

The Power of Persistence

**BRIDGING THE GAP
BETWEEN
KNOWING AND DOING**



It's a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you're tired, you quit when the gorilla is tired.

Robert Strauss,
character actor

You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.

Margaret
Thatcher

The miracle, or the power, that elevates the few is to be found in their industry, application, and perseverance under the prompting of a brave, determined spirit.

Mark Twain

We are made to persist. That's how we find out who we are.

Tobias Wolff

THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN KNOWING AND DOING

Have you ever spoken before a group that seems that it would rather be doing just about anything else than listening to you? As I stood to address a group of 450 Prudential Insurance agents, their dour expressions and shifting backsides said very clearly to me: "I would rather be out selling." "I would rather be eating lunch." "I would rather be anywhere than listening to yet another so-called motivational rah-rah speech about how I, too can be a success!"

Determined to rivet their attention, I told them something that I knew nobody else had ever told them before. "You could sell \$5 million in business this year." The room grew quiet. Shuffling ceased. Skepticism replaced looks of boredom, but at least they tuned in. During the break, one of the senior agents approached me and said, almost apologetically. "We didn't mean to be rude. But this company is 100 years old. We have 20,000 agents. In all those years, with all those agents, nobody, and I mean nobody, has ever written \$5 million in business in a single year.

"How would you like to be the first?" I challenged him.

"But it's already August!" he protested.

"Good," I said. "Then it won't take as long."

Understand that this man knew how to write \$5 million in business. He could write the number five. He knew how to fill out the documents and process them. He was a professional salesman. He knew how to sell. What he didn't know was why he was not doing what he knew how to do, which was to write \$5 million in business.

Think of the person—perhaps yourself—who recoils at the very notion of public speaking. There have been studies showing that some people fear death less than the idea of standing before an assembly of individuals and talking. Yet, we



all know how to stand up. We all know how to talk. Generally, we don't talk to ourselves, but to other people. In our lifetimes, we have spoken to thousands of different people. Put it all together – standing and speaking to lots of people—and we suddenly lose our confidence. Fear and dread set in, although we are being asked to do nothing new. Giving a speech in a foreign language we've never studied, standing on our hands instead of our feet while we espouse our ideas, indeed, that would and should make us sweat!

Why do you suppose we balk at doing what
we already know how to do?

WHAT MAKES US AFRAID

What I've discovered over many years studying the human mind and behavior is that we have been programmed to give up. We are afraid of trying, even if what we're trying is something that we essentially know how to do. To perform the same task in a new way – or combine two tasks as one — feels as foreign to us as a new language.

When I offered ideas to the Prudential agent, he initially protested, until he began to recognize that nothing was holding him back but his own sense of limitation.





First, I suggested: Start your day at 6 a.m.—an hour earlier than usual—preparing to meet face to face with a prospect by 9:00 am. The key to success in selling is personal contact. He often did business over the phone, but he agreed that I wasn't asking him to attempt anything radically new. After all, he had, on occasion, started work earlier. He did meet clients in person. Then I told him to write every prospect a ~~\$1 million~~ policy.

I explained, "You don't have to sell a ~~\$1 million~~ policy. But give the person a chance to turn you down." He wasn't sure he could do this. But the fact is, he had indeed sold ~~million-dollar~~ policies in the past, but they had always come as a pleasant surprise. That amount was hardly the norm. "So you do know how to write a ~~\$1 million policy~~," I told him.

He agreed that he did, even though he'd never thought in these terms before. After all, it was already August, and he'd only sold \$1 million total for that particular year. Still, he agreed that I wasn't suggesting anything beyond his established capabilities.

This man did not sell \$5 million by the year's end. He sold \$6 million, all because he dared to make a few small alterations in his work habits, doing what he already knew how to do. He had successfully bridged the gap between knowing and doing.

I don't know the dream you have for your life. Perhaps you, too, would like to increase sales. Maybe you want to enrich a relationship, travel to a new destination or start your own business. I don't know your dream, but I know that you have within you all the talent and ability to make it come true. You already know how to do what needs to be done, even if you don't know that you know.

By nature, you and I have infinite potential. By practice we may move widely apart. One of us may use a large measure of potential and another, very little. To paraphrase William James, most people live, whether intellectually, physically or morally, in a very restricted circle of their potential being, much like a person, out of his entire body, using and moving only his little finger. If you had a baby that lay in its crib and did nothing but wiggle its little finger, you would stop at nothing to find out what was wrong. But isn't it strange that a human being can stop growing mentally at a very early age and it's virtually ignored? There is a genius that lies asleep in your brain. Now is the time for awakening.



We just spoke of fear as a factor in holding us back from our potential. Another reason is comfort. How do you suppose comfort prevents us from striving to excel?

The Danger of Comfort

Many of us have a pretty comfortable life. We have a reasonable income; we don't skip mortgage payments; there's food in the refrigerator and a nice warm bed in which to sleep. A person in that position could very easily think, "Why would I want to do anything to change this?"

The truth is, if your life is not going in one direction; it's moving in the other direction. If we are not creating, we are disintegrating. If we are not persisting, we are desisting. Many of us have established a comfort zone in our lives, coasting along the path of least resistance, just getting by. This is a very common and understandable attitude. We've worked hard to achieve this security and don't want to jeopardize our position. The problem is, once we stop reaching and risking, we actually stop growing. The comfort zone frame of mind is settling for what we are today. That may be fine for the moment, but without continued growth, we are now all that we are ever going to be. That's a very disturbing thought. If you're in a comfort zone, beware. The danger of a comfort zone is that it doesn't hurt and might even feel good. A comfort zone may be what is holding you back from real accomplishment.



Describe your comfort zone by stating what you do habitually versus what would make you stretch. For instance, you might say, "I feel comfortable tithing five percent; I would feel challenged to tithe 10 percent." "I feel comfortable earning \$40,000. I would feel challenged to strive for \$80,000." "I feel comfortable watching television every evening after 9 p.m. I would feel challenged to read a self-improvement book instead." "I feel comfortable occasionally complimenting my spouse on his (or her) appearance. I would feel challenged to look him (or her) in the eye every day and say, "I love you."

My Comfort Zone

I feel comfortable _____

I would feel challenged _____

I feel comfortable _____

I would feel challenged _____





I feel comfortable _____

I would feel challenged _____

I feel comfortable _____

I would feel challenged _____

Now ask yourself, is there anything outside your comfort zone that is beyond your knowing? For instance, you know how to earn \$80,000. Maybe you've never done it in a single year, but you've accumulated that income. Surely you've spoken "I love you" to your spouse, even if it's been some time. I'll bet you've also made a sizeable donation. I am positive you have skipped television. Break down the parts and you'll find that your capacity to learn and grow is without boundaries, except those that you artificially impose.

Select two challenges from the exercise above and describe how you would accomplish them.



Bridging The Gap Between Knowing And Doing

1 _____

I actually know how to _____

because I have already _____

and I have already _____

2 _____

I actually know how to _____

because I have already _____

and I have already _____

Now make it happen. I once heard some very wise words from a minister in Minneapolis. He said that the saddest part of officiating a funeral is not the death of the body, but the death of the dreams. It's that house you were going to build, but never built; that book you were going to write, but never wrote; that trip you were going to take, but never took; the business you were going to create, but never started. We've got to do what is inside of us. Let's not go to the grave with the dream still locked up inside of us.

Remember, if you are not pushing forward, you are slipping backward. To not persist is to desist. As Calvin Coolidge so eloquently put it: "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."

