

at higher levels by making introductions and brokering relationships.

- As a frustrated mentor, don't be afraid to phone a friend for help or hand the mentee off to another (more aligned) resource.
- Expect the meeting structure and content to evolve over time. A rigid agenda gets in the way of a good mentor who is reacting to what he sees and hears. Early on, you (the mentor) are in control and asking most of the questions. Success comes when those probing questions (looking for information about the mentee) turn into instructive questions (provoking constructive answers and solutions from the mentee). Over time, the mentee will begin to come prepared, take control, and run the meeting. That's real personal growth.

Of course, this is not a comprehensive list. These are just a few suggestions based on my own experience and preferences. Your background may give you additional, different, and even better tools to use.

## **Five Critical Fundamental Concepts to Share and Teach or Affirm**

There are several key concepts that will greatly influence a rising star's chances for success. You might think these concepts would be understood intuitively, but they are not. Fact is, your mentee may not even be aware of them. It's likely that you learned these realities the hard way, but by emphasizing them early in the relationship, you will give your mentee a big head-start over his or her peers.

If you are mentoring someone in an individual effort, I urge you to weave these concepts into your teachings as appropriate. If you run a large mentoring program, I encourage you to ensure these concepts are unilaterally taught and stressed often. They are:

1. Reward follows performance.
2. Choices have consequences.
3. There are eight personal decisions that can control your destiny.
4. The only thing constant in life is change.
5. If you don't manage your time, everyone else will.

Let's address each one in more detail.

## **FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT 1: Reward follows performance.**

In the real world, reward follows performance and never precedes it. I like to illustrate that with the story about the man who one day sat in his easy chair in front of the fireplace and said, "Give me some heat and I'll go get you some wood." He wondered why the room stayed so cold. The man did not understand that before you get heat, you must go outside, find the wood, cut it up, drag it back to the house, fill the fireplace and light a fire. If you do it all correctly, *then* you get the heat. Reward follows performance. The proverb "As ye sow, so shall ye reap" has been around for 2,000 years for a good reason...it's true.

We must add value before we can expect to see reward, and that reward seldom comes immediately. My father used to say, "The year knows much the days never see." He meant what you and I know to be true: The scales don't balance every day. It often takes weeks, months, and sometimes years for hard work to pay off. Unfortunately, the average person becomes frustrated when they can't see input and output, cause and effect, or effort and results in the same day. As important as it is to realize that reward follows performance, it is equally important to understand that it

rarely follows performance *immediately*. There is no timetable for reward.

Once, a rather unimpressive manager told me he was not going to do something because he was not getting paid for it. I suggested that if he never did any more than he was being paid for, he would never be paid more than he was making right now.

## **FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT 2: Choices have consequences.**

There is a difference between what successful people do and what average people do. People who do very well in life don't leave their future to chance. They intentionally make good choices about attitude, appearance, behavior, and direction.

In *Find an Old Gorilla*, we talk about the importance of hanging around the right people. If you want to be successful, choose to spend time with successful people and pay attention to what they do, what they say, and how they act.

We also talk about the importance of honesty in word and deed. Long-term, in business and in life, you cannot be dishonest and survive, let alone thrive. Notice I said, "long-term." There are many people who have enjoyed a brief period of dishonesty and acquired "success" just before they checked into prison. In fact, honesty *is* the best policy, and your long-term success depends on it. As Abraham Lincoln famously said, "No man ever got lost on a straight road."

The truly successful person is honest with friends and business associates alike (in business, with associates both above and below them in the organizational chain). The truly successful person takes personal responsibility for all choices and decisions he or she makes.

## Personal Responsibility Payoff

When I was an area vice president in the Southwest, Midwest and far West Waffle House markets, our real estate department had O'Fallon, Missouri, under contract as a potential location. It was a complicated deal. It involved purchase of the property, moving and selling an on-site house for cash, fill work, relocating a fence to avoid an appurtenance, and other issues. My CEO, Joe Rogers Jr., told me to approve the deal if, and only if, our net out-of-pocket dollars were "X" or less.

At crunch time, the real estate director called me from the closing for final approval to sign off on the deal. I told him I had one question: "Does the deal net out to 'X' or less?" He told me it was complicated but his back-of-the-envelope math on the pluses and minuses said yes. I told him to buy.

Unfortunately, that deal came in at a net cost of "X" plus \$15,000—not over by much, but over. On his next trip into my market, Joe got off the airplane and asked, "Why did you buy O'Fallon?" I felt the fact that the real estate guy's math was faulty was irrelevant. I was the AVP, and the final decision was mine. My answer was, "Joe, I made a mistake."

His response was that "I made a mistake" was the correct answer. He went on to say there would have been consequences if I had overridden his decision and decided on my own that the property was worth the "add-on" or if I had thought a \$15,000 overage was small and acceptable. Seeing I understood, we moved on immediately to other operational topics, and years later he made me president and chief operations officer of Waffle House.

In situations like this, it can be tempting to go straight to blame, rationalization, and victimization. But taking immediate ownership of a problem changes the trajectory of the outcome. If Joe had to convince me that I made a mistake, immediately he would start questioning my judgment. When mistakes are made, you need the

energy to fix the problem, and you can't deplete yourself trying to convince people what right looks like. Plus, it damages confidence, trust, and an overall brand when lack of ownership is your first reaction.

Choosing the right direction or "path" is often difficult. Sometimes it is simply an issue of legal versus illegal. Often, we must choose between instant gratification and delayed gratification, meaning a) smooth sailing today and mediocrity tomorrow, or b) sacrifice now and payoff later.

Usually, though, the choices are about how we behave and represent ourselves to others. Most people follow the masses and reduce themselves to the *average*. To excel sometimes means abandoning the "path of least resistance" that most folks travel and deciding to take the more difficult route where traffic is lighter and rewards are (usually) greater.

Unfortunately, most people go through life trying to avoid pain. Successful people are driven by ambition, not the avoidance of pain.

Here is a "cheat sheet" for success. These are the top-ten behaviors (ten and a half, actually) that I routinely see in highly successful people. Besides sharing these with your mentee, you might ask yourself if you are doing any or all of these things.

1. Successful people always take notes. They keep a pen and paper or personal device with them always. They don't try to remember thoughts and facts. They write them down. Moreover, they all seem to keep a file of the best ideas (thought of or heard) and the great articles they have read that seem to resonate the most.
2. They hang around the right people. They associate with people who have things they aspire to have, who do things they aspire to do, and who hold positions they aspire to hold. Successful people hang around these folks and listen. \*(Number

2.5 is, while hanging around the right people, they find a mentor who is interested in their success and helps to guide them through the social, political, and cultural aspects of life and business.)

- 3.** They are honest. They know the alternative never works long-term.
- 4.** Successful people keep a great attitude, always. No matter what. This is the most impactful of the “Eight Great Social Tells.”
- 5.** They get up earlier than their friends. In the business space, they get up earlier than the competition.
- 6.** They know how and when to say “yes” and how and when to say “no.”
- 7.** Successful people are constantly nourishing their minds, their bodies, and their soul/spirit. For example, successful leaders read. If you do not read, you will pay a price for that, over time. Also know there are many books that are not meant to be read only once. They also eat good food and pray or meditate. They are grateful for what they have and lead a life of reciprocity, always ready to give back.
- 8.** A successful person knows how to manage their time. They have goals and take action when other people procrastinate or get bogged down by distractions
- 9.** Successful people give away all the credit and take all the blame. Period.
- 10.** The most successful people I know are philanthropic. They are constantly helping others. They give away things of value and they do it all anonymously. They don’t talk about it.

### **Give It Away...Anonymously**

I know a family who, on the first freezing day of every winter, calls all the elementary schools in the community and asks one question: "Who are the children who came to school today with no coats?" Think about it. If it is 32 degrees outside and a child comes to school with no coat, there is only one reason: The child doesn't have a coat.

So, this family gets these children's genders and sizes. They go to stores like Walmart, Old Navy, and Burlington, and they buy some warm jackets. They take them home and pin a child's information in each jacket. They put these coats into black plastic lawn bags, and the next day they take them to the school. Without giving their names, the family leaves the coats at the front desk and asks that they be given to the principal. Then they leave.

Knowing what they've done for those children and not seeking credit for their kindness—keeping the secret of this gift in their hearts—can you imagine what kind of positive power follows them all that day? And, if these anonymous acts of selfless kindness are frequent, can you imagine the positive power their giving brings to their lives?

## **FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT 3: There are eight personal decisions that can control your destiny.**

*A successful* life is about making good decisions. Being human, we won't make them all correctly, but if we are thoughtful in our choices, we will get most of them right, especially the really big ones that count heavily. In my book *Find an Old Gorilla*, I discuss the eight most impactful personal decisions that ultimately control where you (and your children) end up in life. The choices to be made regarding those decisions are so important that I believe they are worth repeating here.

Whether mentee or mentor, treat these eight life-directing decisions with greater respect and you will enjoy better long-term consequences:

- 1. What you (or your children) do in high school, and most importantly, after each school day is finished.** (Structure counts at this age.) Do you play sports, participate in band or drama, or join clubs? Or, do you hang out at the mall with friends? If you do just hang out with friends, at least hang out with friends with ambition. This is where we get in the habit of enriching and challenging ourselves—or not.
- 2. If and where you go to college or trade school.** A four-year college degree certainly is not an imperative, but successfully productive people do need some type of post-high-school training. And it's not just about what you study. It's also about the contacts you make that will serve you later in life, often as future business relationships.
- 3. Where you go to work.** The field you're in and the company you choose really matter. Essential industries and growing companies set a much better stage for the future.
- 4. If and who you marry.** Is your partner your social equal? Does your partner have people skills? Share your ambition? Balance your strengths and weaknesses? Lifetime relationships are built upon mutual respect, shared interests, and teamwork in achievement.
- 5. Where you live.** The city, state, and neighborhood you live in will impact your future, not only regarding who you meet and the opportunities that present themselves, but also how your children grow up. It bears mentioning here that as virtual work becomes more and more common, people have a lot more leeway in choosing where they live. It's not always necessary to work in the same city where your company is located.

- 6. Children or no children.** It's just a decision and neither is "better" than the other. You have more time early on (and quite possibly more money in the long run) if you choose no kids. But being child-free also means no grandchildren and no continuing family. There are benefits and drawbacks to every decision.
- 7. Whether or not you save money.** How do you handle your finances in general? Do you have a plan? A budget? Or do you wing it?
- 8. How you relate to the world spiritually.** Do you do so through organized religion? Personal spirituality? Or none?

Each of these decisions will send you (and/or your children) down a very specific path. Think about them all very carefully.

## **FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT 4: The only thing constant in life is change.**

Change is all around us. As a matter of fact, it's about the only surety in life you can count on. Change will occur...by you, to you, and around you.

My friend Quint Studer is fond of saying, "We need to change the way we think about change." Quint is absolutely correct, and the first step in that process is to simply start thinking about the concept of change—what it is and how it works. The more you understand something the better equipped you are to deal with it. Since your mentee will spend a lifetime wrestling with change, it's a good concept for you to explore with him or her.

There are two kinds of change: initiated and inherited.

Initiated change is the change you start and you control, whether in business or in your personal life. There are always seven steps to initiated change:

1. Denial that a change needs to be made. (Interestingly, the largest state in the nation is not Texas, Alaska, or California. It's the state of Denial. Everyone lives in it at one time or another.)
2. Realization and acceptance that a change needs to be made.
3. Attempt to make the change.
4. Failure to make the change. (We all go through it.)
5. Frustration upon returning to the previous behavior or procedure and either wanting or expecting a different result. (It has been said that doing the same thing and expecting a different result is the height of insanity.)
6. Refocus, reengage, reattempt.
7. Successful change. You can always get to #7, successful change, if you don't get hung up on #4. Now that you know failure is out there and it's a normal part of the process, you can deal with it successfully.

Inherited change is the change you did not start and do not control. It could be in the workplace or in your personal space, but inherited change is all around you and is a part of life. You may like the change or you may not like it, but you definitely do have to deal with it in some way.

It has been said that in the face of inherited change, we can respond in only one of four ways:

1. Mope
2. Hope
3. Dope
4. Cope

**Mope:** You can always throw a pity party and wring your hands, but the "woe-is-me" attitude won't fix anything and will simply

alienate everyone around you (except the other pitiful people who aren't getting anywhere, either).

**Hope:** You can hope it will get better, change back, go away, etc., but hope alone is not enough. Prayer works but it works best when we work hard, right alongside it.

**Dope:** You can “dope” about it, stick your head in the sand, and pretend it's not there. (We call this “ostrich management.”)

**Cope:** You can deal with it. The first step in coping with inherited change you don't care for is to honestly ask yourself, *Is this change actually hurting me or am I just annoyed by it?* There is a big difference between pain and discomfort. There is a big difference between inconvenience and injury. It's important to know how you are really being affected because this will influence your coping strategy.

Some people think running away from inherited change you don't like is the same as coping. The reality is that a quick decision to escape may actually bring about a much bigger adverse change. Be very careful with life's four most stressful change events: #1 loss of a loved one, #2 changing relationships, #3 changing jobs, #4 changing residences. It's never a good idea to tackle more than one of these four life changes in the same year.

In the business space, a good CEO or mentor will stress the reality that while the grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence, everyone's grass has dirt on the bottom. You just have to be close enough to see it. This is something to think about before you jump the fence.

Another fact to consider when contemplating a job change (and this one is counter-intuitive) is that change saps momentum. It takes a year or so to assimilate and be assimilated into a new corporate culture. How much ground could have been gained at the former job in that amount of time?

## FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT 5: If you don't manage your time, everyone else will.

We all get the same amount of time: 24 hours in a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Successful people don't get more time; they have just learned how to effectively manage the time they are given.

Here is a good way to present the three skills your mentee must learn and apply in order to effectively manage his or her time:

- 1. Know where you want to go...** This is called goal-setting, and these goals must be physically recorded somewhere (on a piece of paper or a personal device) so you can look at them every day and routinely evaluate your progress. Goals are the achievements and assets you chase in life and business. Goals focus you, ground you, and define your purpose in life. Zig Ziglar, in his many video presentations, accurately points out that without goals, you are a "wandering generality." He says that goals turn you into a "meaningful specific." If you want to accomplish or attain something, make it a goal. You cannot achieve goals you have not set.

Note: It is important to understand that your mentee may not really know how to set goals. You may need to have a fundamental discussion about how to determine what is really important, what he or she really wants in life or business, and how to organize personal thoughts and actions around the achievement of those things.

- 2. ...Then develop an action plan.** Once you know where you want to go, remember that nothing happens until there is an action plan in the execution phase. A good action plan considers what resources are needed, how to manage them, and how to measure the progress through constant follow-up. Consider your goals, marshal your resources, and set deadlines for

yourself and others. Instructions without deadlines are simply suggestions. Written instructions with deadlines that create a sense of urgency will keep action plans on track through a successful finish.

- 3. Learn to avoid distractions.** There are hundreds of distractions in life every day. So many young people (and, frankly, older ones too) are addicted to screens/social media today, and it certainly seems to affect their ability to be proactive, effective, and efficient. The challenge is to press through these and other distractions and stay on course.

As an example, I like to share the Biblical story of the seed sower who is casting his seeds one morning when he notices a few birds several rows back pecking at some of the seeds on the ground. At that moment in his life, the seed sower has one very important decision to make: Does he want to be a seed sower or a bird chaser? As it turns out, the seed sower is smart. He knows some of the seeds he casts will find barren ground and will not grow. He knows the wind will blow some seeds up onto rocks, and a few will be eaten by the birds. He also knows that 100 percent of the seeds left in that sack at the end of the day will not grow. So, he avoids the distraction of the birds and continues to sow the seeds that grow the crops his village needs for survival.

Better to be a seed sower than a bird chaser. Better to set the course and avoid distractions. You cannot major in minor affairs in life or business and hope to be successful.

These three tips aren't just for business. They are incredibly valuable for your personal life as well. As an emerging leader in the Waffle House system, I faced the same problem that confronts rising high achievers everywhere: There aren't enough hours in the day or days in the week. My wife, Kathy, was patient (as she always has been), but my five-year-old daughter was getting pushed aside by an ever-growing schedule of business

responsibilities. I decided that this work/family life-balance issue had more to do with me than with my business, so I took out my calendar and wrote my daughter Aspen's name on the first open date two weeks away.

Seeing this, Kathy chided me, asking, "Why do you have to write your daughter's name on the calendar to spend time with her?" I answered I had come to a decision. If I simply gave her the time that was "left over," she would never get enough, and that was unacceptable. If I didn't treat her time like all the important events and get it on the calendar, things would "come up" and steal that time, just as it had in the past. Aspen and I had a great day together.

This started a tradition of planned "daddy-little girl dates" with all three of my daughters (Aspen, Chalice, and Mayson) that exists to this day, even though they are all mothers and very successful businesswomen. Now, they put me on their calendars, too!

A footnote here is that when Kathy saw the success of my plan, we created a Monday night, turn-off-the-phones "date night." Just us...and that was a game changer!