

Leading News

Helping Successful Leaders Become Even More Successful

#24: Creating Your Own Success By Patricia Wheeler

My client Mark was angry. A leader in a fast-paced industry, he and his team spent weeks of their valuable time working on their company's Futures Initiative. After his team had given up their third weekend in a row on the project, senior management pulled the plug...yet again. To Mark, it felt like the last straw. He hadn't slept a full night in over three weeks. He regularly woke up in the middle of the night, stewing. I listened to him, as any coach would do. From my perspective, he had a point about his company's behavior and priorities. But this didn't mean his company would change anything about their priorities or their behavior.

Mark couldn't see any way around this. He thought his only alternatives were to acquiesce and be miserable or find a new job. Neither seemed a good solution to him.

I convinced Mark to try a simple exercise. For the next three months, at the very end of each day, he was to think of and write down three things that he was truly grateful for. Mark was more than skeptical: he thought I was nuts. Wasn't this just a feel-good, substance-less exercise, he asked. Did I REALLY think that someone as smart and sophisticated as he would be helped by an exercise that was so shamelessly touchy-feely? I assured him that at the end of the three months if there was no effect, he was welcome to berate me with a resounding "I told you so."

Srikumar Rao, the author of "Are You Ready to Succeed?" teaches a popular course on Creativity and Personal Mastery at Columbia University. In his book, Rao does a masterful job of combining business savvy with Eastern thought and discipline. Some of the ideas in his book may seem outlandish to people enamored with reason, but they make behavioral sense. Rao believes that by changing ourselves, we not only change the universe, but change it in our desired direction. He posits that whatever we are truly grateful for and appreciate will increase in our lives. This is heady stuff, especially for logic-loving corporate citizens.

So when we change ourselves, does the universe really change, as Rao describes? Those of us who are parents know this happens. We see miracles happen with regularity when a child takes steps to expand his or her world. When my daughter at 14 learned that she could regularly hit a three point shot on the basketball court, her world shifted. When I learned to be grateful for her stubbornness rather than resisting it, both of our worlds shifted. Can changing ourselves remove all obstacles? Of course not. There are many difficult situations that no amount of internal change will alter. What we can do is experience more choice in our lives, reducing the energy-depleting state of perceived victimization too many of us experience on a regular basis.

Did Mark's company ever change? Unfortunately, no. Is Mark still angry and up at night? Hardly ever. Mark faithfully performed the gratitude exercise, even though it did not yield immediate results. Nine months later, Mark is thriving. He describes himself as more likely to focus on those things that he can actually change. He's a better leader for his own staff and achieving notable results in his job. He continues his daily gratitude

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practice. Mark commented, "I'm much less angry about what happens on a day to day basis; I now look at what I have rather than what I lack." Would he be open for other opportunities, in organizations that are a better fit for his values? Absolutely. But for now, he's happier....and more successful.

It's good, in my opinion, that Rao is bringing this perspective to the corporate arena. It's no wonder that his classes are always full. Remember the words of Albert Einstein, "there are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

Which way are you living your life?

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