

25 TIPS ON... **EXCELLENCE**

1 DISENTHRALL YOURSELF

To disentrall means to discharge, free, emancipate, liberate, loosen, release, unbind, uncage, unchain, or unfetter. So if you are obsessed with perpetually doing or seeing things in a certain way, you may first need to disentrall yourself to stand any chance of changing your attitude.

2 YOU ARE WHAT YOU DO

You can rarely think your way into a new way of acting. You need to act your way into a new way of thinking. In other words, the action proves the thought. Without action, it merely remains a concept, and as such doesn't technically exist.

3 CULTIVATE A FEISTY SPIRIT

Those confronted by extremely tricky obstacles (such as cancer) are said to have a feisty spirit of survivorship. This transformative ability to make good things happen through a positive attitude is a quality you can discover in yourself.

4 FEAR = WISDOM IN THE FACE OF DANGER

"Fear is wisdom in the face of danger. It's nothing to be ashamed of." So said Sherlock Holmes in *The Abominable Bride*. It's okay to be afraid. In fact, it's often beneficial.

5 CLIMB, CONFESS, COMPLY

Student pilots are taught early in their training what to do if they get into trouble: *Climb*: get yourself out of danger immediately by increasing altitude. *Confess*: talk to the control tower and explain what the problem is. *Comply*: do exactly what you are told by the air traffic controller.

6 BE A POSSIBILIST

Pessimists look smart because they see problems everywhere. They even like it when things go wrong because it proves they were right to be pessimistic. Optimists look stupid because they think everything can be done. It is easy for cynics to laugh at their apparently blind enthusiasm. Possibilists can strike a balance between the two. What's the best possible thing we could do here?

7 BE AN ESSENTIALIST

The non-essentialist is all things to all people, pursues everything in an undisciplined way, and lives a life that does not satisfy. He or she thinks that almost everything is essential. The essentialist does less but better, creating a life that really matters. He or she thinks that almost everything is non-essential. If it isn't a clear yes, then it's a clear no.

8 SIT AND BE

Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician, said: *"All of man's misery comes from his incapacity to sit alone in an empty quiet room."* We are useless at doing nothing,

but when we rush into things, we usually cause trouble for ourselves, and for others. In order to determine a decent attitude, we need to pause and think properly. Sometimes we just need to sit and be.

9 EFFORT CREATES OPPORTUNITY

People love the idea of being successful. Of achievement. But often they are simply in love with the idea of the result. They want the reward, but in truth they just aren't prepared to put in the work to get there. To create opportunities and achieve more of what you want, your approach needs to involve applied effort.

10 BETTER AND CHEAPER

It has become fashionable to say, and probably believe, that so-called 'big ideas' require big budgets. This is nonsense. An idea is an idea. And if it's good enough, then it's good enough. In fact, the better the idea, the lower the price tag. Perversely, bad ideas cost the same as good ones. Your approach should be to reduce emphasis on resources, and concentrate on the thought.

11 TRY EVERYTHING ONCE

"Try everything once except incest and folk dancing." This was the advice of the famous conductor Sir Thomas Beecham. One of these activities is illegal, the other merely polarizing. So long as it's legal, it's worth investigating everything. If you don't enjoy it, don't do it again.

12 DON'T FORCE FIT

Jerry Seinfeld, the American comedian, actor, and director once wryly observed: *"It's amazing that the amount of news that happens in the world every day always just exactly fits the newspaper."* And of course it doesn't. And yet we often hang on to rigid and inflexible constructs to organise what we see and do. You don't always have to force fit things into a set format or template.

13 THE SPRINGBOARD OF SOLITUDE

According to Agnes Martin, the American abstract painter: *"The best things in life happen when you're alone."* Working together is great, but the principle of collaboration is often abused. Many executives get a lot more done at home than in the office. That's because they have uninterrupted time to think and do.

14 PROBLEM OWNER, NOT PROBLEM MOANER

Okay, so it's a word play, but it works. Anyone can raise their eyeballs to the heavens and say: *"Well this is a big problem isn't it?"* These people are no help. Someone needs to address the issue, taking responsibility, and making suggestions about how to improve matters. Otherwise we will all just sit around nodding sagely and confirming that there is, indeed, a problem.



15 ROUTINE = DEATH

If you keep doing the same old thing, then you'll just be doing, well, the same old thing. Such consistency may be admirable in some spheres, but in most instances you will want to progress. Most humans become bored easily. So if things have become repetitive, it may be time to make some changes. Alter the pattern. Take some measured risks.

16 TIME DIFFERENCE

Life expectancy in the UK, Japan, Canada and many other developed nations now exceeds 80 years. So that means you have about 1,000 months, 4,000 weeks, or 27,000 days to get your stuff done. If you are 40 years old, you can cut those figures in half. So you have 500 months left to lead a fulfilling life. Once you start hitting the calculator, you'll be less inclined to waste time.

17 THE FUTURE IS BEHIND YOU

The Malagasy of Madagascar see the future as flowing into their heads from behind them, with the past stretching out in front of them. According to their worldview, the past is visible because it has already happened, which means they can see it. By contrast, the future is unknown, so it must be behind them, because they can't see it. Time is truly how you choose to see it.

18 INPO

INPO stands for In No Particular Order. Some people are obsessed with sequence. Where there is an irrefutable logic, the order in which you do things might well be important. But sometimes, it just doesn't matter. Some people are paralyzed by inaction because they don't know where to start. The cure is to start anywhere.

19 PRECASTINATION

In his book *#Now*, Max McKeown introduces the concept of Nowists. Nowists don't worry about the past or the future. They concentrate solely on positive action now. They frequently practice what he calls precastination. They move the priorities of the future into the present by starting things early.

20 DON'T WASTE A CRISIS

"There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full." That was the plaintive cry of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as his diary filled up incessantly. Individuals have no control on the timing of events. What you can control, however, is your attitude to them. A crisis is not a disaster. In fact, the stress of one can be the best friend of progress and forward motion.

21 THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS

American politician Donald Rumsfeld made this astute observation: *"There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know."* The first step to making excellent decisions is to understand what you do and don't know.

22 NON-PLANNING

Often the best plan is not to have one. This may sound counterintuitive, and in many respects it is. The suggestion is based on two main tenets. First, too much emphasis on planning usually means that people are surprised when the theory they believed in doesn't happen in practice. Second, it assumes that the individual is well equipped to make excellent decisions as situations arise, with little forewarning. This may be a more reasonable possibility than it first seems.

23 VAGUE BUT EXCITING

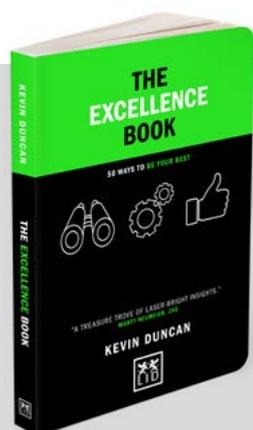
CERN is the European Council for Nuclear Research, based in Switzerland. In March 1989, one of their computer scientists, Tim Berners-Lee, submitted a proposal for an information management system to his boss, Mike Sendall. His response was: *"Vague but exciting."* Tim's idea of course went on to become the World Wide Web. If we are going to make effective decisions, we have to be able to see potential.

24 NO PERMISSION REQUIRED

If you have a good idea, then get on and do it. Don't waste time wondering if it's okay, or waiting to check with someone else. This is precisely the philosophy of American computer scientist Grace Hopper. Despite being a United States Navy Rear Admiral, and doubtless being subject to all the etiquette and hierarchy that such an organization demands, her advice was: *"If it's a good idea, go ahead and do it. It is often easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to get permission."*

25 BE TOMMY COOPER

Here's a classic joke from the comedian Tommy Cooper. "I said to the doctor: "It hurts when I do this." Tommy raises his arm. He said, "Well, don't do it then." The logic is irrefutable. If something doesn't work, or you don't like doing it, then don't do it.



THE EXCELLENCE BOOK

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