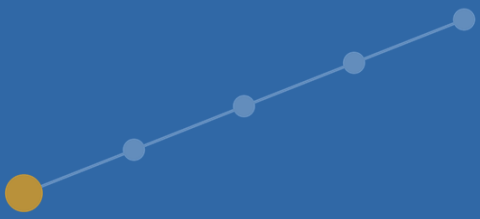
LEADERSHIP SERIES FOR SUCCESSFUL LIVING

VOLUME ONE



Ambition

"Ambition is the spur that makes man struggle with destiny."

ORISON SWETT MARDEN

Edited and narrated by Richard Gorham

Leadership-Tools.com

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VOLUME ONE

Ambition

Based on the original edition of
Ambition and Success (1919)

ORISON SWETT MARDEN
Author of Pushing to the Front

Edited for ebook and audio by
Richard Gorham

REVISED 2026

Leadership-Tools.com

ABOUT THIS EDITION

Orison Swett Marden published *Ambition and Success* in 1919. Richard Gorham edited it for ebook and audio in 2006. He shortened some passages and brought parts of the language closer to the way people talk today. This 2026 edition keeps that text and gives it a new design, with a contents page that links to each chapter.

The audio edition and the companion workbook are free at Leadership-Tools.com. The audio covers the nine chapters of the book, and the workbook follows the same chapters, with a summary of key points and questions for each one.

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CHAPTER I

What Is Ambition?

"Ambition is the spur that makes man struggle with destiny:
It is heaven's own incentive to make purpose great, and achievement greater."

— Orison Swett Marden on Ambition

In a factory where mariners' compasses are made, the needles, before they are magnetized, will lie in any position, wherever they are placed, but from the moment they have been touched by the mighty magnet and have been *electrified*, they are never again the same.

The needle has now taken on a mysterious power and has become a new living creature. Before needles are magnetized, they do not answer the call of the North Star, the magnetic pole does not have any effect upon them, but the moment they have been magnetized they swing to the magnetic north, and are ever-after loyal and true to their purpose.

Multitudes of people, like an unmagnetized needle, lie motionless, unresponsive to any stimulus until they are touched by that mysterious force we call ambition.

Where does this overmastering impulse come from which pushes human beings on, each to his individual goal? Where is

the source of ambition, and how and when does it gain entrance into our lives?

How few of us ever stop to think what ambition really means, its cause, or significance! Yet, if we could explain what ambition is, we could explain the mystery of the universe. The instinctive impulse to keep pushing on and up is the most curious and the most interesting thing in human life. It exists in every normal human being, and is just as pronounced and as real as the instinct of self-preservation.

I believe this incessant inward prompting, call it ambition or whatever you will - this *something* which pushes men and women to their goal, is the expression in man of the universal force of evolution which is flowing forever forward - that it is a part of the great cosmic plan of creation. We do not create this urge, we do not manufacture it.

Every normal person feels this internal urge which is ever pushing us on, even at the cost of our discomfort and sacrifice.

It is a part of every atom, for all atoms are alive, and this upward impulse is in every one of them. It is in the instinct of the bee, the ant, and in all forms of insect and animal life.

The same kind of urge that is in the seed buried out of sight and which is ever pushing it up and out through the soil, prodding it to develop itself to the utmost and to give its beauty and fragrance to the world, is in each one of us. It is ever pushing us, urging us to a larger, more beautiful life.

If it were not for this powerful desire to get on and up, to improve and grow, I fear everything - even the universe itself, would collapse. Inertia would bring everything to a complete standstill.

If we obey this honorable call to excel in life, we expand and blossom and we enjoy the fruit of our labor. But if we neglect the call, or dissipate it, if we only half obey it, we are no better than an annoying weed, choking out the fragile seedling from growing into a healthy flower or plant. Our greatest destiny is kept from us without the full unleash of our ambitious nature.

That mysterious urge within us never allows us to rest. The urge is always prodding us for our own good, because there is no limit to human growth and there is no satisfying human ambition—man's higher aspiration. When we reach the height which looks so attractive from below, we find our new position as unsatisfying as the old, and a perpetual call to go higher still rings in our ears. A divine impulse constantly urges us to reach our highest ideal.

Faith and the ideal still remain the most powerful levers of progress and of happiness.

"Did you ever hear of a man who had striven faithfully all his life toward a single object and in no measure obtained it?" asked Thoreau. If a man constantly aspires, is he not elevated? Did ever a man try hard, work hard and serve others with sincerity, and find that there was no advantage in them,—that it was a vain endeavor?"

Aspiration of one person often becomes an inspiration to others. All parties touched by either sensation are better off for the experience.

When the general habit of always aspiring, moving upwards and climbing to something higher and better is formed, all the undesirable habits will fade away; they will die from lack of nourishment. Only those things grow in our nature, which are fed. The quickest way to kill these undesirable qualities is to cut off the source of their nourishment. Mostly, this can be done effectively with a simple choice, a clear moment of decision when you say, "Never again!"

A strong desire, a craving for something higher and better is the best possible antidote for the lower tendencies which one wishes to get rid of.

Every faintest aspiration that springs up in our heart is a heavenly seed within us which will grow and develop into rich beauty if only it can be fed and encouraged. The better things in our mind and our heart do not grow and develop properly without care and nourishment. Only weeds, briers, and noxious plants thrive easily.

Many people mistakenly believe that ambition is a quality that one is born with and which cannot be materially changed or developed. Some suffer from an injured ambition of various forms. The habit of procrastination, of postponing, the habit of picking out the easier tasks and putting off the difficult ones, for

example, will very seriously impair or deform ones right ambition. Whatever affects the ideals affects the quality of the end result.

Ambition often begins very early to knock for recognition. If we do not recognize its voice, if it gets no encouragement after appealing to us for years, it gradually ceases to trouble us. Like any other quality or function, a person's ambition will deteriorate and eventually disappear when ignored or unused.

God is whispering into the ear of all existence, of every created thing "Look up." Every sentient thing in the universe seems to be trying to get to a higher level. Everything is in the process of evolution, and the evolution is always upward. The butterfly does not become a caterpillar. It is not the evolutionary law. The caterpillar develops into a butterfly. It is never the other way.

Be careful how you discourage or refuse to heed that inner voice which commands you to go forward, for if you do, it will become less and less insistent - until finally it will cease to prod you. Your ambition will continue to deteriorate and eventually die.

That inner call to go forward, to push on to a higher good, is God's voice; heed it. It is your best friend and will lead you into light and joy.

CHAPTER II

The Satisfied Man

"There is no use trying to help people who are unwilling to help themselves.
You cannot push a man up a ladder unless he has a desire to climb himself.

— Andrew Carnegie on Ambition

F. W. Robertson has said, "Whoever is satisfied with what he does has reached his culminating point—he will progress no more. Man's destiny is to be not dissatisfied, but forever unsatisfied."

One of the saddest things in life is to see men and women who started out with high hopes and proud ambitions settle down into mediocre positions, half satisfied just merely to make a living, to plod along indifferently.

Oh, what a tragedy there is in being content with mediocrity, in getting into a state where one is indifferent to the larger, better things of life!

When you are satisfied with the life you are living, with the work you are doing, with the thought you are thinking, with the dreams you are dreaming, satisfied with the character you are building, with your ideals, you may be sure that you are already beginning to deteriorate.

There is little hope for the man who feels completely satisfied with himself. It’s important to remember always and grasp hold

of the phrase, "Noble discontent stirs the acorn to become a mighty oak." Man's ambition to improve something somewhere every day, to get a little further on and a little higher up than he was the day before, an insatiable passion for bettering things all along the line, is the secret of human progress.

Do you realize, my aspiring friend, that if the motive were big enough, if you had a very unusual incentive, you could substantially improve upon what you are currently satisfied with as your best effort? As an employee you may think you are doing your level best, and are conscientious, loyal, true and industrious; and yet, if a great prize should be offered to you to bring your work up to a higher standard for the next thirty days, would you even consider retiring for the day before you had succeeded in greatly improving your output? How much more could you achieve in the next month if you were offered a 4- week paid vacation around the world? Could you increase your monthly earnings 10%, 20% - 50%? Could you double your monthly production for such a grand prize, a life altering opportunity? By simply contemplating this option, does it not provide within you a creative force to make it plausible, if not possible to do better, to be more?

Don’t you think that if it were your name over the door as proprietor instead of the name of the company you work for you could increase your productivity by about fifty per cent; that you would find some way of doing it? Don't you think you would be a little more ambitious, make a little better use of your time, that you would try to call out a little more ingenuity and effectiveness, a little more resourcefulness? Do you think you would jog along

in the same half-hearted manner, thinking more of your salary than of your opportunity to absorb the secrets of your employer's success? Do you think you would stand by without protest and see the merchandise injured, or wasted, when you could stop it; or that you would be so careless or make so many blunders yourself? Don't you think the prize to be gained would make you take a little more interest in things than you do now; make you a little more alert, more eager for the success of the business?

It is a deplorable sight to see so many young men and young women apparently so satisfied with themselves, with what they are currently doing, that they have no great yearnings, no insatiable longing for something higher and better.

Multitudes of capable employees are satisfied to plod along in mediocrity instead of rising to reap the higher rewards of their God-given talents, where their ability would naturally carry them. I have a friend who has a much superior brain to the man that he is working for, and yet for a great many years he has been on an ordinary salary. He has never married. He takes life in an easy-going way and whenever I have tried to encourage him to *go* into business for himself, to show him how much superior he is to the man he is working for, he always says, "Why should I exert myself more or take on greater business responsibilities? I have nobody but myself to consider. I like to have a good time, and I don't want the worry or anxiety of running a business of my own, although I know perfectly well I could do it if I wanted to."

Of course, the higher up in the world a man gets the greater his responsibility, but think of the satisfaction which comes from the consciousness that he has made the most of his talents. On his final day will he not wonder “what if I had tried?”, “did I make the most of my time?”, “could I have been more, done more, contributed more?” These questions and more will belong to the person unwilling to grow and improve. Do not bury your opportunities because they do not come freely. Instead, grasp them and enjoy the satisfaction which comes from the feeling that you have made good.

Deliver your message to the world and deliver it like only you can. Fulfill your higher mission and make the most possible of the material and the opportunities given to you. The feeling that you have no regrets, that you have done your level best, will more than compensate for any additional effort and greater responsibility.

We tend to become like our aspirations. If we constantly aspire and strive for something better and higher and more noble, we cannot help broadening and improving. The ambition that is dominant in the mind tends to work itself out in one’s life. If this ambition is weak, unfocused and undisciplined, so shall be our life experience. One can be certain that the quality of our lives will correlate directly to the quality of our ideals.

Civilization has made its greatest advancement under the stress of necessity, under the leadership of a great ambition to satisfy the heart's yearnings for better things. We do our best

work while we are trying in earnest, under hardship, to reach our dreams.

The struggle of man to rise a little higher, to get into a little more comfortable of a position, to secure a better education, a better home, to gain a little more culture and refinement, to possess that power which comes from being in a position of broader and wider influence, is what has developed the character and the stamina of our highest types of leaders today. This upward life-trend gives others confidence in us.

When we have attained a little success, when we have gained a little public applause, far too many of us think we can relax our efforts. Before we realize it our ambition has disappeared, our energy evaporated. A sort of lethargy comes over us and lulls us into inaction.

First successes, and especially early successes, too often act like a muscle relaxer. The accolades are quickly overcome with inertia. When one started reveling in praise of others, he can quickly become docile and ineffective which only a renewed, unsatisfied and more determined ambition can overcome. It takes more grit and a stronger will to force ourselves to do our level best after we have demonstrated, without doubt, that we have the ability to do what we undertake.

One of the greatest enemies to ambition is personal inertia, and it is one of the hardest things to overcome. The temptation to slide along the line of the least resistance, to get into a comfortable position and take it easy, is so strong that many allow it

to master them. The ambition is not persistent enough or strenuous enough to shame them out of their inertia, or prod them on to greater things. Mediocrity is often a precursor to laziness. The poet tells us,

> *"He who would climb the heights sublime,*
> *Or breathe the purer air of life,*
> *Must not expect to rise in ease,*
> *But brace himself for toil or strife."*

One of the most discouraging problems in the world is that of trying to help the ambition-less, those who have decided to walk through life half-satisfied. Too many people have no clear desire to push forward, no initiative to begin things, or persistency enough to keep going.

If a young man is apparently satisfied to drift along in a humdrum way, half content with his accomplishments and undisturbed by the fact that he has used but a very small part of himself, his energies will surely run off as rain water runs into a sewer drain. You simply cannot do much with such an individual.

If she lacks ambition, life, energy and vigor— and is willing to slide along the line of least resistance and exerts herself as little as possible, there is nothing upon which to build.

It is the young man (or woman) who is not satisfied with what he does, and who is determined to better himself every day, who struggles to express his ideals, to make the possible in him a reality, that will ultimately win the battle.

Activity is the law of growth; and effort is the only means of improvement. Whenever men have obeyed their lower tendencies and ceased to struggle to better their condition, they have deteriorated physically, mentally and morally. In contrast, those that have striven honestly and insistently to improve their situation has developed a larger and nobler human experience.

A man who was known to be one of the highest paid officials in the United States was once asked to give the secret of his success, he replied, "I haven't succeeded. No real man ever succeeds. There is always a larger goal ahead."

It is the small man who succeeds in his own estimation. Really great men never reach their goal, because they are constantly pushing their horizon out further and further, getting a broader vision, a larger outlook, and their ambition grows with their achievement.

If you are getting a fair salary in a mediocre position there is danger of hypnotizing yourself into the belief that there is no need to exert yourself very much to get up higher. There is danger of limiting your ambition so that you will be half content to remain a perpetual clerk when you have the ability to do much more. Do not allow yourself to become the sufferer of “permanent potential”.

This satisfaction with the lesser when the greater is possible often results from relatives or friends telling you that you are doing well, and that you should be satisfied in your accomplishments. These short-sighted advisers say: "Don't take chances with a certainty. It is true you are not getting a very big salary,

but it is a sure thing, and if you give it up with the hope of something better you may do worse."

Don't let any one or any conditions make you think you have not the ability to match your dreams for the future. Wrapped up in every human being there are energies which, if unfolded, concentrated, and given proper attention will manifest into achieving your greatest vision for yourself.

Our dreams, our visions of our future are attainable once broken down into realistic and creative building blocks. We must determine, step by step, the goals that must be reached along the way. With each goal achieved, another stepping stone has been mastered that will support our effort toward reaching the next. Each new task is another step toward actual achievement of our dream.

Once you get a glimpse of yourself as you were intended by your Maker to be, with all of your latent possibilities fully developed; when you finally see yourself as the superb man or woman, it is possible for you to be that successful individual. Nothing and no one but yourself can prevent you from attaining your highest ambition.

It is only the man who has stopped growing that feels satisfied with his achievements. The growing man feels a great lack of wholeness, of completeness. Everything in him seems to be unfinished because it is growing. The expanding man is always dissatisfied with his accomplishment, is always reaching out for something larger, fuller, more complete.

CHAPTER III

The Influence of Environment

"Give me a stock clerk with a clear goal
and I'll give you a man who will someday make history.
Give me a man with no goals and I'll give you a stock clerk.

— J.C. Penney on Ambition

Environment has a great deal to do with man's ambition and achievement. It may make all the difference to you, my friend, between success and mediocrity - whether you are in a favorable environment and keep close to people who inspire and encourage you. Invest your time only in those who are most generally enthusiastic and optimistic. Understand clearly that by spending time with others who suffer the self-inflicted wounds of jealousy and despair, will have a negative effect upon you, and drag you downward.

We cannot associate with a really ambitious person without catching his spirit to a greater or less extent. We unconsciously reflect the people with whom we associate. Their mark is left upon us. We may not be able to see it ourselves, simply because we are too close to it. However, those on the outside looking in, who are assessing our potential, will detect the marks left upon us by our associates.

Too often college graduates return to their hometown after receiving their degrees. They return home looking fresh, ready to take on the world. They are well dressed, intelligent, with the fire

of ambition in their eyes. We predict great things for them; but too often after struggling awhile to keep up their new standard, they gradually drop back to their old manner of living. There are, of course, many notable exceptions, but these are unusually strong characters, able to resist the downward-dragging tendencies that are all around them.

If you were to interview the great army of low-achievers, you would find that the vast majority has failed because they never got themselves into a stimulating, encouraging environment. They failed because their ambition was simply never aroused, or they were not strong enough to rally and break free of depressing, discouraging, or vicious surroundings.

How often we see men and women with all the natural ability for success. They are smart, physically fit, superbly equipped for great careers, and yet they are living very ordinary lives. They allow themselves to plod along, fully accepting of their mediocrity! This may be because their purpose has never been unveiled and their ambition has never been aroused. They are totally ignorant of their true potential. They may never have looked into the mirror of others who were succeeding, and caught a glimpse of their own possibilities.

Whatever you do in life, make any sacrifice necessary to keep yourself in a supportive, ambition-arousing atmosphere, an environment that will stimulate you to self-development. Keep close to people who understand you, who *believe* in you, who will help you to discover yourself and encourage you to make the

most of your life. Choose companions and friends who will encourage your ambition and who will give you their moral support and expect you to do what you are capable of doing. A few such friends may make all the difference to you between a grand success and a mediocre existence. We are all diamonds in the rough. Our environment helps to cut, polish and present us to the world, just like the diamond cutter creates his most impressive works of art. It is a tragedy that some people never come into contact with an encouraging environment, or experience surroundings that lets in the light to reveal their hidden potential. Too many ambitions are buried deep inside, just as rough diamonds are locked into the mountainside. Unless properly mined, no one will ever enjoy the great brilliancy and enormous value of the gem.

We must choose our associates wisely to ensure we stay on a pathway that leads to personal achievement and self-fulfillment. People do become a product of their environment – it's important that you truly know where it is that you allow yourself to reside.

It is amazing to me how such insignificant things can sometimes unleash our ambition and finally reveal to us the person we are meant to be! It may be the sight of a motto or the hearing of a sermon or a speech, the reading of an inspiring book, the encouraging conversation of a friend or of some one who believes in us and sees something that we never knew was there.

I've known men who had apparently lost their ambition, who had been literally down and out, but who, by the reading of an

inspiring book, or listening to a stimulating speech, were thoroughly aroused to their possibilities. Even in the most discouraging environment, they were so completely transformed in a few months that they did not seem like the same individuals.

The speeches of Wendell Phillips, Webster, and Henry Clay, started a fire in many ambitious youth which never went out, but which became a beacon of light in American history.

We all know that the old-fashioned debating societies and clubs woke up the ambition of many a youth in the early days of our country. Those young men and women who might never have been heard from outside of their own hometown if it were not for the arousing influence of those debates.

The ambition of the boy who has lived on a farm in the back country is often aroused for the first time when he goes to the city. To him the city is comparable to a world's fair, where everybody's achievement is on exhibit. The progressive spirit, which pervades the city, is like an electric shock to him and arouses all of his latent energies and loudly calls out his reserves. Everything he sees seems to summon to him to go forward, to continually push on.

He is constantly reminded by his city environment of what others have done. He sees the tremendous engineering feats, great factories and offices, vast businesses, all huge advertisements of man's achievement, and he is stirred by an ambition to do something great himself.

Ambition is contagious. When a man meets others at the restaurant or club, or in other social ways, and hears accounts of

their great successes, greater achievement, he immediately says to himself, "Why can't I do it?" "Why don't I do it?" and if he has the right stuff he probably says, "I *will* do it!" Then he goes back to his business with a new determination, perhaps with new ideas and higher belief in the possibilities of his own success.

I have known young businessmen from rural towns who have not been successful, but who acquired tremendous motivation upon visiting larger cities, or other countries. After seeing what successful people are doing in same line of business, the answers to ones own challenges seem plentiful. Once they saw the light, they returned home and began to build their ideas into a new reality.

The same thing is true in professional life. The young doctor, lawyer or accountant attends a national convention or a topical seminar. She attends clinics and sees the latest technology in her field. She then goes home with her ambition aroused and makes a vigorous resolution to try harder, to be better, to contribute more - and to be somebody in her own profession.

People who are in business in very small communities where they have no competition, and where they very seldom come in contact with those who are successful in their line of trade, are in constant danger of getting into a damaging rut. Their ambition unconsciously becomes dulled, the energy oozes out of their efforts, and they take things easier. They jog along in the same old manner year after year, and before they realize it dry rot gets into their business and creeps into their bones.

It is much easier to keep up our interest and enthusiasm to do things worth while, when we are in touch with the ambitious, with those who are forging ahead with all their might, and who are perhaps working under great difficulties.

One of the unfortunate things about small towns and country places is the lack of stimulus to unveil and support one's ambition. Many people living in remote country districts do not come in contact with standards by which they can measure and compare their own powers. They live a quiet unchallenged life, and there is little in their environment to arouse the faculties which are not currently active.

If you are ambitious to move on in this world you will learn some timeless lessons from studying the qualities of those who have succeeded along the line of your ambition. You will find that it is a characteristic of the winner that he is always thinking about how to improve upon his life. He is always headed towards the goal of his ambition, always planning along the line of one-day realizing his dreams. He talks about his passion. His actions reflect his commitment to himself. His whole life is absorbed in his purpose. He radiates law, medicine, engineering, or manufacturing – whatever his passion, he becomes it. By keeping his mind in a positive and creative condition, and keeping his body fit to endure any obstacle, he is constantly preparing himself to attract the thing he desires most. If he is studying law he thinks law. He pictures himself pleading at court, or giving advice in his office. He becomes a lawyer both internally and externally. People

begin to recognize his commitment to law and eventually see him as what he desires to be – a great lawyer.

I know a man who says he will not take chances with his own ambition by associating with habitual failures. He will have nothing to do with such people. He avoids doing business with them, for he says he finds that no matter how he may protest against it, they unconsciously influence him.

There is no denying that there is much truth in this. We are unconsciously affected by the atmosphere surrounding us. Like attracts like. Successful people attract successful people. Failure attracts failure. Unlucky people attract unlucky people. Slovenly, unkept people attract others of the same sort. "Birds of a feather do tend to flock together." The failures get together and complain, blame and rationalize; the successes come together and speak of big ideas and new inventions.

On every campus we turn out flocks of young men and women who begin their careers as brilliant prospects. Their professors, family and friends predict great things for them, but somehow or other, the enthusiasm of their school or college days soon oozes out of them. The continual suggestion of possibility which came to them from their school environment, the contagious spirit that was all around, seemed at the time to multiply their prospects. The environment magnified their ability and stirred up their ambition until they really thought they were going to amount to something in the world. They truly believed they were going to accomplish something; but after they got

away from the battery-charging institution, they somehow gradually lost their enthusiasm; their ambition dwindled. Their ideals changed with their environment. Little by little their dreams faded, and they resigned themselves to mediocrity or hopeless failure.

There is no environment so unfavorable, so discouraging - no situation so disheartening that a youth who is made of the right material cannot change for the better. Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Fred Douglas, Helen Keller and thousands of other American boys and girls found themselves in the midst of the most disheartening environment but made a new environment for themselves. It is possible for you to do the same!

The unfortunate reality for far too many is that their ambition never becomes fully discovered. They fail to discover their best selves until late in life. While it is never too late to begin a new journey for self-improvement, it is very important that we become aware of our greatest possibilities as early on as possible. Each person must struggle to face his fears and to overcome the most unfavorable environment. He must walk away from the guilt of those things he cannot remedy and move on to Learn and Grow and Contribute, and to get the greatest possible quality out of his remaining life.

CHAPTER IV

Unworthy Ambitions

"Without ambition one starts nothing.
Without work one finishes nothing.
The prize will not be sent to you.
You have to win it!"

— Ralph Waldo Emerson on Ambition

There are scores of people in our world today who do not really live at all. They merely exist. They are the slaves of a morbid ambition and a greed that has grown to be a monster. Many of these people take very little comfort; they are always too focused on keeping up appearances. They buy homes in portions of the city where they can not afford to live. They buy brand new automobiles when they can barely afford a bicycle. They wear clothing and jewelry that is beyond their means and they keep themselves constantly worried over their desperate financial situation, killing any legitimate comfort and enjoyment that they've earned. They become exhausted from the strain and stress, and all for nothing that is either real or permanent, nothing that adds to their character or well being.

Such people have a perfect mania for trying to make other people think they are better off than they really are, that they amount to more than they really do, that they own a larger estate in the world than is actually the case. In other words, they make themselves pitiful in the eyes of those who know better. They go

through life not doing the things they ought to do, what is best for their welfare and growth. Their lives are superficial because they do not live in or deal in reality. Everything about them is deceiving. They live masked lives. Few people know them as they really are. They only know them as they pretend to be. What do these people, who are always chasing shadows, get out of life anyway?

There is a seductive ambition, which reminds one of a bird whose voracious appetite can never be satisfied. It grows on what it feeds, and the more it eats, the more ravenous the appetite. “Woe be it to him who caters to a false ambition!” The misled man follows this false ambition blindly. He expects that it will give him peace when it is satisfied, but it is never satisfied. Such an ambition is fatal, and will surely wreck the man or woman who blindly pursues it. Unworthy ambitions eventually overtake your right mind, they end up ruining your health and will rob you of all that is dearest and sweetest in your life.

There are a great many people in this country who are forfeiting years of their lives by allowing themselves to become the slave of an unworthy ambition.

One of the most unfortunate states within our civilization is when men and women in poor health, who are quickly deteriorating from over-work, continue to pursue empty goals that are fueled by a fiendish ambition. Their pride and their vanity say to them, "It is not acceptable to slow down. We must keep up with our neighbors. People who do not keep up appearances are doomed. We must keep going, no matter how we feel. We must

make more money. We must acquire more in order to show evidence of our prosperity. We must put up a better front or else our neighbor might pass the suspicion along that we not much of a success, that we lack the ability to do what people think we were doing. No matter how we feel we must keep up, buy more, do whatever is necessary in order to protect our reputation as an achiever, a real somebody. It is absolutely imperative to keep pushing forward no matter what the cost."

Oh, what fools we become when we fall to the feet of our pride and vanity. Especially when we are in no condition to keep up the pace, when we owe it to ourselves, and particularly to our friends and family, to slow down. How many people are driven into an early grave by the lash of a mortgage on a farm, on a home, or on their business, put there in a misguided attempt to betray and impress others who could probably care less?

Debt has made more people miserable, ruined the peace of mind of more human beings, the comfort and the happiness of more homes, than almost anything else in the universe. It is a terrible thing to mortgage oneself to the point that we must make slaves of ourselves. How much better it is to live simply, to struggle on with less until we can improve our position. Why do we compromise ourselves with debt? Why do so many sell themselves to a large mortgage?

What an easy thing it is to borrow money, to sign a simple note or commit to a mortgage! We believe at the time that we can pay all right, but no one can be certain that things will go as planned and that our lives will not be riddled with adversity. No

one knows what the times may bring forth. No one knows whether his health and strength will be spared, or how soon he may be physically or mentally disabled.

The only true measure of real success is the quality of the ambition. If your ambition is ill conceived and misguided, if the quality is tainted with unflattering traits such as envy or jealousy - the results achieved will be less enjoyed or appreciated. False ambition creates only cheap and empty results.

It is an unfortunate thing that so many of our youth should start out in life with only one aim; simply to make money. This becomes the leading purpose in their lives and warps their way of looking at things. Everything is seen for only its monetary value. They do not consider benefits gained from making a quality life or building character; they are bent only on making money. This is their all-absorbing purpose.

The ultimate purpose that we adopt in our heart and hold steady in our mind, is the one that inevitably shapes our lives. The quality of our ambition, its true character, is reflected in everything we do. Think, therefore, what the negative influence must be when we focus all of our energies upon the moneymaking goal! When everything in us looks to money as the overriding goal, when our gaze is held persistently upon the almighty dollar and what it will bring, what must be the cost? It's difficult to overstate the tragedy, the fatal damage done to the soul when money is the priority. When money is the priority, it lessens our affections, friendships and our social sensibilities. When our priorities are cheapened for monetary gain, our relationships suffer.

Without quality relationships, what is there left in a person worth any value? Never sell yourself short by giving in to the quick dollar. It only leads to a place that isn't worth spending any real time.

This is why a youth who starts out with noble aspirations, with fine sensibilities and responsive affections, often becomes hardened in his business career. His finer sensibilities and more delicate faculties atrophy from disuse. His better self weakens as he overdevelops these harmful greedy and selfish traits.

The decline of a man or woman, as a result of greed, is so insidious that one does not half realize what is taking place until one day he finds himself stooping to scheming and plotting and underhandedness, which would have shocked him only a few years earlier.

Once a person adopts the tragic habits of the selfish, greedy monster that lives within each one of us, it is almost impossible to regain all that has been lost. The person often becomes the slave of the very thing he once despised and loathed.

It is always a question of what is the high purpose in the ambition, the dominant aim, that shapes the life most. When a man has pursued an unworthy goal for years and he has used up the very best of himself, when he has used all of his greatest energies to feed that unworthy ambition until it controls him, he has left himself to be a hollow - pitiable creature. There is no more distressing sight in the world than that of one who is completely in the clutches of a heartless, grasping, greed. Spurred on by the empty ambition which has taken possession of him, he madly

pursues the almighty dollar until he is deaf to all appeals of his finer self. The greedy man loses all taste for that which he once enjoyed so much.

Multitudes of people seem to think that if they were only in an ideal environment, they would be free from worry or anxiety. If only they were not strapped with financial problems, they would be free from pain and would enjoy vigorous health and they would be perfectly happy. In truth, our happiness is not so dependent for upon our environment or circumstances, as we sometimes imagine. False ambition, envy and jealousy are responsible for much of our uneasiness, our restlessness and our discontent. Our minds are so intent upon what other people have that we do not get a fraction of the enjoyment and satisfaction out of our own work and our possessions, that they should afford us.

An unhealthy ambition, a desire to get ahead of others, a mania to keep up appearances at all costs - all these things feed selfishness; eats away at our possible enjoyment, and destroys our very sources of happiness. The selfish and jealous ambition to get ahead of others in money making and to outshine others socially develops a pitiful disposition which is the root of unhappiness. No man with greed developed largely within him should expect to be happy. Neither contentment, satisfaction, nor any other member of the happiness family can exist in the presence of greed, or an over-developed, selfish ambition.

We have had some conspicuous examples of aspiring political figures that have put their personal ambition above their duty

to their party and their country. Time and time again, one or the other of the great political parties has been negatively impacted by a man who has placed his own personal ambitions against even his country's welfare.

It is a dangerous thing to put personal ambition above duty, but especially so to a politician or statesman who has been elected to serve and protect his constituents. He must never forget those who put him in his higher place.

We do not always know where our ambition's call will lead us, but we do know that by being loyal to a wholesome ambition and doing our best, our efforts will not be in vain. We must not allow our ambition to become perverted by selfishness, greed or self-gratification. By keeping our ambition clean it will lead to our best and highest welfare. When we follow the proper path, when we put ourselves in a position to give our ambition the best possible nourishment, it will lead us to the highest self-expression of which we are capable. Maintaining our honesty and integrity will give us our greatest satisfaction. We know, too, that when our ambition is perverted our lives go all awry; when we are defiant to the higher voice within us, we quickly become unhappy, inefficient, and our lives decline.

When a man becomes so infatuated with the mania for wealth, position or fame that he focuses his whole self, all his powers and energies, upon a false ideal,—upon a selfish, narrow goal, he develops only a very small part of himself.

Don't start out in life with a false standard. Always remember that “he lives most who lives truest to his best self.”

CHAPTER V

Ambition Knows No Age Limit

"It's never too late to be what you might have been."

— George Eliot

"I've got a great ambition to die of exhaustion rather than boredom."

— Angus Grossart

What has become of that something, which in your youth strengthened your determination? What has become of that something in you which would not let you rest, which robbed you of sleep, which constantly prodded you, bombarded you with visions of the great and wonderful things you were going to do in the future?

Unfortunately, one of the earmarks of old age is the cooling down of the fires of ambition. While they can continue to burn brightly, so long as you feel just as eager and as determined as in your younger days to do your level best, too often older people lose their vitality as they age. Some however, continue to get up and to get on in the world, to keep growing, to keep improving. These folks don't seem nearly as old as their years. Your years will increase steadily, but as long as a man aspires, as long as he is eager to grow, as long as he yearns and struggles to better his best - he is not old.

When we are getting along in years there is always a great temptation to make ourselves believe that we have a right to let

up a bit and to take things easier, to get rid of as much demand as possible. We have less and less inclination for the strenuous struggle to attain that which characterized our youth. The great danger here is that as we let up a bit in our efforts, our ambition will decline, all of our life standards will drop.

Many people are not quite as painstaking, not quite as particular when they get along in years as in their younger days. It is so much easier to simply slide along, not to trouble over one's dress and personal appearance, to hypnotize oneself into thinking, "Well, it does not matter very much now, I am too old to care what others think."

One of the most difficult things one is called upon to do as the years pass is to keep his ambition from dying. All persons, no matter what the age, should keep their ideals clear and clean-cut, and their interest in their work from getting tired or stale.

The secret of keeping the ambition fresh and bright is in keeping up the interest. The artist who is in love with his work, no matter how old, never loses his zest or his enthusiasm. He goes to his canvas in old age with all the interest and eagerness of his youth.

Many men and women age through sheer laziness, mental inertia, and indifference. They are only half alive. They are not willing to take the trouble to pay the price for perpetual youth, to keep their ambition from weakening.

Some people seem to think that the ambition to do a certain thing in life is a permanent quality which will remain with them. It is not. One of the first symptoms of age and deterioration in

one's work is the gradual, unconscious shrinking of one's ambition. There is no one quality in our lives that requires more careful watching and constant attention than our ambition, especially when we are advancing in years and do not remain in an atmosphere which tends to emphasize life's possibilities. Without realizing it we can easily become victims of the human inclination to take things easy, and to not exert ourselves very much.

No matter how high our youthful ambition, it is very easy to let it wane with the years, to allow our higher standards to drop. The moment we stop looking for ways to improve ourselves, to gain knowledge and wisdom, we begin to deteriorate, just as a child does when his mother ceases to pay strict attention to him and lets him have his own way. The tendency of the majority at every age of existence is to go along the line of least resistance, to take the easiest way. The human instinct to climb is continually at war with the lower tendency in later years that would drag it down. Even the noblest beings are not free from the struggle between their higher and lesser instincts. The human conflict within a person that goes on ceaselessly throughout our lifetime. It is only the triumph over our inclination to settle for less that keeps us on a healthy path for greater self improvement.

There is no more pitiable sight in the world than that of a person in whom ambition is dead,—a man who has repeatedly denied that inward voice which provides encouragement to press on, a man in whom ambition's fires have gone out from a lack of fuel. There is always hope for a person, no matter how bad he may be, as long as his ambition is alive; but once ambition is

gone, the driving motivation is missing, a downward spiral in one's life begins.

It requires a great deal of effort and a great variety of nourishment to keep the ambition vigorous. Unless it is well fortified it does not amount to anything. Ambition must be backed by a robust willpower, stern resolve, physical energy and endurance.

The habit of watching the ambition constantly and keeping it alive, is absolutely imperative to those who would keep it from deteriorating. Everything at some critical level depends on the vitality of our personal ambition.

If we lived our entire lives, thinking more like a personal trainer, there would not be such a dropping of standards with advancing years. A personal trainer realizes that our bodies are at their best when every muscle is pushed, tested, and utilized. Our minds, just like our muscles, decline quickly when they are not used. The decline becomes even more rapid as we advance into old age.

Whatever our ambition may be, nothing else can be quite so precious to us as life, and we want that life at its best. Every normal person dreads to see the mark of old age, the symptoms of decrepitude, and wants to remain fresh, buoyant and robust for as long as possible. Yet most people do not take sensible precautions to preserve their youth and vigor. They violate the laws of good health and longevity. They allow their bad habits to sap their vitality. Foolish and unnatural living becomes their ultimate downfall.

I have a friend who is always referring to his age. He has formed a habit of constantly dwelling upon his declining years, and keeping the picture of death and unnatural decline at the forefront of his mind. "You know, when a man gets old he can't stand what he once could," he will say. His cries for other's pity and attention take over his life and unfortunately can bring friends and family members to the breaking point.

The idea that our energies must begin to decline and the fires of our ambitions must die after a certain age, has a most destructive influence upon the mind. We must fight this silent urge to slow down. To take it easy and enjoy our "retirement". Retirement should be our time to do all the things we wanted to do but didn't, and to share our wealth of knowledge with those young enough to benefit from our life experience.

No one is really too old until the interest in life has gone out of him, until his spirit becomes aged, until his heart becomes cold and unresponsive. As long as he touches life at many points he can not grow old in spirit. A man is old, no matter what his years, when he is out of touch with youth, with its ideals, its points of view, out of touch with the spirit of his times; when he has ceased to be progressive and up-to-date.

Many of the grandest characters that ever lived have retained their youthful mentality up to the very last day of a long life. There was no deterioration in the mind of many who lived to be more than 100 years old. In their advanced years they showed no inclination to make less effort to grow. They did not allow any

cooling of their daily ambition, or any drop in their standards or ideals.

Many a man signs his death warrant when he retires from business. Retiring from business to many means practically retiring from life, that is, from real living, because they have nothing to retire to. They have not prepared themselves for retirement. They have no plans to take on anything outside of a routine daily existence. Too many of these professional men and women lost most of their friends during their quest for wealth and social standing. They have never fully developed their most rewarding faculties, their love of art, of music, or of reading. The whole life has gone into one business channel and as soon as they no longer can indulge in their life profession, they are lost.

Life means little without a purpose. Once his life aim is gone man simply exists—he does not really live. A high ideal, a lofty purpose and a noble aim, whatever tends to make man look up and struggle to improve, tends to better the condition of his health and prolongs his life. The soul that aspires, other things being equal, has the longest life. An aspiration for self-improvement is a long-lasting tonic for life; a healthy ambition stimulates all faculties, no matter what the age.

CHAPTER VI

Make Your Life Count

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great ones make you feel that you too, can become great."

— Mark Twain on Ambition

Everywhere we see men and women doing the bare minimum, they've created a daily routine of lower expectations. They appear to be satisfied to continue this routine all their lives, when they are perfectly capable and have the ability to do the higher things.

Many people do not start out with ambition enough to do big things. They make a large career practically impossible at the very outset, because they expect so little of themselves. They have a narrow, stingy view of life and of themselves which handicaps their ambition. They place themselves into a narrow, rutty, poverty-stricken groove.

If I could give the American youth only one word of advice, it would be the word which Michael Angelo wrote under a diminutive figure on a canvas in Raphael's studio. There he wrote the word, "Amplius," meaning "larger." Raphael needed no more reminding. This single word meant volumes to him.

I advise every person to adopt this motto – Larger! Frame it, hang it up in your room, in your office, any place where it will stare you in the face and provide you with encouragement to do

more. Continual reminders to expect more of yourself will make your life broader, deeper and more rewarding.

A fine ambition makes any life more steady and more rewarding. It holds us to our task; keeps us from yielding to the hundred temptations that might ruin us.

What chaos there would be if not man's natural ambition to get up and get on in the world and to improve his condition?

Nothing in life strengthens or provides more opportunity to a person as a constant effort to measure up to a worthy ambition. A solid ambition stretches our thoughts, which in turn introduces us to many of life's finer issues.

"I am determined to make my life count," said a poor young immigrant.

Now, there is a resolution that is worth while, because it is backed by a high ambition! This determined immigrant has a clear purpose to be someone, to make his life one of value and achievement.

Many inspired immigrants work hard during the day and study at night, improving themselves in every possible way in order to achieve their goals.

This is the sort of grit and desire that wins. This is the sort of material that has made America distinctive among all the nations of the earth. This is the sort of iron will and determination that gave us a Lincoln, an Andrew Jackson, a Thomas Edison,—all of our great leaders.

Could any one have a more noble ambition than this—to make his life count? One cannot imagine a failed life taking place

so long as this was the person's mantra during his time here on earth.

Our thoughts determine our actions. Our actions determine our results. Therefore, if we begin and continue life intending to be great and to do great things – it must be inevitable that we will look back on our lives and be pleased that we led a life that counted.

The trouble with many people is that they start out with no definite plan, no one unwavering aim for success. They have no noteworthy or worth while goal in view. They just look for a job. It may fit them or it may not, and they plod along, doing their work indifferently, with no spirit or ambition to push them to greater challenges and a higher place in life.

It is astonishing how many people there are who have no definite aim or ambition, but just exist from one day to another with no well-defined life plan. Although many of our youth have a clear realization of their responsibilities, and they have been raised with high ideals and lofty aspirations, we still see all about us young men and women aimlessly drifting. Sadly, they are throwing away precious time, without serious purpose or method in anything they do. They simply drift with the tide. If you ask one of them what he is going to do, what his ambition is, he will tell you he does not exactly know yet what he will do. He is simply waiting for a chance opportunity. Is he really?

Said the philosopher Monod, "Between the great things that we cannot do and the small things we will not do, the danger is that we shall do nothing".

It is not enough for success to have ability, education and health. Hundreds of thousands have all of these valuable traits and still fail, or live in mediocrity, because they do not supply their minds with an attitude or their body with a condition for achievement. Their ability is placed at a disadvantage by the lack of a large motivation, the stimulus of a worthy ambition.

"The important things in life is to have a great aim and to possess the aptitude and perseverance to attain it," says Goethe.

Of course, many people are hindered in the race through no fault of their own, but the vast majority of those who cease to climb and give up (often right in sight of their goal), do so from some weakness or defect. Many of them lack continuity of purpose or persistency; others lack courage or determination. Many of these unfortunate people would realize some real level of success if they could simply stick to their task.

If the motivation is big enough, the ability to answer it is usually available. There is not one of you, my friends, who could not be more alert, more original, more ingenious, more resourceful, more careful, more thorough, more level-headed; not one of you who could not use a little better judgment a little more forethought, a little more thoughtful, if you saw a tempting prize ahead of you as a reward.

"Whatever may be your ambition, play fair with yourself. Quit the side issues." Cut out the diversions. Live with and for your big ambitions!

Drop all else to attain your end result and you will win—you will be and you will have whatever it is that you want.

"Take a lesson in pruning and lop off the useless branches which consume vitality and obstruct the sunshine. Those late night meetings that interfere with rising early; that light reading that takes your mind off preparation for bigger things; those evening cocktails that are meant to relax you but only dull your ability to achieve greater goals, and all other wasteful habits. Have you cut them off? If you have not it is because you don't want the "larger thing" hard enough to deserve it, and you won't get it unless you prune off the useless habits that are diverting your energy and keeping you away from realizing the main dream.

"Success in life is a process of selection and elimination—a choosing between the worthless and the worth while. To get time for things that count you must save time by eliminating time wasters. Copy the athlete at the training table, feed on that which builds you up and keeps you fit for the struggle ahead."

Unless you are inspired by a great purpose, a resolute determination to make your life count, you will not make much of an impression upon the world. The difference in the quantity and quality of success is largely one of ambition and determination. If you lack these you must cultivate them vigorously, persistently, or you will become less than you were meant to be. I have never known anyone to make a place for himself in the world, who did not keep his purpose alive by the constant struggle to reach his goal. The moment ambition sags, we lose the force that propels us; and once our propelling power is gone we drift with the tide of circumstances.

"The youth who does not look up will look down, and the spirit that does not soar is destined to grovel."

A young stenographer said to me once that if she felt sure she had the ability to become an expert literary stenographer, she would go to evening school and would study nights and holidays, and improve herself in every possible way; but if she was convinced that she could never attain great speed, she would simply prepare herself for ordinary letter dictation, and let it go at that.

She did not seem to think that making the most possible of what ability she had would be enough to reach her ultimate goal. Because she lacked confidence in her own abilities, she resigned herself to accept the lesser of her desired outcomes. Think how far down she will drive herself if she continues to always accept the lesser option? See how life could quickly become a downward spiral? A much better choice for her would be if she decided from the beginning to reach for the moon. No matter where she ends up, she'll land among the stars. Becoming a star-catcher, versus a star-gazer, that would be the best possible training she could give herself. This would be the best possible investment she could make, and would give her infinite satisfaction.

The less ability you have, my young friend, the more important it is that you make the most possible out of it. Desire and a strong work ethic, fueled by an unwavering ambition, can provide a person with limited talent more opportunity than most folks who seem to naturally attract success. Life certainly does make way for the determined man or woman. We are all capable of greater things than we realize.

CHAPTER VII

Visualize Yourself in a Better Position

"Anybody can do just about anything with himself that he really wants to and makes up his mind to do. We are all capable of greater things than we realize."

— Norman Vincent Peale on Ambition

No matter what type of business you may be in, or whatever your profession, your prime ambition should be to excel in it. The love of excellence is the key trait that leads the world forward. It is this key trait that makes not only a successful business or professional, but also the all-round successful person in any endeavor.

Andrew Carnegie said, "I would not give a fig for the young man in business who does not already see himself a partner, or the head of the firm."

Do not be satisfied for a moment with a thought of yourself as a head clerk, foreman, or manager in any business or profession, no matter how big it is. Say each day to yourself, "My place is higher up." Be a king in your dreams. Vow that you will reach the position with untarnished reputation, and make no other vow to distract your attention.

I am frequently asked by young men and women whether I think they really have enough in them to make much of a success

in life, anything that will be distinctive or worth while, and I answer, "Yes, you have. I know you have the ability to succeed, but I don't know that you will. That rests entirely with you. If you have the energy and the will to succeed nothing can hold you back. But if you have no energy or desire, no amount of education, no prompting, no power on earth outside of yourself can push or lead or boost you into success.

There is nothing so important in your life as your mental attitude towards yourself, what you think of yourself, the model which you hold of yourself and your possibilities. If you see yourself as small, narrow, and dwarfed - your life will correspond.

You must see yourself above your current circumstance or you will never be anything higher than your present position. You must visualize yourself in a better position, and hold constantly a firm determination to reach it or you will never get there. Never for a moment blur your motive or weaken your determination by harboring a doubt of your ability to reach your goal. If you doubt yourself, how in the world can you expect others to see you as more than you currently are? Make certain that you self-talk is positive, energetic, enthusiastic. Ensure that your own thoughts are that of encouragement and support so that you can begin to be in the positive habit of healthy self-assuredness.

Remember, there is a partnership waiting for you somewhere if you are determined enough and have determination enough to take it. If you do not there is probably someone very near you who will do so, someone who perhaps has not had nearly as good an opportunity as you have had. And in the years to come, if you

do not take advantage of these opportunities to climb, you will no doubt, grumble at your "bad luck" and wonder how Billy or Johnny or Jo, who worked alongside of you, managed to jump past you and attain the partnership or coveted position.

A recent writer says: "My advice to all those just starting to travel life's turnpike is: " 'Don't start until you have your ideal. Then don't stop until you get it.' "

Very few of us realize how dependent our growth is on some special stimulus. Every act must have a motive. We do nothing outside of our automatic habitual acts without an underlying motivation. Perhaps the stronger life motive of the average person is that which comes from his desire to rise up in the world. Every successful person can quickly recall the one or many life experiences that provided massive fuel to their ambition. At some point in their life, they become greatly motivated to achieve. Perhaps their motivation came to them in a seminar, a book or a play, a special relationship or a sermon. Perhaps it came through the loss of a loved one or some other catastrophe. No matter was the root cause, be thankful for the inspiration to be better.

There was a force behind Lincoln which drove him from a log cabin up to the White House. There was a vision of the North Pole which haunted Peary, filled him with ambition to climb to the earth's uttermost boundary, and finally drove him, after repeated failures, to the Pole. The same unstoppable inner force urged the despised young Jew, Benjamin Disraeli, to push his way up through the lower and middle classes in England, up

through the upper classes, until he stood a master, self-poised, high atop the political and social power. He eventually became England's prime minister.

The story of these great men is quite similar in their beginning. They were continually urged forward and upward by some inward prompting that they could not resist.

This instinctive impulse to keep pushing onward and upward is the most curious and the most interesting thing in human life. It exists in every normal human being, and is just as pronounced and as real as the instinct of self-preservation. Upon this higher instinct for invent and achieve, rests the destiny of the human race. Without it men and women would still be savages, and living in caves and huts. Civilization, as we know it, would not exist. There would be no great cities, no great factories, no railroads, no steamships, no beautiful homes or parks. There would be no pictures, sculpture or books, if not for this mysterious urge which we call ambition.

The best of every person's work is above and beyond their current skill level. Improved results are accomplished as each person struggles to attain a more lofty ideal. The artist stands aside and often sees how she could have made her work better – even after a successful sale of her work. During a well prepared and practiced speech, the orator often becomes inspired with a thought or idea that provides an even higher level of eloquence to his message. In art and business, in science and even in the daily commonplace tasks of life, a motivated person will naturally gravitate toward the line of absolute excellence. Without

this hungry urge to achieve, our expectations of ourselves tend to quickly decay.

We do our most effective work as we struggle to get what we are after. Our ambition drives us to arrive at the goal. We put forth our greatest effort, our most strenuous struggle, while we are climbing, not after we have arrived at our goal. This is one reason why rich men's sons rarely achieve any great personal success.

Son's and daughters born to wealth, lack the climbing motivation inspired by necessity. They do not possess naturally that tremendous urge, the prodding of ambition which drives us on to achieve what we desire and are capable of attaining. Ambition is the leader of all great achievement. It is the forerunner which goes ahead and clears a way for others to pass.

Simple ambition is not always a safe guide, however. There are two wings to genius. Common sense and good judgment must accompany the ambition, or the unbalanced ambition will very often run away from the person. We have seen splendid pieces of machinery, whose iron fingers would punch holes through solid steel plates. The machinery accomplishes this wonderful feat because of a huge balance-wheel. It is the stored-up power, velocity, and momentum which enable it to accomplish this wonderful task. Take away the balance-wheel, and the machinery falls all to pieces the moment the balance-wheel is removed. The balance-wheel is the secret. Good judgment is man's balance-wheel—great common sense, horse sense if you will,

provides the perspective of a mature businessman or professional. Too often we look to hire the smartest, the most well educated, to fill our highest position. While it's difficult to overestimate the value of a quality education, no higher learning is complete without also possessing common sense and good judgment. Ambition will run away with the person who does not possess these.

The young man who overestimates his ability, who plunges beyond his depth, who is overconfident, whose self-trust is not based upon an accurate knowledge of his own ability, almost always comes to realize his shortcomings through disappointing results. It is just as necessary to know what you are not qualified for, and to let it alone, as to know what you can do, and do it well.

"Study yourself," says Longfellow, "and most of all, note well wherein nature meant for you to excel."

It takes a giant to do a giant's work. What a Morgan or a Carnegie would do with perfect ease and safety, at the moment might be impossible for you to accomplish. Certainly the work can be achieved by you, but only once you've taken the pains to lift yourself by your own boot straps. On the other hand, you may be able to do something which even a Morgan could not do. Study your own talents and skills. Try to get a measure of your own unique possibilities.

Early on a man should take an inventory of his ability and determine for himself where he belongs. If he has but one talent he should seek to master it, while also considering the benefits of developing new and innovative talents. Most likely this person

is competing against men and women with multiple talents. So it's imperative to make the most of what you have and seek to develop in several additional areas.

It's important to be diligent in your efforts, but not to the point of exhaustion. A great brain does a great thing quite easily. We all do our best work without overstraining. It is dangerous to our mind, body and spirit to over-tax our faculties.

I have seen a college student who has overstrained his brain until he has seriously damaged his health and mental wellbeing, all in the foolish effort to become the top honor student in his class when he was not a natural scholar. He seemed to think that by making a superhuman effort, studying all the time when others were at play, during holidays and Sundays, always studying, pushing and studying some more, — he could overcome any handicap. While he managed to come pretty near leading his class he never completely rallied from the effects of overwork and exhaustion.

It is a great thing to be able to measure our talents so accurately, to understand ourselves so thoroughly, that we will only take on that which we are fully able to accomplishing with pride and dignity.

CHAPTER VIII

Thwarted Ambition



YOUNG ABE LINCOLN STUDYING BY THE FIRELIGHT

"My philosophy of life is that if we make up our mind what we are going to make of our lives, then work hard toward that goal, we never lose – somehow we win out."

— Ronald Reagan on Ambition

All about us we see people who seem to have no special zest in life, no great enthusiasm for anything; there is a great disappointment somewhere in their lives. Why are they so unhappy?

No one loses his interest in life, or becomes indifferent to his work unless he has been thwarted in the carrying out of his ambition, or for some other reason has been unable to find his right place in life. Wherever we see discontent, unhappiness, unrest,

we may be sure that the person exhibiting these conditions has not identified his or her right place in life, and has no clear purpose. For some reason the heart has been cheated of its ideal.

There is no suffering in life that is so devastating as that which comes from the consciousness of no hope, or the smothering of our aspiration. To be aware that one clearly possesses an ability for some particular calling, yet the person for whatever reason is unable to follow his rightful path, can be a fatal set of circumstances. To break away from our current state of affairs in order to go after our calling requires supreme courage. To feel that there is no probability, or even possibility, of ever being able to change coarse to follow a dream is a feeling each person must take steps to avoid. Too often people go through the bulk of their life trying to be cheerful and hopeful and helpful to those they loves, while ignoring the personal costs of not beginning what they were put on this planet to accomplish. To sacrifice for others can be a noble thing, yet to suffer needlessly in silence will only make the heart sick. If you allow yourself to live life with a sick heart, you cannot give those you love your very best. Be the best you can be, and you will become even more to those you love.

It is very easy to criticize other people, who have not risen in the world, and perhaps at times we have done this. But they may be heroes compared to us. We can never tell what tragedies may be going on in their hearts, or from what turmoil they may be working to recover from. They may very well be suffering from disappointed ambition and blasted hopes. Too many women feel compelled to go through life without satisfying their ambition.

They sacrifice themselves to care for others. From a sense of duty, they put everyone and everything before themselves.

I know a beautiful woman, of charming personality, who has a great musical talent, a superb voice and yet, she scarcely dares mention the subject of music in the presence of her husband. She knows he would fly into a rage at the mere suggestion of her developing her wonderful talent.

All of her friends think it is criminal of her not to use her great gift but she feels forced to stifle her ambition. Her husband, although well able to meet the expense will not even consider her taking lessons or making any effort to improve her God-given talent. The result is that a dark cloud is setting itself upon this woman's life.

She tries to be cheerful and to do her duty; but those who understand her can see the slow strangulation processes going on, which is undermining her ambition and destroying her health.

I recently heard through a piano dealer of another woman of great musical talent who purchased a beautiful piano, that she had longed for, with money that she had inherited. Her husband made life so unbearable to her because of it that she returned the piano. The store owner, appreciating her position, generously returned to her the money she had paid for it.

Is there anything more cruel than to strangle a talent which was intended to be a perpetual joy as well as to give us success? Is there anything more wicked than to destroy personal aspirations; anything more cruel than to make a human being miserable who is intended to be happy? It should be a crime to rob

someone of all possibility of doing that which she was made to do? Yet there are thousands of people doing this to their mates, and they wonder why their spouse is not always cheerful and bubbling over with zest for life.

Many spouses do not mean to be selfish in their home life, and really believe they are generous, but their minds are so focused upon themselves and their own ambition that they can only think of their partner in reference to themselves. They need to understand that the highest love you can show to your spouse is one that supports him or her in obtaining their own success. Assist them in realizing their own individual dreams and desires.

There is nothing more pitiable than to see a person suffering from the self-inflicted wounds of a selfish ambition. To see a man advance himself at all costs, to gain fame, or notoriety, or pleasure, no matter who is sacrificed in the process.

Many women have a marvelous way of hiding their grief, covering up their disappointment; not wanting to offend or confuse their ambitious, workaholic husband. But hiding their true pain and despair only creates greater pain as more time passes.

There is something so utterly discouraging when a man or woman is forced to give up the career they long for. Their nature never entirely rallies from the shock. Everywhere we see these burned-out shells of individuals who have been robbed of their most excellent pursuit. They quite often give up, become ambitionless, restless, ineffective, mere pygmies of their possible selves.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox gives some wise advice that any dissatisfied and unhappy man or woman whose ambition has been thwarted may benefit from.

"Do not waste your vitality in hating your life; find something in it which is worth liking and enjoying, while you keep steadily at work to make it what you desire," she says. “Be happy over something every day, for the brain is a thing of habit, and you cannot teach it to be happy in a moment, if you allow it to be miserable for years."

There is a powerful medicine that you benefit from when you choose to hold the conviction that you are in this world for a purpose - that you are here to help, that you have a part to perform which no one else can complete for you. Only you can do your part because every one else has his own part to play in the great life drama. If you do not act out your role, there will be something lacking, a hole within in the entire production. No one ever amounts to much until he feels this pressure—that he was made to accomplish a certain thing in the world, to fill a definite part. Then life seems to take on a new meaning.

"Few of us," says Sir John Lubbock, "realize the wonderful privileges of living; the blessings we inherit, the glories and beauties of the Universe which are our own if we choose to have it so; the extent to which we can make ourselves what we wish to be; or the power we possess of securing peace, of triumphing over pain and sorrow."

We must go through life with our eyes steadily fixed on some distant goal, straining every nerve to reach it.

Man was made for growth; to realize peace, poise and satisfaction.

An ambition to be someone, to stand for more in the community, to push our horizon farther and farther away from us, to think a little higher each day, to think a little more of ourselves, to have a little more faith in ourselves and in others, an ambition to be of real use in the world is an ambition worthy of the person God created. An honorable ambition will most definitely bring happiness to the individual.

In the white light of history, before the tribunal of justice, we shall not be judged for what we seem to be or have achieved. Rather, we will be judged for what we are and by what we have tried to do.

In the final judgment, from which there is no appeal, many of our failures will be approved as successes, and many successes will be seen as personal failures.

Too often our youth start off in life believing they can achieve anything they set out to do. But at some place along the way, they allow a tiny doubt to creep into their mind. They make choices that place them around other youth with even lower self-esteem. As a result, their tiny doubt turns into one that is growing until at last, they give into it and let it overtake them. As the opportunity nears they determine that college is not for them. These unfortunate youth have stifled their ambition for no other reason than their own fear. Fear of what might happen if they fail, and worse yet, fear of what might take place if they were to succeed!

Too often a girl smothers her ambition for a higher education, in order to marry and keep a home of her own. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with marriage, but why at the expense of a solid education that would benefit her and those she loves for the rest of her lifetime? How grand she would be in the eyes of her future children if they grew up knowing she was an accomplished scholar. How much greater will her children's chances of realizing their higher calling be, if she were only to follow her own?

Throughout history we have witnessed unforgettable characters whose names will forever be inscribed on the success honor roll. Most of these names are completely unfamiliar to us, yet their stories are no less inspiring. They all share a quality of grit and determination and a personal commitment to help others that is unmatched by the masses. The names include those who tirelessly performed the most humble works in life; the unknown workers for humanity, the heroic sufferers,—some blind, some crippled or handicapped, or stricken by incurable disease,—who, with an iron will and personal fortitude, took ownership of life's burdens and bravely made the most of the powers and opportunities bestowed upon them by their creator.

CHAPTER IX

Why Don't You Begin?

"It is common sense to take a method and try it.
If it fails, admit it frankly and try another.
But above all, try something"

— Franklin D. Roosevelt on Ambition

When do you expect to do the wonderful things you have been dreaming about? Why don't you begin? What are you waiting for? Why don't you start? Are you waiting for a "good opportunity" to present itself? Are you waiting to be invited in or supported by others? Are you expecting someone else to provide your motivation?

Do you know that there is nothing more demoralizing in life or more weakening to our character, than to be constantly wishing and dreaming of the great things we are going to do without making a corresponding effort toward making it happen? Wishing without a corresponding effort to realize our dreams degenerates the mind and destroys our initiative.

How many people deceive themselves into thinking that if only they keep wishing to reach their ambition, somehow they will, without any other effort?

They do not seem to know that there is such a thing as aspiring too much. In other words, at some key point your aspiration must turn into action or nothing will be accomplished.

Our visions are the plans for what is possible in our life; but they will end merely in plans if we do not persistently follow them up with a vigorous effort to make them real. As an example, the architect's plans will end as mere drawings if they are not followed up and made real by the builder.

Three things we must do to make our dreams come true. 1) *Visualize our desire. 2) Concentrate on our vision. 3) Work to make it real.* The tools and resources necessary for this to happen are inside of each of us. So long as we possess a health mind and heart, we can overcome any obstacles to make our dreams a reality.

All men and women who have achieved great things have been dreamers, and what they have accomplished has been just in proportion to the vividness, the energy and persistency with which they visualized their dreams; held to their ideals and struggled to make them come true.

Theodore N. Vail said, "There is a crying shame of the young man who enters the business world today with a lack of vision, preparation or thoroughness. He may possess ambition but without the willingness to struggle to gain his desired end, he will not succeed."

It is one thing to have the ability and the desire to do something distinctive, something individual, but actually engaging oneself and doing it is a very different thing. There is a tremendous amount of ability that is wasted and unproductive. This is the great failure of so many people that remained handicapped with low expectations. Why doesn't every human being with the

ability make something of themselves? Many of these people could be prosperous, successful and of high standing in their community. Instead, we have people who give over their lives to drugs, alcohol, and other cancerous habits that make them weak and powerless. They had the opportunity to make good. Why didn't they? Many can still turn their lives around and start anew. Why don't they?

It is a good thing to ask ourselves every now and then whether we are making good; whether we are making the most of our opportunities; whether we are going up or down. Oliver Wendel Holmes says it does not matter so much where we stand as the direction in which we are moving.

In what direction are you moving?

There are thousands of people in this country today who have splendid ambitions, who have made resolutions to carry out those ambitions, but who are cowering victims of doubt, which keeps them from making a start. They are just waiting. They are unable to make a beginning while this monster stands at the door of their resolution. They are afraid to burn their bridges behind them, to commit themselves to their purpose.

At the very outset of your career it is best to make up your mind that you are going to be a conqueror in life; that you are going to be the king of your mental realm and not a slave to any treacherous enemy that would stifle your energy. Decide that you will choose the wisest course and no matter how difficult the challenge, you will remain persistent toward meeting your goals and realizing your life ambition. Don't let your own doubt, or

others, minimize your efforts. Don't let fear paralyze your beginning. Do not settle for making only half an effort when you possess the energy and talent to become a giant in your field. Confidence, self-assurance, self-faith— these are the great friends which will kill the traitor known as - doubt.

The fact that you have an almost uncontrollable impulse, a great absorbing ambition to do something that meets with the approval of your best judgment and your better self, is a notice served upon you that you CAN do it, and you should do it at once!

Do not be afraid of taking responsibilities. Make up your mind that you will assume any responsibility which comes to you along the line of your legitimate career and that you will carry it out better than anyone else has before you. There is no greater mistake in the world than that of postponing present responsibility, thinking that we will be better prepared to assume at a later time. It is accepting these positions as they come to us that gives us the experience; for we can do nothing of importance easily or effectively, until we have done it so many times that it becomes a habit.

How often we hear people make remarks like this: "I know that I ought to do this thing today, but I do not believe I will," or "I do not feel like doing this right now, maybe later." Armed with these do-nothing thoughts, they allow themselves to procrastinate, or let the time slide along, and do just the opposite to what they know they ought to do.

If those who are disappointed with what they have so far accomplished, would only make up their minds that for one month

they would force themselves to do the things they dislike, but which they know would be for their own good - they would find themselves on a new start on the road to success. They would see brighter days ahead, for themselves and for what is possible. Their entire work and life experience would be raised to a higher ideal.

Our ultimate destination is greatly dependant upon our stern resolve to do the things which are best for us - no matter how disagreeable or humiliating; no matter how much we may suffer from the anxiety that comes with our inexperience.

Why be afraid to demand great things of yourself? Affirm your ability to do and be and powers which you never dreamed you possessed will leap to your consciousness. "Trust thyself. Every heart vibrates to that iron ambition."

There is no one that can shut the door to your ambition, to a larger, fuller life, but yourself. There are no obstacles, no difficulties, no power on earth, nothing but yourself that can make God's promise to man null and void: "Behold, I have set before you an open door which no man can shut."

We all possess great reservoirs of power, and what we make of ourselves, what we achieve in life, is not dependent on the outward things, but on the extent to which we draw on our own hidden forces, our natural talents and resources.

Whatever comes to us in life we create first in our mind. As the building is a reality in all its details in the architect's mind before a single stone or brick is laid, so do we create mentally

everything which later becomes a reality in our own achievement. Our hearts desires, our greatest aspirations, are something more than mere thoughts. These are in actuality prophecies, predictions of things that can become our future reality.

Hold firm to your vision. Create a clear picture in your mind. Develop the plan of the man or woman you long to be and that you are resolved to be, and stick to your mental plan of a glorious future. Do not give up in your discouraged moments or allow any obstacle to blur your view of what's coming. Persist in visualizing the ideal person you are determined to be, and always think of yourself as though you are already that successful person. This mental attitude will help you to match your dream with its reality. There is a magnetic, attractive power in such a mighty purpose, an unwavering aim. This sort of positive mental attitude and effort will establish your relation between yourself and the thing you are seeking. Resign yourself to greatness. Expect more of yourself than any other person would expect. Set your goals higher than the goals set for you. Associate yourself with only those people who are going somewhere you want to reside. Take ownership of your present day situation and never allow yourself to blame or convict others for your reality. Take ACTION daily toward your ambition. Start today – then start again everyday thereafter. You CAN achieve your great ambitions in life!

The End

PUT THIS VOLUME TO WORK

Keep Going

Marden's advice comes down to one habit, and that's turning ambition into a plan you work on every week. The companion workbook gives you the questions for each chapter, and these free resources help you write the plan down and keep it moving.

- **Ambition Companion Workbook** Questions and exercises for all nine chapters.
- **Personal Development Plan Templates to Fuel Your Ambition** Step 1 of the 10 Steps series, on putting your ambition into a written plan.
- **Master Action Plan (M.A.P.)** Keep your goals and next actions on one page.

THE LEADERSHIP SERIES FOR SUCCESSFUL LIVING

VOLUME ONE	**Ambition**
VOLUME TWO	Character
VOLUME THREE	The Hour of Opportunity
VOLUME FOUR	Diligence: Do It to a Finish
VOLUME FIVE	Persistence: An Iron Will

Each volume comes with the ebook, the audio edition and a companion workbook, free at **Leadership-Tools.com**.