LEADERSHIP SERIES FOR SUCCESSFUL LIVING

VOLUME FOUR



Diligence
Do It to a Finish

"Thoroughness, taking infinite pains, precedes all success."

ORISON SWETT MARDEN

Edited and narrated by Richard Gorham

Leadership-Tools.com

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VOLUME FOUR

Diligence

Do It to a Finish

Based on the original edition of
Do It to a Finish (1909)

ORISON SWETT MARDEN
Author of Pushing to the Front

Edited for ebook and audio by
Richard Gorham

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

Orison Swett Marden published *Do It to a Finish* in 1909. 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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CONTENTS

The Crime of Carelessness 1
The Relation of Work to Character 6
Blunders That Cost a Million Dollars a Day 11
The Difference Between Artist and Artisan 16
Second-Class Men and Women 23
Thoroughness, the Handmaid of Genius 28
That Fatal “Almost” 35
What Every Employer Is Looking For 39
Where Only the Best Is Good Enough 43

CHAPTER I

The Crime of Carelessness

Many years ago a relief life-boat at New London sprung a leak, and while being repaired a hammer was found in the bottom that had been left there by the builders thirteen years before.

From the constant motion of the boat the hammer had worn through the planking, clear down to the plating.

In another instance, it was discovered that a young girl had served twenty years for a twenty month sentence, in an Alabama prison, because of the mistake made by a court clerk who wrote "years" instead of "months" in the formal record of the prisoner's sentence.

The history of the human race is full of the most horrible tragedies caused by carelessness and the inexcusable blunders of those who never formed the habit of accuracy, of thoroughness, of doing things to a complete finish.

Multitudes of people are hobbling around on one leg, have lost an eye or an arm, or are otherwise maimed, because dishonest workmen wrought deception into the products they manufactured; they cheated their employer and slighted their work, covered up defects and weaknesses in the product with paint and varnish.

How many innocent people have lost their lives because of dishonest work, carelessness and criminal blundering in railroad construction, for example? Think of the tragedies caused by lies packed in car-wheels, locomotives, steamboat boilers, and engines; lies in defective rails, ties, or switches; lies in dishonest labor put into manufactured material by workmen who said it was good enough for the meager wages they got! Simply because people were not conscientious in their work there were flaws in the steel, which caused the rail or pillar to snap, the locomotive or other machinery to break. The steel shaft once broke on a ship sailing in the middle of the ocean, and the lives of a thousand passengers were jeopardized because of somebody's carelessness.

How many serious accidents have occurred because of a lack of care in the casting of steel girders and all sorts of iron building material! Even before they were completed, buildings have fallen and buried the workmen under their ruins, because somebody was dishonest in his workmanship — employer or employee — and his dishonesty left only lies and deceptions, into the material of the building.

A big mill in a manufacturing city in Massachusetts fell one day while in full operation. The ruins accidentally took fire, and sadly, one hundred and twenty-five lives were sacrificed.

The disaster was the result of the grossest carelessness of the superintendent, or master-builder. Iron columns were put in that were defective in casting. They were thin as paper on one side, and as thick as a plank on the other, when they should have

been measured equally and true to a hair-line fraction all around. When the pressure came upon them, they were quickly broken, and botched work claimed a holocaust of human lives.

Some time ago the world was startled by the collapse of a great bridge in Canada, which caused the loss of many precious lives and millions of dollars in property. The newspaper reports of the disaster stated, "twenty thousand tons of steel, which had in the course of several years been laboriously worked into the south arm of a great bridge over the St. Lawrence River at Quebec, suddenly crumpled up like cardboard and fell into the river, carrying with it nearly a hundred human beings. Of these over seventy were crushed to death or drowned. Besides this terrible loss of life the disaster must have cost the builders of the bridge millions of dollars — all wiped out of existence in only a few seconds." Before the investigating committee appointed by the Canadian government to inquire into the matter, Mr. Theodore Cooper, the consulting engineer of the bridge, an expert in his profession, gave the following testimony:

"I believe if prompt action had been taken to protect chord nine west (the section of the bridge under suspicion) from further deflection, which could have been done by the employment of three hours' work and one hundred dollars' worth of timber and bolts, the defects and deficiencies which we now recognize in the compression chords and members could, at a later date, have been corrected, and the bridge could have been made perfectly safe and sufficient for its intended purpose."

Here was a double crime; carelessness or negligence on the part of the constructing engineers or some of those employed in building the bridge in the first place, which made the collapse at all possible; in the second place, criminal carelessness on the part of those responsible for the condition of the bridge, who might have prevented the fatal accident by the exercise of a little ordinary care and intelligence, the expenditure of a few hours' work and a hundred dollars' worth of material!

The majority of railroad wrecks, of disasters on land and sea, which cause so much misery and cost so many lives are the direct result of carelessness, thoughtlessness, or half-done botched and blundering work. They are the evil fruit of the low ideals of slovenly, careless, indifferent workers; selfish, self-centered people who expect everything of others, but never from themselves.

Everywhere over this broad earth we see the tragic results of botched work. Wooden legs, armless sleeves, numberless graves, fatherless and motherless homes everywhere speak of somebody's carelessness, somebody's blunders, somebody's habit of inaccuracy.

The worst crimes are not punishable by law. Carelessness, a lack of thoroughness, are crimes against self, against humanity, that often do more harm than the crimes that make the perpetrator an outcast from society. Where a tiny flaw or the slightest defect may cost a precious life, carelessness is as much a crime as deliberate criminality.

If everybody put his conscience into his work, did it to a complete finish, it would not only reduce the loss of human life, the

mangling and maiming of men and women, to a fraction of what it is at present, but it would also give us a higher quality of manhood and womanhood. It takes honest work to make an honest character. The habit of doing poor, slovenly work will, after a while, make the worker dishonest in other things.

The man who habitually slights his work slights his own character. Botched work makes way for a botched life. Our work is a part of us. Every half-done job you let go through your hands diminishes your competence, your efficiency, your ability to do good work. It is an offense against your self-respect, an insult to your highest ideal. Every inferior piece of work you do is an enemy which pulls you down, keeps you from getting on in life.

CHAPTER II

The Relation of Work to Character

Nothing kills ambition or lowers the life standard quicker than familiarity with inferiority— that which is cheap, the "cheap John" method of doing things. We unconsciously become like those with whom we are regularly associated. It becomes part of us, and the habit of doing things in an inferior, slovenly way weaves its fatal defects into the very texture of the character, and becomes part of a lower life standard.

Most young people think too much of quantity, and too little of quality in their work. They try to do too much, and do not always take the time and care necessary to doing it well. They do not realize that the education, the comfort, the satisfaction, the general improvement and bracing up of the whole man that comes from doing one thing absolutely right. If only they understood the importance of putting the trademark of one's character into the final product; realizing how that one act far outweighs the lesser value of doing a thousand botched or lazy jobs.

We are so easily influenced that the quality which we put into our life-work affects everything else in our lives, and tends to bring our whole conduct to the same level. The entire person takes on the characteristics of one's usual way of doing things. The habit of precision and accuracy strengthens the mentality

and improves the whole character. On the contrary, doing things in a loose-jointed, slipshod, careless manner deteriorates the whole mentality, demoralizes the mental processes, and pulls down the quality of the entire life-experience.

Every half-done or slovenly job that goes out of your hands leaves its trace of demoralization behind, takes a bit away from your self-respect. After slighting your work, after doing a poor job, you are not quite the same man or woman you were before.

You are not so likely to try to keep up the quality of your work, not so likely to regard your word as sacred as before. You incapacitate yourself for doing your best in proportion to the number of times you allow yourself to do inferior work. The more you accept mediocrity in your work, the easier it is for you to accept all the lesser things in your life.

The mental and moral effect of half doing, or carelessly doing things; its power to drag you down, to demoralize you, can hardly be estimated because the processes are so gradual, so subtle. No one can respect himself who habitually cheats his work, and when self-respect drops, confidence goes with it; and when confidence and self-respect have gone, excellence is impossible.

It is astonishing how completely a lazy habit will gradually, insidiously fasten itself upon the individual and so change his whole mental attitude. As a result, his prospect for achieving his life-purpose is greatly diminished, even though he is unaware and may think he is doing his level best.

I know a man who was extremely ambitious to do something very distinctive and who had the ability to do it. When he started

on his career he was very exact and painstaking in his efforts. He always demanded the best of himself — he would not accept his second-best in anything. The thought of slighting his work was painful to him, but his mental processes have so deteriorated, and he has become so demoralized by the habit of always accepting less, he does it now without a protest, seemingly without even being conscious of it. He is today doing quite ordinary things, without apparent care or any sense of humiliation, and the tragedy of it all is, he does not know how his heart and mind were so quickly imprisoned!

One's ambition and ideals need constant watching and cultivation in order to keep the standards up. Many people get so set in their ways that their ambition wanes and their ideals drop when they are alone, or when they surround themselves with careless, indifferent people. They require the constant assistance, suggestion, prodding, or example of others to keep them up to a higher standard.

I recall a once prominent man who, until the death of his wife, had very high ideals and a lofty aim; a man who was extremely painstaking and careful in everything, who would never accept anything from himself but the best he was capable of. However, once he was living alone, he gradually dropped his lofty standards, neglected his appearance, and grew so slovenly in his personal habits, that he became repulsive to the eye, and yet he was, apparently unconscious of the change in him that those around him witnessed.

How quickly a youth of high ideals, who has been well trained in thoroughness, often deteriorates when he leaves home and goes to work for an employer with inferior ideals and dishonest methods!

The introduction of inferiority into our work is like introducing subtle poison into the system. It paralyzes the normal functions. Inferiority is an infection which affects the entire system. It dulls ideals, palsies the aspirations, stupefies the ambition, and causes deterioration all along the line of the one afflicted.

The human mechanism is so masterfully aligned that whatever goes wrong in one part affects the whole structure. There is a very intimate relation between the quality of our work and the quality of our character.

Did you ever notice the rapid decline in a young man's character when he began to slight his own work, to shirk responsibility, to slip into lazy hours, and display rotten service?

If you should ask the inmates of our penitentiaries what had caused their lives to ruin, many of them could trace the first signs of deterioration back to when they began shirking responsibility, cheating on their hours, deceiving their employers — to being indifferent and adopting dishonest work habits.

We were made to be honest. Honesty is our normal expression, and any departure from it demoralizes and taints the whole character. Honesty means integrity in everything. It not only means reliability in your word, but also carefulness, accuracy and honesty in your work. Honesty with integrity means that not only you will not lie with your lips, you will also never lie and

defraud others with the quality of your work. Honesty means wholeness, completeness; it means truth in everything — in our deeds and in our word.

You must also not steal another person's time, you must not steal goods or ruin his property by half-finishing or botching your work, by working carelessly or with indifference. Your contract with your employer means that you will give him your best, not just your second-best will do.

Aside from the question of honesty and its effect on your body and mind, you can't afford to give the worst of yourself to the man who hires you to do your best, for your lack of honest effort will always come back to cause you pain and discomfort.

"What a fool you are," said one workman to another, "to be so diligent and to make so much effort with that job, when you don't get much pay for it. 'Get the most money for the least work,' is my rule, and I get twice as much money as you do." "That may be," replied the other, "but I shall like myself better, I shall think more of myself, and that is more important to me than money."

You will like yourself better when you have the approval of your conscience. That will be worth more to you than any amount of money you can pocket through fraudulent, skimped, or botched work. Nothing else can give you the glow of satisfaction, the electric thrill and uplift which comes from having completed a superbly-done job. Perfect work harmonizes with the very principles of our being, because we were made for perfection. It fits our very nature.

CHAPTER III

Blunders That Cost a Million Dollars a Day

Some one once said: "It is a race between negligence and ignorance as to which can make the most trouble."

Many a young man is being kept down by what probably seems a small thing to him — negligence, or a lack of accuracy. He never quite finishes anything he undertakes; he cannot be depended upon to do anything quite right; his work always needs an inspection by someone else with a more devoted stare for the details. Hundreds of clerks and bookkeepers are receiving small salaries in poor positions today because they have never learned to do things absolutely right the first time.

A prominent businessman says that the carelessness, inaccuracy, and blundering of employees costs many cities more than a million dollars a day. The manager of a large Chicago firm says that he has to place covert lookouts here and there throughout the establishment in order to neutralize the evils of inaccuracy and a dishonest work habit. One of John Wanamaker's partners says that unnecessary blunders and mistakes cost that firm thousands of dollars a year. The dead letter department of the Post Office in Washington receives millions of pieces of undelivered mail. Of these, a very large portion are sent without any address

listed, none whatsoever. A great many of them were from businesses. Are the clerks that are responsible for this carelessness likely to win the next best opportunity or promotion? No, not likely.

Many employees would be shocked at the thought of telling his or her employer a lie with his lips. Yet, he'll not hesitate to lie every day in the quality of his work; in his dishonest service; in the rotten hours he is recording; in shirking any sort of personal ownership; in the indifference he displays toward his employer's interests. It is just as dishonest to express deception in poor work, as to express it from the voice. Yet, too often office employees, who could not be induced to tell their employer a direct lie, have no apparent issue with stealing his time when on an errand, to hide away during working hours to smoke a cigarette or even in some cases, to take a nap. Is it that they do not realize that lies can be acted as well as told and that acting a lie may be even worse than telling one? To the contrary, I would wager that they do know, deep down, the standard they are setting. Yet, although they know it is wrong, they rationalize and make every effort to minimize the importance of the act. They refuse to see the significance of just one lowly act, or to recognize the negative impact it has on their future chances for a successful life.

Every man who makes the selfish choice to live with dishonesty, untruthfulness; and allows himself to be wasteful, deteriorates. The man who botches his work, who lies or cheats in the goods he sells or manufactures, who uses weak, poor or inferior material where it may be covered up with paint and varnish is

dishonest with himself and with his fellow men, and he will pay the price in loss of self-respect, loss of character, and of his standing in his community.

Yet on every side we see all sorts of things selling for a song because the maker put no character, no thought or real effort into them. Articles of clothing that look stylish and attractive when first worn, very quickly get out of shape, and hang and look like old, worn-out garments. Buttons fly off, seams give way at the slightest strain, dropped stitches are everywhere, and often the entire article goes to pieces before it is worn half a dozen times. Many people never think of putting on a ready-made garment until the buttons are sewn on again, and often the seams re-stitched.

Everywhere we see furniture, which looks all right, but in reality is full of blemishes and weaknesses that are covered up with putty and paint. Chairs and bedsteads break down at the slightest provocation, castors come off, handles pull out, and many things "go to pieces" altogether, even while practically new on the showroom floor.

I have known a buggy to collapse completely before it had been in use for only three months. The bright and shiny finish already peeled off to reveal unsafe spokes, knotted wood, open joints and all sorts of slovenly work.

"Made to sell, not for service," would be a good label for the great mass of manufactured articles in our markets today. If the half-made manufactured products could only come out from their disguises, and speak the truth, they would say, "Don't buy

me, you poor laboring soul. I was made only to sell, not for quality to service. Not even the wealthy man can afford such extravagance and waste. Beware to the consumer, I shall go all to pieces before I am only half worn out."

The cheap, shoddy articles of clothing would say, "Don't buy me. My buttons will fly off, and my seams will rip the first time you wear me. I shall very quickly get out of shape, and the first time I get wet my shoddy material will reveal my deception."

The painted and varnished woodwork would say; "Don't judge me by my appearance. There are lots of lies under my cover, lies of rotten, cross-grained, knotty wood, and gaping joints, covered up by a coat of putty, paint, and varnish. I am only for show, not for use."

It is sometimes difficult to find anything that is well and honestly made, that has true character built into it, with a stamp of pride of individuality and thoroughness placed upon it. Most things are just thrown together. This slipshod, dishonest manufacturing is so general that the businesses that turn out products based upon honesty and truth quickly win for themselves a world-wide reputation and more easily command the highest prices.

Probably not one woman in America would reject a present of jewelry or silverware from Tiffany's. But many women may reject one from another house of lesser reputation. Why? Because the name Tiffany is packed full of character, because it has a reputation, which it has taken nearly a century to earn; the name is synonymous with reliability, quality and fairness. People who

trade at Tiffany's know that whether they purchase personally or by mail, they are not going to be swindled. They know that no lies, no botched, half-made or dishonest pieces are sold in that house.

There is no other advertisement like a good reputation. Some of the world's greatest manufacturers have regarded their reputation as their most valued possession, and under no circumstances would they allow their names to be put on an imperfect product. Vast sums of money are often paid for the use of a name, because of its great reputation for integrity and square dealing. There are companies in New York whose trademarked name alone would probably sell for millions of dollars, because they are synonymous with integrity. The name embodies goodwill and has earned the public confidence, their trust and loyalty. There was a time when the names of Graham and Tampion on timepieces were guarantees of the most exquisite workmanship and of unquestioned integrity. Strangers from any part of the world could send their money and order goods from those manufacturers without a doubt that they would be squarely dealt with.

Graham made the Greenwich Observatory clock, which furnished the standard time to the nations.

Tampion and Graham lie in Westminster Abbey because of the accuracy of their work — because they refused to manufacture and sell lies. By protecting their reputation from tarnish or decay, they ensured their rightful place in history, and they set a high standard for their industry and indeed, their nation.

CHAPTER IV

The Difference Between Artist and Artisan

When you finish a thing you ought to be able to say to yourself: "There, I am willing to stand for that piece of work. It is not pretty well done; it is done as well as I can do it; done to a complete finish. I will stand for that. I am willing to be judged by it."

Never be satisfied with "fairly good," "pretty good," or "good enough" Accept nothing short of your best. Put such a quality into your work that anyone who comes across anything you have ever done will see character in it, individuality in it, your trademark of superiority upon it.

Your reputation is at stake in everything you do, and your reputation is your most prized capital. You cannot afford to do a poor job, to let botched work or anything that is inferior go out of your hands and into the open market.

Every bit of your work, no matter how unimportant or trivial it may seem, should bear your trademark of excellence; you should regard every task that goes through your hands, every piece of work you touch, as Tampion regarded every watch that went out of his shop. It must be the very best you can do, the best that human skill can produce. It is the fine little difference between the good and the best that makes the difference between the artist and the artisan. It is the smallest of details that make

all the difference. When the average man would quit, the superior man or women will go the extra mile, make the extra effort to make the picture worthy of the master's fame.

Regard your work as Stradivarius regarded his violins, which he "made for eternity," and not one of which was ever known to come to pieces or break. When a piece of work leaves your hand it should bear your recommendation, the hallmark of your character.

Stradivarius did not need any patent on his violins, for no other violin maker would pay such a price for excellence as he was willing to pay; no other would take such pains to put his stamp of superiority upon his instruments. He was determined from the outset to make his name on a violin worth something special, to make it a trademark which would protect and embolden the instrument all the world over. His reputation was his patent; he needed no other. Every "Stradivarius" now in existence is considered to be priceless and unmatched in quality.

Think of the value such a reputation for thoroughness as that of Stradivarius or Tampion, such a passion to give quality to your work, would give you! There is nothing like being enamored for accuracy, being grounded in thoroughness as a life-principle, of always striving for excellence.

No other characteristic makes such a strong impression upon an employer as the habit of painstaking effort, carefulness, and accuracy. He knows that if a youth puts his whole conscience into his work out of principle, not merely from the standpoint of salary, but because there is something in the young worker which

refuses to accept anything from himself but his very best, the employer will be confident that the youth is honest and made of good material.

I have known many instances where advancement hinged upon the little added effort, extra interest that an employee might put into his work, on his doing a little better than was expected of him. Employers are no fools. They do not say all they think, but they detect very quickly the earmarks of superiority. They keep their eye on the employee who has the stamp of excellence upon him, who takes pains with his work, who does it to a complete finish. They recognize the diligent man or woman, the one of the few who has a solid future.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., says that the "secret of success is to do the common duty uncommonly well." The majority of young people do not see that the steps which lead to the position above them are constructed, little by little, by the faithful performance of the common, humble, every-day duties of the position they are now filling. The thing that you are now doing will either unlock or bar the door to your next promotion.

Many employees are looking for some great thing to happen that will give them an opportunity to show their mettle, to display the stuff from which they are made. "What can there be," they say to themselves, "in this dry routine, in doing these common, ordinary things, to help me along?" But it is the youth who sees a great opportunity hidden in just the simple chores, who sees a very uncommon chance in a common situation, an opportunity to shine from even a humble position, who will ultimately

get on in the world. It is in doing things a little better than those about you do them; being a little neater, a little quicker, a little more accurate, a little more observant. It is the ingenuity one displays in finding new and more progressive ways of doing old things; it is being a little more polite, a little more obliging, a little more tactful, a little more cheerful and optimistic, a little more energetic and helpful than those around you - that attracts the attention of your employer and his competitors.

The employer marks many young people for a higher position long before they are aware of it. It may be months, or it may be a year before the opening comes, but when it does come the one who has demonstrated the infinite difference between "good" and "better", between "fairly good" and "excellent," between what others call "good enough" and the best workmanship that can be done, these will be the ones more likely to get the next promotion, the next higher place.

One of the earmarks of success is diligence, the desire to do things to a finish; to be as particular in doing small things as in doing big things. The girl who is going to succeed is not satisfied to do anything "pretty well," or to leave things half finished. Nothing but completion to perfection will satisfy the demand in her for the best. It is those who have this imperative demand for doing their best, for doing things right, who will accept nothing short of it, that hold the banners of progress, that set the standards and the highest ideals for others.

One of the most successful men I know stamped his individuality upon everybody who knew him by this constant desire for

the highest and the best in everything. No one could induce him to do anything half way, or to accept an inferior work when a better outcome was within his reach. Whether it was the quality and the style of his clothing, or of anything he bought, he would allow nothing around him, which was not the best available. Even when poor and trying to get a start for himself, when others patronized cheap restaurants and obtained lesser rooms in cheap locations, he would have none of this. He believed that his success depended largely upon following high ideals, upon keeping himself up to a higher quality, upon his making a good impression, and he would not have anything to do with cheap or shoddy things. He shrank from inferiority, and avoided it as if it were poison, believing that it would taint his ideals, lessen his ambition, and lower his standards. No cheap, ill-printed books; no cheaply made clothing; no poverty-stricken rooms for him. He had to have the best or nothing.

His friends thought that it was foolish and destructive for him, when trying to establish himself in his profession, to spend his entire income in keeping up appearances or trying to keep in touch with the best people. He always considered that it was worth every penny, however, to connect himself with people of culture and refinement, people of means, because he expected they would be his patrons later in life. He believed that social success was important to his professional success, and for that reason he regarded his ties with the higher classes as an invaluable strategy.

Although he had a hard struggle at first, he has attained great distinction, and has been a marvel to his schoolmates and those who knew him in early life as a poor boy, and who laughed at the lofty standard which he set for himself. The main value of this man's career is in its suggestion that we should allow nothing to enter our lives that will deteriorate our ideals or lower our standard of quality. His example teaches us that keeping company with the best, doing our best, insisting upon the best everywhere and always will have a marked influence in elevating the life to the standard one adopts.

> **NOTE**
> This author does caution his readers, however, to be very leery of living a lifestyle that does not match your pocketbook. Too much debt has killed a man’s dream too often throughout our history.

If there is that in your nature, which demands the best and will take nothing less; if you insist on keeping up your standards in everything you do, you will achieve distinction in some line provided you have the persistence and determination to follow your ideal.

But if you are satisfied with the cheap and shoddy, the botched and the slovenly, if you are not particular about quality in your work, or in your environment, or in your personal habits, then you must expect to take second place, or worse, to fall back to the rear of the procession.

People who have accomplished work that is worthwhile have had a very high sense of the way to do things. They have not been content with mediocrity. They have not confined themselves to

the well traveled paths; they have never been satisfied to do things just as others do them, but always a little better, with a little more quality and usefulness. They always pushed things that came to their hands a little higher up, a little farther on. It is this little higher up, this little farther on, that counts in the quality of life's work. It is the constant effort to be first-class in everything one attempts that conquers the heights of excellence.

CHAPTER V

Second-Class Men and Women

It is said that Daniel Webster made the best chowder in his state on the principle that he would not be second-class in anything. This is a good resolution with which to start out in your career; never to be second-class in anything.

No matter what you do, try to do it as well as it can be done. Have nothing to do with the inferior. Do your best in everything; deal with the best; choose the best; live up to your best. Don't be second-class in anything. You can hardly imagine a boy saying: "I am going to be a second-class man. I don't want to be first-class and get the good jobs, and the higher pay. I just want to be ordinary and mediocre. Second-class jobs are good enough for me."

Such a boy would be regarded as lacking in good sense, if not insanity. Yet this, in effect, is what many boys and girls across our nation are expressing, in their studies, their work, their conduct, in everything they do. In not trying to do their level best, they are training for mediocrity, lives filled with disappointment, and perhaps even complete failure.

You can become a second-class man or woman, simply by not trying to be a first-class one. Thousands do that all the time so that the second-class mindset is becoming an epidemic in the marketplace.

Everywhere we see them, those men and women of minimal efforts — perpetual clerks who will never actively prepare to move up in the world, away from the daily grind they have created for themselves. Too many people will simply never choose to rise above mediocrity. They will always fill very ordinary positions because they do not take pains to pursue their ambition, do not put heart into their work, and do not even try, or aspire to become first-class in anything.

Aside from the lack of desire or effort to be first-class, there are other things that help to make marginal workers. Dissipation, bad habits, neglect of health, failure to get an education, all are signs of an undisciplined, ambition-less man or woman. A man weakened by dissipation, whose understanding has been dulled, whose growth has been stunted by self-indulgences, is a second-class man, if not even worse. A man who, through his amusements in his hours of leisure, exhausts his strength and vitality, cools his blood, wears his nerves till his limbs tremble like leaves in the wind, is only half a man. These men who aspire only for more “time off”, can in no way be considered first-class.

Everybody knows the things that make for second-class characteristics. Boys imitate older boys and smoke cigarettes in order to be "smart or cool." Then they keep on smoking because they have created an appetite as unnatural as it is harmful, a terribly destructive habit. Men get drunk for all sorts of reasons; but, what-ever the reason, they cannot remain first-class men and habitually drink. 28 Dissipation in other forms is pursued because of the pleasures one experiences, but the surest consequence of

these acts is that of becoming mediocre, always falling short from ones potential, falling below the standard of the best men and women for any great purpose or aim.

Some even allow fault, or the blame game, to become a habit. You put others down so that you might fill the void of your own making. Casting shadows onto others only helps to make you second-class, and puts you at a disadvantage in the race for honor, position, wealth, and happiness. Carelessness in maintaining good health is another terrible mistake. Ill-health fills the ranks of the inferior. The lower-classes that all of the economists talk about, are those that are crippled with poverty and illiteracy, even though they live in a country where the opportunities are endless, and every able-bodied man or woman, with enough grit and determination, can and should overcome their plight.

Education of some sort, and even a pretty good sort, is possible to practically every one in our land. Failure to get the best education available, whether it be in books or in business training, is sure to limit one to the ranks of the second-class. It is in every man to be first-class in something, if he will choose to be it. Only the man or woman can hold him or her self back. There is no excuse for incompetence in this age of opportunity; no excuse for being less when it is possible to be so much more, and when quality, high standards and a strong character is in such high demand everywhere.

Lesser things are wanted only when the higher things seem out of reach. You wear higher quality clothes if you can pay for them; you eat finer meals when available, or, if you don't, you

wish you could. Second-class men are no more wanted than any other second-class commodity. They are taken and used when the better article is scarce or is too high-priced for the occasion. For work that really amounts to anything, first-class men are in high demand. If you make yourself first-class in anything, no matter what your condition or circumstances, no matter what your race or color, you will be in high demand. If you are a king or queen in your calling, no matter how humble it may be, nothing can keep you from success.

Some years ago a young man was graduated from Tuskegee who had taken the course in dairy farming. A friend of the institution, being called upon to recommend a suitable manager to a firm of all white men about to open a dairy, named this young man. The color of this young man's skin was never mentioned. When the black man presented himself, the astonishment was widespread, and the president of the company began to talk about the man's color. The young man reminded the president that he had come to talk about the making of butter, and so the conversation oscillated from butter to color, and from color to butter, until finally it was agreed that the young man should have a trial; but there was no decision to retain a man of his complexion until returns came from his first shipment of butter to New York City.

When the butter that was prepared by the young man brought one cent a pound more than any butter that had been shipped before from the community, well, he became about half white to those same men; and when the returns from the second

or third shipment showed that the butter manufactured by him realized something over two cents a pound more than any butter ever before shipped from that point, he became entirely white, so far as the eyes of that firm were concerned. It was said that the fact that this young man was able to develop a first-class product, that elevated the productive industry of that community by two cents a pound on butter, has proved the only sure cure for bigotry and prejudice.

The world does not demand that you be a physician, a lawyer, a farmer, or a merchant; but it does demand that whatever you do undertake, you will do it right, will do it with all your might and with all the ability you possess. It demands that you be a master in your industry or area of expertise. It demands your care and complete observance to quality.

CHAPTER VI

Thoroughness, the Handmaid of Genius

When Daniel Webster, who had one of the best brains of his time, was asked to make a speech on some question at the close of a Congressional session, he replied: "I never allow myself to speak on any subject until I have made it my own. I haven't time to do that in this case, hence, I must refuse to speak on the subject."

Mr. Webster once made a very brilliant speech upon being honored and presented with a special book by the Phi Beta Kappa society of Harvard. Everyone thought at the time that his speech was impromptu. After he had left, however, it was found that he had forgotten to take the book with him, and the carefully prepared speech was discovered inside.

Dickens would never consent to read before an audience until he had thoroughly prepared his selection. It was his practice to read a piece once a day for six months before giving it in public.

Balzac, the great French novelist, sometimes worked a week on a single page, and yet many a modern writer wonders where Balzac's fame comes from.

Macready, when playing before scant audiences in country theatres in England, Ireland, and Scotland, always played as if he were before the most brilliant audiences in the great metropolises of the world. "Before the most meager of audiences ever

assembled," he once said, "it has been my invariable practice to strive my best, using the opportunity as a lesson; and I am conscious of having derived great benefit from this one rule. I used to call it acting to myself."

It cannot be argued: Diligence – thoroughness, doing things to a complete finish as a rule, characterizes all successful men and women.

Genius is the art of taking infinite pains. The trouble with many Americans is that they seem to think they can put any sort of poor, half-done work into their careers and get first-class results. They do not realize that all great achievement has been characterized by extreme care, infinite painstaking effort, even to the minutest detail. No youth can ever hope to accomplish much who does not have thoroughness and accuracy indelibly fixed in his life-habit. Laziness, inaccuracy, the habit of half doing things, would ruin the future of any youth, even one fortunate enough to be born with a brilliant mind.

If we were to examine a list of the men who have left their mark on the world, we should find that, as a rule, it is not composed of those who were brilliant in youth, or who gave great promise at the outset of their careers, but rather of the diligent young men and women who, if they have not dazzled us by their brilliancy, have had the power and discipline of delivering a full day's work, every day, who could stay by a task until it was done, and done well; who have had grit, persistence, common sense, and honesty.

It is the steady exercise of these ordinary, hard-working virtues, united with average ability, that enables a person to achieve greatly and honorably. So, if we were to attempt to make a forecast of the successful men of the future, we should not look for them among the ranks of the "smart" boys, those who think they "know it all" and are anxious to win by a short route.

The diligent boys and girls are the ones that are heard from, and usually from posts far higher up than those filled by the youth who were too "smart" to be thorough. One such boy is Elihu Root, who became a United States Senator. When he was a boy in the grammar school at Clinton, New York, he made up his mind that anything he had to study he would keep at until he mastered it. Although not considered one of the "brightest" boys of the school, his teacher soon found that when young Mr. Root professed to know anything he knew it through and through.

He was fond of hard problems requiring application and patience. Sometimes the other boys called him a plodder, thinking he was slow because of the time he invested, but Root would only smile pleasantly, for he knew who he was, and what he was about.

On winter evenings, while the other boys were out skating, he frequently remained in his room with his arithmetic or algebra. Mr. Root once said that if his close application to problems in his boyhood did nothing else for him, it made him careful about jumping to conclusions. To every problem there was only one answer, and patience was the price to be paid for it. Carrying the principle of "doing everything to a complete finish" into the law,

he became one of the most noted members of the New York bar, entrusted with vast interests, and then a member of the President's cabinet.

William Ellery Channing, the great New England theologian, who in his youth was hardly able to buy the clothes he needed, had a passion for self-improvement. "I wanted to make the most of myself," he says; "I was not satisfied with knowing things superficially and only part way, but rather, I tried to get comprehensive views of what I had studied."

The quality which, more than any other, once helped to raise the German people to their commanding position in the world, was their thoroughness. Germans, at the time, did not half do anything.

The slipshod methods which characterized many Americans during the early 1900's were practically unknown to the Germans, who were patient in their investigation and thoroughness down to the smallest details. The efficient mind is orderly and methodical; it makes progress slowly by doing everything completely, as well as it can be done.

This quality of doing everything to a finish is giving young men and women a great advantage over their less-disciplined peers. Every employer is looking for thoroughness, and devoted workmanship from their employees. These high-ranking employees owe their preeminence to the superiority of their training, and the completeness of their preparation for their specialty. They will always be in great demand.

It is an exception to find an English-speaking youth who can use any language but his own, whereas the majority of youth from other countries can speak and write several languages. They go to France and England and serve without pay in order to learn French and English. If you are a merchant and have any transactions with French houses, you will notice that, except in rare instances, Frenchmen correspond with you in their mother tongue. This is not the case with other countries. On account of their knowledge of languages, many workers from European countries are able to carry on their correspondence in the language of the country with which they trade.

Due to the rapid increase in global trade, this gives them a great advantage. Unfortunately the average American youth thinks that he can succeed with any kind of preparation. He believes that his "smartness" will take the place of broad and firm foundations in knowledge and expertise, and that his natural talents will ultimately "win the day" for him.

This is a fatal mistake; for, even with a flexibility and native adaptability to varying conditions, which is, undoubtedly, a strong point in any man’s favor, thorough preparation and ability to master details gives the first-class man a great advantage at the outset of his career. As a rule, a first-class man or woman who expects to engage in business invests in taking a four years' course in some commercial school, and after graduation serves three years' apprenticeship, without pay, to his chosen business. Thoroughness and reliability, the first-class characteristics, are

increasing the power of many young people throughout the civilized world. The great lack of thoroughness that still exists, however, is a clear opportunity for the young aspiring professional.

How seldom you find a young man or woman who is willing to fully prepare for his lifework. A little education is all they want, and then they feel they are ready for business.

Not long ago a professor in one of our universities had a letter from a young woman in the West, asking him if he did not think she could teach education, if she could come to the university and take twelve lessons!

In an examination in primary schools in Massachusetts, out of eleven hundred and twenty-two pupils who used the word "too," eight hundred and fifty-nine spelled it incorrectly. Twenty-seven ways of spelling "Cyrus " were used by advanced scholars.

They had fifty ways of spelling the word "which." The word "whose" was spelled in more than a hundred ways. "School" was spelled in two hundred ways.

Multiple examples of mis-spellings were taken from the examination papers of candidates for Harvard College: The list was appalling. "Duells, jelosie, opposit, repetedly, ficle, beveradge, insted, preasant, wating, superceeded, conspiritors, avaritious, undoubtibly, peece, couardise, origen, differculty, proclamed, loose for 'lose,' champaign for 'champagne,' finnish, Rip Van Rincle, Adison and Adderson" 38 The efforts to cover up ignorance, and "the constant worry and fear that exists", of exposing one's lack of education, are pitiable. Short cuts and abridged methods used by our students are simply in too high demand.

Excuses such as,"it can't wait," "haven't time to be thorough," is characteristic of our country, and is written on everything — on commerce, on schools, on society, on churches. We can't wait for a high-school, seminary, or college education. The boy can't wait to become a teenager, nor the teenager to become a man. Young men rush into business with no great reserve of education or discipline; of course, they do poor, feverish work, and break down in mid-life, while many die of stress and old age in their forties and fifties.

Perhaps there is no other country in the world where so much poor work is done as in America. Half-trained medical students perform bungling operations, because they are not willing to take the added time for thorough preparation. Half-trained lawyers stumble through their cases, and make their clients pay for their own experience which the law school should have provided. Half-trained clergymen bungle away at the pulpit, and disgust their more intelligent and cultured parishioners. Many an American youth is willing to stumble through life half prepared for his work, and then blame society because he is a failure. Nature works for centuries to perfect a rose or a fruit, but an American youth is ready to try a difficult case in court after a few months' of training, or to go into business, risking all that he has acquired, putting his family in debt and perhaps into the poverty line, based solely on his own misguided high opinion of himself.

CHAPTER VII

That Fatal “Almost”

A young man, armed with letters of introduction from prominent men, one day presented himself before Chief Engineer Parsons, of the Rapid Transit Commission of New York as a candidate for a position.

"What can you do? Have you any specialty?" asked Mr. Parsons. "I can do almost anything," answered the young man. "Well," remarked the Chief Engineer, rising to end the interview, "I have no use for anyone who can 'almost' do anything. I prefer some one who can actually do one thing thoroughly."

There is a great crowd of human beings just outside the door of proficiency. They can half-do a great many things, but can't do any one thing well, to a full and complete finish. They have the makings of future skills which remain permanently unavailable because they were not carried through to the point of mastering; they stopped just short of efficiency.

How many people almost know a language or two, which they can neither write nor speak; a science or two, whose elements they have not fully mastered; an art or two, which they cannot practice with satisfaction or for profit!

Everywhere we meet people who are “almost” successful. Here is a man who is almost a lawyer, but not quite; here is an-

other who is almost a physician, but is neither a good pharmacist, a good surgeon, nor a good businessman. Another man is almost a clergyman, or about halfway between a farmer, or a tradesman, and a clergyman. Another is almost a teacher, but not quite competent to take charge of a school or an academy. In every country there are men and women who are almost something, but just a little short of it.

If these people undertake anything, they never quite finish it; they never quite complete their courses at school; they never fully learn a trade or profession. They always manage to stop just short of true success.

In thousands of American homes, lying, perhaps, in the attic, woodshed, or workshop, are scores of ingenious, labor-saving devices, or inventions, which, if carried a step further and patented, would not only give those who originated them a competence for life, but would enrich the civilization of the world. But the inventors get discouraged or tired, or lack persistency, the habit of carrying things to completion; and so the half-developed machinery, the superb idea, has never come to light, and the time spent upon it has been lost, perhaps worse than lost, because the lesson of perseverance, persistency, and thoroughness was never learned.

The Patent Office at Washington contains thousands upon thousands of inventions which are useless simply because they are not quite practical, because the men or women who started them lacked diligence and persistency. They never gained the education, or the ability necessary to carry their idea to the point of

practicality. Thomas Edison was shrewd enough to carry on and complete many of these half-finished inventions to a useful application and commercial success.

The world is full of half-finished work, — failures which require only a little more persistence, a little finer mechanical training, a little better education, to make them useful to civilization. If only we had a thousand Edisons to pick up all such half-finished inventions, meager attempts and discoveries which have stopped just this side of usefulness!

What a blessing to civilization are men who can do things to a finish, who complete what they undertake, who leave nothing half done! Think what a loss it would be if such men as Edison and Bell had not come to the front and carried to a successful termination the half-finished work of others!

"Almost" is a dangerous word. It has tripped up many a man who might have been successful if he had formed the habit of painstaking thoroughness in youth, the habit of doing everything he undertook to a complete finish.

There are multitudes of people today plodding along in mediocrity, many of whom lay down right in sight of their goal, just because they were satisfied when they were young with "almost" doing things; "almost" learning their lessons; "almost" finishing the tasks they were given to do. Like the boy who was sent to gather the sheep that had strayed away from the flock but who would regularly return without all of them accounted for. In answer to his father's query if he had found all the sheep, the boy

would reply, "Yes, almost all, father." The boy never seemed to realize the gulf that separates "almost" from "success."

CHAPTER VIII

What Every Employer Is Looking For

A successful manufacturer says: "If you make a good pin, you will earn more money than if you make a bad steam engine."

"If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap than his neighbor," says Emerson, "though he may build his house deep in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door."

Make it a life-rule to give your best to whatever passes through your hands. Stamp it proudly with your name. Let superiority be your trademark, let it characterize everything you touch. This is what every employer is looking for.

Diligence, choosing to be thorough in all that you do, indicates the best kind of human resource; it is the best substitute for genius; it is a better capital than cash; it is a better promoter than friends.

Never allow yourself to dwell too much upon what you are getting for your work. You have something of infinitely greater importance or greater value at stake. Your honor, your whole career, your future success, will be impacted by the way in which you do your work.

Your reputation is judged by the loyalty you employ, or the lack of it, which you put into doing your job well.

A young woman working on a newspaper said she did not try to do her best because she did not get much pay. What a pitiable choice! This doing poor work because it does not pay much is just what keeps thousands of people from getting on and moving higher up in the world. Work is a question of character, not of pay. One has no right to demoralize his own character by doing slovenly or botched work simply because he is not paid much. The employee has something at stake besides his salary. Character, manhood and womanhood are at stake, compared to which salary is nothing.

A well known Judge, says that he once employed a young man to mend a fence, and told him to use rough, unfinished boards, not to try to make a neat job, because he would pay him only a dollar and a half. Later the judge found the man carefully planing the boards and doing a very fine job. Supposing that he would try to collect much more than a dollar and a half, he ordered him to nail the boards on the fence, rough, as they were, and passed on. The young man paid no attention to the order. He did the best job he could. When the judge returned, he was angry, and said to him, "I told you this fence was to be covered with vines. I don't care how it looks." "But I do," said the carpenter.

"How much will you charge?" asked the judge. "A dollar and a half." "Why did you spend all that labor and pains, if not for money?" "For the job, sir." "But, nobody would have seen the poor work on it." "But I would still know it was there," the young man replied.

Ten years afterward the judge was in charge of awarding a contract for the construction of several large public buildings. "Among the bidders." he said, "I recognized my man of the fence. I gave him the contract, and it has made a rich man of him."

If you put your conscience into your work, no matter how poorly you are paid, the fruits of it will come back to you at some time, in some way.

No matter how meager your salary, you cannot, on your own account, afford to let work go out of your hands without your unqualified endorsement. The job which goes out of your hands should mean that there is nothing slovenly or weak about it. If you have made a suit of clothes, it should mean that the seams will not part, or the buttons fly off upon the first bit of strain; if a piece of furniture, it should mean that it is not glued where it should be dovetailed, that you have not tried to cover up weak or defective wood with paint or varnish, or filled gaping joints with putty, where strength is necessary.

In short, everything you do is a part of your legacy. If any work that goes out of your hands is skimped on or shirked, your character will suffer. If your work is badly done; if it goes to pieces; if there is shoddiness in it; if there is dishonesty in it, then there is shoddiness and dishonesty in your character. We are all accountable for our work. We cannot have an honest character, a complete, untarnished character, when we are constantly allowing our work to suffer from lesser quality, a poor work ethic, or a lower standard of service to our customers.

The man who has dealt in schemes, who has botched his work all his life, must be conscious that he has not been a real man; he cannot help feeling that his career, and indeed his life, has been a great disappointment.

To spend a life buying and selling lies, dealing in cheap claims with no intention of delivering on one's promises, is demoralizing to every element of nobility.

No matter what the contract for your job specifies, you cannot afford to do a poor job, or you will cheapen yourself. You will move toward the habit of inferiority, which is fatal. Beecher said he was never quite the same man again after reading Ruskin. You are never quite the same man again after doing a poor job, after botching your work.

You cannot be pure and just to yourself, and at the same time be unjust to the man you are working for, in the quality of your work. If you slight your work, you not only strike a fatal blow at your efficiency, but you also stain your character. If you would be a full man, a complete man, a just man, you must be honest to the core in the quality of your work.

CHAPTER IX

Where Only the Best Is Good Enough

No one can be really happy who does not believe in his own honesty, does not believe he is trying hard to do right, to be just, clean, and honest.

Our minds and our bodies are so interconnected that every departure from doing the right thing, from adhering to our core principles, makes us unhappy, and causes us to lose vitality, good health and self-respect.

Every time we obey the natural law of doing right we hear an inward approval, the "amen" of the soul, and a protest or condemnation every time we disobey it.

Did you ever notice how much better you feel after having done a superb piece of work, how much more you think of yourself, how it tones up your whole character?

What a thrill one feels when contemplating his masterpiece, the work into which he has put the very best that was in him, the very best of which he was capable!

This all comes from obeying the natural law within us to do things right, as they should be done, just as we feel an increase of self-respect when we obey the law of justice, and reinforce the character and integrity within us.

A famous artist said he would never allow himself to look at an inferior drawing or painting, to do anything that was low or demoralizing, for fear that familiarity with the lower standard will taint his own ideal and thus be communicated to his brush. There is everything in holding to a high ideal for the sake of your work; for the sake of your soul. Hold the idea of excellence constantly in your mind, for whatever model the mind holds, the life copies. What we think, is what we become. Never allow yourself for an instant to harbor the thought of deficiency or inferiority. Thinking it alone, will only call it directly to your doorstep

Reach for the highest, cling to it. Take no chances with anything that is inferior. Whatever your vocation, let quality be your life-slogan.

Many excuse poor, careless work due to their incorrect assumption of "a lack of time". But in the ordinary situations of life there is plenty of time to do everything as it ought to be done. If we form the habit of excellence, of doing everything to a finish, our lives would be infinitely more satisfactory, more complete; there would be a wholeness instead of the incompleteness that characterizes most lives.

There is an indescribable superiority added to the very character and fiber of the man who always puts quality into his work. There is a sense of wholeness, satisfaction and happiness, which is never felt by the man who does not commit himself to quality and doing his level best every time. He is not haunted by the ghosts of half-finished tasks, of deferred problems; and is never kept awake by a troubled conscience.

When we are trying with all our might to do our level best, our whole nature improves, everything looks up when we struggle up; everything looks down when we are sliding down hill. Aspiration lifts the life; groveling lowers it. When we are striving for excellence in everything we do the entire life grows and expands, but if we allow our standards to drop, there is a natural progression that follows, a tendency for a downward effort in all that we do thereafter.

It is never a merely optional question whether you do a thing right or not, whether you half do it or do it to a complete finish. There is an eternal principle involved, which, if you violate it, you pay the penalty in deterioration, in the lowering of your standards, in the loss of self-respect, in diminished efficiency, a dwarfed existence and an unsuccessful life.

Don't think you will never hear from a half-finished job, a neglected or botched piece of work. It will never die. It will resurrect itself farther along in your career at the most unexpected moments, in the most embarrassing situations. It will be sure to mortify you when you least expect it. Like an unfriendly ghost, it will arise at the most unexpected moments to mar your happiness. A single broken thread in a web of cloth is traced back to the girl who neglected her work in the factory, and the amount of damage is deducted from her wages. Your botched jobs, your neglected tasks will mortify you years into the future and may keep you from the success you otherwise expected.

On every hand we see men seriously embarrassed by the ghosts of skipped problems and neglected payments, sins of

omission committed at school or at work, way back in their youth.

Thousands of people are held back all their lives and obliged to accept inferior positions because they cannot entirely overcome the handicap of wasteful habits formed early in life, habits of inaccuracy or laziness. They suffer from a lack of cleanliness, of work-ethic, and they do not adhere to the rules of economy, thrift or frugality. In all they do, they do it only half way, or worse.

They continually passed over their problems in school because it seemed too hard at the time. They said they would be sure to return to conquer it later in life, but never quite got around to it.

Half doing things "just for now," expecting to finish them later, has ruined countless, otherwise bright young men and women, because it has led to the habit of slighting one's work. "Oh, that's good enough, what's the use of being so awfully particular?" has been the beginning of a lifelong handicap in too many careers.

I was greatly impressed by this motto, which I saw recently in a very successful establishment. The sign read: "WHERE ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH."

What a life-motto this would be!

How it would revolutionize civilization if everyone were to adopt it and use it; to become resolute to the promise that, whatever they did - only the best they could do would be good enough!

Adopt this life-motto as your very own. Hang it up in your bedroom, in your office or place of business, put it into your pocketbook, weave it into the texture of everything you do, and your life-work will be what everyone's should be — a masterpiece.

Proclaim it here and now, "ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH."

The End

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