

PRINCIPLE

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ACCEPT YOUR SITUATION

I knew who he was and why he had come. Numbly, I handed over the car keys to the bank representative and watched him back my fully-equipped Buick Riviera out of the driveway and drive into the autumn sun. The car blended with the fall colors as it disappeared into the distance. That car had been the last symbol of my success, and now even it was gone.

I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I had been riding so high--the kid with the golden touch. At age nineteen, I had earned \$7,500 selling books one summer. In 1967, that had seemed like the pot at the end of a rainbow, the good luck talisman that insured a life of continued success. Now, just two years later, I not only had been stripped of my most prized possession, but I was also \$14,000 in debt.

Dazed by the reversal in my circumstances, I staggered back into my apartment as if I was in a dream. My situation seemed so unbelievably hopeless, and I felt so depressed that I began to understand how a person could turn to drink, drugs, or even commit suicide.

The idea of paying back what seemed at the time to be such an overwhelming amount was devastating. I had no job and no tuition money for my last semester. I wasn't doing well in college, my self image was punctured, and my confidence was shot. Someway, I had to graduate so I could get a decent job, but even if I managed that, it would take me years just to get even financially.

Bankruptcy went through my mind, but I just couldn't take that route since I'd talked close friends into cosigning my notes. As the days progressed, I retreated from my problem by sleeping more and more, hoping I'd wake up and find it was all a bad dream.

If I had been told at that point I could bounce back from failure to success in *thirty seconds*, I wouldn't have believed it, and I probably would have thought my intelligence was being insulted.

The summer between my junior and senior years in college, I had invested all my savings and \$14,000 in borrowed money into a cosmetics company. I had been led to believe I could clear \$50,000 the first year. Instead, just a few months after I joined, the company was declared illegal, and I was left holding an empty moneybag. I'd already sold my Corvette to pay my fall tuition. Yet, I returned to Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, and continued to play the part of the successful entrepreneur. However, the reality was, I was broke except for pocket money and a few dollars in a checking account.

Even after my second car had been repossessed, I kept trying to carry off the success role, but with a student body of only 1,200, that was no easy task. When friends would ask about my difficulties, I'd just smile and say, "Oh, I've just had a little setback. Nothing serious." I might have fooled some of them, but my creditors knew better.

Christmas vacation came, but I couldn't afford the plane fare to California to be with my family. Instead, I went to Kentucky and stayed with a friend who had a home care products

business. I sold his assortment of cleaning products door to door, but only earned fifty dollars in commissions for the week's work. That sure wasn't going to pay the tuition for my last semester, and I was facing the necessity of dropping out of school.

My place of refuge during those dark days was the nearest Pizza King. Manager Ben Hodgkin and his wife, Carolyn, demonstrated an inordinate amount of patience by letting me hang around night after night for hours at a time. The atmosphere was warm and friendly, but most importantly, Ben and Carolyn would sit and listen to my tale of woe without judging my stupidity or berating my fate. "Okay, Turkey, so you blew it," Ben would agree, "but look, you can pull out of this if you just keep your cool." Instead of sympathy, he gave me a job delivering pizzas and mopping floors.

Taylor's head football coach, Bob Davenport, former two-time All-American from UCLA, took time to counsel me. It really helped to be able to talk frankly about my situation. Except for my roommates, I was still trying to give my fellow students and professors the impression that I was still on top. With "Coach" I could be open about my situation.

"You can overcome this," Coach Davenport assured me. "And someday you'll look back at this as one of your greatest learning experiences."

I had great respect for Coach Davenport, so his strong belief that I could bounce back helped to bolster my self-image and to redirect my thinking. A short time later, a phone call came from Glenn Jackson, my former sales manager at The Southwestern Company.

"I've heard you've got a little situation," Glenn said.

"Yeah, I really have."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Not unless you have \$14,000 to \$15,000 you don't need," I laughed.

"I heard you're considering dropping out of college."

"I don't want to, but I don't have a choice. I don't have money to repay my debt and I can't borrow more. I wouldn't want to borrow more if I could."

"How much would you need to get you through your final semester?"

"A thousand would probably do it."

"Okay, David, you'll have a check for that amount in the mail Monday morning."

"Glenn, I don't know how or when I'll be able to pay you back."

"Don't worry about that, David. Pay me when you can. Now, this is what I want you to do. First of all, quit feeling sorry for yourself. You'll pull out of this, but you need to finish college first. Right now you need to go to your creditors and assure them that you intend to pay back everything you owe, even if it is just a small amount weekly or monthly. Explain your situation to them. David, you've got to quit ignoring the problem."

"Should I sell books again next summer?"

"I don't know. That's your decision. But you and I both know it would probably be your best bet for that three month period of time."

"Glenn, I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't try."

I hung up the phone and sat there reviewing the conversation in my mind. Glenn was sending me \$1,000 with no strings attached. What a vote of confidence! He had also given me some excellent advice. Now was the time to accept my situation exactly the way it was. Nursing my wounded ego, whining about my humiliation, and wallowing in self pity all these months had not helped. All the principles I had learned about being successful weren't working for me because I was not accepting my situation. I was trying to put my life back together without first

laying the proper foundation. Before I could make any progress, I had to quit daydreaming that my debt would somehow miraculously disappear and start facing my problem honestly.

Honestly. That word gripped me. Honestly facing my problem would mean I would no longer have to try to pretend I was a success. It didn't mean that I had to be satisfied with the mess. I sure didn't like it, but if I had guts enough to accept it and make the commitment to do whatever was necessary to pull out of it, I could go on from there. I could quit trying to fool my friends. I could call my folks and tell them about my financial fiasco. I breathed a deep sigh. Honestly accepting my situation brought me a sense of relief. It seemed that a burden had been lifted from me, and I could feel my old enthusiasm coming back.

As objectively as I could, I considered my liabilities and my assets. There was really only one big liability: "The Debt." On the positive side, I had a family that loved me. I was in excellent health. I had friends like Ben and Carolyn, Coach Davenport, and Glenn Jackson, who still believed in me.

If I really cracked the books, I'd soon have a college degree. With 3,000 hours of sales experience gained by knocking on over 8,000 doors, I'd had a lot more experience than most of my contemporaries. I'd had a taste of success, and even though the climb out of debt looked rough and would take a long time, I was excited because I had just taken the first step.

NOW THIRTY-FOUR YEARS LATER.....

As I look back on that experience, now thirty-four years later, I continue to realize just how big a step accepting my situation really was. I've also learned in the intervening years that I'm not the only one who has had to take that step. After my friend, Bill Wade, and I had finished playing a couple of sets of tennis with my brother, Doug, and a successful music personality he works with quite often, I asked the singer how he had turned his career around.

Just a few years previously, after he'd been working for seventeen years in his profession, his music group was dissolved and he was broke, thousands of dollars in debt, and perplexed about his future. As hard as it was to do, he accepted his situation, determined to return to doing those things that had worked when his career was doing better.

"I went back to the basics," he told me. That must have been the right decision. Kenny Rogers made a tremendous comeback and has become legendary in the music world.

COLONEL HARLAND SANDERS REFUSED TO BE DEFEATED

I had the privilege of interviewing Colonel Harlan Sanders for my radio talk show, "The Winners' Circle," just a few weeks before he died at age ninety-one. He was an excellent example of a man who refused to be defeated by circumstances. When he was sixty-two years old, a new highway had wiped out his restaurant business. Colonel Sanders could have gone to Florida and spent the rest of his life in a beach chair, bewailing his bad luck. He didn't. He accepted his situation exactly the way it was. The traffic was gone. The business was dead. He took inventory of what he had left and decided he had a pretty good recipe for fixing fried chicken.

"I had a friend who had a restaurant in Salt Lake City," Colonel Sanders reminisced for me. "In the twelve years he'd been in business he'd never sold fried chicken, and I couldn't interest him in trying mine. It took some doing, but I finally convinced him to eat some. He

smiled when he took his first bite and nodded at his wife. He started selling chicken like it was going out of style. He couldn't keep up with his booming business."

"That was my first franchise. After that, one franchiser would tell another what my chicken had done for him. In two years, I had 600 franchises. That highway moving away from my place was one of the best things that ever happened to me," Colonel Sanders mused. Here was a man who hadn't spent much time worrying about circumstances he couldn't control. He accepted his situation and turned the negative circumstances into one of the greatest business successes of our time.

KFC Corporation, based in Louisville, Kentucky, now has more than 11,000 restaurants in more than eighty countries and territories around the world and is the world's most popular chicken restaurant chain.

HE BRAVELY ACCEPTED HIS SITUATION, KEPT HIS COMMITMENT, AND WON OVER THE ODDS

It's only natural to feel down when circumstances seem to be going against you. However, even in the most difficult of times, if you're willing to accept your situation exactly the way it is, and commit to proven success principles, you can bounce back. One of the young men who attended the sales school held each summer at The Southwestern Company was faced with seemingly insurmountable odds. Two weeks before he arrived in Nashville, his fiancée had dropped him cold, and a week later his mother died. He came on to sales school anyway. When he picked up his commission check at the end of the summer, he ranked as one of the top out of the 3,500 first-year salespeople.

"David," he told me, "I can honestly say that half the mornings before I started knocking on doors, I was in tears. I never felt more alone in all my life, but I had made a commitment, and I felt I should keep it. And I did."

He could have spent the summer feeling sorry for himself and everyone would have understood, but instead he bravely accepted his situation, kept his commitment, and won over the odds.

MARY KAY ASH OVERCOMES CHALLENGES ON THE WAY TO BUILDING A GREAT COMPANY

Mary Kay Ash is well known because of the tremendous success of Mary Kay Cosmetics. Shortly after plans had been made to start the business, her husband died of a heart attack. She had depended on him for the administration and financial end of the business. Mary Kay could have dropped the plans for a new direct-selling business in cosmetics, and no one would have blamed her. She didn't. She accepted her situation and went on to build one of the most successful companies in the country.

Mary Kay suffered another tragic loss. Mel Ash, her second husband of fifteen years, died of lung cancer a few weeks before I interviewed her. Shortly after I entered her luxurious home in Dallas, Mary Kay was reminiscing about Mel. "He was a wonderful man who went everywhere I went," she said. "He called himself the 'father of 70,000 daughters'. When he died, I was scheduled to be in a jamboree with my salespeople four days later. I went because I had committed myself to being there, and I knew that was where Mel would have wanted me to be."

Mary Kay Ash did not allow hardship, tragedy, and numerous difficult circumstances to

defeat her. In each instance she accepted her situation and became stronger as a result.

JERRY POGUE FIGHTS BACK TO BREAK COMPANY RECORDS

In 1968, my good friend Jerry Pogue was a district sales manager with The Southwestern Company. That year he had a tragic boating accident that almost took his life. Jerry was hospitalized for two-and-a-half months, and lost the use of one arm until seven operations over many years helped his situation. Instead of allowing the accident to ruin his career, he returned to work just as soon as he could.

Jerry went from recruiting 150 salespeople the year before the accident to 200 the next year. The following year, in 1971, he recruited 417 salespeople. The year after that, he built an organization of 665 people and set a recruiting record that still stands. He went on to become senior vice-president of The Southwestern Company. In the nine years we worked together, I never once heard Jerry complain about his misfortune.

Jerry later went into the investment business as a stockbroker in Seattle. During his first four years and five months, he opened 14,000 new accounts, managing over \$200 million in funds in precious metal stocks. After selling his business, Jerry went on to be CEO of several publicly traded Canadian mining companies. Today, he serves on the board of several successful companies. Jerry Pogue has learned to accept his situation no matter what it is and has continued to be a great winner.

COACH JOHN WOODEN WINS HIS FIRST TWO NATIONAL TITLES UNDER VERY CHALLENGING CONDITIONS

Over lunch one day, John Wooden, famed basketball coach and winner of ten national titles, talked with me about his early years.

“When I came to UCLA, basketball was not well thought of. Strict academic entrance standards prevented us from acquiring some of the best players. I was led to believe that UCLA’s Pauley Pavilion would be completed within three years, and instead it took seventeen. I conducted practice during those years on the third floor of an old gym with the wrestlers and gymnasts practicing on the sidelines and at the other end of the floor people were working out on the trampolines. Besides these distractions, for seventeen years my managers and I had to sweep and mop the floor every day before practice, because the dust would make it dangerous for the players.”

“These conditions were rather difficult, and I let them bother me for quite a while. As a matter of fact, I was at the point of developing a persecution complex. Eventually, when I accepted them, I came to realize you have to do your best with the things you can control and not spin your wheels on things you cannot control. I changed my attitude, and we went on to win the first two of our ten national championships under those same conditions.”

JEANNE ROBERTSON TURNS HER HEIGHT INTO AN ASSET

Jeanne Robertson, CSP, Certified Professional Speaker, and CPAE, is an inductee of the National Speakers Association Speaker Hall of Fame. She is an excellent example of a young lady who took stock of a circumstance she could not change and turned it into an asset. “In the seventh grade, at thirteen years of age I was 6’2” tall,” she told me. “All thirteen-year-old girls

seem to have problems, but this wasn't one that was going to go away. My parents were great about it, though, and helped me have a positive outlook. They helped me anticipate remarks that people were sure to make."

"Then we'd come up with a comic response. This really helped me to develop a sense of humor about my height, and I still use many of the lines we developed in my speeches. I might as well face the fact that even though I might live to be 103, I'll never be a 'little old lady'."

"One advantage I had was that I grew up in a basketball area in North Carolina. I started playing in the fifth grade and played all through high school and college. The things you cannot change, you have to accept."

The tallest woman ever to have competed in the Miss America pageant and winner of the Miss Congeniality award, she continues to be in great demand as a professional speaker. Toastmasters International named Jeanne the recipient of its 1998 Golden Gavel Award, given annually to one individual for accomplishments in leadership and communications. Jeanne is earning top money in a demanding field because she learned to accept her situation and has used it to her advantage. She is frequently billed as "a tall gal with a tall sense of humor."

THE RICE BROTHERS "THINK BIG"

At the National Speakers Association Convention where I first met Jeanne, I also met John and Greg Rice, twin brothers who are very successful businessmen from Florida. While having dinner with them, I asked for one of their business cards. The name of their company is Think Big. "The name expresses our philosophy of life," John explained to me. "We hold motivational seminars and challenge people to think big." Naturally, I asked them how they'd gotten started doing these seminars. "First, we decided to go into the real estate business," Greg recalled, "so we took a one-week crash course, got our licenses, and started selling in West Palm Beach, Florida. Together we sold fifty-eight houses that first year, setting a record for the company we were working for. Before long we were being asked to speak to groups of realtors, and the seminars resulted."

The Rice brothers continue to be willing to accept themselves as they are. This, in spite of the fact that soon after they were born, their parents abandoned them. John and Greg Rice "Think Big" and are great men that continue to speak professionally even though each stands just 2'11½" tall.

JANET BALLAS KNOWS, "WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET GOING."

Recently I was discussing the current trends in the real estate market with my friend Janet Ballas, one of the top real estate salespersons in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, and for years, a true professional in the field. She told me, "The real estate business is fantastic. It continues to be challenging and ever changing, and that's okay, because so does life. This business tests you everyday and allows you to see just what you are made of. Like the saying goes, 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going,' and that's really true. I'm having some of my best months ever, but I'm 'getting to' work longer hours to do it."

"It's hard to get to the top in any profession, but it's even harder staying there. Over the years, I have learned that 'if it wasn't this challenge', it would be 'something else'. Life is never without challenges. So, it's a matter of choosing to take what could be seen as negative and

counteracting it with a positive thought or action of some sort. If I worry about the client I just lost, I will lose the next two, so I don't worry about the things I can't control. I try to learn from past mistakes, but I never live in the past. I erase negative thoughts and keep charging."

"To keep making progress toward my goals, I choose to stay positive, accept each challenge as it comes, and work through each one the best I can. I'm committed to staying at the top, regardless of the challenges and difficult circumstances I am sure to encounter from time to time."

With an attitude like that, it's very obvious as to why Janet Ballas continues to be one of the very best in her profession.

MORT UTLEY SHARED, "IT ISN'T WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU THAT'S IMPORTANT...IT'S HOW YOU REACT TO WHAT HAPPENS."

When my friend, Mort Utley, was age fifty-nine, he lost his complete net worth in the real estate recession of 1974; \$3 million. "I learned a lot through that experience!" he declared enthusiastically. "Believe it or not, the loss of money didn't really bother me. The fact that some people had taken advantage of me was the hard thing to accept. I did find out who my real friends were."

"Some of the men in the same company took bankruptcy as a way out and then moved away. One man told me, 'The only thing anyone could do for me is to put a .38 to the back of my head and shoot me.' Four of us just kept working, and we're all in good shape today. Those who took bankruptcy haven't recovered yet."

"It took me five years to recoup my losses. I learned that it isn't what happens to you that's important...it's how you react to what happens. If you have the right attitude, and are willing to work hard, you can always make a comeback. Happiness is in the journey--not the destination."

I believe the following piece on acceptance is the best I've read:

ACCEPTANCE

And acceptance is the answer to all of my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation – some fact of my life unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is suppose to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in God's world by mistake. Unless I accept life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as what needs to be changed in me and my attitudes.

ACCEPTING MY SITUATION FREED ME TO COMMIT MYSELF TO BASIC SUCCESS PRINCIPLES I KNEW WORKED

I wish I had known how to apply these principles back in my student days when I was having such a difficult time. With the advantage of hindsight I can now look back and realize some of my mistakes...

My first summer at The Southwestern Company I worked hard and finished as the number twenty-one student salesman. The next summer I recruited fifteen students from my campus and received a commission on their sales. I had the sixth best team in sales, finished number seven in the company with my personal sales, and doubled my overall profit from the previous summer.

Instead of continuing to do my best, however, I became overconfident. I didn't work as hard at recruiting during the following school year and brought only two people to sales school the next May. Additionally, I wasn't mentally prepared to start selling again.

As my third summer wore on, I became discouraged. I wasn't reaching my weekly goals. I got off schedule, and though I tried hard to get back on, I just couldn't. The last two weeks I was so psyched out that I couldn't make myself knock on a door. I was so embarrassed that I called my sales manager, Glenn Jackson, and asked him to mail my commission check to school, so I wouldn't have to face the people at The Southwestern Company. Glenn persuaded me to come through Nashville anyway. Even though I hadn't done as well as the previous summer, I had managed to finish as the number thirty salesman in the company. In the eyes of many, that was okay, but I knew it was far below my sales goal for the summer. It's been said that the greatest burden we can carry is our unused potential, and I hadn't come close to reaching my full potential. I simply had not done my best.

A real fear swept over me as to whether or not I could make a comeback the next summer and get on a good schedule. I didn't know then that the solution to my problem would have been to accept the fact that I hadn't done as well as I had expected to and go on from there. One slow summer didn't mean I couldn't bounce back even stronger the next summer if I'd commit myself to a set of principles that would make it possible.

I had been looking for an easier way, and when I was assured that I could get rich quicker with less effort by investing in a new cosmetic company, I'd bought it. I bought it big. Then when the business went under, so did I.

After the scheme failed, I spent months feeling like a ship lost in a fog. I knew there had to be a way to return to solid ground, but all the signals were distorted. After three summers of selling, I was quite knowledgeable in motivation and success principles, but none of them could get me back on course, because I wasn't applying them. It's not what you know that helps you win—it's what you do with what you know. I could tell others how to be successful, but I couldn't break through the fog of self pity that kept me from doing it myself. I just didn't want to believe that the person who was really responsible for my problems was David Dean. I didn't want to admit to myself that I had fouled up so royally. I wanted to blame others for the shape I was in, but I knew too well I was responsible for the choices I had made.

Another reason I found it extremely difficult to be honest about my situation was that I just didn't know if I was willing to make the kind of commitment necessary to bail myself out of my problems. Finally, I recognized it was either sink or swim. I couldn't continue treading water much longer.

After the phone call from Glenn Jackson, I faced my situation squarely for the first time. I totally and completely accepted my situation exactly the way it was and decided to do something about it. That acceptance was the lifeline that put me back on course. The course was certain to be stormy, but at last the fog was gone and I could start moving.

Accepting my situation freed me to commit myself to basic success principles I knew worked. This realization, this total acceptance of my situation and the commitment to doing whatever was necessary to bounce back from failure to success, had taken only *thirty seconds*.