

**There are those that look
at things the way they are,
and ask why?
I dream of things
that never were,
and ask why not?**

Robert Kennedy

This quotation is all about attitude! The degree of success each of us achieves in our business and personal lives is affected by what we believe. Our beliefs drive our actions, and those actions always have consequences.

Here is a new set of “ABCs” to remember: Attitudes, Behaviors, Consequences. And they can be as important as the ones we all learned years ago in school.

Although there are always some factors we can’t control, there are also many we can control. Here’s an example.

A physician friend of mine took charge of his own health in the best way he could to prevent serious consequences. He was motivated because both his father and his older brother had died of heart attacks when they were in their mid-forties. He didn’t want that to happen to him.

He exercised, dieted, and did everything he could to stay healthy.

However, at the age of forty-four he had a heart attack. Just like his father and brother. But he survived.

He told me, “I controlled everything I could to maintain good health. The one thing I couldn’t control was the genes I had inherited. But, if I hadn’t done everything else, I too would have died.”

“It would have been easy,” he said, “to just accept what I knew was inevitable. I was going to have heart trouble, but why not fight it in every way I could?”

He fought; and he won. He is now sixty-two.

His attitude led to his behavior; and his behavior led to the exact consequences he wanted.

Think about this principle in your business life. Don’t simply accept what you think might be inevitable. Take action and influence the outcome.

Don’t ask, “Why”; ask “Why not?”

Then do it!

**He who can, does.
He who cannot, teaches.**

George Bernard Shaw

Like other mottoes, this one too is all about attitude. But it often reflects academic behavior.

Although it is often spoken or written as a derogatory comment, or as a “put down,” I suggest you consider it another way.

Entirely different skills and talents are necessary for performing and for instructing. Talented teachers often produce students who are more talented and more capable than the teachers.

It’s the teachers’ talent, ability, and commitment that guide and encourage their students to higher levels of achievement.

In every business there are teachers, and there are students. The teachers, of course, are the managers; and the students are the members of the staff.

An important role of a good manager is to be a teacher. It is the manager’s responsibility to get others to perform—not to do the work himself. If a manager does the work, he is a doer—not a manager.

I once offered a series of seminars on this topic. It was titled, “Getting Work Done Through People,” and that title is right on target as a descriptor.

The skills and talents needed to manage and to teach are very different from those needed to follow directions and perform.

Don’t look at this motto as a description and comparison of ability, but rather as a separation and designation of ability.

Someone who “does” is not better than someone who “teaches”—or vice versa. Each has his specific responsibilities. If those responsibilities are carried out to the best of the individual’s ability, they complement each other, and they contribute to the success of the organization.

**We miss you most
when you're home.**

Seven-year-old son of a friend

A few years ago, I was working with a group of young, successful executives. At one of our regular meetings the discussion turned to family responsibilities and the pressures of business travel. Everyone agreed that travel was difficult but necessary. It was an important part of their success.

One of the men, Steve, brought us all up short and changed the course of the discussion with this story.

He had returned home from an “important” business trip one Friday evening and spent most of the day Saturday doing the paperwork required to close out the trip. On Sunday he began packing his suitcase and briefcase when his seven-year-old son asked him to play catch with him in the backyard.

Steve explained he couldn’t play because he “had” to get ready for the upcoming trip. Seeing that the little boy was disappointed, Steve said to him, “Tommy, you know I have to take these trips even though I don’t want to. I miss you and Mom so much when I’m away.”

Tommy knew there would be no game of catch—again. His father was too busy. With a tear in his eye, Tommy said, “I know you miss us, Dad; and we miss you too when you’re away.

“But we miss you most when you’re home.”

Think about that statement for a few minutes, and think about how you affect the most important people in your life.

**Eventually—
why not now?**

Many years ago I saw this sentence presented as a banner newspaper headline. The newspaper was one of those fake papers people can have made up at an amusement park. Usually they are jokes and are intended to be gifts.

I'm not sure whether this one was intended as a joke or not because it was in the office of a building janitor who didn't like to work very much. Everything he did was put off as long as he could get away with it. It certainly was a message about him, but I don't know who gave it to him.

Regardless of the reason, however, it struck me as great wisdom in just four words.

In every job we have during our careers there are tasks we know we have to carry out, but we put them off as long as we can. We all know what they are: performance reviews, report writing, etc. We also know they have to be done—we just don't want to do them.

But they don't go away. They sit on our desks and in our "to do" files and wait for us. The passage of time doesn't make them any easier; in fact we often worry about them to the extent we magnify them out of proportion. Then, when we do them, we often just want to get through with them as quickly as possible and move on to something else. The tasks don't get the attention they deserve.

So, take this old fake newspaper headline to heart when you face an unpleasant task. You have to do it sooner or later, so why not right away? Get it "off your plate" by taking control of the situation.

Gather your thoughts and your resources and face the task with this positive attitude: "This task is a necessary part of my job so I'll do it well, and I'll do it *now*."

It works!

**If anything is worth doing,
it is worth doing well.**

In order to complete any job or assignment, you must devote time, talent, energy, and resources. Nothing happens all by itself. Some kind of work is necessary.

Since that's the case—you're going to have to perform some task, and it just makes sense to do it right the first time. The other way to look at it, of course, is this way: If something isn't worth doing—don't do it! Don't waste the time, the talent, the energy, or the resources. Just don't bother. You would just be spinning your wheels.

If, on the other hand, you determine the task must be undertaken and completed, you might just as well focus on performing quality service rather than simply filling up time. And time is a nonrenewable commodity. Once it's used, once it has passed, that's it! You can't go back and recapture it. It's gone.

Every one of us is evaluated on performance, and that evaluation includes not only accomplishing tasks, but also doing so within the allocated time frame.

Since every job requires “spending time on task,” it just makes sense to use that time as well as we can.