

TAKING ACTION

Tips and techniques to take the
first step toward your goal

BY BRIAN TRACY



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-Brian Tracy

The Impact of Action

The world seems to belong to those who reach out and grab it with both hands. It belongs to those who do something rather than just wish and hope and plan and pray, and intend to do something someday, when everything is just right. Successful people are not necessarily those who make the right decisions all the time. No one can do that, no matter how smart he is. But once successful people have made a decision, they begin moving toward their objectives step-by-step, and they begin to get feedback or signals to tell them where they're off course and when course corrections are necessary. As they take action and move toward their goals, they continually get new information that enables them to adjust their plans in large and small ways.

It's important to understand that life is a series of approximations and course adjustments. Let me explain. When an airplane leaves Chicago for Los Angeles, it is off course 99 percent of the time. This is normal and natural and to be expected. The pilot makes continual course corrections, a little to the north, a little to the south. The pilot continually adjusts altitude and throttle. And sure enough, several hours later, the plane touches down at exactly the time predicted when it first became airborne upon leaving Chicago. The entire journey has been a process of approximations and course adjustments.

What's the big problem? The big problem is that there are no guarantees in life. Everything you do—even crossing the street—is filled with uncertainty. You can never be completely sure that any action or behavior is going to bring about the desired result. There is always a risk. And where there is risk, there is fear. And whatever you think about grows in your mind and heart. People who think

continually about the risks involved in any undertaking soon become preoccupied with fears and doubts and anxieties that conspire to hold them back from trying in the first place.

Launch!

At Babson College, in a 12-year study into the reasons for success, researchers concluded that virtually all success was based on what they called the “corridor principle.” They likened achieving success to proceeding down a corridor in life. Each of us stands at the entrance to this corridor, looking into the darkness, and we see the corridor disappear into the distance. The researchers said that the difference between the successes and the failures in their study could be summarized by the one word *launch!* Successful people were willing to launch themselves down the corridor of opportunity without any guarantee of what would occur. They were willing to risk uncertainty and overcome the normal fears and doubts that hold the great majority in place.

And the remarkable thing is that as you move down the corridor of life, new doors of opportunity open up on both sides of you. However, you would not have seen those doors if you had not moved down the corridor. They would not have opened up for you if you had waited for some assurance before stepping out in faith and taking action.

The Confucian saying “A journey of a thousand leagues begins with a single step” simply means that great accomplishments begin with your willingness to face the inevitable uncertainty of any new enterprise and step out boldly in the direction of your goal.

Take a Leap of Faith

Not long ago, a couple came to me with a problem. He was working for a company owned by his family in which he was bitterly unhappy. It was full of politics and backbiting and negativity, and he was stressed out and hated his job. He wanted to do something else but had no job offers or potential alternatives to his current position. He asked me for my advice on what to do. I explained to him that there is a "vacuum theory of prosperity," which says that when you create a vacuum of any kind, nature rushes to fill it. In his case, this meant that as long as he stayed at his current job, there was no way that he could recognize other possibilities, and there was no way that other opportunities could find him. I told him to take a giant leap of faith and just walk away from his current job with no lifeline or safety net. I assured him that if he did, all kinds of things would open up for him that he simply couldn't see while he was locked up in his current situation.

He took my advice. He quit his job. The members of his family became very angry and told him that he would be unemployable outside of their business. But he stuck to his guns. He went home, took a few days off and began to think about his experience and his skills and how they could best be applied to other jobs in other companies.

Within two weeks, without raising a finger, he had two job offers from other companies, both paying substantially more than he was getting before, and both offering all kinds of opportunities that were vastly superior to the job he had walked away from. As soon as the word had gotten out in the marketplace

that he was available, other company owners, having worked with him and his company in the past, were eager to open doors for him. As he moved down the corridor of life, he began to see possibilities that he had been missing completely by limiting himself to where he was.

Take Chances

If you want to be more successful faster, just do or try more things. Take more action; get busier. Start a little earlier; work a little harder; stay a little later. Put the odds in your favor. According to the Law of Probability, the more things you try, the more likely it is that you will try the one thing that will make all the difference.

I've found that luck is quite predictable. If you want more luck, take more chances. Be more active. Show up more often.

Tom Peters, the best-selling author of *In Search of Excellence* and other business books, found that a key quality of the top executives in his study was a "bias for action." Their motto seemed to be, "Ready, aim, fire." Their attitude toward business was summarized in the words, "Do it, fix it, try it." They realized that the future belongs to the action-oriented, to the risk taker.

Top people know, as General Douglas MacArthur once said, "There is no security in life, only opportunity." And the interesting thing is this: If you seek for opportunity, you'll end up with all the security you need. However, if you seek for security, you'll end up with neither opportunity nor security. The proof of this is all around us, in the downsizing and reconstructing of corporations, where thousands of men and women who sought security are finding themselves unemployed for long periods of time.

There is a “momentum principle of success,” which is very important to you it’s derived from two physical laws, the Law of Momentum and the Law of Inertia, and it applies equally well to everything that you accomplish and fail to accomplish.

In physics, the Law of Momentum says that a body in motion tends to remain in motion unless acted upon by an outside force. The Law of Inertia, on the other hand, says that a body at rest tends to remain at rest unless acted upon by an outside force.

In their simplest terms, as they apply to you and your life, those laws say that if you stay in motion toward something that is important to you, it’s much easier to continue making progress than it is if you stop somewhere along the way and have to start again. When you look at successful people, you find that they are very much like the plate spinners in the circus. They get things started; they get the plates spinning. They continually keep them spinning, knowing that if a plate falls off, or something comes to a halt, it’s much harder to get it restarted than it is to keep it going in the first place.

Self-Discipline

Once you have a goal and a plan, get going! And once you start moving toward your goal, don’t stop. Do something every day to move you closer toward your goal. Don’t let the size of the goal or the amount of time required to accomplish it faze you or hold you back. During your planning process, break down the goal into small tasks and activities that you can engage in every day. You don’t have to do a lot, but every day, every week, every month you should be

making progress, by completing your predetermined tasks and activities, in the direction of your clearly defined objectives.

And here's where the rubber meets the road. The most important single quality for success is self-discipline it's the ability to make yourself do what you should do, when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not.

Let me break down that definition of self-discipline. First, *it's the ability to make yourself*. This means that you have to use strength and willpower to force yourself into motion, to break the power of inertia that holds you back.

Second, *do what you should do, when you should do it*. This means that you make a plan, set a schedule, and then do what you say you'll do. You do it when you say you'll do it. You keep your promises to yourself and to others.

The third part of this definition is *whether you feel like it or not*. You see, anyone can do anything if he feels like it, if he wants to do it because it makes him happy, if he is well-rested and has lots of time. However, the true test of character is when you do something that you know you must do whether you feel like it or not—especially when you don't like it at all.

In fact, you can tell how badly you really want something, and what you're really made of as a person, by how capable you are of taking action in the direction of your goals and dreams even when you feel tired and discouraged and disappointed and you don't seem to be making any progress. And very often, this is the exact time when you will break through to great achievement.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "When the night is darkest, the stars come out." Your ability to endure, to continue taking action, step-by-step, in the

direction of your dreams, is what will ultimately assure your success. If you keep on keeping on, nothing can stop you.

Preparing for the Future

Earl Nightingale once said that if a person does not prepare for his success, when his opportunity comes, it will only make him look foolish. You've probably heard it said repeatedly that luck is what happens when preparedness meets opportunity. Only when you've paid the price to be ready for your success are you in a position to take advantage of your opportunities when they arise. And the most remarkable thing is this: The very act of preparation attracts to you, like iron filings to a magnet, opportunities to use that preparation to advance in your life. You'll seldom learn anything of value, or prepare yourself in any area, without soon having a chance to use your new knowledge and your new skills to move ahead more rapidly.

There is a series of things that you can do to become ready for success. All of these activities require self-discipline and a good deal of faith. They require self-discipline because the most normal and natural thing for people to do is to try to get by without preparation. Instead of taking the time and making the effort to be ready for their chance when it comes, they fool around, listen to the radio, watch television, and then they try to wing it and dupe others into thinking that they are more prepared than they really are. And since we're all transparent, since just about everyone can see through just about everyone else, the unprepared person simply looks incompetent and foolish.

Preparation also requires a lot of faith because you have no proof in advance to demonstrate that the preparation will pay off. You simply have to believe, deep

within yourself, that everything you do of a constructive nature will come back to you in some way. You have to know that no good effort is ever wasted. You have to be willing to sow for a long time before you reap, knowing that if you do sow in quality and quantity, the reaping will come about inevitably with the force of a law of nature.

Evaluate Yourself

Look at your work. Be honest and objective about your strengths and weaknesses. What are you good at? What are you poor at? What is your major area of weakness? What must you absolutely, positively be excellent at in order to move to the top of your field? What one skill do you have that, because of its weakness, may be holding you back from using all your other skills?

Norman Augustine, CEO of Martin Marietta Corporation, recently said that the most important thing he learned in the last 10 years of business was that your weakest important skill determines the extent to which you can use all of your other talents and abilities. In looking at the hundreds of people who worked below him in his corporation, he had found that people's careers were largely determined not only by their strengths but also by their weaknesses. The very act of overcoming a particular weakness, through preparation and practice, was enough to propel a person into the front ranks in his or her career.

In preparing for success, one of the very best questions that you can ask yourself, continually, is: "What can I—and only I—do that, if done well, will make a real difference in my career?" Usually, there is only one or perhaps two answers to that question. Your ability to honestly appraise yourself and to identify the particular skill area that may be holding you back is critical.

Remember when I said that preparation requires both self-discipline and faith. It requires self-discipline because your natural tendency is to do more and more of those things that come most easily to you, and to avoid those areas that you don't enjoy because you're not particularly good at them yet. It requires faith and character for you to admit your weaknesses in a particular area and then resolve to go to work to develop yourself so those weaknesses don't hold you back.

The greatest change that has taken place in our society in the last 20 years is that it's become an information-based society. More than 50 percent of the working population is in the business of processing information in some way. This means that we now have a knowledge-based society and that you're a knowledge worker. You work with your mind, your brain, your mental talents and abilities. You no longer "load that bale and tote that hay." You work by thinking and the more effectively you think and the better prepared you are mentally, the more productive and positive you'll be.

The Golden Hour

One thing that has helped me enormously over the years is the habit of getting up early in the morning and spending the first 30 to 60 minutes reading something uplifting. You can read material that is educational or motivational or even inspirational. Many people read spiritual literature. Henry Ward Beecher once said, "The first hour is the rudder of the day." This is often called the "golden hour." It's the hour during which you program your mind and set your emotional tone for the rest of the day. If you get up in the morning at least two hours before you have to be at work, or before your first

appointment, and spend the first hour investing in your mind, taking in “mental protein” rather than “mental candy,” reading good books rather than the newspaper or magazines, your whole day will flow more smoothly. You’ll be more positive and optimistic. You’ll be calmer, more confident and relaxed. You’ll have a greater sense of control and well-being by the very act of reading healthy material for the first hour of each day.

After just three days of reading for 30 to 60 minutes in the morning, you’ll notice a profound difference. You’ll begin to develop what Dr. William Glasser called a “positive addiction.” As a result of your early-morning reading, you’ll feel so good about yourself and your life that you’ll develop a desire and motivation to get up earlier, even though your tendency in the past was to sleep in later. Try it and see. It’s a wonderful experience, and it can have a profound impact on the rest of your life.

Plan and Prioritize

In the period of time before work, another thing that highly successful people do is plan and prepare for their entire day. They review all of the tasks and responsibilities that they have for the coming hours. They carefully make a list of all their activities, and they set clear priorities on the activities. They decide which things are most important to do, which are secondary in importance, and which things should not be done at all unless all the other things are finished. They then discipline themselves to start working on their most important tasks and stay with them during the day until they’re complete.

Again, the natural tendency of the low performer is to do what is fun and easy before he does what is hard and necessary. Underachievers always like to do

the little things first. They are drawn to the tasks that contribute very little to their careers or future possibilities. But high achievers are not like that! High achievers discipline themselves to start at the top of their list and to work on the activities in order of importance, without diversion or distraction.

If you're in sales, you should spend fully 80 percent of your time prospecting until you're so busy with presentations and proposals that you've no time left to prospect at all. In fact, whenever you have money problems of any kind, you should look upon them as a signal telling you that you need to reorder your priorities and to prepare more thoroughly to accomplish more of the things that contribute the greatest value to your life.

Eating Right

Another way to prepare for success is to eat right. Energy and dynamism are essential to your success, and they're possible only when you're sharp and alert. There are foods that are highly nutritious and that give you high energy and vitality on through the day. Also, there are foods, which you eat usually by habit, that are hard for your system to digest and that tire you out and make you slow and drowsy in the morning and the afternoon.

The chief culprits in diets are foods containing fats of any kind. More and more nutritional research suggests that fatty foods, which require the greatest effort on the part of the body to break down and digest, are the real enemies of human performance. Fats are becoming closely linked to many illnesses and ailments. One reason why people drink so much coffee is to counteract the drowsiness that occurs naturally in the morning because their stomachs are so loaded down with fatty foods.

You see, the process of digestion is the activity of your body that consumes the most energy. When you eat foods that are hard to digest, your body rushes blood from everywhere to the digestive system to work to break them down. In this process, the digestive system draws away blood from the brain and the muscles. The reason you feel drowsy after a large meal is because the blood has gone from your brain to your stomach. The reason you get cramps when you engage in vigorous physical exercise immediately after eating is because a substantial amount of blood has been drawn from your muscles to aid in the process of digestion.

The key is to eat lightly and healthily. Eat more fruits and vegetables. Eat more whole-grain products. In his book *Eat to Win*, Robert Haas says that your diet should be comprised of 75 percent carbohydrates, 15 percent fats and only 10 percent proteins. Since the average diet in America contains as much as 50 percent fats and proteins, there is ample room to improve. And every move that you make toward a high-carbohydrate diet will give you more energy and make you sharper in everything you do.

Think and Speak Positively

In preparing for success throughout the day, you should also talk to yourself in a positive way. The work by Dr. Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania has demonstrated that the way you talk to yourself largely determines your emotions, how you feel about yourself on a minute-to-minute basis.

If you don't deliberately and consciously think about what you want, and talk to yourself in a positive way, your mind will tend to slip toward your worries and

your concerns. And negative thinking takes the edge off your personality and your enthusiasm, which is so important to your success with people.

A few years ago, Dr. Abraham Zaleznik of Harvard University did an interesting study on disappointment. He found that successful people bounce back from disappointments far faster than unsuccessful people do.

And what I've learned is that the key to your keeping yourself positive and optimistic is preparation in advance of the ups and downs that you'll experience each day. For example, if you're in sales, change the way you talk to yourself by viewing yourself as a "rejection specialist" rather than a "sales specialist." If you define yourself as a sales specialist, you'll be setting yourself up for failure, disappointment and lowered self-esteem with every rejection you get. But, on the other hand, if you look upon yourself as a rejection specialist, you'll be setting yourself up to feel like a winner every time someone turns you down for any reason. You can look upon every rejection as a percentage of a sale. If it takes you 20 calls to make a sale, you can look upon a rejection as 5 percent of the commission that you receive for making that sale. In this way, every person you speak to actually pays you money. You simply collect it when you make the sale that is inevitable when you speak to enough people. Every time someone turns you down, you're a winner. You're just that much farther ahead. You're just a little bit closer to the sale that must come if you keep on keeping on.

Use every setback or disappointment as a spur to greater effort. Decide that nothing will ever get you down. Decide that you will bounce back instead of break. Develop a resilient or hardy personality. Become the kind of person who

is always cheerful, no matter what happens on the outside. Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation. In this way, you become a far more resourceful and effective person. Preparing mentally, you become almost unstoppable.

If you're making sales calls, resist the "parking-lot mentality" of the average salesperson. The average salesperson doesn't think about the client until he drives onto the parking lot, and he stops thinking about the client when he drives off. Instead, prepare thoroughly for each call. Review your file of notes on the customer, and establish a clear set of call objectives before you go in. Know what you're doing and why. Be very clear on what you want to accomplish with this call. If a person were to ask you how you would judge whether or not this upcoming call was successful, you should be able to tell that person exactly what you want to accomplish, and after the call, you should be able to tell that person exactly what you achieved. Most salespeople never do this. When you ask them if a call was successful, they don't know how to answer you or how to base it. But this is not for you.

Be Prepared

In everything you do, preparation is the key. If you want to be ready for success, you have to plant the seeds well in advance of the harvest that you expect. Do what the winners do: Think on paper. Memorize the winner's creed: "Everything counts." Everything you do is either moving you toward your goals or moving you away. Everything is either helping you or hurting you. Nothing is neutral. Everything counts.

A successful businessman was once asked for advice by a young person on how he could be more successful faster. The businessman told him that the key to his success had been to "get good" at his job.

The young man said, "I'm already good at what I do."

The businessman then said, "Well, get better!"

The young man, somewhat self-satisfied, said, "Well, I'm already better than most people."

To that, the businessman replied, "Then be the best."

Those are three of the best pieces of advice I've ever heard: Get good. Get better. Be the best!

Remember, we live in a knowledge-based society, and knowledge in every field is doubling approximately every seven years. This means that you must double your knowledge in your field every seven years just to stay even. You're already "maxxed out" at your current level of knowledge and skill. You've reached the ceiling in your career with your current talents and abilities. If you want to go faster and farther, you must get back to work and begin to prepare yourself for greater heights. You must put aside the newspaper, turn off the television, politely excuse yourself from aimless socializing and get back to working on yourself.

A quotation by Abraham Lincoln had a great influence on my life when I was 15. It was a statement he made when he was a young lawyer in Springfield, Illinois. He said, "I will study and prepare myself, and someday my chance will come."

If you study and prepare yourself, your chance will come as well. There is nothing that you cannot accomplish if you'll invest the effort to get yourself ready for the success that you desire. And there is nothing that can stop you but your own lack of preparation.

Let me end with this beautiful poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "Those heights by great men won and kept; / Were not achieved by sudden flight; / But they, while their companions slept, / Were toiling upward in the night"

Your possibilities are endless, your potential is unlimited, and your future opens up before you when you prepare yourself for the success that must inevitably be yours.

About the Author:

Brian Tracy is Chairman and CEO of Brian Tracy International, a company specializing in the training and development of individuals and organizations.

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Brian Tracy has consulted for more than 1,000 companies and addressed more than 4,000,000 people in 4,000 talks and seminars throughout the US, Canada and 40 other countries worldwide. As a Keynote speaker and seminar leader, he addresses more than 250,000 people each year.

He has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in the fields of economics, history, business, philosophy and psychology. He is the top selling author of over 45 books that have been translated into dozens of languages.

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He speaks to corporate and public audiences on the subjects of Personal and Professional Development, including the executives and staff of many of America's largest corporations. His exciting talks and seminars on Leadership, Selling, Self-Esteem, Goals, Strategy, Creativity and Success Psychology bring about immediate changes and long-term results.

Prior to founding his company, Brian Tracy International, Brian was the Chief Operating Officer of a \$265 million dollar development company. He has had successful careers in sales and marketing, investments, real estate development and syndication, importation, distribution and management consulting. He has conducted high level consulting assignments with several billion-dollar plus corporations in strategic planning and organizational development.

He has traveled and worked in over 80 countries on six continents, and speaks four languages. Brian is happily married and has four children. He is active in community and national affairs, and is the President of three companies headquartered in Solana Beach, California.

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