

No Regrets

by Larry Strattner

About a week ago I read a very good article about what I call “self talk”, the habit of reinforcing yourself toward positive thinking and goal attainment. It gave me pause as I reflected on the many changes in my life and how I have responded, or not responded, and what I have learned from the experiences. I see the habit that has helped me most is ignoring Regret.

Regrets stifle our future. Even more insidiously, Regrets stifle our “now”. They allow us an artificial structure within which to rationalize failure. Regrets make it possible to build an outside cause for our failure using others, change wrought from beyond us, or other events out of our control to explain why we lack fulfillment. Once we accept lack of fulfillment it grows increasingly elusive.

No one disputes life is about changing. Whether we intend to or not we all change every year. We change every day. Gain weight. Lose weight. Grow a year older; a year more experienced. A year smarter.

Other people or events change us. We lose our jobs. Someone close to us dies. Someone unexpectedly helps us. Disaster of some kind displaces us. The majority of change-agents are out of our control.

Recognize change, or accept it, or not. What is important is to have no Regrets. Some call this “being in the moment”. Positivity. A focus on the now.

Looking critically backward or forward with any intensity is a waste of energy. Particularly if it involves thoughts of “I wish I had done that or I wish I could do this”. Working toward a goal is productive and concentrating on one's position at the moment certainly enhances goal-focus immeasurably. Staying in the moment is the skill of knowing and doing what needs to be done, now. The other critical dimension of the moment is the recognition and acceptance, without Regret, of doors that are always opening to us. These doors, sometimes difficult to see because our lives are so

crowded with cultural contradiction and pop psychology, can lead to new and exciting places. One of the most common reasons for not even peeking through the open door, let alone entering is what I have been calling Regret.

Let's use tennis as an example. Imagine you are forty years old attending a lawn party at a friend's house. There is a tennis court. You have never played tennis but friends entice you into a raggedy doubles match. You find yourself enjoying the physicality of the game. Even more importantly you find yourself enjoying the strategy. Further, it seems you have an ability to "see" the ball, a physical rarity that could even be called a "gift" for the game.

Above is a beautiful scenario for Regret. Random chance has presented you with an unexpected and exhilarating "now". Surrounding reality gives you a number of reasons for Regret. Looking backward, you weren't born into a tennis playing family. You were never exposed to the game as a youngster. Until your chance doubles game you never realized your ability to "see" a hard hit ball. Perhaps most disturbingly, looking forward, you are forty years old. You will probably never be able to play the game at its highest levels.

What you have discovered is an open door to an unexpected and wonderful gift. In the "now" you can learn to play the game, understand its strategies and nuances, become a student of its techniques and significantly let it take you to physical heights you might not otherwise have achieved. There's much satisfaction for you in the "now" of tennis.

Replace tennis with any pursuit or occupation you can name. The scenario remains the same. It is about grabbing onto revelation, opportunity and change and making it your new "now" rather than seeing the multitude of opportunities for Regret change carries as baggage. There will always be opportunity for Regret. Regret spawns all manner of mental weakness keeping you from happiness in your "now".

Let's return to your tennis epiphany. Without a second thought you embrace your new discovery. You play the game. You study

techniques. You take lessons and learn from and discuss the game with other devotees. Your gift to “see” makes you quite proficient with both your own game and in evaluating the game of others. People ask you for pointers, advice. They benefit from your insight.

One day a mother brings you her young daughter who is very interested in tennis. You volley with her and realize she too can “see”. She comes along fast under your tutelage. Before you know it you have a number of young students. Soon you are faced with a decision. Should you keep your office job or begin teaching tennis as a profession?

None of the decisions described above are made with backward or forward thinking. They have been enacted in your “now”. You have not “Regretted” your involvement with tennis (auto mechanics, music, woodworking, construction, writing) you have merely thrived within change and your “now”. You let it take you where it will with your full effort and commitment.

This is not to say your journey is without trial or pain. Trial and pain are always with us. Frequently they are a big part of change. Just think back to how your 40 year old body might have felt the day following your first-ever tennis match. Conversely what this also suggests is trial and pains are more endurable if suffered in the moment, without Regret. Trial and pain are particularly endurable if you embrace change and focus on the dawning light, revealing new possibilities in your “now”.

Lately the world has seemed to be more prone to change than ever. Or maybe that's just how we see it. One thing is sure. The groundswells of humanity, the elements and the world economy promise a different future.

If you find yourself caught up in the weave of that future pay careful attention. Don't look back. Don't try and look forward. Look at what you see now. You might find yourself on the metaphorical tennis court able to see something others cannot. Something enabling you to become someone unique in the midst of change. Someone who is a child of “now”. Someone who, with no Regrets, walks through the open door.

