

USING YOUR PERSONAL ECO-SYSTEM™ TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS!

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Part 1: Personal Eco-Systems™ for Success

Life works best when our environment supports us. We all know exactly what this looks and feels like. Some days things flow, we get stuff done, it feels good! We're at our best. Our energy is high, we're cheerful, confident and productive. If only every day could be like that!

I've written many articles and presented dozens of talks on the concept of Personal Eco-Systems.™ I've even written a book about it and you may wish to download my free ebook, *Personal Eco-Systems: Creating Systems for Automatic Success* from my website.

The basic concept is simple: we succeed best when our environment supports us in accomplishing our most important tasks. When we are stumbling or fumbling, when we can't find our tools, are interrupted or distracted, our productivity goes down and we get frustrated. Every plant and animal on earth knows this! Plant a rose bush in rich soil, place it in the sun, add some water and warmth (an ideal eco-system) and it flourishes. In that environment it doesn't struggle, it's not deformed or stressed. It quickly becomes the beautiful, fragrant flower it was meant to be. Move it a few feet into the shade, however, or give it slightly too much or too little water, or add a few bugs and unfortunate things happen.

So it is with us. Here's one of my favorite examples. You are at a beautiful resort. The day has been sunny and warm. You've enjoyed yourself all day and had a fantastic dinner with friends. Perhaps you enjoyed some wine or nice music on the stereo and now it's time for bed. You turn off the lights, crawl into a luxurious king-size bed...and notice a mosquito buzzing around your head. How well are you going to sleep with that mosquito in the room? You've had a perfect day. You're in an expensive, luxurious room, everything is wonderful and one tiny insect spoils it.

It's that way in every aspect of our lives.

What happens to your productivity if you consistently sleep on a mattress that's too firm, too soft, or old and lumpy? What happens to your momentum (and your mood) when you find a stain on your best shirt in the morning? Think of the time and energy wasted when you can't find a file you need or the distraction when you can't find your glasses before an important meeting.

These are the “little things” that make all the difference in our lives. The rule is that as we go up the ladder of success, the offices not only get larger, they become neater! Corporate headquarters tend to be neat and clean, quiet, orderly and extremely productive. Here’s a question: Did the people in those offices acquire habits of precision *after* they got there, or did they get those offices *because* they had the precision, order and focus to earn that corner office? I think the answer is obvious. And, as it happens, research confirms it. Highly productive people pay attention to their personal eco-systems!

So should you.

Success requires precision. It requires the ability to do our best work in a world that supports and encourage our best efforts. You want systems (not chance, an alarm clock or mere “discipline”) to get you up early, full of energy and ambition. You want to hit the floor running and productive. Here’s a personal example. I’ve had a dog most of my adult life, especially since the confluence of two important events. First, I discovered Benjamin Franklin’s famous quote that, “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise” and suspected it might be true. Second, my doctor convinced me that exercise would be a good thing. I reasoned that I could use an alarm clock, lots of personal discipline and force myself to get up early despite my preference to sleep in. Then, I could pay monthly dues to a health club. All I had to do was drive over to the club (most days), park, change clothes, exercise, cool down, shower, change clothes (again) and drive back to work.

Or, I could get a dog. I discovered that dogs like to get up early—very convenient! I discovered they need lots of walks and if we walk hills, I get plenty of exercise. I discovered that they tend to insist on these things and that bad things happen if I ignore them. I discovered that playing with a dog was a good way to break up my day, lower my blood pressure, release stress, have fun and that dogs always kept my secrets! What a system!

Every day, you want to work until you decide to quit. You want to focus on priorities and concentrate on your most important projects all day long, not just until the phone rings, someone interrupts or you can’t find a file you need. You want to be effective and productive until you are done or decide to do something different. To do that, never rely on something as weak as “self-discipline” or as unpredictable and uncontrolled as a to-do list or schedule. You need a system!

You need a “positive system” that encourages you, and a “negative system” that consistently avoids or shields you from the ordinary interruptions that distract most people. Consider the “little things” of your world. Is your closet clean, neat and organized? Is your car reliable, clean and comfortable? How about your personal finances? Are your bills paid on time, and filed appropriately? Is the checkbook balanced? Consider your health and fitness—does your body support you in every

way it could? How about personal boundaries and clear agreements with the people in your life? Do they know and respect your priorities, your work space and your private time? How about fun? Is your world filled with things that inspire you, make you smile and lift your spirit?

These are the little things that make a huge difference in our lives. Some people go through life frustrated, confused, over-whelmed, feeling like they are running through quicksand. Others design a lifestyle, systems and daily routines that "make it easier to succeed than to fail." They are the folks we meet at the top. I hope to see you there!

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Part 2: **Your World Determines Your Results**

My friend and mentor, Thomas Leonard, was fond of saying that "space management is more important than time management." What he meant was that while we cannot actually "manage" time (it just keeps marching forward, no matter how we use—or squander—it), we can and must manage our personal environment.

This is one of the KEY STRATEGIES of highly effective people. They "set themselves up" for success by surrounding themselves with the situations, tools, ideas, the people, posters, music, furniture and toys that "drive" or "pull" or "push" them in the direction of their most important goals. It's not coincidence or chance or "good luck" that every single day their environment "just happens" to push them in precisely the direction they intend to go all along!

Failures live in the midst of chaos. While they may get up early, work very hard, and stay busy in their eagerness for success, the reality is that they permit their work, their time and their achievements to be determined by whatever "happens to happen." That is not a recipe for success! Working hard and being productive are not the same thing.

This week I read an extraordinary statement from Carl Jung about this. Writing in a time when the masculine pronoun was taken for granted, he said that man "can meet the needs of outer necessity in an ideal way only...if he is in harmony with himself. Conversely, he can only adapt to his inner world and achieve harmony with himself when he is *adapted to the environmental conditions*" (italics added).

What an extraordinary thing! Obviously, today it would be phrased to include both women and man, but the point is extremely important.

Jung was saying that we can ONLY achieve peak performance, fulfill our potential and know inner peace when we live in harmony with our surroundings! And yet, the

vast majority of us work in surroundings that are determined by our employers, by “urgent” emails and phone calls, by the news of the day or whatever interruption happens to destroy our concentration. Even trivial things like yesterday’s dirty dishes, messy desks, unreliable computers or inadequate lighting distract us. That is no way to organize your life or achieve your dreams!

Thomas Leonard was a master at controlling his environment. Although he could afford to live anywhere he chose, he preferred small, tightly controlled spaces. He once told me that his financial independence made it possible for him to have “the luxury of an office smaller than most closets,” and I don’t think he was joking. I never saw dust or dirt or stray papers laying around. And, I think everyone who knew him would acknowledge that in his short 47 years, he achieved an extraordinary amount. The two things – organized space and high productivity – are connected.

Our images of extremely successful people confirm this. The President is never surrounded by clutter. While rock stars may throw tantrums and trash their hotel rooms, the Donald Trumps, Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey’s of the world are organized. Their offices and homes, their private jets and executive suites are efficient, elegant, inspiring spaces! They achieve great things in part because they are not distracted, confused or frustrated by their surroundings.

I am not a "neat freak" and readily admit that some people are most productive when surrounded by the “creative chaos” of books, papers and files piled all around them. The point is to create and insist upon the environment that allows you to be most productive.

Highly successful people know this. World class athletes don't have to "find" time to train. Stephen King and other prolific writers don't "try" to write! Wealthy people don't “force” themselves to do the paperwork of managing their investments. Successful people organize their environments to support their most important projects.

We can learn from these extraordinary people. We may not be able to be as rigorous and systematic about it (yet!), but we can create environments that encourage and support the achievement of our most important goals.

Greatness is rarely achieved in our "spare time."

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Part 3: **Your Personal Eco-System™ Checklist**

Here's a simple 10-question exercise to help you evaluate and up-grade your Personal Eco-System™. Simply ponder each item briefly and give yourself a score from 1 (low) to 10 (high) on each item, then add up your scores. After reviewing this exercise with dozens of people over the years, I'm convinced that most people (if they are honest) score somewhere in the 60's to low 70's at first.

After completing the review, decide where you want to up-grade your Personal Eco-System™ to make your world more supportive. The idea is to make yourself more productive so you achieve your goals faster and easier in the future. Repeat this exercise every month and keep working on your surroundings until you consistently score in the 90's. (It takes most people several months, sometimes a year or more to score 90 or above.) Strive for a score of 100 (a perfectly supportive world), but at least decide that you are going to live, work and play in a world that at least supports you with a score of 90.

Ready? Here we go:

1. My bedroom is perfect and gives me a good night's sleep. The room has plenty of fresh air, it's dark, quiet and restful. I have high-quality sheets, a mattress that supports my body and a pillow that's "to die for." I have a reading light, a bedside table with a favorite book, a notepad and alarm clock all arranged exactly the way I want them. I awake rested, refreshed and eager for the day almost every morning. SCORE: _____
2. My bathroom energizes me. The mirrors are clean. The toilet and shower are spotless. My shampoos, soaps, deodorants, etc., make me feel good and there is always an extra supply of toilet paper and a new box of tissue stored under the counter. My bathroom starts my day with energy, enthusiasm and a big smile on my face. SCORE: _____
3. My living space is magnificent! I have a spot for reading or relaxing that fits me perfectly. I love the sense of space, the music, and energy in my living or family room. There is no junk mail, litter or clutter. Every picture on the wall or magazine on the table is there for a reason and they make me happy. The television is available for comfortable watching, but is rarely turned on and is usually ignored. SCORE: _____

4. My office is perfect. I love the pictures and the wall-paper, the carpet is cleaned regularly, the windows are clean and I have personal effects that make the office mine. My door is closed whenever I need privacy or time to concentrate. I have all the tools I require, from paper-clips to a heavy-duty paper shredder. My office chair is the most comfortable and ergonomically sophisticated available. SCORE: _____
5. My computer is perfect! It's fast, reliable, and never surprises me. I use it with confidence. My monitor sits at a comfortable angle to avoid eye or neck strain. The computer has appropriate spam, spyware and virus protection, which is up-dated automatically. I have all the software I need for my work and I've invested in mastering it's potential. SCORE: _____
6. I have a plan for career development. I know exactly where I'm going and have a 5-year plan to get there. I have a mentor to show me the way and a team of people to support me. My family and loved ones know where I'm going, and encourage me every day. The future is bright! SCORE: _____
7. My friends and family support me in every way. They understand and respect my goals. Our relationships are warm, caring, open and respectful so we can talk about differences and find healthy solutions to disagreements. I have mentors to show me the way, and a community of people I turn to for help with problems. My social relationships are perfect. SCORE: _____
8. My health, fitness, diet and nutrition are exactly the way I want them to be. I honor my body, take care of myself, play hard and exercise several times a week. I eat food that energizes me and keeps my body in peak condition. I never abuse my body with drugs, alcohol, or junk food that is high in sugar or artificial anything. SCORE: _____
9. My finances are in great shape! I balance my checkbook and do a family cash-flow analysis and balance sheet every month. I have a plan to achieve my financial goals and no troublesome debts. My bills are always paid on time. I save and invest regularly knowing that retirement and financial independence are my responsibilities. SCORE: _____
10. I am spiritually fulfilled. I actively practice my faith or spiritual path. I take time for prayer or meditation, support others in their spiritual practice, and have a mentor (priest, rabbi, teacher) who I trust to guide me in becoming more spiritually mature. My spiritual beliefs have been studied or examined so they are a clear and reliable source of strength when needed. I respect the beliefs of others and am open to learning from them, while being secure and comfortable in my own path. My life reflects my spiritual beliefs, to the best of my ability. SCORE: _____

Now, add up your scores:

Today's Date is: _____

Today My Total Score is: _____

How did you do? If your environment supports you in every way so you are confident and effective every day, congratulations! Very few people can say that and you can be proud of the effort you've put into creating a world that suits you.

If some areas of your world are not the way you prefer, what will you do about that? Some actions may take weeks or months. You may have to learn new skills, invest in new tools or equipment, or negotiate new relationships with the people around you. That may seem hard, but it is absolutely worth it! And, know that many of the most important changes will require little or no time or even money! If some areas of your life are not supporting you, take action! Clean them up. Fix them up. Replace, repair or re-arrange until things are better. Do not permit the friction of small frustrations to hold you back!

Finally, are there other areas (beyond the 10 listed above) that need to be addressed? If so, simply describe them briefly, give yourself a score, and set out to make things better. Perhaps you need a new car, or a new job, new housing or changes in some other area. Whatever it is, take care of it! Take action. Make it better so you can get on with your life. Never allow petty, daily annoyances to hold you back. Big or small, fix them.

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And NOTE: A much more complete series of exercises, audio lectures and workbooks will be available in a few weeks. We'll let you know when that system is ready for prime time! Watch for the announcement in your email in a few weeks.