



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Orchestrating Attitude—Part 1

Getting the Best from Yourself and Others

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How do you measure success? Is it by financial security, career growth, community involvement, quality of relationships, spiritual centeredness or the legacy you leave? Whichever measure you choose, your attitude is the single most important factor in achieving success.

The topic of attitude can be conceptual and confusing. In fact, as we go through life we often hear phrases like: “keep your chin up,” “look on the bright side” or “you need a winning attitude.” Unfortunately, we seldom know how to convert these soft sayings into hard results.

This series of articles translates the incomprehensible into the actionable. It is intended to provide you with inspiration *and* application so you can orchestrate your attitude ... and your success.

The great news is that even in the worst situations—when you are a victim of a natural disaster, prisoner of war, target of abuse or hit by a string of unfortunate circumstances—*your attitude is something you can always control!*

When we control our attitude we influence how our body responds and performs. Where our thoughts and attitudes go, our bodies follow. For example, blushing is a physical reaction to a mere thought. If we have this kind of reaction to a thought, is it such a leap of faith to believe that we can orchestrate our attitudes to affect our bodies in beneficial ways?

A landmark study shed light on the ultimate benefit of a positive attitude. In this particular study, *participants who were more positive lived an average of 10 years longer than the other participants.* Considering that smoking has been shown to reduce life expectancy by 5.5 years for

men and 7 years for women, your attitude might be a health risk factor worth paying real attention to.

The choice of attitude is yours. Tomorrow you will become what you choose today.

How Do Attitudes Develop?

Our attitudes develop from repeatedly thinking, speaking and acting the same way, over and over, until it becomes a stable and enduring way we behave—a habit. Although we can hear and see our attitudes in the words and actions we choose, attitudes start developing with our thoughts.

Our minds are our ultimate personal computers! What we program into them determines how they will function. The most powerful computer ever made, programmed with the wrong software or with bad data, will never function to its capacity. For instance, just as we have viruses (bad data) in today’s cyber world that cause computer malfunctions, our mental computers are also susceptible to the data we put into them. If we choose to load them with bad data, it will limit how effective or successful we will be.

Our attitude is our personal boomerang to the world—whatever we throw out will come back to us. Express enthusiasm and it comes back. Offer a smile and it is returned.

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Start to gossip and that's what we will hear. Get frustrated about a team member and that's what we will see. Help a colleague and we will find a helping hand. This boomerang effect holds true for our thoughts about money, relationships, self-worth, a performance goal, team building, a problem colleague or customer, a new project or career.

So, once we develop a habit of choosing a positive or negative attitude, that is exactly what we will send to and receive from the world.

A Script for Orchestrating Attitude

There are three aspects of the script that work in concert: thoughts, words and actions. By orchestrating each aspect with conscious responses, we positively influence our beliefs, commitments and results.

Orchestrate your ... to positively influence ...

Thoughts	Beliefs
Words	Commitments
Actions	Results

The script plays out like this:

- **Thoughts**, the way we choose to interpret our world, directly influence our beliefs.
- **Beliefs** directly influence the words we choose to speak to others, and more importantly, to ourselves.
- **Words** reflect our commitments to ourselves and others.
- **Commitments** influence our choice of actions.
- Finally, our **actions** directly influence the results we achieve.

This script is self-reinforcing, for better or for worse. The results we achieve reinforce our thoughts and the same script is played out again. So, it all starts with our thoughts. **Our thoughts today influence our results tomorrow.**

The left side of the script is the side of choice. Each of us chooses our thoughts, words and actions either consciously or subconsciously. Therefore, **we influence the right side of the script—the side of responsibility.** We must take responsibility for our beliefs, commitments and results. We are each responsible for the choices we make and the results we ultimately achieve. The choice is ours—victim or victor?



To illustrate how this script plays out, let's say I am given a new project to lead. I am confident that the prospects for this project are positive. Therefore, I start thinking about how to ensure its success and how I can measure the benefits of the project deliverables. I also think about my talented project team, knowing they will need to go above and beyond to achieve success on this project. My kick-off e-mail contains words like "excited," "opportunity," "talented team," "creative solutions" and "positive impact." My team members speak and react in kind, "boomeranging" my winning attitude back to me. Meetings are crisp, roles are clearly defined and decisions are made collaboratively, yet quickly.

The expected challenges, even the seemingly big ones, are handled professionally and swiftly because the team knows that failure is not an

option, and there are many pathways to success. My thoughts and words have already predisposed the team to acting in alignment with my expectation of success. And our eventual success predisposes me to the same thoughts, words and actions on the next project. This is when the powerful, self-reinforcing script will be played again.

Orchestrating attitude creates a beautiful human symphony. The result is a person of integrity who gets the best from him/herself and others.

Next time we will discuss how to orchestrate your thoughts. □

Editor's Note: Watch for Part 2 of this series, "Orchestrating Your Thoughts," in the April 2008 issue of The Stepping Stone.



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