or she can begin to change. Admission of a problem can't come with a finger pointed at other people or external conditions. It means accepting responsibility for one's difficulties and making a genuine effort to change.

There's a prophetic story from the Old Testament, book of Leviticus, about a sacred ceremony called "The Escaped Goat." When the people's troubles became overwhelming in those early days, a healthy male goat was led into the temple. The tribe's highest priest placed his hand on the animal's head and solemnly recited the long list of the people's woes. Then the goat was released -- and it ran off, supposedly taking the human troubles and evil spirits with him. That was some four thousand years ago, but the concept of the scapegoat remains in full force today. Blaming someone else or something else for our problems is nearly as old as civilization -- and stays consistently young. When Adam ate of the apple, he quickly pointed at Eve. "The woman you've put here with me made me do it," he said.

The Disposable Assets

We live in a land of incredible abundance. Americans enjoy material riches and a civic and legal inheritance that people of other countries continue to die for, that most Americans take for granted. But like so many successful societies in history, we are squandering our resources and past rewards faster than we're replenishing our investment for future harvesting. That has become obvious to almost everyone but ourselves. It's dangerous enough to simply rest on one's laurels. Worse than that, we may actually be engaged in pawning them.

The tolerance for sacrifice among immigrants and workers in developing nations gives them an enormous social and financial force. Typical Asian workers save an estimated 20 percent of their spendable income, more than triple the percentage of American savings.

We protest for individual liberty and social order in the same breath. We strive for material wealth, hoping that spiritual riches will come with it as a bonus. We plead for more protection from crime but demand less interference in our social habits. We want to cut taxes and build our own empires -- at the same time, we want our government to provide more financial and homeland security. But we can't have it both ways. If we want results, we must pay the price. So far we've been dealing with the symptoms. The secret is in changing the cause.

> ***To achieve emotional security, each of us must develop two critical abilities: the ability to live with change and uncertainty, and the ability to delay immediate gratification for the sake of long-range goals.***

How to be Different

In a very real sense, we all become hostages of hundreds of restrictions of our own choosing. As children, we either accepted or rejected the teachings and lifestyles of the significant adults in our lives. As teenagers and young adults, many of us felt a need to conform to the standards of our peers. While fooling ourselves into thinking we were being different, we were actually as regimented as an army calling cadence and

marching in full-dress uniform.

To be responsible leaders and gain real wealth, we must understand that being different is admirable and valuable if:

- It means higher personal and professional standards of behavior.
- It means putting more time and effort into everything you do.
- It means taking calculated risks.

Life's greatest risk is depending on others for your security, which can really come only by planning, acting, and making choices that will make you independent.

Your network marketing business will help you gain financial freedom so that you can employ your power of choice to the maximum for the rest of your life.

Denis Waitley is one of America's most respected and beloved authors, keynote lecturers and productivity consultants on high performance human achievement. He has inspired, informed, challenged and entertained audiences for over 25 years from the boardrooms of multi-national corporations to the control rooms of NASA's space program. Denis has been voted business speaker of the year by the Sales and Marketing Executives' Association and by Toastmasters' International and inducted into the International Speakers' Hall of Fame.

With over 10 million audio programs sold in 14 languages, Denis Waitley's CD album, *The Psychology of Winning*, is still the all-time best selling program on self-mastery. To order this Best-Seller or his newest

release, *The Platinum Collection* and to subscribe to the free Denis Waitley Weekly E-zine visit his website here: DenisWaitley.com