

Believing in Yourself



Perhaps you, like I, have seen a consistent pattern with certain people that might be summed up like this: Many people regularly have things turn out badly for them, while others experience just the opposite; things seem to always work for them.

And it doesn't seem to matter how conscientious or sincere the people are—one group's bread and jelly always seems to fall jelly side down, while for the other group, it lands jelly side up. What's more, the first group even has someone stomp on its bread, while the others seem to have inherited a bread store.

I saw this pattern repeated so often in my own life and the lives of others, I wanted to know the reason. What follows is a report on my search and its results.

First, I found that this pattern is closely related to a common complaint, which is summed up in the words, "It should have worked, but it didn't!"

THE MAGIC TOUCH

In the university where I used to teach there was a large machine for forming plastic. If handled incorrectly, it could literally blow up a student's \$20 sheet of plastic. When I gave instructions on how to use the machine properly, there was often at least one student following my every word, writing things down, and asking questions to make sure he understood completely. Then, when it was his turn, he proceeded to blast his sheet of plastic all over the shop. As the student picked up the pieces of hot plastic, I usually heard, "It should

Kurt's teaching years.

Most people seek fulfillment by following other people's formulas for success. But they are frustrated when the formulas don't work for them.



Then there are the magic few who, as the world hands them their desires, nonchalantly saunter through life going “doot-da-do.”

have worked, but it didn't!" And then, to make matters worse, there was usually a kid in the back who, after staring out the window during the instructions, got up and did it perfectly the first time.

Recently, a friend came into my office with tears in his eyes and said, "How could she do it, after all we meant to each other? How could she leave me? And for *him!* He just strolled into our lives and took her from me. I love her and worked so hard for her love. He just beckoned with his little finger and she went running. She should have loved me, but she didn't."

These experiences illustrate something I discovered in my search: Some people seem to have a certain magic that is best described as a "doot-da-do" approach to life. They have the uncanny ability to be at the right place at the right time, and seem to always fall into opportunities and successes by accident—while the rest of us watch in disbelief and frustration. That frustration is only heightened when these people don't appear to be at all aware of what they are doing. They casually stroll up and grab the gold ring you've been knocking yourself out to get.

SOME CONTRASTING EXAMPLES

One man I've known for almost 30 years has always wanted the same thing—money. He has tried many ways to achieve his desire over the years, but none has ever really worked. He is sincere. He is diligent. He is smart. But he is still just getting by. Making matters worse is a colleague we both know who is *always* making money—without even trying. In one venture this guy bought some property for very little and sold it for a huge profit. Then to top it off, after he used the money to pay off his mortgage and buy several new cars, the property reverted back to him because the developer couldn't finish making the payments.

Another person I know makes friends with everyone. He walks into a room and people are naturally drawn to him. I've lost count of the number of times men want to befriend him, women seek his attention, little kids call him their buddy, and older people adopt him as their son. At a business farewell party for him, people wept over his departure. To contrast this you need to know his brother, who has never had this

special way with people, but has always envied it.

THE ANSWER

Well, I finally found the answer to my questions about these opposite types of people—the many with the frustration and the few who seem to have the magic. I know I’ve found the secret because I’ve applied it and had others test it, and it works—the magic can happen when the secret is applied.

The secret is much different than I expected. It lies in applying the principle of

CONFORMITY

You’re probably saying, “You’ve gotta be kidding! This is a joke!” Well, just give me time to explain. First, a question: Who is conforming and who isn’t in the following drawing?

These are very conservative CPAs working 8 to 5, voting Republican, with 2.8 kids, two cars and a dog.



OK, who’s conforming and who isn’t in the drawing below?

These are old hippies keeping the dream alive, hoping to make a difference by being different. But the hair is going and the dream is fading.



Remember this for the explanation that follows—conformity is relative to the situation. The definition of conformity depends on context.

HITTING YOUR HEAD AGAINST A BRICK WALL

Trying to solve a problem the wrong way can be like standing in front of a large brick wall and believing that if you pound your head against it hard enough or long enough, you’ll somehow break through.

“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

—Henry David Thoreau

Such an effort can produce a lot of pain. But if you are convinced this is the only way to get through the wall, you will consider pain the cost you must pay to get to the other side. You may even think, “I should be able to get through, but I can’t.” And as you stop and lean there for a little rest, you might say, “I’m just not trying hard enough,” and you go back to slamming your head into that immovable wall even harder than before.

BUYING INTO A PRINCIPLE

If you frequently find yourself pounding at the wall, you may have bought into the following principle: By conforming (there is that awful word) to other people’s values, I will be fulfilled. If I do what they say I need to do, I’ll break through the brick wall and then I’ll be happy, rich, successful, or whatever.



This principle could be put into the following formula:

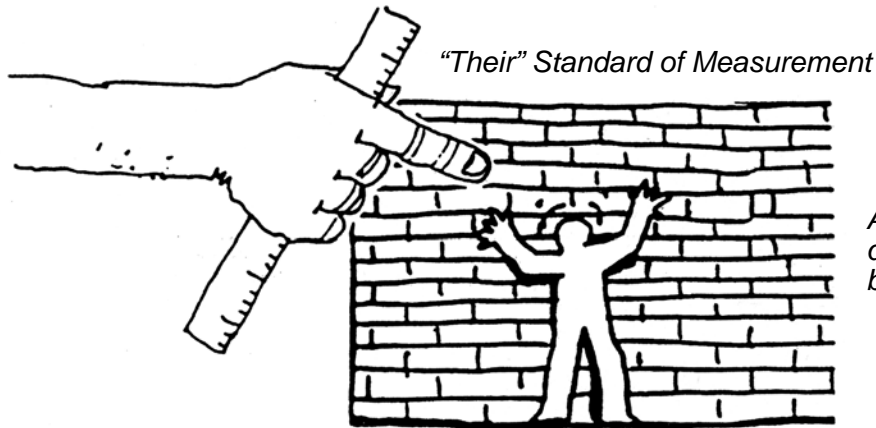
* *Other People’s Values*

CONFORMING to O.P.V.* = FULFILLMENT

It’s almost as if there were a gigantic hand pointing its huge finger straight at you. It is showing you, as you stand there pounding your head, what you *ought* to be doing, what you *should* think, and who you *should* be. It makes its judgments in all areas of your life—from dress to occupation, from the language you use to the thoughts you think. And at the wall, you receive the message and obediently pound away.

This gigantic hand might also be said to hold an equally large ruler. This ruler is the standard of measurement, establishing the criteria by which the conforming souls hitting the wall are to be evaluated.

“THEY”: Friends, culture, school, business, church, peers, etc. . . .



A diligent person doing his or her best to succeed

When you pound against the wall, you let others decide for you. You give them control.

What does the large hand represent? It could be family, friends, the school system, our culture, church, business, peer groups, or leaders. These are “they” whose ideas we buy without question—the people and institutions whom we have allowed to set our standards and to whom we spend our lives blindly conforming. We accept their ideas and values as absolutely true. In doing so, we give control of our lives to someone else—often without even questioning or realizing we have lost it.

Another tidbit from Kurt’s childhood.

I’M DOING THE BEST I CAN

I was raised on a farm, and my father in many subtle ways made it clear to me that my value as a person was contingent upon my competence in the fields and with the cattle—despite my lack of aptitude for the agricultural life.

One day I decided to show him how good a farmer I could be. He gave me an entire field of corn to weed and left me there to spend the day hoeing it. All day I worked and sweated, doing the best I could—even to the point of carrying the weeds off the field so it would look perfect. I finished as the sun was setting, and I stood by the edge of the field watching my father’s truck approach in the late afternoon light.

I was proudly expecting a pat on the back, but instead I got a swift kick in the backside. It seemed I had made a wrong choice at the beginning of the day about the difference between crabgrass and corn. I had created the most beautiful field of weeds you have ever seen. I never did live up to the aspirations my father had for me of being a farmer. Working both ends of a cow wasn’t for me.

The only thing I was really good at was art. But being an artist was not a profession my dad considered legitimate. So for years I pounded my head against the wall of my father's expectations.

But eventually, out of sheer frustration, I looked down that wall and saw a door. It had "art" written on it. Somehow I knew my only chance for success in life was to go through that door. And you know what? There wasn't even a lock on it. It opened easily, and I have never looked back.

If you are pounding your head against the wall of other people's values, look down the wall for the door; it is only a few feet away. And you don't even need a key. But to enter, you must buy into a different belief: **To find fulfillment, you must conform** (there's that word again) **to your own uniqueness.** Your happiness and success depend on being yourself and living up to your own unique potential. To walk through the doorway, you must decide for yourself to be in control of your own life.

Blind acceptance at its worst has given us the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust; at the very least it has given us shallow and wasted lives.

A NEW BELIEF

Your car has more than 15,000 parts in it. What if you were to disassemble your car, then make every part like every other part? Could you make a car from 15,000 dip sticks?

But with each unique part functioning together, you get magic—a bunch of different parts moving at 70 m.p.h. for over 100,000 miles. The same magic exists in all successful mechanical and living systems.

We wouldn't try to turn 15,000 different auto parts into identical ones, so why do we deny the magic by trying to make ourselves into clones of other people?

This principle could be expressed in the formula:

CONFORMING TO Y.O.U.* = FULFILLMENT

However, walking down the wall to the door isn't always easy. It may require major changes in thinking. You can no longer have the comfort of saying that your failures are someone else's fault. You realize that you alone are re-

* *Your Own Uniqueness*

sponsible for your own success and failure, for what you believe and what you do or don't do with those beliefs.

More than we care to admit, we love to control each other, to project on others what we think they should do, think or be. But what's more, we ourselves often want to be controlled. Although we are chained to that huge hand, we like the security it gives us.

Just down the wall from the place of head-bashing is a door to get through the wall.



The door doesn't even have a lock on it.

TRYING AN EXPERIMENT

After I discovered this principle, I had an opportunity to see it work in someone else's life as well. Randy was a student at the university who was despondent over being told in his senior year that he wouldn't make it in his field—at least not according to that major's usual yardsticks. In talking with him, I was surprised to find that nobody had ever asked him what *he* wanted to do. He wanted to create special effects in the movies, like Steven Spielberg or George Lucas. The school had no such program, but together we mapped out a course of individual study and preparation. We found a room hardly bigger than a closet where we could set up models and work on projects. It was odd who showed up in that little room to help us: well-known movie directors and film production designers who just happened to be passing through.

Then one day Randy came in and said he was ready. With \$135 in his pocket, he headed for Hollywood—no degree, no grades; there were none to give. But I well remember his

The great men and women in history went through their own door.

phone call to me after he got his first job in that very competitive industry, and especially a second call when he got a job offer from Steven Spielberg.

QUESTION—WHO DO YOU ADMIRE?

Take a moment and think of three historical figures you admire. You may have listed people like Roosevelt, Mother Teresa, Jesus, Edison, Einstein, Da Vinci, Kennedy, King, Churchill, or Lincoln. Now look at the previous two drawings and decide which approach the people on your list followed. Did they conform to other people's values, or to their own uniqueness?

A word of caution: There are people who don't always like those who walk through the door. They try to control them, and sometimes they even kill them. You may pay a heavy price to walk along the wall and through the doorway. But amazing things happen when you do it.

R. Buckminster Fuller, an inventor, once said that when he followed his own vision, things worked. When he did what most people did, things went sour. In my own life, after I got up the courage to find and follow my dreams, the miracles came. The opportunities, connections and resources that followed my decision can only be described as magic.

The magic is in your own hands ... and the open door is waiting.

