

LESSON 9: DEVELOPING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.

—Thomas Jefferson

TAKE 10 MINUTES

9-1: What does it mean to have the right mental attitude?

After a federal judge sentenced me to 45 years, I had to meditate on that question. Since I didn't know what it meant to have "the right mental attitude" to overcome challenging circumstances, I turned to masterminds for guidance. The right mental attitude differs, depending upon how the person defines success.

Course participants may want to consider the following questions to gauge whether they have an attitude that aligns with their commitment to success:

- » In what ways does your attitude reflect a commitment to preparing for success?
- » How would you articulate the ways that your activities over the past five days advance your potential for success?
- » What further steps can you start taking today to prepare for the success you want to build in the future?

The earlier lesson on values prompted participants to think about how they would define success at every given stage in life. The lesson on goals encouraged participants to work toward success with a series of small, incremental steps. The small, specific goals we achieve prove our level of commitment to success, as we define it.



Remember that success comes in tiny steps, not all at once. Sometimes we're in difficult situations. Sometimes others attempt to pressure or influence us. They try to tell us what we can or cannot become.

We determine whether we want to listen.

Our values and goals should continually advance us along the pathway to success.

FERTILIZER:

We can always take incremental steps to grow. First, we define success with our values. Then, we plant the seeds with our specific goals. If we plant seeds for success, we also must nurture those seeds with fertilizer. In time, as seasons pass, those seeds grow through the fertilizer. By nurturing the seeds appropriately, they will produce crops of abundance. We can feed off those crops for a lifetime.

I see three critical points in the paragraph above.

- » We must plant the right seeds.
- » We must nurture seeds over time.
- » The seeds must grow through fertilizer.

What does that lesson tell us? It means we cannot merely “plant seeds” and expect to get everything we want. We've got to work the seeds, nourishing the soil with fertilizer to get the outcome we want. We know that one of the most effective types of fertilizer comes from animals—a polite way of saying a profane word that I pledged not to use in this course. We've got to grow through the fertilizer (“livestock manure”) to build the future we want!

Start sowing your seeds for success regardless of where you may be today. Prepare yourself to nurture those seeds, growing through difficulties and struggles along the way.



STRAIGHT-A GUIDE:

In this lesson, we use our values and goals to move into the “Straight-A Guide.” Before elaborating on the “Straight-A Guide,” let me tell you how and why I created this tool.

I had about 20 or 22 years of prison behind me. I didn’t know when authorities would let me out. There were some complications because federal sentencing laws had changed from when I committed my crimes. My release could come after I served 23 years, 24 years, 25 years, or 26 years.

Regardless of when I got out, I knew that I wanted to advocate for reforms. That would not be easy. I anticipated myriad complications. For example, from what others had told me, I understood that a probation officer would place restrictions on me. The officer would require me to have a job, or dependable income stream.

Further, when I finished my sentence, I’d be close to 50 years old—and I’d need to sow seeds for retirement. Although I aspired to teach others the strategies that masterminds taught me, I would have to anticipate complications and put myself in a position to overcome those complications.

Good strategies help all people who choose to live a values-based, goal-oriented life. They help people who want to succeed. We simply must apply values-based strategies to every area of our life. We can use the strategies to achieve success with fitness, relationships, finances, careers, and community involvement.

I knew that I hated every aspect of being in prison, and I hated that our country incarcerated more people per capita than any nation on earth. To overcome, I wanted to earn a living by creating products that would empower others. But that would require me to sow a lot of seeds. I would need to grow through a lot of “fertilizer.”

Although I didn’t quite know how I would start, I had many examples. Leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Nelson Mandela, Viktor Frankl, and Malcolm X used those personal stories to help others see the need for reform. If I could write in ways to document the pathway to change, I hoped to become more influential in being the change that I wanted to see.



During a visit with one of my mentors, I got inspired to begin writing this course.

My mentor asked how I intended to earn a living after I got out. In response, I told him about a book I had read by Suzie Welch, a management guru. She used to work as a journalist and editor for a business magazine. After she married Jack Welch, the legendary CEO and chairman of General Electric, she launched a new career with him. Together, they advised business leaders. Suzie Welch wrote a book called Ten-Ten-Ten, I told my mentor.

Using that simple concept, Suzy Welch advised leaders to think about how each of their decisions would influence life in the next ten minutes, the next ten months, and the next ten years. If a businessperson used that strategy, the person would make better, more deliberate decisions.

After my mentor listened to the story, he told me that I would need to develop a memorable teaching resource of my own. I wouldn't be able to build a career teaching someone else's story. He was right.

I told him I would use the story of my journey and other people's stories. By sharing those stories, I could show how all people that overcome struggles make small steps. When directed and deliberate, those small steps can take a person from struggle to success.

My mentor gave me some good advice. Besides stories, he said, I needed a simple tool that people could remember, like Ten-Ten-Ten.

After listening to his advice, I came up with the Straight-A Guide. The course's moniker would be easy to remember. As described earlier, we must identify our values and goals to start on the Straight-A Guide. Then, each subsequent lesson begins with the letter "A."

All masterminds start with the right attitude:

- » Their attitudes align with how they define success.
- » They follow a simple path to overcome challenges, clearly defining success.
- » They set clear goals that align with how they define success.

With values and goals established, we move on to Attitude—the first "A" in our Straight-A Guide.



Masterminds like Nelson Mandela, Viktor Frankl, and Martin Luther King show the power that comes with the right attitude. Nelson Mandela's powerful and inspiring attitude carried him through 27 years of imprisonment.

- » Viktor Frankl had the right attitude to make it through the challenges of a Nazi concentration camp.
- » Martin Luther King had the right attitude to work toward restoring civil rights for all people.

Each of those masterminds defined the right attitude with a 100% commitment to success. With the right attitude, they overcome monumental struggles.

It isn't only world leaders that move through challenges with the right attitude. Business leaders like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Jack Welch prove that we can create value from ideas with the right attitude. Steve Jobs built Apple, one of the most innovative companies in history. Bill Gates had the right attitude when he led his partners to start Microsoft and change the world with computer software. Jack Welch built General Electric with a commitment to grow companies that would lead their industries.

By sticking with the same lessons that drive masterminds, we all can succeed on a personal level. Those leaders start with the right attitude, and we should do the same. Masterminds teach that success depends upon what we profess to hold essential.

TAKE TEN

9-2: When it comes to the individuals I named above, how would you define their values?

We can learn a great deal about preparing for success by studying people who've helped to shape history and our society:



FREDERICK DOUGLASS:

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery. As an enslaved person, he didn't know the liberties that we take for granted. He lived in an environment of oppression until he escaped. After he escaped, he devoted his life to becoming an agent for change. He taught himself to read, to write, and to become an orator. Then he wrote three autobiographies. By writing his life story, he communicated at scale and became one of the most powerful voices that led to the abolition of slavery.

NELSON MANDELA:

Authorities locked Nelson Mandela in prison, and he spent 27 years inside because he opposed the racist laws of South Africa. Those laws existed during the Apartheid era. Despite imprisonment for multiple decades, Mandela did not harbor any bitterness. He did not hate his oppressors after his release. Instead, Mandela worked to bring justice and peace. He became a leading world figure, personifying the best of human dignity.

VIKTOR FRANKL

Nazis locked Dr. Frankl in a death camp, killing his family members as he watched. On any given day, Dr. Frankl knew the Nazis might murder him. He refused to show anger. He maintained his peace by devoting his life to helping others.

MARTIN LUTHER KING

Authorities locked Dr. King in many jails. They did not like his efforts to expand civil rights for all people. Dr. King led the way in bringing awareness to injustice. Dr. King fought against inequality between races. He crusaded and united people of all races. People from around the world consider Martin Luther King a global leader. We celebrate his life as an American historical figure and role model.



STEVE JOBS

Participants may not know Steve Jobs, but I'm sure that everyone know his company. He and his partner started Apple Computer. Later, business decisions forced him out of Apple. Rather than being bitter at losing the company he started, Steve went on to start new companies. Then he returned to lead Apple. With the right attitude, he grew Apple into the most valuable company in the world.

BILL GATES

Bill Gates and his partner started Microsoft. Their company began with an idea. Bill wanted to make computers more practical. He believed that every business and every home should have a computer. With Microsoft, Bill turned those ideas into a reality. In the process, he became one of the wealthiest people alive. And he pledged to use his wealth to improve the world for everyone.

JACK WELCH

Jack Welch studied chemical engineering in college. He began building a career with General Electric after earning his doctorate. He rose quickly, eventually reaching the top position. Under Jack's leadership, the value of GE grew by more than 4,000 percent. Many people wrote books about his leadership philosophy and his commitment to success.

LEARN FROM LEADERS:

Leaders like those described above inspired me during my 26 years in prison. Each leader clearly defined what he wanted to achieve. Mandela, Frankl, and King valued equality for all humankind. Jobs, Gates, and Welch placed high importance on creating value. When I write about learning from "masterminds," I'm writing about people like them. They define success. Then they engineer the path that moves them closer to success. The journey never ends!



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We should learn from masterminds. Their strategy can work for us. Notice how they identify values and make their values public. They invite others to judge them by their authenticity, integrity, and commitment to those values.

TAKE TEN MINUTES

9-3: Describe a person you know who succeeded in one area, but failed in another.

VALUES AND GOALS IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE:

The initial lessons on values and goals teach us how to excel in areas of our life that are important to us. But we can fail miserably when we don't use that approach in other areas of our life.

For example, we frequently hear or read about talented celebrities or superstars who set goals of becoming the best in the world at what they do. Take Whitney Houston, for example. She valued her talent as a singer, but her life ended tragically from a drug overdose. Whitney didn't place as much value on being free of substance abuse as she did on her professional singing career.

When I concluded my prison term, I heard the tragic story of Aaron Hernandez. He was a star athlete, and since childhood, he set goals to become the best at his craft. Yet when it came to other areas of his life, he failed. He lost his career in professional sports. He lost a criminal trial, and a judge sentenced him to life in prison. Then he committed suicide while locked inside his jail cell.

If being successful outside of football meant something to Aaron, he should have followed the same disciplined path he cultivated to become a best-in-class athlete.

Clear values and goals would have helped.



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Values and goals advance our prospects for success. We should apply them to each area of life that can bring fulfillment. Some areas where we can use values and goals as a guide to success include:

- » Fitness
- » Relationships
- » Education
- » Spirituality
- » Career Development
- » Family
- » Hobbies
- » Substance abuse
- » Release preparation

To the extent that we use values and goals, we grow closer to success. We can learn from masterminds like Douglass, Mandela, Frankl, and King—we all can learn a great deal from those masterminds.

VALUES AND GOALS GUIDED ME THROUGH PRISON:

As I wrote previously, Socrates started me on the path to change my thinking patterns. After a jury convicted me, I thought about the decisions that led to my predicament. I needed to pinpoint where I started to go wrong.

What could I accomplish from inside a jail cell to make things right? I may not get out of prison early. But what could I do to make things better when I got out? That question led to my three-part plan. I would work:

- » To educate myself,
- » To contribute to society, and
- » To build a support network.

I came up with that three-part plan by reading about people who succeeded. From them, I learned that I needed to define success. In my case, success would mean a return to society without complications. I wanted to live and interact with people that didn't have problems with crime or prison. Those people became my avatars.



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My avatars want me to educate myself, contribute, and have a strong support network. As I wrote earlier, I didn't know those people. But someday I may meet them. If that happened, I would want them to accept me as a good person. If I didn't make efforts while I served the sentence, they would always wonder about my lengthy incarceration. I had to take steps to influence their perceptions of me.

WHO IS YOUR AVATAR?

An "avatar," for me, was specific. When I got out, I knew that certain people would advance my prospects for success. And certain people would threaten my access to opportunities. I needed to connect with people that would help me succeed.

I wanted to use all my time in prison to prepare in ways that would make it more likely for my avatars to support my efforts to succeed.

- » I thought of my future probation officer.
- » I thought of my prospective employer or business partners.
- » I thought of my future creditors or investors.

When I got out, a probation officer would oversee the level of liberty that I would have. What would my probation officer expect of me?

Future employers would know about my criminal background and lengthy prison term. What would employers expect me to accomplish while I served my time?

I needed to make changes that would counter the negative background from my early 20s.

Prospective creditors or investors would also know about my criminal background. What could I do to make things right with them? I would need to find creditors and investors when I got out.

After 26 years inside, I would return to society without a vehicle, a place to live, or clothes. I knew that I would need help to get started.

Avatars could help. While in custody, I had to build a record that would make it easier for avatars to believe in me.



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WHO IS IN YOUR FUTURE?

By thinking about avatars, I found my value categories. When my judge sentenced me to 45 years, I had to think differently. “Good time” credits would result in my release after 26 years if I didn’t have disciplinary problems.

The release date felt far away. I hadn’t been alive for 26 years, so I didn’t have a frame of reference to comprehend that time. Instead of focusing on the time I had to serve, I kept my sights on the future I wanted to build.

- » Who is in your future?
- » Who influences your thoughts about what you can or cannot accomplish?
- » What can you do while in prison to prepare for your future?

To sustain my energy and discipline level, I had to set clear goals that I could measure. Those goals would take my mind off what I could not control and help me focus on what I could achieve.

HOW TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL?

A great management guru, Peter Drucker, is famous for advising companies on becoming more successful. He spoke about the importance of measuring incremental success. We could improve our performance by measuring each tiny step we took.

I took that message to heart. By reading from leaders like Peter Drucker, I learned to set clear metrics to define what it meant to commit. Like everyone else, I needed to measure progress if I wanted to work toward success.

- » How could I measure a commitment “to educate myself?”
- » How could I measure a commitment “to contribute to society?”
- » How could I measure whether I worked “to build a support network?”



FINDING YOUR “WHY” WITH QUESTIONS:

To answer those questions, I thought about my avatars. What would they expect? Then, I set a time limit. Since prison would be a big part of my life, I set a time horizon focused on the first ten years. I could measure ten years. What could I accomplish during the first ten years? What would make a favorable impression on my avatars?

- » In ten years, I committed to earning an undergraduate degree. My avatars would see me as an educated man if I had a degree.
- » In ten years, I committed to publishing something. My avatars would consider a “published author” as someone who contributed to society.
- » In ten years, I would persuade ten people to have a vested interest in my success. Those ten people would become my support network. If I built a support network, avatars would find it easier to believe in me.

GUIDES THROUGH THE MAZE OF CONFINEMENT:

Values and goals became my guide through prison. By adhering to them, I could overcome struggles and achieve high levels of success.

- » If you set values and live by those values, you’re on the path.
- » If you set goals that you can measure—with timelines—you advance prospects for success.

Use the Straight-A Guide to achieve new performance levels, starting with the right attitude.

An individual must have the right attitude to overcome. The right attitude leads to higher levels of success. Individuals may differ in how they define the right attitude. That’s okay. We bring more clarity when we define the right attitude with a 100% commitment to success, as defined by our values and goals.

Is success the same for everybody? No. Success isn’t the same for everyone because people set different values.

- » Some people place the accumulation of wealth or financial security at the apex of their value system.



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- » Some people hold their commitment to family as their highest value.
- » Some people value their faith in God as their highest value or contribution to society.

When we set our values, we take a step toward defining success. Our goals show our commitment to success.

Once we define success and show our commitment to goals, we can demonstrate that we have the right attitude. We can keep everything we say, do, and think in harmony with our values and goals. That's when we have the right attitude. That's when we follow the path of masterminds.

When you determine what you want, you have made the most critical decision of your life. You have to know what you want to attain it.

—Douglas Lurton

Determine what you want! Use values and goals. Then, advance your prospects for success with the right attitude. Make a 100% commitment by making decisions consistent with your values and goals. I learned the importance of this strategy from these true masterminds:

- » Frederick Douglass
- » Nelson Mandela
- » Viktor Frankl
- » Martin Luther King
- » Steve Jobs
- » Bill Gates
- » Jack Welch

I had the right attitude long before I left prison. While inside, I made a 100% commitment to my definition of success. Does that mean I was a model inmate? Not at all. It means that I made decisions that were consistent with my values and goals.

I made decisions that would influence my avatars. That 100% commitment defined my pursuit of excellence. My attitude guided my choices seven days a week. I explain when people ask what I mean by seven days a week.

I mean seven days a week!



When people ask whether I obsessed over those goals on weekends or holidays, I tell them I had the right attitude seven days a week. If weekends and holidays fell within a seven-day week, I adhered to the strategy.

I am not in prison anymore. But I still follow the strategy of having the right attitude. I make a 100% commitment to success because I know what I want to achieve. That strategy powered me through prison. I am convinced that it opens opportunities for me in society.

A conscientious, values-based, goal-oriented adjustment through prison allowed me to seize control of my adjustment. My attitude may not have influenced an earlier release date, but it certainly influenced how I passed each day. By making a 100% commitment to my values and goals, I put myself on a path to receive support from “avatars.” The strategy made all the difference during my journey through prison. More importantly, the process empowered me to return to society precisely as I anticipated— with my dignity intact and opportunities for a life of fulfillment.

By adhering to the principles of this Preparing for Success After Prison Course, participants advance prospects for a better outcome. But it all begins with attitude.

TAKE 20

9-4: How would you measure a 100% commitment to success?



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