

## THE GENIUS OF PERSISTENCE: PART 1

Thirtieth president of the United States Calvin Coolidge earned a reputation for being honest, direct, and hardworking. Coolidge honored persistence with a plaque in his office.

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not, nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with great talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence, determination alone are omnipotent.

Persistent effort is the building block for success in all difficult and worthwhile endeavors for three reasons.

### **FIRST, INITIAL SUCCESS IS NO GUARANTEE OF FUTURE SUCCESS.**

In the 1960's we called pop musicians who managed only one hit song a "one hit wonder." History is replete with examples of individuals who succeeded once, but never again. One of my favorite examples is from the world of baseball. On July 28, 1875, Joe Borden of the Philadelphia White Stockings pitched the first no-hitter in professional baseball history. Borden parlayed his success into a three-year contract with the Boston Red Stockings of the newly established National League. He started the 1876 season strong, winning the first game (he is credited with being the first pitcher to win a game in the National League) and pitching a shutout on May 23. But the rest of the season didn't go well. One sportswriter described his pitching style as "fast and without strategy." By the end of the season, his erratic personal behavior, combined with his eroding effectiveness on the mound landed him in the role of the team's ticket-taker and groundskeeper. He ended his career with a 13-16 record. One success a career does not make.

### **SECOND, THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS TO ENDURING SUCCESS.**

Things don't change the moment we act. English art critic and Oxford professor John Ruskin noted,

If a great thing can be done, it can be done easily, but this ease is like the ease of a tree blossoming after long years of gathering strength."

Goals are not achieved on schedule. Valued ends are not served up on a silver platter. The release of one's attention and energy must be measured, invested and reinvested over time. When things take time—and all good things do—persistence is a necessity.

### **THIRD, LIFE IS HARD SO THOSE WHO WANT TO SUCCEED MUST WORK HARD.**

Scott Peck's landmark book, *The Road Less Traveled* begins with these ominous but strangely encouraging words.

"Life is difficult. The sooner we accept this fact, the more quickly we can be happy."

Good things don't happen immediately. No noble endeavor comes easily. As the saying goes,

There is no elevator to success. You have to take the stairs."

Historic Examples. History is full of examples of these truths. It was said of the four-time British Prime Minister William Gladstone that he "toiled terribly." George Washington was a leader of unrivaled tenacity and energy. He possessed "an unflagging attention to small detail, that willingness to do anything that the service required..." One of George Washington's contemporaries, a fellow veteran observed of him, "No man ever worked harder."

Scottish-born British historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) was leading literary figure in the Victorian era. His collected works take up thirty volumes. Carlyle faced every writer's nightmare when he was forced to rewrite the entire first volume of his epic three-volume work, History of the French Revolution. His friend and fellow author, John Stewart Mill had borrowed the manuscript to read, and loaned it to his future wife whose maid burned it thinking it was waste paper. Carlyle later commented that he "Had not only forgotten the structure of it, but the spirit it was written with was past." He wrote to his brother that he felt like a man who had "nearly killed himself accomplishing zero." Mill offered Carlyle two hundred pounds to make up for his financial loss. Carlyle accepted one hundred pounds from Mill to support himself while rewriting his masterwork, finally published in 1837. Carlyle proved by his own experience his observation,

"He that can work is born a king of something."

Alexander Hamilton (1755–1804) was a founding father, first Secretary of the Treasury, and part-author of the Federalist Papers. The trajectory of his brief, forty-nine year life is remarkable. He served in the Revolutionary army seeing action in battles around New York City in 1775 and 1776. His great organizing ability brought him to the attention of George Washington, who commissioned him as a lieutenant colonel in the Continental Army and employed him as his aid-de-camp for four years. Hamilton later served as a field commander, leading a regiment of troops at the Battle of Yorktown in October of 1781. Well before his thirtieth birthday, Hamilton had led a distinguished military career and knew on a personal basis the leaders of the American Revolution.

Hamilton had also become one of the leading lawyers in New York. He drafted the call for the Constitutional Convention and when the document appeared doomed to defeat, fought for and helped secure its ratification. He played a critical role in defining the power of the federal government by writing the Federalist Papers, and laid the framework for a national economy. Washington chose him as the first Secretary of the Treasury under the new constitution, holding this office for over six years, and proving to be a brilliant administrator in organizing the Treasury Department.

His contemporaries knew Hamilton as an intellectual genius, but as far as he was concerned, any great thing he might have accomplished was due to simple, hard work.

"Men give me some credit for genius," reflected Hamilton. "All the genius I have lies in this: when I have a subject in hand, I study it profoundly. Day and night it is before me. I explore it in all its bearings. My mind becomes pervaded with it. Then the efforts that I make are what people are pleased to call the fruits of genius. It is the fruit of labor and thought."

## **HAMILTON REMINDS US THAT WHILE GENIUS MAY BEGIN GREAT WORKS, ONLY PERSISTENT EFFORT AND HARD WORK FINISHES THEM.**

There is simply no getting around it. Noble endeavors demand great effort. Massive investments of time, attention and energy are required over time if progress is to be made in the things that matter. 19th century American preacher Henry Ward Beecher declared,

"Victories that are easy are cheap. Those only are worth having which come as the result of hard work."

As the Irish proverb says: *Nodding the head does not row the boat.*" Or, as the biblical Proverb reminds us,

"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" (Proverbs 14:23).

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