

Challenging ourselves

"You don't have to be a fantastic hero to do certain things -- to compete. You can be just an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated to reach challenging goals." Sir Edmund Hillary

Edmund Hillary, of course, was a great mountain-climber. Along with his guide, he conquered Mt. Everest for the first time,

And yet few of us will ever conquer the mountains around us -- we'll stay down on the level ground -- or worse yet, concentrate on finding the paths that all lead downhill.

It's sad, I guess, that so few of us will ever really challenge ourselves -- or even if we do, will only challenge ourselves a very few times in our lives. For most of us, the challenges that arise in our lives are rarely those of our own design -- they're thrust upon us, from job loss to sickness, to downturns in the economy, to troubles in the family -- and the method we use to respond to those challenges becomes one of the defining moments in our lives.

Ultimately, I think our self-worth hinges on the decisions we make when we encounter those challenges. Do we rise to the occasion? Do we slink silently away? Do we stare at the challenge, hoping it will go away and leave us alone?

But just as important, are the challenges that we make for ourselves -- and the responses we make to those challenges.

Few of us ever learn to do something great in life without challenging ourselves. We never learn how to play the piano unless we challenge ourselves, sit down and practice (I didn't). We don't learn how to drive until we accept that challenge. We never learn to walk until we've fallen a few times. We don't grow, in other words, until we accept the need for challenge in our lives, and put those challenges into play.

Even simple exercise is a challenge -- our bodies grow and get stronger when we challenge them. We don't get stronger by sitting on the couch and munching on potato chips.

Then why is it that so many of us shy away from challenges? Why is it that so many of us choose the easy path, even though we know that it will never lead to anywhere interesting?

Perhaps we are afraid we will not rise to the occasion. Perhaps we think we aren't good enough to address the challenge.

And the truth is -- if we think that, we are right in our judgment.

In order to overcome the challenges in our lives -- especially the challenges we set for ourselves -- we have to believe we will be able to achieve those challenges, or at least be willing to take a chance on the future.

Even if we don't know we can achieve something, we're not out a whole lot by taking a chance.

So how about you? Are you willing to challenge yourself? Are you willing to rise to the occasion? Are you willing to take a chance on your abilities? Will you make that first step, even when the future path may be uncertain?

I bet you can do it. I bet I can do it. Let's take a chance together, and challenge ourselves to greater heights, better futures, a better life.

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