STAYING POSITIVE

IN A COVID WORLD

Strategies For Business Leaders To Keep Upbeat In The Midst Of A Pandemic

MATT MICHEL
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By

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Preface

At the tail end of 2007, the world experienced a financial pandemic. Throughout 2008 and the early part of 2009, people operated under intense financial pressure. The appropriateness of the government response is debatable, just as it is today, but I’ll leave that to the future scholars. All I know is 2008 was a dark, bleak year.

A lot of wealth evaporated during that time. A lot of businesses failed. People needed hope.

At my company, Service Nation, we were working our tails off, trying to help the small business owners we served. In many ways, they were fortunate. As plumbers, air conditioning, and electrical contractors working in residential service, there was demand for their work. A homeowner might want an old, broken air conditioner repaired instead of replaced, but it was still work. While people might attempt some plumbing repairs on their own, they were as apt to make things worse as fix them. Electricians saw the least impact due to consumer fears of electricity.

Life wasn’t as good for these companies as a year earlier, but they had work. If they worked hard, if they continued to market their businesses, they would be fine. They just needed confidence. Like I said, they needed hope.

At the time, I was the sole writer for the Comanche Marketing e-zine. I started writing a series on staying positive. It became extremely popular. I believe it did some good. I do know that many of our members who invested, grew. Some grew wildly as their more fearful competitors all but disappeared from public consciousness.
The coronavirus pandemic is different than the financial meltdown. I think the fear was greater at its onset and has been rapidly dwindling as we collect more data on the virus and its impact. There is not the same sense of futility as the financial meltdown and as time passes, I believe the nation will spring back to life quickly.

Nevertheless, we are not out of the woods yet. As I write this, parts of the country are just beginning to open up. While most of the business owners I talk with are fairly optimistic, all are not. They need hope. They need some optimism.

So, I dusted off the old Comanche Marketing series, edited it for the current times, and added quite a bit. I hope you find some hope and optimism from reading this. It’s divided into 55 chapters, each focused on a different aspect or approach to maintaining a positive mental attitude and outlook. If you enjoy it, let me know.

Cheers!

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Staying Positive
In A Covid World

Winston Churchill said, “The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Today, it seems that we’re surrounded by pessimists. If you’re looking for an optimist to give you a positive outlook, you’ve found one. Churchill also said, “I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.”

I agree with old Winston. Yet, being an optimist is far from easy today. Let’s face it, bad stuff is happening. Covid-19 is bad. What it is doing to the economy is bad. But… It’s not as bad it seems. And… It doesn’t have to affect your outlook on the world.

This Is The Most Negative Period In History

Things seem worse than they are because negativity is assaulting us from every direction. Take the media (please). Real journalism is largely dead in America. Journalists no longer investigate or dig below the surface. Instead, mass media has become mass spin. Even in good times, the spin tends towards the negative. Give them a pandemic and an accompanying recession and the chattering class really piles on.

To the media, good news is not news. When was the last time you heard a news anchor trumpet great news on the radio or TV? Tick, tick, tick.
The media is not reporting the silver linings. They are making things seem worse than they are.

And then there are the social media CAVE dwellers. CAVE dwellers are people who Complain About Virtually Everything. The CAVE dwellers are emerging from every rock to tell anyone who will listen how hopeless things are. Challenge them and they call you foolish, a Pollyanna, or downright irresponsible. I know. Because I advise contractors to invest in their companies, to market, and to sell, I’ve been criticized. One guy wondered publicly how I “sleep at night giving such horrid suggestions given the reality at hand?”

CAVE dwellers are making things seem worse than they are.

Even during booms, those operating a “service” business know how business can beat you down. People tend to call you when something is wrong, when there’s a problem. Your job is to deal with one problem after another. And though you exceed customer expectations nine times out of ten, you hear ten complaints for every complement. Worse, some do not even give you a chance to correct a problem before spraying their venom on review sites.

The nature of service and repair work can make things seem worse than they are.

Don’t Buy

With all of the doom and gloom, what can you do? DON’T BUY IN!

When you accept the media’s message, you risk making it a self-fulfilling prophesy. You risk spiraling down and taking your
business with you. We largely get what we expect. Expect doom and you’ll get it. Expect to prosper despite the virus and despite the economy and you’ll find a way. During the Great Recession, Michigan contractor, Joel Wensley, commented on the negative news in the Service Roundtable…

Even here in Michigan, where the unemployment rate is high, there are still millions of people working. I for one choose to look at the glass half full.

About three or four months ago, when all I was hearing was bad news, I finally made a decision to turn off the news in my car and in my home. I don’t allow myself to focus on bad news any longer. In conversations with people I keep control and don’t allow it to go south. I don’t want to hear it. When others are talking doom and gloom I simply walk away.

I am focused on growth and I refuse to participate in this recession. Nor will I let it control me or my thoughts. In six months or so from now everyone will have forgotten how bad it supposedly was anyway, so why embellish this line of thinking.

Yes I recognize that things are tougher out there, you'd have to be a complete idiot to at least not recognize it but you just can’t let it consume you it will make you physically sick.

I remember reading something from Matt Michel (Surviving a Slowdown) that it might take some hard work and that if everyone put forth 5% more
effort that it would payoff, and he was dead on. It was after reading that article that I made the decision not to participate.

At the end of September we were still on my "stupid" target to only be down 10% in gross sales from 2007. What stupid line of thought. Why would anyone in their right mind plan on failing or at least some sort of failure?

Needless to say after changing my thinking I went at it hard, and we finished the year 4% over 2007 and we are on pace for a record January and 1st quarter.

I think just by being positive and walking around with a permanent smile on my face it has had some effect. People think I'm up to something and I love it. I have responded several times this week to the old "how are you doing" with "if I were any better I'd be on vacation."

A lot of business leaders I talk with are truly frightened; and with reason. Some are going turtle, which is the worst possible response. When it’s harder to find customers, you should increase your efforts to find them, not pull back.

Businesses fail and succeed in good times as well as bad. While the economy can help or hinder, it’s not the most important factor in a company’s success. The most important factor is the business leader. Remember, people tend to get what they expect. Employees and customers tend to reflect the attitudes and actions of the business owner. Virus or not, recession or not, you can prosper. You can refuse to participate.
The Service Nation Alliance is an elite best practices group for air conditioning, plumbing, and soon, remodeling contractors. Members are placed on Advisory Boards that meet weekly using Zoom because they are located across North America. Facilitated by a consultant or senior contractor, these meetings address KPIs, problems the members face, and opportunities. I read the summaries of each meeting. Since Covid, these small business owners have been overwhelmingly optimistic.

Granted, each plumbing company is an essential services provider and in most of North America, air conditioning companies are considered essential services. They can work. Plus, their focus is the residential service market, where people are stuck at home running air conditioning more than normal and flushing who knows what down their toilets when homeowners run out of toilet paper. There is demand.

All of these contractors should be okay, right? That is not the case. A large survey by a manufacturer found that one out of five had just closed up, stopped functioning. A digital marketing company noted that despite a jump in searches and conversions, digital advertising costs were falling by half as contractors cut their marketing.

Why were the Service Nation Alliance members seeing success when so many of their competitors were not? There is not one answer. Almost all adjusted their methods, introducing revolutionary new services like no indoor contact air conditioning maintenance, with homeowners providing assistance from phone instruction. Almost all upped their messaging to their teams and to the public. And why not? It cost less to advertise. They crafted new offerings. Some shifted their focus. They found ways to give back to restaurants and hair salons, which were particularly hard hit. They reinvented their businesses around things they could do, not
the things they could not. They added products and services, stressing those around air and water quality and sanitation. They expanded into new markets. They chose to grow.

You also have a choice to make. You can chose to react badly. Or, you can chose to respond positively.

During the Great Recession, I was fascinated to read a blog post by Dave Chase, then the Chief Marketing Officer of Altus Alliance. Chase noted that historically, companies that acted aggressively during tough economic times were not affected by the contraction. Look at what has to say about the ways different companies responded to the Great Depression…

To begin, not all was doom and gloom during the Great Depression. It was a time when those who knew what they were doing made great economic strides, and the very nature of the Depression was an economic boon for them. It was a time when several companies benefited from aggressive marketing while their rivals cut back. A good example of that would be Kellogg besting C.W. Post during that time. Consumers didn't stop spending during the Depression; most just looked for better deals, and the companies providing those better deals came out stronger after the Depression ended. When spending picked up, consumer loyalty to those companies remained.

Generally speaking, those companies that not only survived but also thrived during the Great Depression were those that continued to act as though there were nothing wrong and that the public had money to spend. In other words, they
advertised. These are industries that didn't wait for public demand for their products to rise. They created that demand even during the most difficult of times.

Because so many companies cut spending during the Great Depression era, advertising budgets were largely eliminated in many industries. Not only did spending decline, but some companies actually dropped out of public sight because of short-sighted decisions made about spending money to keep a high profile. Advertising cutbacks caused many customers to feel abandoned. They associated the brands that cut back on advertising with a lack of staying power. This not only drove customers to more aggressive competitors, but it also caused financial mistrust when it came to making additional investments in the no-longer-visible companies.

Both anecdotal and empirical evidence support the case that advertising was the main factor in the growth or downfall of companies during the Great Depression. To put it bluntly, the companies that demonstrated the most growth and that rang up the most sales were those that advertised heavily.

And this was exactly the experience of the companies in the Service Roundtable that followed our guidance and increased their advertising and marketing efforts across the downturn that followed the financial meltdown starting in late 2007 and ending in 2009. These companies had leaders who made decisions to power through the economic headwinds, so they did.
You Set The Tone

You’re the boss. It’s your job to reassure and pump up the people around you. But who motivates you? Unfortunately, no one. As boss, you must rely on self-motivation.

It’s important for you to stay positive and even-keeled. Your employees feed off you, seeing your every mood and action out of proportion. Their highs are higher and lows are lower.

Within limits, your employees’ attitudes are a reflection of yours. Of course, even if you have the sunniest disposition, the grump employee will still be a grump. But, he might not be as big of a grump.

And If You Don’t Set The Tone?

What if you’re not the boss? A positive attitude is still important. First, no one wants to hang around a grump.

Second, optimists are more successful. Studies by Harvard and Stanford found that 15% of an individual’s success is due to technical skills and 85% is due to attitude. This makes sense for no other reason than expectations. Optimists set positive expectations and as a result, practice more and try harder to achieve them. Optimists sew positive expectations and reap success as a result.

Third, optimists are healthier. In the 1988 paper, "Pessimistic Explanatory Style as a Risk Factor for Physical Illness: A Thirty-five Year Longitudinal Study,” published in the “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,” it was reported that optimistic
people live longer, suffer from fewer, less severe diseases, and are generally healthier than pessimists.

The University of Rochester Medical Center published findings of a review of the research. They noted, “Researchers have reviewed the results of over 80 studies to look for common findings. They found optimism had a remarkable impact on physical health. The study examined overall longevity, survival from a disease, heart health, immunity, cancer outcomes, pregnancy outcomes, pain tolerance, and other health topics. It seemed that those who had a more optimistic outlook did better and had better results than those who were pessimistic.”

Whether you’re the boss or not, it’s harder in the Covid-19 world than ever to stay positive, more important than ever to stay positive, and on one’s going to help. You must do it. You must manage your attitude. So how do you manage it? I’ve come up with a set of simple ways to stay positive in a Covid world.

Some of them may work for you, while others do not. Some might work for a while, but lose effectiveness over time or with repetition. That’s why there are a lot of them.
People with clear written goals are more positive, by definition. If you have goals to focus on, you are focusing forward, toward the future, and not on the negative day-to-day. Goals help you move forward in a positive direction.

Steel magnate, Andrew Carnegie said, “If you want to be happy, set a goal that commands your thoughts, liberates your energy and inspires your hopes.”
Identify Attainable Near Term Goals

No matter what kind of goal setting process I engage in, it’s unlikely I’m ever going to become an NBA forward. I’m too short, too fat, too old, and limited by a six-inch vertical leap. If I were to focus on NBA stardom, I would set myself up for failure. I would be putting myself in a position where life would beat me down.

Set goals that are attainable, but not easily attainable. Baseball great, Steve Garvey said, “You have to set goals that are almost out of reach. If you set a goal that is attainable without much work or thought, you are stuck with something below your true talent and potential.”
Near term goals should be just out or reach, but not out of sight. They should be near enough that you can see them, but out of reach so you must stretch to achieve them.
Keep the End in Mind

Even with attainable goals, setbacks are inevitable. How we respond to them is our choice. The negative response is to see a setback as a failure. The positive response is to recognize it as a mere setback that delays, but does not halt you. To keep setbacks in perspective, look beyond them to the end goals, the big goals that may take years to accomplish.

End goals are not easily attainable. They are major goals that inspire and motivate. On May 25, 1961, President Kennedy said, “I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth.”
Kennedy declared an end goal. He did not know exactly how it would be accomplished. No one did. But the goal gave the space program an end goal to focus on and keep at the forefront when the inevitable setbacks occurred. The tragic deaths of astronauts Grissom, White, and Chaffee during a mission test early in 1967 (unofficially called Apollo 1) did not derail the Apollo program. Two years later, Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon on July 20, 1969.

Compare the different responses to Challenger explosion. When the Challenger tragically exploded early January 28, 1986, the space program lacked a similar end goal to putting a man on the moon. Without an end goal, the Challenger was more than a setback. It nearly marked the end of the space program. We did not resume manned spaceflight until December 29, 1988, nearly three years later.

When the Columbia broke up upon re-entry on February 1, 2003, the shuttle program was questioned again. It was two and a half years before spaceflight resumed with the Discovery on July 26, 2005.

The response to setbacks in the moon program was positive. We wept and mourned, but pressed on. The end goal was the focus. The response to setbacks in the space shuttle program could not have been more different. Perspective was lost. The setbacks, while tragic, were magnified in importance.

On a more personal level, almost every student experiences a poor grade on a test or paper from time to time. Students who obsess on the poor performance magnify it. They surround themselves with negative thoughts and energy. They are more likely to get frustrated, repeat the performance, drop the course, or drop out.
Those who focus on the end goal of graduation tend to see a poor grade as a minor setback. They don’t let it affect the long term “mission” of earning the degree or certification. Keeping focused on the end allows them to stay positive.

The business owners most likely to close their doors as a result of Covid-19 are those without the big, end goal. Without the end goal, they find it difficult to see beyond their current difficulties.
Practice Positive Self Talk

Too many people program themselves with negative thoughts. Motivational speaker and psychologist, Denis Waitley, was Chairman of Psychology on the U. S. Olympic Committee's Sports Medicine Council. Waitley worked with U. S. Olympic athletes to improve their performances. According to Waitley, top athletes program their minds for success, for positive performance.

Waitley says the mind records self talk a robot. Whatever you program, gets played back. The mind moves in the direction of the currently dominant thought. When, for example, you stand in the tee box telling yourself, “Don’t slice. Don’t slice,” you’re engaging in negative self-talk. Your robotic subconscious cannot distinguish between positive and negative. It only knows “slice.” So, you do.
Instead of focusing on what not to do (negative self talk), focus on what you want (positive self talk). Instead of saying, “Don’t slice,” tell yourself “Straight down the fairway.”

Top performing athletes focus on the outcomes they want. You should as well. If you believe you can or cannot accomplish a deed, you are probably correct.
Recall Victory

The Dallas Cowboys were one of the first professional sports franchises to employ the use of sensory deprivation tanks. Other teams and top athletes from other sports (e.g., Carl Lewis, when preparing for the 1988 Olympics) have followed. The player floats in the tank while viewing videos of his best performances on the field.

The athletes are recalling moments of victory. You can as well. You do not need a state-of-the-art sensory deprivation tank to recall victory. Relive past moments of success and victory in your life. Recall them with a smile, remembering how you felt.

Recalling victories not only helps you repeat them, it gives you a victorious outlook. It gives you confidence you can win again. As
Vince Lombardi said, “Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence.”
Slightly different than reliving past success is projecting future success. Think of what you want and visualize it achieved. If you want a new car, see yourself driving it. If you want to win a tennis tournament, visualize yourself holding the first-place trophy. If you want a certain level of financial gain, see it attained. This differs from self-talk. Paint a vivid, Technicolor picture in your mind with as much detail as possible. See it. Script it. Attain it.

According Alan Simpson, a former Marine Corps fighter pilot, “Before every show or group practice flight, the Blue Angels sit in a quiet room and have the Skipper talk through the flight. They all close their eyes and visualize the entire flight, including moving their hands on imaginary controls. The Skipper uses the same tone and gives the exact orders at exactly the same point in the flight.”
This is all done in real time just as though they were airborne. Afterwards, they sit for a while without talking just to ensure they are all ‘in the zone’ prior to manning the airplanes.”

Visualizations related to your goals are especially powerful motivators for the subconscious. The subconscious has a difficult time distinguishing between a vivid visualization and reality. What you see and visualizations you believe possible become internalized.

On the other hand, visualizations that are pure fantasy do nothing. No matter how much I visualize myself slam dunking a basketball, it’s not going to happen. I don’t believe it’s possible and it’s not related to my goals. That makes the thought of me gusjohnsoning the province of Walter Mitty, a mere daydream (and bonus points if you know what where gusjohnsoning comes from).

When you visualize victory, you visualize a positive outcome. You visualize a positive future. You gain and project a positive outcome.
Attend Windshield University

What do you listen to when you’re behind the wheel? Talk radio? Shock jocks? Sports? Music? There’s nothing wrong with talk radio or music. On the other hand, there is nothing particularly right with it. Broadcast radio and music typically do little to help you improve your craft, to put you in a more positive frame of mind, or to improve your outlook.

Instead of listening to the radio or music, consider listening to audio books and seminars. With Audible.com, you listen to a practically unlimited number of business books and motivational programs. Or, you can download podcasts, which are free. Listen to Dave Ramsey’s Entreleadership podcast or John Jantsch’s Duct Tape Marketing podcast. For contractors, I strongly recommend David Heimer’s Profiles in Prosperity (www.ProfilesInProsperity.com)
podcast where he interviews the industry’s best performing contractors about their best practices.

Instead of spending your windshield time with your favorite political blowhard or vapid entertainer, spend it with some of the best motivators and most successful people in the world of business. Instead of pure entertainment, seek entertaining business professionals who will uplift and inspire you. If you spend 30 minutes behind the wheel each day, you will gain the equivalent of more than three full 40-hour weeks of training. That’s three full weeks of motivation. It’s three full weeks of positive mental programming.
Focus on Things You Can Affect
And Ignore Things You Cannot

Some things are outside of our control. The president and congress do not listen to my opinions about tax policy, so it does little good for me to get worked up about our tax system. I can’t affect it. Neither can I affect government decisions related to Covid.

You cannot control the economy or the government. You can control how your company responds to a pandemic or an economic downturn. You cannot control your employees. You can control the rules of conduct you will accept and the incentives and rewards you will offer.
Don’t let yourself get tied up in knots over things beyond your control. It’s frustrating. It beats you down. Instead focus on things you can impact.

Motivational speaker, Wayne Dyer said, “It makes no sense to worry about things you have no control over because there's nothing you can do about them, and why worry about things you do control? The activity of worrying keeps you immobilized.”
Recognize That Your Boss Sits On a Higher Rock

This one is for employees. When I was a marketing grunt with a Fortune 500 type company, some decisions did not sense to me. Vicki LaPlant (currently a Business Coach with Service Nation) was an executive in the same company. While I don’t remember the circumstances that perplexed me at the time, I remember what Vicki said to me about them:

“Well Matt, that doesn’t sense to me either. I guess I’m not on a high enough rock.”

“Huh?” I responded.
“If I were on a higher rock I would see farther and have a bigger picture. When there’s something I don’t understand I figure it’s because I’m not on a high enough rock.”

Instead of getting wrapped up in negative suspicions about the wisdom of management, let it go. Figure management looks at things from a different, higher rock. That’s far better for your attitude than wondering how your superiors could be such morons.

After all, if you work for morons, what does that make you? Talk about a beating! It’s better for your frame of mind to avoid the whole subject.
Pray or Meditate

Personally, I find that prayer does wonders for my attitude. Prayer helps organize thoughts. It helps focus on things to be thankful for, on the people who matter most, and on important goals, helping to gain and maintain a positive state of mind.

Turn things over to God and you free yourself from focusing on things you cannot control. You release negative energy. This is why William James, considered the father of American psychology said, “The sovereign cure for worry is prayer.”

God may not answer all of your prayers. God may not answer any. But if and when God does intercede, it will do wonders for your outlook on the world.
Christian writer, Joyce Meyer noted, “Prayer doesn't just change things - it changes us. If we are diligent in seeking God, slowly and surely we become better people.”
We all have problems. Some are work related. Some are personal. It’s hard enough to keep positive without taking work problems home, and troubles at home to work.

On the way to work, find a place to mentally store your personal problems for the day. I’ve used the mailbox of a house along my commute. Mentally, I placed all of my personal problems in the mailbox and withdrew all of the work problems I left the night before.

Stashing your problems is an exercise in compartmentalization. In reality, it’s nearly impossible to keep different aspects of your life
completely separate from one another. However, even partial compartmentalization helps your attitude. Bringing work problems home, makes home problems worse because you’re still mentally at the office. When you bring a work problem home, you dwell on a problem you cannot actively solve until you go back to work. Dwelling on a problem you cannot solve, drags you down.

Writing in *Psychology Today*, Maria Baratta advised, “Walking at some point in your commute is a great way to process the day and clear your mind. Sometimes walking to the next subway stop, getting off the bus one stop earlier, or parking a distance from home gives you some precious time to transition. The goal is to walk into your home and leave the work day behind so that you give your brain the needed rest it deserves.”
In a scene from the TV mini-series, “Band of Brothers” one soldier explains the trick of coping with the war, of overcoming the frontline soldier’s very legitimate fear of being killed so that he can do his duty. The trick was to accept death. As a soldier, you accept that you will not live to see the end of the war. In other words, identify the worst outcome and accept it. If you can handle the worst case, you can handle anything.

With the Covid pandemic, death is a possibility. Fortunately, as more information and more data becomes known, the possibility of death is shrinking dramatically. We will never live completely risk free. In fact, we face risk from the regular flu. We face risk from cancer. We face risk every time we get behind the wheel of a car. Yet, we chance it anyway.
The governor of New York told a reporter that nothing was worse than death. I disagree. For me there are many things worse than death. For example, the failure to live, in a vain attempt to avoid death is far worse to me than the actual thing. Everyone dies. What is tragic is that some do not live.

We will face good and bad outcomes for every situation for the rest of our lives. Instead of worrying about them, think through the worst outcome. What really is the worst thing that can happen? Face it squarely. If it did happen, what would you do? Could you handle it?

For most business owners, the worst imaginable outcome is business failure. If the business failed and you had to start over, could you? As you will read later, Henry Ford failed twice before he succeeded. You might not like starting over, but you could handle it. If you can handle that, you can handle anything else.

If life knocks you down, you can always get up, dust yourself off, and get back in the game. If you can face the worst that can happen, anything else is a snap. Okay, maybe not a snap, but better.

Have you ever heard a millionaire shrugs his shoulders and say, “I made it once. If I lost it all, I could make it again.” He’s facing his worst outcome.

Now, think about the odds. In all likelihood, the odds that the worst-case scenario will occur are pretty slim, particularly if you are actively working to prevent or avoid it. The late, great motivational speaker Zig Ziglar said that fear is usually little more than “False Expectations Appearing Real” (F-E-A-R). Things are seldom as bad as we fear.
“X” is the worst thing that can happen. Realistically, “X” is unlikely to happen, but if it does, you can handle it. Thus, you have nothing to worry about, nothing to fear. You might as well move forward positively, working for and expecting a better outcome.

It’s easy to worry, worry, worry about the bad outcomes, about what can go wrong. Unchecked you can worry yourself into a funk. You can paralyze yourself. To avoid worry, face your fear squarely. Recognize that if you can handle your worst fear, everything else is easier. Recognize that your worst fear is unlikely as long as you’re actively working to prevent it.
Nothing helps your attitude like a pat on the back. Unfortunately, the boss might not know how to give pats on the back. Worse, you might be the boss.

Who pats the boss on the back? Usually, no one, so give yourself a pat on the back when you do something well. It might be mental congratulations. It might be more tangible.

“When I was growing up, my parents used to take me out for ice cream when I got good report cards,” noted Laura Vanderkam, author of several books on time management and productivity. “I’m not so into ice cream now, but when I’ve accomplished something tough, I like to reward myself in a more adult fashion—by getting sushi—spicy tuna rolls and avocado salad, washed down with a glass
of Chardonnay. We all need little rewards in our lives to keep us motivated.”

Do not limit yourself to BIG rewards for BIG accomplishments. Give yourself little rewards for little accomplishments too. When you do this, you begin the process of associating pleasure with accomplishment. This leads to more accomplishment.

When you hit a target, celebrate. You did well. Give yourself a reward.
Emulate Without Envy

Too many people see someone successful and resent his success. Too many people think he must have gotten lucky or broken the law or otherwise cheated or acted unethically. This is pure envy. It’s negative thinking. It’s excusing your own performance (or lack thereof).

From time immemorial, unscrupulous politicians have made an art out of playing to envy. By stirring up resentment, they play to our baser instincts, telling one group of people that the only way to get ahead of others is to tear them down. Beware the politicians who play up envy. They are the worst sort, who cynically seeks power by bringing out the worst in people to control them.
Not only politicians play the envy card. Watch for the office gossip who uses envy to stir dissension. Watch for your peer who similarly sews the seeds of discord by sniping at the most successful companies in your market. Read between the lines and he’s really seeking your concurrence with the excuses he’s made up to explain why his competitor has done so much better than he has.

In truth, some people are lucky. But the luckiest often seem to be the hardest workers. Luck and perspiration seem to accompany each other. And when luck appears without perspiration, it doesn’t stay long. According to newspaper columnist Ben Graydon, “the vast majority of lottery winners are right back in poverty within a couple of years.”

Luck is fickle. When you see sustained luck, someone’s likely given luck a lot of help.

Just like some people are lucky, some accumulate wealth and status illicitly. Yet, things have a way of catching up to people. Sometimes it’s obvious. Sometimes it’s not. All of us wonder at times how so-and-so can continually “get away with it.” Just because old so-and-so’s “gotten away with it” so far, doesn’t mean he’ll get away with it in the future. Again, things have a way of catching up with people.

Don’t worry about the people who have benefited from luck and/or illicit or unscrupulous activity. Certainly, don’t envy them. They’re due for a fall, maybe not right away, but eventually.

Most successful people are the beneficiaries of sweat and good decisions. They’ve worked hard, efficiently, effectively, and were willing to take risks. Most of them are not that different from you and me! They are not smarter than we are. They are not better educated. They merely kept working at it until they succeeded.
President Calvin Coolidge said, “Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

The positive response to the success of others is not to envy them, but to emulate them. When you see a successful person, think to yourself, “He is not all that different from me. If he can succeed, then by God, so can I.”

Beware the envy trap. You can never build yourself up by tearing someone else down. Envy leads to cynicism.

Instead practice emulation. Find someone successful to emulate. Read the biographies of self-made titans in business. Their stories will motivate you in a positive manner.
When I was a kid, Dad made me rake the leaves. We had a big yard and lots of trees. It seemed like a huge task. “I’ll never finish,” I would whine. He didn’t care. He made me do it anyway. Dads are like that.

By focusing on raking one section of the yard at a time, I eventually got the yard raked. I think I could have done it in half the time without all of the whining, but kids are like that.

It’s the same when facing a daunting task as a grown up. We get depressed thinking about how large it appears. It looks overwhelming. It’s not.
We live in an instant world and tend to think in terms of instant solutions. Like the man who wanted patience RIGHT NOW discovered, some things can’t be done instantly. Some things take time.

Mike Hajduk, who retired as President of Callahan-Roach Products & Publications, liked to ask, “How do you eat an elephant?”

He answered with a grin, “One bite at a time.”

One bite is not overwhelming. When facing a monumental task, tackle it one bite at a time. Oh, and be sure to celebrate the small victories along the way.
Take Breaks

Every so often, taking a break does wonders for your mental outlook. This is not the same as Stephen Covey’s “sharpening the saw” habit.

Stephen Covey says highly effective people take time out for themselves every now and then to renew themselves physically and mentally. Covey illustrates the principle by noting that a lumberjack who stops to “sharpen the saw” periodically will cut more wood than a lumberjack who works harder and non-stop, eventually dulling the blade and reducing effectiveness.

Covey’s absolutely correct. Yet, when facing a forest of problems, sometimes it helps to do more than merely sharpen the saw, which is a different form of work. Sometimes it helps to take a pure break.
Escape. Do something frivolous, fun, and that you simply want to do for pure enjoyment.

How does this help you stay positive? Simple. It’s fun. “Fun” helps your attitude.

According to writer, Elizabeth Sims, breaks do not merely help your attitude, they improve your thinking. She says, “The most obvious – and easiest! – way to gain perspective is to put your work away for a while. The truth is, we don’t know how taking a break frees up the mind, but it does: Somehow it freshens our little neurons, or perhaps it prompts the brain to create more cleverness molecules.”
Often success lies just beyond the horizon of failure. Napoleon Hill was given letters of introduction by industrialist Andrew Carnegie to study the country’s top achievers. Hill captured his research in his classic book, “Think and Grow Rich.”

Napoleon Hill wrote, “Before success comes in any man’s life, he is sure to meet with much temporary defeat, and, perhaps, some failure. When defeat overtakes a man, the easiest and most logical thing to do is to quit. That is exactly what the majority of men do.”

“More than five hundred of the most successful men this country has ever known told the author their greatest success came just one step beyond the point at which defeat had overtaken them. Failure
is a trickster with a keen sense of irony and cunning. It takes great delight in tripping one when success is almost within reach.”

One of the people Hill met and studied was Thomas Edison. No one illustrates the value of persistence and tenacity better than Edison. Many people know that Edison failed 2,000 times in his effort to find the filament for the light bulb. But did you know his attempt to create a better battery resulted in the failure of 50,000 tests?

A discouraged assistant figured even Edison would quit after 50,000 failures. “You must be pretty downhearted with the lack of progress,” said the assistant.

“Downhearted?” replied Edison, “We've made a lot of progress. At least we know 50,000 things that won't work!”

Edison’s kept at it, through 50,000 failed tests, through ten years, and through one million dollars of his own money until he developed the nickel-iron alkaline storage battery, which is still used today!

Maybe you don’t have Edison’s tenacity. I know I don’t. Yet, when I think about Edison, I find I have just a little bit more tenacity. Edison inspires me. Edison helps me see failure in a different light. It’s not failure. It’s progress. Edison helps me to stay positive while I’m making progress.

“Don’t Quit” is an inspirational poem many people have read that may have been written about Edison. It is reprinted on the next page. Though many claim to have written the poem, its author is lost.
Don’t Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and debts are high,
And you want to smile but have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won if he'd stuck it out.
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You might succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man.
Often the struggler has given up,
When he might captured the victor's cup,
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar,
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.
Few countries are more prosperous than the U.S. and Canada. And few publics are more sedentary. The American Heart Association says that only 22 percent of the U.S. population performs enough regular physical activity to achieve cardiovascular fitness.

Exercise is one of the best things we can to do stay positive. Exercise releases endorphins, which are natural chemicals produced by the brain. Endorphins are similar to, and more powerful than morphine. According to the Merck Online Medical Library, endorphins “reduce pain and induce a sense of well-being. Thus, exercise appears to help improve mood and energy levels and may even help alleviate depression.”
Of course, you already know exercise is good for you. Right? We all do. So why don’t we do something about it? Well, exercise is one of those things that’s easy to do and easy not to do. Make it a priority. Make it one of your “breaks.”

Exercise is not only a break, it’s sharpening the saw. Your productivity is better when you regularly exercise because you are healthier. You have fewer sick days.

Exercise improves your mental sharpness. It gives you more energy. It lowers your blood pressure and heart rate, allowing you to react better to stress, improving your decision making. And, it releases endorphins.

After you start a sustained exercise program, you will find yourself addicted to the endorphins. This is a positive addiction and helps you maintain your fitness program.

The challenge is getting started. Sometimes the motivation is external. For example, after falling off the exercise wagon, a series of events combined over a two-week period to motivate me to action.

First, a pair of pants spontaneously deconstructed. They must of shrunk or something. Why else would they rip apart at the seam?

On the off chance they didn’t rip due to poor workmanship, I stepped on a scale. I broke it. I know it was broken because the little arrow pointed at 250. That couldn’t be right, could it? It was so depressing I decided to do something about it. I threw out the scale.

Actually, I decided to run around the track during one of my daughter’s summer track practices. A group of 12-year old girls made fun of me (no lie). One of the coaches came up to make sure
I was alright. He was concerned that I might be having a heart attack (absolutely true).

This combination of events motivated me to start an exercise program again. I supplemented it with every trick I knew. I listened to audio recordings of industry seminars, to positive music, and to sports talk while I exercised. I planned runs down the most scenic and inspirational trails I could find. I signed up for area races, which provided added motivation to exercise, if only to avoid abject humiliation (e.g., the people pushing strollers would pass me, the little kids would pass me, the little old men would pass me, and the little old ladies would pass me).

I improved. When I started, I was a 250-pound, seam splitting fat boy who couldn’t run a whole mile without little girls laughing and adults concerned they might need to call 911. Six months later, I managed to run the Dallas Turkey Trot’s 8-mile course without stopping, passing out, cramping, pulling anything, collapsing in pain, or otherwise injuring myself. A few days earlier, I won the “Rhino” 215-240 pound weight division in a 5K race (don’t be too impressed; since not many fat boys are willing to get out of bed at 7:00 a.m. on the weekend to run a 5K against fast, skinny people, there’s not a lot of competition). During a physical, my blood pressure was about the same as it was in college. My resting heart rate was 44, the lowest it’s ever been.

Then, I pulled my Achilles. I couldn’t run without a lot of pain so my exercise program ground to a halt. I fell into old habits. In hindsight, I can see that my attitude slipped with my inactivity. And I found all of the weight I lost. That seems to be my trigger. When the scale heads north of 250, I do something.

Because of my Achilles and later, my knees, I’m off the trails and in the gym using the non-impact elliptical trainer and walking on the
treadmill. I can always tell the difference when I’m exercising. I feel better and my outlook is better.

You’re probably in better shape than I am now or than I was before I first started to get back in shape. If I can get in shape, so can you. You’ll feel better. You’ll have more energy. You’ll have a more positive outlook on life.
As a parent, I worried about my children’s peers. Every parent does. Every parent knows the potential positive or negative influence of friends during a child’s formative years. Peer pressure doesn’t end with the conclusion of teen years. Peers affect us throughout our lives.

We tend to reflect the outlooks of the people we associate with. Attitude is contagious. Run with negative people and you will begin to adapt a negative outlook that reflects their worldview. Associate with positive people and you will view the world optimistically.

The late motivational speaker, Jim Rohn hypothesized, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”
Rohn’s hypothesis is born out by research. In The Compound Effect, Darren Hardy wrote, “According to research by social psychologist Dr. David McClelland of Harvard, [the people you habitually associate with] determine as much as 95 percent of your success or failure in life.”

The people we associate with do not merely affect our attitudes and outlooks, they affect our very success. This is one of the big advantages of belonging to business alliances like the Service Roundtable and the Service Nation Alliance. They put you in contact with positive, successful people who will exert a positive influence on you.

If your friends grouse and grumble, tell you why things are rotten, shoot down your dreams, and give you reasons to fail, find new friends. These people are like black holes. Their negative gravity sucks the positive energy right out of you. Find new friends.

If you employ negative people, either surround them with personnel who are so upbeat it’s impossible to pull them down or replace them. Do not let them poison your company.

If your family is comprised of negative people, do your best to become a positive force and influence in their lives, while surrounding yourself with others who will build you up.

Surround yourself with positive people who will support your dreams and who will give you reasons to succeed. Get involved with a business alliance or other professional group, join a service club, become active in a small group at church, or associate with positive online groups. Feed your attitude by associating with positive people.
Count Your Blessings

William Penn said, “The secret of happiness is to count your blessings while others are adding up their troubles.”

You have a lot of blessings to count. By accident of birth, most of us are incredibly fortunate. We live in a day and age where we lack little. By historical standards, today’s impoverished are wealthy beyond measure. Compared to the third world, virtually everyone in the first world is wealthy.

We are all blessed. Yet amid our day-to-day problems and stresses, it’s all too easy to forget our blessings. Don’t. Take the time to count your blessings. For my part, I find that offering a prayer of thanks is an excellent way to count my blessings and remind myself of the good things in my life.
When I think about my petty little problems, the world can seem pretty depressing. But when I think how my life has been blessed, the petty is put in perspective. My attitude gets a lift. Things really are pretty good and they’re getting better and better.

“Count your blessings,” said Og Mandino. “Once you realize how valuable you are and how much you have going for you, the smiles will return, the sun will break out, the music will play, and you will finally be able to move forward the life that God intended for you with grace, strength, courage, and confidence.”
Seek Mentors

As a grunt engineer, I was often lost. Mike Mosher, one of the senior engineers, took pity on me. He casually mentored me by sharing simple advice and counsel. He showed me how to use a piece of silver solder to test the logic in a CNC tube bending program. He nudged me to run my designs by the guys on the shop floor (who actually had to build the stuff I designed). With Mosher’s help, I went from horrible to adequate.

Years later, Garry Upton guided me in the art of public speaking. He would make me practice presentations over and over while he counted the number of times I said “uh” and “um.” He loaned me his videotape equipment so I could video one of my longer presentations and watch what I did (I fell asleep watching it – yes, I put myself to sleep).
Jay Clifton gave me career advice about advancing in a Fortune 500 company. He also helped me to understand the impact of work and career on family and how to ease their burden.

When I found my job at risk over corporate politics, not performance, Jerry Thomas guided me through the crisis. He listened patiently, asked the right questions, and offered calm, detached advice that proved sage.

I had long looked up to Ron Smith, who is considered the father of modern contracting business practices in the air conditioning industry. When Ron invested in Service Nation, I was ecstatic. He then became a member of our Board of Directors and mentored me through the years with a combination of stories and questions. The stories all carried lessons that I needed to learn. The questions made me think.

Mike, Garry, Jay, Jerry, and Ron were serving as mentors. They were helping me without any motive for personal gain. Mentors give back.

Mentors typically have a lot more experience than we do. They’ve been there, done it, and have a closet full of t-shirts.

All of us have mentors at different points in our lives. A mentor gives us the confidence that comes from their knowledge and experience. Mentors also give us objective feedback. They let us know when we can do better and give us positive feedback when we’ve done well. Mentors let us know we can accomplish our goals and may even encourage us to aim higher because they can see we’re capable of more.
Mentors come and go throughout your life. How do you find one? They can come from anywhere. Mike Mosher was a colleague. Garry Upton was my boss. Jay Clifton was in my Sunday School class. Jerry Thomas was a vendor at the time. Ron Smith was an investor.

An old proverb states that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. To me, this implies that mentors and teachers are all around us, though we are not always ready to follow their coaching. I know that’s been the case in my life.

Mentors do not always recruit you. Sometimes you must recruit them. Ask for input from someone whose opinion you value. Then, listen. If you want additional input, pay attention and act on what you’re told. Give feedback about the results. Let the mentor know how things turned out.

Remember, mentors are people like you and me who have experience and wisdom to share and at a point in their lives to share it. Because they are like you and me, they are not perfect. They have their foibles and failings. They have their egos.

If you want a mentor relationship, you must actively listen to the mentor. Act on the mentor’s advice. Let the mentor know how things turned out. Thank the mentor. Show genuine interest in the mentor’s life.

Mentors can do wonders for your attitude. When you’re ready, you will find there are more of them around than you might imagine.
Ken Bowdon is one of the top geologists in the oil industry. He’s very smart. He works very hard. Yet, he also knows the value of play. When Ken launched Bowdon Energy, he routinely took employees to the movies during the middle of the week. The small investment in time had a big pay off in attitudes.

While Ken was using the movies as a way to boost morale, I think he was also at play for himself. He got to go to movies his wife and kids didn’t want to see. Movie day boosted Ken’s attitude as well as his employees’ attitudes.

According to Dr. Mary Sarafolean, writing in “A Pediatric Perspective,” 2% of pre-teens are clinically depressed. The number
jumps to 3% to 5% of teens. The lifetime risk of depression is 10% to 25% in females and 5% to 12% in males.

Why does the risk of depression increase as we age? Is it because we take on more responsibilities? Or is it because we get recess when we’re young and play is frowned upon as we age? George Bernard Shaw said, “We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”

If adolescent play is important, it might explain why males are half as likely to be depressed as females. Men are probably twice as likely as women to behave like adolescents.

Play is important. It’s a release. It’s fun. And it’s impossible to have a bad attitude when you’re having fun.
Be Careful Around Dream Killers

Beware dream killers. Dream killers are people who tell you why your dreams are unrealistic. While you’re stretching, saying, “I can,” a dream killer grabs you around your ankles, saying, “You can’t.”

Dream killers try to limit your horizon. They try to keep you from seeing farther than they can see. They try to keep you from seeing more good than they can see.

They kill your attitude. They kill your dreams.
Dream killers wallow in the mediocrity of unfulfilled potential. Anyone who rises beyond their swamp of self-pity is a reminder of the dream killer’s self-imposed limitations. Your dreams are threats to the dream killer.

The dream killer fears facing what might have been. Thus, your success is a threat.

The dream killer fears his own inadequacy and lack of worth. Your success is a threat on two fronts. First, if you succeed you show the dream killer what might have been. Second, if you succeed the dream killer fears you might leave and forget about him.

We encounter dream killers throughout our day, but it’s those closest to us who pose the greatest threat. Because we love them, we value their support, their ratification, and their encouragement the most. We are more likely to trust them and take their counsel to heart, deep down in our innermost being if nowhere else.

Beware of your dream killers. Beware of the people in your life who want to push you down when you need a boost up. Love them. Just keep your dreams away from them.

When young, dreams are fragile. They need nourishment and support. Be careful who you share your dreams with.
Remember It’s Not That Bad

In Greek mythology, Narcissus was the first empty suit. According to myth, the guy looked good and knew it. Women, nymphs, and goddesses fell for Narcissus left and right, but he treated them like dirt. Some of them got together and asked a goddess to make Narcissus love someone the way they loved him. They also asked that he could never win over the creature he loved.

It wasn’t long after that when Narcissus saw his reflection in a pond and fell in love with himself. Unable to move, Narcissus died by the pond, gazing longingly at his own reflection.

Today, we describe someone as narcissistic when he is obsessed with himself. Think of your typical teenager.
Teens inhabit an overly dramatic world called “Days of Our High School Lives.” Everything that happens to a teen takes on much greater importance it merits, largely because teens lack the life experiences to keep things in perspective.

That’s a teen’s excuse. What’s yours?

I find that I get upset about really minor stuff all of the time. In my narcissistic little world, little things seem very important. They seem traumatic. Things that don’t go my way seem HUGELY significant. They aren’t.

When you step back and gain some perspective, things are probably not all that bad.

A good example is the reaction that many people have whenever there is a rise in gas prices. All of us get sticker shock when gas prices jump suddenly. Every 50 cent increase in the price of a gallon of gas seems horrific. Yet, if we drive a vehicle that gets 20 miles per gallon and drive it an average of 15,000 miles per year, the 50 cent increase works out to $7.21 per week.

An extra seven dollars per week of personal expense is nothing to sneeze it, but it’s also not the end of the world. My daughter can easily spend that much on a trip to Starbucks. Rent a couple of movies from Amazon or your cable provider and you’ll spend more.

Granted, for businesses that operate a fleet of service vehicles, a bump in the price of gas is tough to swallow. Good thing it’s customers who swallow it, not the business owner. Of course, that’s assuming the business owner is smart enough to adjust prices when costs change.
When things seem bad, ask yourself if you aren’t being a little narcissistic, if you haven’t lost your perspective. Step back and take another look. It’s probably not that bad.
Find the Good in Bad News

After a storm, part of our fence blew down. I lost complete perspective about it. Because I was working on the fence, I couldn’t do something else I wanted to do. Bwaaaah.

“You knew the fence needed to be replaced,” my wife reminded me.

“Why now? This isn’t a good time.”

“There’s never a good time.”

Great. Confuse me with the facts.

Yet, the more I thought about it the more I thought that this would be a great time to buy an air compressor and a nail gun. In fact,
when I thought about the opportunity to buy some boy toys, the fence’s demise didn’t seem all that bad.

Unfortunately, the cost of the compressor, tank, and nail gun combined added up to more than I thought reasonable. As my father-in-law commented when he dropped by and saw me digging a post hole, “You can nail a lot of pickets for that.”

When I saw the cost of the nail gun I returned to my “woe is me” mentality. But then I remembered that I sorta like driving nails. It’s fun. It’s also exercise. Once the post holes are dug, putting up a fence isn’t that bad.

When you’re confronted with bad news, it’s easy to focus on it. After all, being “confronted” usually means the bad news is slapping you in the face. Yet, whenever there’s bad news, there’s probably some good news buried in its midst. You just have to find it.

It really comes down to a choice. You can focus on the bad or you can look for something good and focus on it. It’s your choice.
“Celebrate,” shouted one of the coaches of my daughter’s soccer team whenever we would score a goal. It’s important to celebrate. In a soccer game, and in life, there are ups and downs in the normal course of events. Celebrating victories, even minor victories, leads to more and bigger victories. Celebration lifts the entire team. It makes the game more fun. Even when the team is behind, it’s important to celebrate goals.

What works for a youth soccer team, will work for you, and will works for your company (or any organization). Celebration lifts spirits. So, celebrate your personal victories. Celebrate your company successes.
When I was a grunt engineer with the Turbo Refrigerating Company, the company achieved an injury free record. As Turbo closed in on an entire year without a lost time accident, the company president announced that everyone would celebrate with a company-wide barbeque and chili cook-off.

Some employees planned on bringing their families to the plant to show off where they worked and what they did. Others wanted to bring their cooking gear to show off how well they could cook chili. Morale and attitude increased in anticipation of the celebration and stayed high for more than a month afterwards.

We should celebrate more often, I thought. We should. But we don’t.

If 12-year old girls must be cajoled into celebration, how much more effort is required for adults? We’re far too reserved and dignified.

I bought a ship’s bell for our offices. Whenever someone joined the Service Nation Alliance, the idea was the business advisor would celebrate by ringing the bell. The business advisors are incredibly reluctant to ring it. I guess, it’s not natural to ring the bell.

As children, we would jump at a chance to ring the bell. Remember when we used to scream, “Look at me!”

Now, we are adults. We believe we are supposed to be more reserved, that there is something untoward about calling attention to ourselves.

It seems people not only need permission to celebrate, they need encouragement. The embers of celebration must be fanned into flame. It’s worth the effort.
Celebration, whether personal, private, or company wide, creates an afterglow that burns long into the future. Celebration’s afterglow can warm you though dark and depressing times.

Few companies celebrate as well as Southwest Airlines. In the book, “Nuts! Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success,” authors Kevin and Jackie Frieberg write that at Southwest Airlines celebration builds relationships, communicates a history, helps people visualize the future, reduces stress, motivates, re-energizes, builds self-confidence, helps people deal with change, and removes fear.

Celebrate company successes. Celebrate personal successes. Even if you celebrate privately, celebrate.
In the excellent movie “Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World” Midshipman Blakeney, loses his arm in battle. Blakeney is young, really just a kid. His dreams of a career in the navy lying in ruin, Blakeney was nearing despair, but doing his best to keep the proverbial British “stiff upper lip.”

While Blakeney is recovering, he’s visited by Aubrey, the ship’s captain. Aubrey hands Blakeney a book on the great British admiral, Lord Nelson, and encourages the boy to read the book.

After Aubrey leaves, Blakeney thumbs through the book and sees an illustration of Lord Nelson. Nelson is missing an arm. The audience can almost hear Blakeney’s thoughts. If Nelson could
become the greatest admiral in the world’s most powerful navy with one arm, then Blakeney’s prospects might not be so bad either.

Successful people who overcome the odds inspire us. Their lives lift our spirits. They serve as role models. This is especially true when we discover they overcame odds similar to those we face.

While successful people are considered exceptional, many were thought to be anything but exceptional at first. Successes were not born that way. Many are like the company that took 20 years to become an “overnight success.” Superficially, they appear gifted, fortunate, instant successes. Only when we study them, do we learn the truth.

Like you and me, they struggled with periods of confusion and uncertainty. They wrestled with fear. They fought with doubt. They faced obstacles just as daunting as any that lie before us.

Yet, they persevered. They are people like us who persevered past their struggles, thereby transforming themselves from ordinary to extraordinary. They inspire us, not by what they have done, but by how far they traveled. They inspire us because they were so very like us at the start.

How do you find inspirational people to study? They’re everywhere. Read the biographies and autobiographies of successful people. Watch their profiles on the History Channel and the Biography Channel.

Autobiographies, especially, are gifts. When someone of accomplishment (or someone and a ghost writer) takes the time to share his thoughts as he faced challenges and triumphs, it’s like he’s having a conversation with you. It’s priceless. So, listen closely.
Don’t limit yourself to people who are featured on cable or are the subject of books. Study successful people in your community and profession. Most will be more than happy to share their experiences with you. In fact, they will be flattered.

When we study successful people we realize what’s possible in our own lives. We’re inspired. Our spirits are lifted. We’re motivated.
The runner was in the lead. It was the race’s home stretch. The finish line and victory neared. Then he heard footsteps. Someone was coming from behind, threatening to overtake him. He turned to see who it was and how fast the competitor was closing.

Big mistake. When he looked back, the runner’s focus left the road before him, increasing the chance he might stumble. In the final sprint, looking back is wasted motion. It saps energy and will at the precise moment every bit of it is needed for the final kick.

Focused on the pursuit, the runner was passed. He lost his race.

Some people limit their future by looking back at the wrong moment. When they should focus on the road ahead, they look back
to their past failures, sapping energy and will. They allow old failures to overtake them.

Examples abound. The adult who lets a childhood slight control his self-image is still a child, reliving childhood experiences but never learning from them. The business owner who continues to pursue a venture with little potential for future gain because of the sunk costs he’s already invested, risks his company’s future because of past mistakes.

The past has passed. You can learn from it, but you cannot change it. So, learn from your past, and then, let it go. Focus on today and tomorrow.

You cannot change the past. You can change the present. You can prepare for the future.

Do not let last week, last year, or the last decade overtake your future. Do not let your future be limited by your past. Look forward, not backward. Focus on the future.
We live in a society that trumpets immediate gratification at every turn. The problem with immediate gratification is it doesn’t last. It’s like a drug. We need more, more, more, now, now, now.

The need for gratification becomes the perpetual pursuit of pleasure. When we allow the pursuit of short-term pleasure to drive us, its absence leaves us empty, depressed.

Joy, by contrast, is more eternal. Joy lasts.

Think of your happiest memories. What stands out more, a new car or the birth of a child? The car gives momentary pleasure. The birth of a child offers eternal joy.
A few drinks also offer a night of pleasure (that becomes something else the next morning). Time with a loved one gives a lifetime of joyous memories.

The pleasure that comes from immediate gratification is momentary. It fades. Joy lasts.

Joy typically comes from creation, from building, from sharing, from giving, from activities and experiences that are larger than ourselves. It’s more than us. Pleasure is all about us, only us.

Immediate gratification leaves us empty, longing for the next pleasure fix. Joy fills our souls, leaving us feeling better about ourselves and our lives.

Seek joy. Seek lasting joy.
According to psychologist Theodore Rubin, “Happiness does not come from doing easy work but from the afterglow of satisfaction that comes after the achievement of a difficult task that demanded our best.”

Few things improve your attitude and outlook as much as hard work. Applied effort is intensely satisfying. Hard work seems to carry its own reward.

When we work hard, we feel good. No matter the outcome, we feel good about ourselves after a good day’s labor. Why?
Extrinsic rewards are external. Someone notices something we’ve done and gives us a pat on the back, a bump in pay, or some other from of praise and compensation.

Extrinsic rewards count on others. They may or may not be deserved. They may or may not be forthcoming for our greatest efforts and achievements.

Intrinsic rewards are internal. They come from the inside, from knowing we did well. Hard work is intrinsically rewarding. We know we’ve done well and feel good about ourselves as a result.

The importance of intrinsic satisfaction is captured perfectly in one of my favorite poems, “The Man in the Glass.”

The Man in the Glass

When you get what you want in your struggle for self
And the world makes you king for a day,
Just go to the mirror and look at yourself
And see what that man has to say

For it isn't your father or mother or wife
Whose judgment upon you must pass
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life
Is the one staring back from the glass

You may be like Jack Horner and chisel a plum
And think you're a wonderful guy.
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum
If you can't look him straight in the eye.
He's the fellow to please - never mind all the rest,
For he's with you clear to the end.
And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test
If the man in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years
And get pats on the back as you pass.
But your final reward will be heartache and tears
If you've cheated the man in the glass.

Dale Wimbrow, 1895-1954

As “The Man in the Glass” suggests, it’s impossible to fool
yourself and difficult to live with the attempt. In fact, it’s
depressing. Deep down, you know when you’ve done well, when
you’ve worked hard, and when you have not. Hard work feels
good and improves your attitude. Hard work makes the man in
the glass your friend. And when that happens, the world seems a
trad better place.
Every athlete’s heard the refrain, “Practice like you play. Play like you practice.” And top performers do practice.

Champion athletes practice the same plays over and over and over. Golfers hit the range. Ball machines feed volleys to tennis players. Pitching machines fire strikes to hitters. Football teams run the same plays again and again.

If anything, musicians are more diligent than athletes. The great 19th century pianist Ignace Paderewski said, “If I don't practice for one day, I know it; if I don't practice for two days, the critics know it; if I don't practice for three days, the audience knows it.”
While practice may be important for athletes and musicians, it’s critical for pilots and astronauts. No one dies when you screw up a sonata.

When Laurel Clark took her first flight aboard the shuttle Columbia, she remarked that her biggest surprise was, “how much the ascent felt just like the simulation.” Neil Armstrong told mission control that walking on the moon was, “just like our drills.” After Apollo 12, Pete Conrad described walking on the moon as, “just like old home week. I feel like I’ve been rehearsing this moment for the past four years!”

Practice gives you confidence in your own abilities. It also teaches you your limits, building your confidence within those limits. Before a football game, for example, kickers will practice field goals. They’re not merely practicing. They’re learning their range for that day, field, and weather. Good coaches will not ask a kicker to attempt a field goal beyond his pre-game range. If the kicker is asked to make the kick during the game, he’s confident. After all, he already hit a field goal from that distance during warm ups.

We expect shuttle astronauts to practice. We expect Tiger Woods to practice. So why don’t we expect it of ourselves in our professions?

If practice helps an athlete, artist, or astronaut, won’t it help you? If you want to improve your presentation skills, your management skills, your salesmanship, practice. Simulate. Role play.

Practice in a mirror. Practice until the performance becomes automatic, and then practice some more.

With practice, comes confidence. Nothing gives you a positive outlook like sincere confidence in your own ability.
Practice like you play. Play like you practice.
All of us face fear from time to time, but imagine facing something as scary as taking on the world’s greatest superpower almost single handedly. That’s what Moses faced.

Moses was minding his own business when God spoke to him from a burning bush…

“Hey Moses, come over here,” said God.

Is that burning bush speaking to me, wondered Moses. Cool. “Here I am.”

“Stop! What are you doing Moses? Don’t you know better than to walk on holy ground with your shoes on? Get those sandals off.
You don’t wear sandals around Me. I’m God, your God, your Dad’s God, his Dad’s God, and so on. I’m GOD,” said God, cranking up the reverb.

Moses ripped his sandals off.

“Better,” said God. “Now, I’ve got a job for you. Things are pretty bad for the Israelites. Since they’re God’s people, this isn’t good. So you’re gonna do something about it. You’re gonna free them.”

“Huh?” said Moses. This was scary. Moses started shaking. “Me? You want me? You’re craz…, uh, who am I to take on Pharaoh? He’s one seriously mean dictator. You don’t want an old man like me. Pharaoh will kick my tail!”

“Moses,” said God. “Think. You’ve got a pretty serious ringer of your own helping you out. He’s called God. You know, GOD with the capital G and full surround sound reverb?”

When Moses’ ears stopped ringing, he gulped. He was thinking fast, trying to figure a way out. “Yeah, well what if I go to the Israelites and tell them ‘God sent me’ and they say, ‘God, huh? Well if you know God so well, what’s his name?’ What do I say then? What?”

“I am who I am,” said God. “Tell them ‘I AM has sent me.’”

Greeeat, thought Moses. That’ll work really well.

“The Elders will listen,” declared God. “The King of Egypt will not.”

Now I really want to do this, thought Moses. Pharaoh’s got like a gazillion chariots and big, mean guards.
“I will show Egypt wonders and the Egypt will set you free. And the Egyptians will give you gifts. You will plunder Egypt.”


“What’s in your hand Moses?”

“Yeeewwww,” screamed Moses as his staff turned into a snake and he jumped back. “Come on God! Why a snake? I hate snakes!”

“Grab it by the tail.”

“I don’t wanna,” said Moses.

“DO IT,” said God with full reverb.

“Okay, okay.” Moses touched the snake and it became a staff again. He looked at it suspiciously.

“Put your hand in your cloak and remove it,” said God.

“Aww, not again.”

“Moses…”

“Alright,” said Moses, removing his hand, covered with leprous sores.

“Oooh, yuck. You gave me a zombie hand. I can’t believe you gave me a zombie hand.”

“Stick it back in your cloak.”
This time, Moses followed God’s instructions as fast as he could, removing a normal hand.

“Okay God,” said Moses, making one last attempt to talk his way out of freeing the Israelites, “You can kick Pharaoh’s butt. You can make people believe. You can do all of this God stuff. I’ll give you that. But why me? God, I’m scared of public speaking and don’t do well in front of groups.”

God cranked up the reverb again and mixed in a little thunder for emphasis. “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

“Oh Lord,” whined Moses, “Please send someone else.”

Then God got really mad and told Moses he was going to have to put up with his kid brother, who had a rather bizarre cow fetish. Moses gave in, went home, and told Jethro, his father-in-law, he was finally moving out.

Jethro later commented to his wife, “You won’t believe it, but that son-in-law is finally going to leave and find a job on his own. I always figured it would take an act of God to get him to move out.”

I don’t know about you, but God’s never spoken to me from a burning bush. Something like that would definitely get my attention. It got Moses’ attention.

Moses knew he was talking with the Big Guy, had God’s full support, and was still so terrified that he managed to get God irritated with him. Moses was scared of Pharaoh, but had God’s help handling the King of Egypt.
If God was taking care of the life-threatening risk, the rest should be easy. Yet, Moses was just as scared of people laughing at him, of not being believed, and of making a fool of himself in public. Most of the things he feared the most would not hurt him.

Like Moses, most of us want to run and hide from things that can’t physically hurt us. According to Gallup, 40% percent of the public is terrified of speaking in public. Jerry Seinfeld quipped that, “Surveys show that the #1 fear of Americans is public speaking. #2 is death. Death is #2. That means that at a funeral, the average American would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy.”

Usually, “fear” is nothing more than False Expectations Appearing Real. Yet, what appears real to me, is real to me. In other words, our very fear of something makes it real and gives it power over us. The only way to conquer the things we fear is to face them head-on.

Once, I was afraid of speaking in front of a group. During one of my first, very short, speeches I memorized every word. I felt gratified when I received polite applause. Only later did I learn that no one heard a word I said. Warned about feedback, I held the microphone too far away from my mouth to pick up my voice. Yet, people still applauded.

I totally blew my first big speech. And yet, people applauded. So, what was I afraid of? It was no longer speaking in public. In fact, today I even get paid to speak in public (and more on occasion if I’ll sit down and shut up).

As a kid I was never much of a street fighter, punishing the knuckles of too many opponents. When I grew older, the thought of stepping into a boxing ring with an audience terrified me. I wasn’t afraid of
getting beat up. I’d already experienced that. I was afraid of getting beat up in public.

I forced myself to box anyway. I’m a lousy boxer. Yet, it felt great to lose. It felt great because I was no longer afraid. My fear no longer held power over me.

When you face your fear, you remove its power over you. You boost your confidence and feel great about the world.
If business owners want to improve their attitude and outlook, they need to charge enough to earn a profit. Earning a profit is a no-brainer, right? Apparently, it’s not. One of the leading reasons small businesses fail is that they simply do not charge enough.

Companies fail to charge enough for a variety of reasons, with ignorance leading the list. In fact, ignorance lies at the root of most other reasons. Business owners are often ignorant about the market, their competitors, their own costs, and their worth to society.

I could write a book about pricing (in fact, I think I have). For now, I want to focus on how a business owner’s perception of self worth affects pricing and vice versa.
In the end, your pricing reflects your value. When you fail to charge enough to make a profit, you’re telling yourself and the world that you’re not worth much. That’s a horrible thing to live with. When you raise prices to profitable levels, you’re sending yourself and the world the opposite message. That’s uplifting by itself.

Charging too little leads to a life of austerity. It causes you to question every extra for yourself, your family, your employees, and your customers. Callbacks, when you have to return to the job because you didn’t get it right the first time, are resented because they’re money out of your pocket; money that you do not have.

The resentment adversely affects your attitude and outlook. Others sense it and reflect it back, making things appear even worse. It starts a spiral that only you can break. You can break it by saying, “Enough! What I do matters. It’s important. It’s important to my customers. It’s important to the world. I’m going to charge accordingly.”

Your prices should be based on generating a profit, given your business’ costs and overhead structure. If you fail to generate a profit, you can boost prices, increase sales while holding overhead in check, or cut costs. While a good businessperson will always scrutinize costs to prevent unnecessary spending, you are unlikely to save your way to prosperity. That leaves boosting sales and pricing. Either can work. However, if you cannot increase sales without increasing overhead, raise prices.

Will your market accept higher prices? Probably. After all, there’s probably someone in your market, in your industry who charges more than you. If there’s not, if you price more than anyone else, there’s probably another service business in a different industry with a similar cost structure that charges more than you (e.g., talk to the copier repair companies).
Just like there’s always someone lower priced, there’s usually someone higher priced. So, while there is a price ceiling, it’s unlikely that you’re near it. If you only charge enough to survive, instead of enough to thrive, you are almost assuredly below the price ceiling.

You are worth a profit. Your customers deserve a service provider who’s worth a profit. No one wants a grouch. No one wants a company that skimps, that makes mistakes by rushing, and that always takes the cheap way out. No one wants a company that cannot readily stand behind its work.

Charge enough to earn a profit and your service will improve, your attitude will improve, and your outlook with improve.
Think Like a Texas Aggie

Texas A&M is the Rodney Dangerfield of universities. Aggies get no respect. Maybe this makes them the Avis of universities. Aggies try harder.

While Texas A&M may not win every football game, they never believe they lose either. Aggies don’t “lose.” They get “outscored.” While the difference between “losing” and getting “outscored” may seem like mere semantics, it’s really a huge difference in psychology.

When you get outscored, you simply run out of time. It’s not defeat. It’s circumstance.
“You’re just lucky the clock ran out. If I had a little more time, I’d show you!”

Losing is demoralizing. Running out of time is not. Losing is permanent. Running out of time is temporary. It’s the mindset that matters.

“If you don’t see yourself as a winner,” said Zig Ziglar, “then you cannot perform as a winner.”

Colin Powel said, “I think whether you're having setbacks or not, the role of a leader is to always display a winning attitude.”

All of us have setbacks in life. Are yours permanent or temporary?
In Frank Herbert’s classic book, “Dune,” he writes, “Fear is the mind killer.” Fear paralyzes. Worry and fear can stop us cold and keep us from moving forward. Worse, when we focus on the things we fear and worry about, we direct our subconscious minds towards the very thing we fear the most.

Unfortunately, it’s hard to wish fear and worry away. They nag at you, demanding attention, and refusing to be brushed aside.

Instead of refusing to worry, make an appointment to worry. Set aside 30 minutes of time when you will worry about everything that can possibly go wrong, about every negative outcome. If you start to worry during the other 23.5 hours of the day, tell yourself, “Later,
I haven’t got time now. I’ll worry about this during the scheduled time.”

Trite? Maybe. This technique is effective for many. I’ve used it. Maybe I’m fortunate, but during the times in my life when I was most worried about events and set aside 30 minutes, I couldn’t fill it. I would run out of things to worry about after five minutes or so.

Allow fear and worry to run uncontrolled through your day and they will linger, paralyzing you. Concentrate them in a defined block of time and not only will it free you during the rest of the day, but your problems will seem smaller, more manageable. Most of us worry a lot when we really don’t have that much to worry about.
A contractor I know said he came across an old goal he had written down before he started his business. The goal was to be the highest paid employee at his company and worth every penny. He said he achieved this goal and now was trying to figure out the best way to craft a similar goal for his business. Though his company is profitable, the profitability is recent. The contractor wonders if the lack of a goal has impeded his success. It probably has.

Today, Ken Goodrich is known as one of the nation’s most successful air conditioning contractors. He wasn’t always that way. The turning point came when he was asked to wait at the supply house while they took care of good customers. He sat in his truck and stewed. And, he started writing goals down. While it didn’t happen overnight, Ken gradually built up his company, sold it,
repeat and repeat. Today, he runs plumbing and air conditioning companies that generate $150 million in revenue at healthy margins.

According to Dave Ramsey, “Something magical happens when you write down your goals. It changes the way you see your situation.”

In a longitudinal research study, the graduates of an Ivy League university were asked about their goals. Only 3% of the graduating seniors had written down their goals. Twenty years later, in the follow up research, the 3% who had written down their goals had amassed more wealth than the 97% who lacked written goals.

There’s something about the power of a written goal that makes it more tangible. There’s something about writing the goal down that forces a psychological commitment. Earlier, I wrote that motivational psychologist Denis Waitley says our subconscious mind moves us in the direction of our currently dominant thought. When a goal is written, the imprint on the subconscious is stronger. The pull is stronger. Written goals have added strength.

Written goals are powerful motivators. They direct your subconscious in a positive, forward direction. Your subconscious directs you.
Give People the Benefit Of the Doubt

People who wrong us stand out. They stand out because they are so few in number. If a lot of people wronged us, they wouldn’t stand out. They would be in the majority. Fortunately, most people are honest, ethical, and well meaning. Most people are nice. Most people are good. Most people deserve the benefit of the doubt.

At the scene of an accident four different eye witnesses offer four different interpretations of the event. You would think the observers were watching four different accidents, instead of the same event from four different perspectives. All of us are like that. All of us view things from different perspectives. Thus, we interpret the same event differently.
If we can interpret a car wreck differently, imagine how many ways we can interpret the off-hand comments of another person? I’d say, oh, a gazillion.

When someone says something stupid, insensitive, hurtful, or offensive to you, it probably wasn’t intended that way. You expect mean people to say mean things. Most people aren’t mean. If someone sounds mean, it may only be the way you’re interpreting things.

Of course, someone might be having a bad day. Sadly, all of us have our moments when we say or do things that hurt those around us.

The next time someone makes you mad, upset, or hurt, give him the benefit of the doubt. Maybe you are misinterpreting things. If not, maybe he’s simply having a bad day. Assume the best in people and you will be surprised how often you get it.

If more people gave others the benefit of the doubt, this would be a better country with fewer misunderstandings. The majority of racial tensions, for example, would evaporate overnight. After all, most racism is the perception of the worst in others.

Give people the benefit of the doubt. Your world will seem a little cheerier and brighter.
We need to laugh more. When we were toddlers, we laughed an average of 400 to 500 times a day. As adults, we only laugh 15 times a day.

A Robert Half survey of executives found that 84% believe employees with a sense of humor perform better on the job. I expect the executives believe people with a sense of humor are fun to be around, positive, and less easily offended. All told, this makes them more productive.

According to the human resources and payroll company, Ceridian Corporation, laughter reduces the number of sick days in a year. Fifteen minutes of unrestrained laughter does the same thing for your body as six to eight hours of meditation.
In the classic book, “Anatomy of an Illness,” Norman Cousins wrote about the use of laughter in his recovery from a serious illness. While it’s true that laughter won’t fix a broken leg, it does appear to have a positive effect on health. Patch Adams aside, the healing power of laughter is still poorly understood within the medical community.

Nazi concentration camp survivor, Viktor Frankl said, “I never would have made it if I could not have laughed. It lifted me momentarily out of this horrible situation, just enough to make it livable.”

Laughter is an antidote to stress and worry, which drain the body and spirit of energy and will. Stress and worry cause illness and shorten life spans. So, laugh more. Live longer. Live better. Enjoy life.
Ignore Criticism

When I was in high school we played a game at Plano, a wealthy suburban community of Dallas. Plano’s high school had the best of everything, including a stadium many small colleges would envy. It was the first time I played in a big concrete stadium and the first time I even walked on Astroturf.

The stadium and atmosphere were intimidating. Making things worse, kids were catcalling. I made a mistake and they jumped all over it. I let them get to me. I let their criticism influence my play. My game spiraled down and I played my worst game as a senior.

A year later, I was a freshman at TCU. The coach of the basketball team had a block of seats behind the opponent’s bench reserved for my fraternity. It was our job to catcall the other team and we were
good at it. A couple of times we even got the other team’s players and coaches so mad they lost their tempers, screamed things at us I won’t repeat, and drew technical fouls.

Our game was to influence their game. When we succeeded, our criticism was controlling them.

Steve Saunders, the President of Tempo Air, one of the country’s most decorated contracting companies, has a good answer to criticism.

“Ignore it,” says Steve, with a shrug.

He’s right. Of course, ignoring unbridled criticism is easier said than done. Maybe Steve learned how to ignore it when he played basketball at TCU.

Critics aren’t in the arena, on the field, or on the court. They aren’t playing the game. They’re sitting in the stands, exerting negative influence. They win when you react. You win by treating them as the distractions they are, ignoring them, and focusing on improving your performance.

It’s not easy to ignore criticism, especially when your performance slips and there’s some truth to the critic’s call. Yet, heeding the critic does not help your game. The critic is not a coach, who offers constructive criticism, designed to help you improve. The critic is destructive.

At best, the critic seeks attention at your expense. At worst, your failure is the critic’s aim.

When there wasn’t anything substantive for us to criticize at TCU basketball games, it didn’t stop us. We would make something up.
For example, we would get a cheerleader to give us the name of some poor kid sitting on the bench and start riding him.

“Put Miller in. Miller wants to play. Miller practiced hard all week. Miller can’t be that bad; c’mon, put Miller in.”

Miller would slump down and try to disappear. Sometimes his teammates would catch on and start laughing and elbowing the poor guy.

The only way Miller could get the better of us was to ignore us, pretend to be deaf. It’s the only thing you can do with a critic. Ignore criticism.
Remove Sources of Irritation

Sometimes improving our outlook is as simple as eliminating sources of irritation. When I worked at Decision Analyst, one of the company’s employees would send emails to all employees that represented her rather extreme political views. Since I inhabit the other end of the political spectrum, these emails tended to get under my skin.

Complaining about the employee would have seemed rather petty. Responding would have placed me at her level. So, when her bosses failed to act, I removed the source of irritation. I created an email rule that automatically deleted anything sent from her address. If she ever emailed something work related, I never missed it.
The email rule worked so well I created rules to autodelete email sent by particular obnoxious people on several email lists I subscribed to. It was better than removing spam. I don’t read spam. I tended to read these emails.

Email isn’t the only source of irritation I’ve removed. I avoid certain agenda driven television shows, movies, and actors. There are radio programs, news programs, and magazines I avoid as well.

Growing up in North Florida, we received one television station. DVRs had not been invented. There was not streaming media available on demand. Today, I’ve got choices and exercise them. You can too.

Remove your sources of irritation. Life will improve.
Remember, We Need the Bad To Recognize the Good

If every day was absolutely terrific, how would we know? We wouldn’t. We wouldn’t know how good we had it. As far as we would know, the presence of a hangnail would be a horrifying experience that spoils our whole day.

Matt Prazenka, president of Precision Recruiters, an employee recruiting, interviewing, screening, and testing service for the service trades, advises people to remember good days and use the memory to endure bad days. Matt says we need a bad day every now and then so that we remember to appreciate the good days.
Good and bad are two sides of the same coin. You really can’t have one without the other. The only time good days were uninterrupted without end, Adam and Eve managed to blow it and get tossed out of Eden.

The next time things are going really well, stop. Store the memory. Store the feeling. Draw upon it during a bad day. Use it as an anchor to hang fast during troubled times, remembering that they will eventually blow over and the sun will re-emerge. Remember, without the occasional bad day we would never be able to recognize a good one.
A few years ago, a contractor’s wife posted a plea for help on the HVAC Roundtable Idea Exchange. Among the issues she faces is her husband’s attention deficit disorder (ADD).

I read the responses with interest. One, by Dave Squires of Online Access, particularly caught my attention. Dave suffers from ADHD himself (i.e., ADD with hyperactivity) and has three children with it. I asked Dave for permission to share parts of his explanation…

“The best way to describe what your husband experiences,” wrote Dave, “is to think of an ADD person as camera with a stuck shutter unable to easily focus in on just one thing.”
Dave explained that while her husband may appear unmotivated at times, “it is more like he lacks the ability to focus on the routine and daily systems that are needed to make a business successful. The lack of focus is due to the fact that everything around him--as well as any passing thought--competes evenly for his full attention.”

Here is the part that really interested me. Dave suggested, “that if there is something that challenges him or he is interested in, he will effortlessly ‘hyper-focus’ on it to the exclusion of all else. When this happens, he is probably brilliant as well as very creative at finding solutions that others don't easily see. The creativity comes from the fact that the ADD gives him the ability to draw from a bigger ‘solution box’ than other people. His mind is so used to shifting focus, he will typically find solutions quicker and from places that no one else even saw as being related to the problem since most people tend to have ‘tunnel vision’ when focusing on problems--and limit their solution possibilities. This is why I tell my children that even though there are challenges, ADD or ADHD can be a gift if they harness it properly.”

Dave is framing things positively. Instead of making excuses or engaging in a pity party, he’s declaring the glass to be half full. He’s making a positive statement.

It’s hard to imagine today, but once there was a stigma associated with adoption. When my parents adopted me, they were careful to always stress that I was “chosen.” I grew up feeling sorry for kids not adopted. Their parents didn’t get to pick them out. They got stuck with the lottery result of natural birth.

My parents were framing my adoption in the most positive light possible to ensure I saw it similarly. As a result, I always viewed my adoption positively.
In a message to the members of the Service Roundtable, shortly after the economic shutdowns began, I attempted to frame things positively around the Coronavirus…

The *Wall Street Journal*, which is supposed to be business friendly runs a headline that proclaims a quarter of the economy is shut down. OMG!! But wait!

That means 3/4s is up and running. The glass isn’t half full. It’s 3/4s full.

Sure, restaurants are closed. Planes are empty. Casinos are closed. Disney is shut down. The way the media report it, I thought 75% was shut down. But it’s just the opposite. 75% is up and running!

Yet, this understates things. Morningstar claims 70% of GDP is exempt from the government shutdown orders and half of the businesses that are not exempt can continue with remote operations. That adds up to 85%.

So really, how bad is it? It’s as bad as we imagine it will be, as bad as we expect it to be. If you expect it to be bad, change your expectations. If there is a recession, refuse to participate.

Depending on how you look at things, the glass is partly empty or partly full. Even an empty glass is merely one with lots of room. We can look for excuses or we can frame things in the most positive possible light. One holds us down and limits us. The other lifts us and opens possibilities. Frame things positively.
“When I look back on all these worries,” said Churchill, “I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.”

Mark Twain said, “I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.”

Indeed, few of the things that really trouble us come to pass. According to the late, great motivational writer and speaker, Earl Nightingale, 40% of the things we worry about never happen. We get all in a dither over nothing, over our imaginations. Sometimes, we become so anxiety fraught over imagined events that we become
paralyzed. We fail to act, proving that “nothing” can stop us. Our imagination stops us.

If you’re thinking that it’s the other 60% you should worry about, stop! You’re thinking negatively. Nightingale said another 30% of the things we worry about have passed. They cannot be changed. Worrying does no good.

For example, I can still vividly remember dropping a ball during little league. It would have been an easy out and the muff cost us the game. My coach blew up and threw a temper tantrum at me, which I also remember. Today, I see the incident as a learning experience. In fact, that particular coach proved the adage that no man is wholly without value since he can at least serve as a bad example.

It only took me twenty years to get past the experience, to quit making excuses for choking, and to quit worrying about it. Pretty silly, huh?

I’ve got other, equally silly things I worry about that can’t be changed either. I bet you do as well. With effort, I can eventually let the past go. However, it takes effort. It takes recognition that the past has passed (see “Look Forward, Not Backward”).

Twelve percent of our worries are needless health concerns, said Nightingale. Hypochondriacs of the world unite! There are more of you than imagined.

All of us appear to suffer a little from hypochondria. Why don’t we imagine health instead of illness? Norman Vincent Peale wrote about a minister who gave a prayer of thanks daily for his amazing, fantastic, incredibly healthy organs, naming them one by one. He continued well into his nineties during a day when people rarely
lasted to age 70. How long would the minister have lived if he imagined himself afflicted with an array of illnesses? While we’ll never know, I expect he would have lived a rather short life.

Another 10% of our worries fit the petty, miscellaneous variety. The Encarta Dictionary defines “petty” as insignificant, narrow-minded, mean, and of relatively little importance. In other words, 10% of the things we worry about aren’t worth worrying about.

According to Nightingale, only 8% of the things we worry about are worth the trouble. I believe that. It bothers me. Now I’m worried about which 8% of my fears should concern me.
When I was a consultant, I fired a six-figure client. In consulting, six figure clients are pretty darn lucrative. They are also rare enough that nobody fires one casually. Neither did I.

“High maintenance” could not begin to describe this client. He was like some motive disruptive force, making one impossible demand after another and balking at paying for any. Each request seemed wholly reasonable in isolation. Yet, altogether this guy was wrecking my world. He sucked so much time out of my day, I had trouble handling my other clients, let alone prospecting. So, I fired him.

After the deed was done, I wondered why I waited to act. It seemed strange that I agonized over dropping the account. The next
morning seemed like the first day of spring after a hard winter. Everything was brighter. Everything was cheerier. Everything was better. I almost skipped across the company parking lot.

I wasn’t alone. My whole team felt better. We quickly made up the lost business. After firing the client everyone was able to devote more time to our other, better clients. I was able to pick up new clients. Not only did the other clients more than make up the volume, but the gross margins were higher.

In truth, the client was never my client. We were both pretending. He wanted more attention and special treatment than I was willing to give. I wanted higher margins than he would pay. My inability to meet his needs as a client generated tension and stress. When I fired him, the tension and stress lifted. Life improved.

Just because someone appears on your customer list does not mean he is your customer. Not everyone is qualified to be your customer. Some people are simply ill-suited for your company. You will not be able to meet their requirements (i.e., response speed, service quality, pricing). To try is to introduce unnecessary stress and tension in your life and organization.

Correct incompatible customer relationships by dissolving them. Fire the customer. Remove stress and tension from your organization. Improve life.
Diet affects attitude. Bernard Gesch, a senior researcher at Oxford University tested the impact of vitamin supplements on prison populations. One group of prisoners was given supplements with vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids. A second group was given an identical looking supplement containing nothing. No one at the prison knew who received the supplement and who received the placebo.

Gesch reported that the prisoners receiving the supplements saw a 35% reduction in “anti-social behavior” and a greater reduction in violent acts. The behavior of the second group was unchanged. In other words, the first group was less “grumpy.”
Here’s the key point. The supplements were designed to do nothing more than ensure the prisoners met the British government’s standard diet for prisons. The standard diet contains nutritious food, but the prisoners did not always choose to eat the nutritious food.

Based on the number of decaled service company vehicles I see outside fast food restaurants at lunch, I would guess that many service technicians fail to eat well. As Gesch reported, a healthy diet makes one less grumpy. It’s not good for sales or customer service when our front-line service personnel are grumpy.

There’s a lot more research than Gesch’s. Anthony Elementary School in Leavenworth, Kansas gave K through 5th graders daily vitamin-mineral supplements at 100% of the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance, added a structured daily exercise program, provided the kids with nutrition education, and improved the nutrition in the school’s breakfast and lunch menus. The results were even more dramatic than Gesch’s.

The year before the changes were made students were sent to the principal’s office for “out of control” behavior 438 times. In the year the diet changed, kids were sent to the principal’s office a mere 18 times all year. That’s a 95% reduction.

The school had 13 school suspensions, compared to 52 the year before (down 80%). Suspensions due to violent acts dropped from 34 to one (down 97%). Teachers reported that it was easier to control their classrooms and were able to spend more time teaching. Perhaps most remarkable, the school’s Math and English test scores improved from last out of ten schools to the district’s best in Math and second best in English.
Your diet affects your mood, your attitude, and your overall mental sharpness. The more balanced your diet, the more balanced your mood.
We all screw up from time to time. Unfortunately, we can’t go back in time and unscrew up. We can’t change the mistake. All you can do is learn from it.

You should learn from your mistakes. As George Santayana said, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

The price of your mistakes is the tuition of experience. Sometimes the tuition is minor. Sometimes it’s not. Regardless, the tuition is paid. It’s not necessary to add on a guilt premium.

Motivational speaker, Les Brown said, “Forgive yourself first. Release the need to replay a negative situation over and over again.”
in your mind. Don’t become a hostage to your past by always reviewing and reliving your mistakes. Don’t remind yourself of what should have, could have or would have been. Release it and let it go. Move on.”

You screwed up. You paid for it. You learned from it. You can’t change it. Forgive yourself and move on.
Legendary football coach, Barry Switzer said, “Some people are born on third base and go through life thinking they hit a triple.” It’s not where you are that matters, but how far you’ve traveled, what you’ve overcome along the way, and where you’re heading.

It’s always tempting, maybe inevitable that we compare ourselves to others. We stand on second base and look at the guy smiling smugly on third. When we do, it’s important that we also remember where we started. We may not be on third base, but considering where we started, we’ve done pretty darn well. Plus, the guy born on third may not be going anywhere. We already have and are.

Taking measure of where we started and how far we’ve come from time to time matters. It reinforces our decisions to persevere and
press on when times are tough. Megachurch pastor, Rick Warren says, “Remember how far you've come, not just how far you have to go. You are not where you want to be, but neither are you where you used to be.”

Don’t worry about the guy with the silver spoon. Worry about yourself. When you face your next challenge, remember where you started and what you’ve overcome. Success may only be one more step.
Ronald Reagan never lacked critics, yet never seemed very troubled by them. Reagan biographer Dinesh D’Souza described a time while Reagan was serving as governor of California where a newspaper columnist was particularly harsh. Reagan’s aides needed to review the column as part of their daily briefing, but were hesitant. The critic was nasty. How would the governor react?

Reagan’s response was to ask, “Yeah, what’s his problem?”

Reagan shrugged it off. Sure of his own path and approach, he didn’t let the criticism bother him. Instead, he turned it around. He wondered what was wrong with the critic.
Once, someone got so upset by a column I wrote that he took out a full-page ad in a trade magazine criticizing me and what I wrote. At first, it bothered me. I guess I’m no Reagan. My view changed when industry consultant Charlie Greer, reacted more Reagan like.

“I’m insulted,” said Charlie. “That he never wasted money on a full-page ad attacking me.”

Charlie pointed out that I was being criticized for being on target. I should be honored that someone felt threatened enough by something I wrote to spend thousands of dollars in an attempt to refute it. In truth, they spent the money because they were worried. They were worried what people who read the piece might think (I can see why they might worry in hindsight, though ironically, I wasn’t even thinking of them when I wrote the column).

Charlie was right. They have the problem, not me. I framed the original column and ad side-by-side as a reminder. Take a detached view. Thoughtfully consider what a critic has to say. And if the critic’s the one with the problem, dismiss him.
Seek Inspiration

Positive people are inspired. They’re inspired by a compelling vision. They’re inspired by others. They’re inspired to look forward and look upward.

Sometimes inspiration finds you. Your subconscious mind synthesizes random bits of data below the surface. One day, the compelling idea takes shape and takes hold. You cannot help but pursue it.

Sometimes inspiration comes in the form of a person. You read about or meet someone who inspires you. Frank Lloyd Wright said, “Nature is my manifestation of God. I go to nature every day for inspiration in the day's work. I follow in building the principles which nature has used in its domain.”
Inspiration cannot be commanded. It can be sought. It can be sought in the stories you read, the television you watch, the websites you visit, the speeches you hear, and the places you place yourself. Seek better mental nutrition. Choose with care what you feed your mind.

Feed your mind inspirational material and your subconscious will synthesize the input, leading to new ideas, a new focus, an attitude of gratefulness, and an overall forward vision.
Choose to Be Positive

One of the simplest ways to stay positive in a negative world is by choice. *Choose* to be positive. If that’s oversimplifying things, it’s because it is simple. A positive attitude can be the result of a conscious decision.

Choosing to be positive won’t give you a new outlook overnight. You must first break the habit of negative thinking and replace it with the habit of positive thinking. Whenever you catch yourself falling into the old patterns, mentally say, “Stop!”

Discard your negative view and replace it with a positive one. In golf terms, you are mentally replaying the hole.
Watch a golf pro after a bad shot. He doesn’t shake his head sadly and resign himself to poor play. He looks solemnly at the hole or down the fairway for a second. What’s he doing?

During that second, he’s replaying the hole. This time the ball is traveling straight down the fairway.

Golf pros know that bad habits are all too easily formed, while good habits result from practice and diligent reinforcement. When pros make a mistake, they replay the shot mentally, swinging and connecting perfectly the second time.

When you catch yourself thinking negative thoughts, stop. Replay the hole, but this time replay it positively. Practice being positive. Choose to be positive. After all, as Oprah Winfrey noted, “The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.”
Remember, Bad News Outsell Good News

For nearly 75 years Pensacola, Florida dodged all hurricanes. Then, Erin struck. We were staying at my family’s condo on Pensacola Beach at the time. Everyone was evacuated from the island and for two days we couldn’t return.

Having grown up in Florida, I’ve seen my share of hurricane devastation. Hurricanes can be a form of architectural Darwinism where only the fittest structures survive. Since Pensacola had gone untouched for so long, I expected a lot of damage. When we returned to the Santa Rosa Island, I was surprised at the lack of damage. Almost all of the thousands of homes on the island
appeared untouched. However, on the sound side of the island, near our condo, two beautiful homes received extensive damage.

Guess where the news crews where parked? Yup, directly in front of the two damaged homes. When we returned to Texas, people who knew where we had been tsk tsked about the devastation. They were convinced we must have we lost our condo and that West Florida was now a wasteland. After all, that was the picture painted by the media.

Few professionals are more negative and cynical than the modern journalist (okay, the class action tort attorney can give the journalist a run for the money). Few professionals appear to delight in reporting that the glass is half full more than journalists.

Nothing has brought that to light more than the coverage of the coronavirus. It is persistently negative. When good news is reported, it is twisted to present it as darkly as possible.

Whether it’s a pandemic, a natural disaster, local economic news, national economic news, or foreign affairs, the mainstream media is a bunch of sourpusses. They not only report that the glass is half empty, but that it’s evaporating rapidly.

Why the negativity? I’m sure some of it is agenda driven, but most of it is human nature. Sadly, bad news sells. Panic generates clicks. If it didn’t, we wouldn’t be confronted by nearly as many tabloid magazines in supermarket checkout lines.

The negativity and tendency of the press to stir up the public is as old as the republic. Thomas Jefferson wrote that the “printers can never leave us in a state of perfect rest and union of opinion. They would be no longer useful and would have to go to the plough.”
Even “fake news” is nothing new. Thomas Jefferson noted that, “Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle. The real extent of this state of misinformation is known only to those who are in situations to confront facts within their knowledge with the lies of the day.”

As a businessperson, I’ve got to follow the news. However, I can choose the news I follow. I try to spend more time with the trade press and less with the national press. I look for positive news and I often wait until the day is done to check it out.

Every so often, take a week off from the news and social media. Don’t pay attention to the news at all. By the end of the week, life will seem far cheerier.

If you can’t help yourself and simply must follow the news, blow by blow, remember things are seldom as bad as reported.
Want to improve your own outlook? Volunteer.

Volunteering is giving of us. When we volunteer, we do well. We feel better about ourselves. Our spirits are lifted and we walk around with that warm glow inside. Try it.

Volunteering helps in other ways. Sometimes the people we help remind us how good life is.

When I coached youth soccer, one of the kids I coached wound up in the hospital. Erika woke one morning with no feeling or movement in her legs. An MRI revealed a growth along her upper spine that turned out to be a blood clot. The surgery to remove it necessitated the removal of three vertebrae. Two were replaced.
When I visited Erika, she was so excited. With effort, she could move her toes. She was remarkably upbeat. So was her mother, Julie, who was candid about the bad days, accepting of the situation, and hopeful about the future.

The future did improve for Erika. After a few weeks, she was able to stand briefly with assistance. She returned to school and even returned to soccer.

Visiting Erika lifted my spirits. My spirits were lifted because her attitude was so great. My spirits are also lifted because I’m reminded not to take things for granted. Erika didn’t.

Another of the kids I coached was mildly autistic. Yet no one tried harder than Amber. No one had a better attitude or a more infectious smile.

Out of the blue Amber would come running up and say something like, “My mother says I have to be brave. I’m trying to be brave. I’m trying.”

Or, Amber would walk up after practice and put her arm on my back, declaring, “You’re a good coach.”

How can you feel down around a kid like that?

Whenever I help others, whether through a formal, organized program or as spur-of-the-moment happenstance, I usually benefit in numerous ways. If nothing else, my outlook improves.

I’m not the only one. I talk with lots of top contractors on the Service Roundtable who go out of their way to help others. Why?
Most were given help along the way and figure it’s their turn to give back. They sincerely want to assist others.

Yet, inevitably, they tell me that the more they give, the more they get back. It’s not why they do it. It’s just how things turn out. Try it.
What if you do fail? When you were an infant you failed over and over again in your attempts to walk. Your parents never accepted those failures as final and neither did you. You were not meant to crawl through life.

I suspect you failed the first few times you tried to ride a bike. Everyone does. Failure is not an end. It is a step towards success.

Earlier, I wrote about Edison. He failed thousands of times but saw his failures as progression. He wasn’t merely persistent, he had to overcome a near complete loss of hearing and dyslexia. As a result, he struggled in school, was told he was “addled” by his teacher, and eventually homeschooled by his mother, who was frustrated with
the school. Many children are homeschooled today for nearly the same reason.

Edison recalled, “I used to never be able to get along at school. I was always at the foot (bottom) of the class. I used to feel that the teachers did not sympathize with me, and that my father thought I was stupid.”

And yet, Edison went on to become America’s greatest inventor. Others beat the odds as well.

Edison isn’t the only inventor to fail repeatedly. James Dyson made 5,127 prototypes before he got his vacuum cleaner right. In Wired Magazine, he wrote, “There are countless times an inventor can give up on an idea. By the time I made my 15th prototype, my third child was born. By 2,627, my wife and I were really counting our pennies. By 3,727, my wife was giving art lessons for some extra cash. These were tough times, but each failure brought me closer to solving the problem.”

Dyson created his vacuum, but recruiters refused to carry it because replacement of vacuum bags was too lucrative. This led Dyson to create his company at age 46.

When Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen write their inaugural Chicken Soup for the Soul book, they were rejected by 144 publishers. One publisher doubted they could sell 20,000 copies. They finally found a small publisher and ended up selling 500 million books, which are translated into 20 languages.

Walt Disney was fired from the Kansas City Star. The editor said Disney lacked imagination and didn’t have any good ideas.
Soichiro Honda left home at age 15 to find work. He found it in an auto repair shop as an apprentice. After many years and lots of struggles, Honda won a contract with Toyota. Then, his factory was leveled during a World War II bombing run. He rebuilt and lost the factory in an earthquake. He rebuilt again and instead of supplying Toyota, started making motorized bikes, which eventually became Honda motorcycles.

Henry Ford lost his business twice before age 40. For Ford, the third time was the charm and led to the creation of the modern production line.

In high school, Michael Jordan was crushed when he was relegated to the junior varsity basketball team. Instead of quitting, he worked harder and eventually became known as the greatest basketball player of all time. He said, “I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

At age 65, Harlan Sanders had suffered one failure after another. He was down to a $105 social security check, a recipe, and a model for running a chicken restaurant. He was rejected by 1,009 restaurants before he sold his first Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise.

Winston Churchill said, “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”
Steve Wood, an executive with Johnson Supply, a Texas and Louisiana air conditioning distributor, says we have two dogs. One is our faith dog and the other is our fear dog.

In times of stress, we allow our fear dog to get fat, while our faith dog gets skinny. We want the opposite. A fat fear dog crowds out the faith dog. It commands all of your attention. Fear takes old.

Force yourself to feed your faith dog. Feed your faith that positive outcomes will happen if you keep moving forward, pressing on.

St. Augustine said, “Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”
The new media and social media are all screaming woe to the world. Your fear dog gobbles this up. Turn away from the negative and focus on the vision you want. That is what will fatten up your faith dog.

Martin Luther King put it this way. He said, “Faith is taking the first step, even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

The first step is your first action. This leads to the concluding chapter.
I put off this one until last.

I confess. At times I procrastinate. I delay tackling unpleasant tasks. And the more I delay, the worse they seem, until finally I’ve got this huge dark cloud hanging over my head. The only way to make it go away is to take action.

Taking action always improves things. It’s especially true when it’s taking an action that we dread or have delayed.

When we act, we are doing what we can. That makes us feel good about ourselves and improves our attitudes. Conversely, failing to act is depressing to us because we know we aren’t putting forth our best effort.
Taking action is forward progress. It’s positive motion.

British author and philosopher Gilbert Chesterton wrote, “I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act.”

How are you going take action?
If You Enjoyed This Book…

If you are not already a member of the Service Roundtable, please consider joining. Separate Roundtables exist for air conditioning contractors, plumbers, electricians, remodelers, and general business. Business owners join the Service Roundtable to take advantage of the downloadable sales, marketing, and business management tools. Second, they also engage with other like-minded business leaders on the various Idea Exchanges. Third, they take advantage of the Roundtable Rewards buying group that is included with membership where business owners receive cash rebates on purchases when they shift purchasing to the company’s scores of strategic partners. Members save on printing, office supplies, air conditioning equipment, parts, water heaters, tools, advertising specialties, and much, much more.

The Service Roundtable only costs $50 a month and does not require a long-term equipment. Text “TEN” to 797979 and you can try the Service Roundtable for one month for only $10. This e-book is worth more than that.
About the Author

Matt Michel is an internationally recognized and highly acclaimed motivational and informational speaker. He has spoken about marketing, branding, sales, pricing, leadership, strategic planning, and goal setting from Istanbul to Australia and every place in-between.

Matt founded Service Nation Inc., which operates the Service Roundtable (the world’s largest contractor alliance), the Retail Contractor Coalition (a contractor branding and marketing program), the Service Nation Alliance (an elite contractor best practices group), Roundtable Rewards (the service trades’ largest contractor buying group), and the Service World Expo (the service trades’ largest residential conference and show). Previously, he founded and created the Aire Serv Franchise System, which is the oldest continually operating HVAC residential franchise network.

Matt is the 35th and youngest person to be inducted into the Contracting Business Hall of Fame. The Air Conditioning Heating & Refrigeration NEWS presented Matt with the 2018 “Legends of HVAC/R” Award. Contracting Business Magazine named Matt one of the 22 most influential people in the history of the residential HVAC/R industry. Contractor Magazine named him one of the 18 most influential people in the history of the plumbing/hydronics industries (Matt is the only person to appear on both the Contracting Business and Contractor lists). The Air Conditioning, Heating & Refrigeration NEWS named Matt one of the top five business advisors in the HVAC industry.

Matt is the inaugural recipient of the HVAC Golden Toolbox Award, presented by North American Technician Excellence and
Contracting Business Magazine to “recognize industry leadership and support of technician certification.” He has also received the Significant Sig (distinguished alumnus) Award from the Sigma Chi Fraternity.

Service Nation has been named to the Aggie 100 (“The 100 fastest growing Aggie-owned or Aggie-led businesses in the world.”) six times. Service Nation has also been listed in the Dallas 100 and made the Inc 500|5000 six years running, including a ranking in the top 300 for Business Products & Services. In 2017, Service Nation was acquired by Evercommerce and is no longer eligible for these awards.

A popular writer, Matt is published more than 60 times per year as a featured columnist for The Air Conditioning, Heating, & Refrigeration NEWS, Contracting Business Magazine, Contractor Magazine, Contracting Canada, Plumbing & Mechanical Magazine, Southern PHC Magazine, and CB Hotmail. He also publishes the popular Comanche Marketing blog.

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