Character Building Thought Power

by Ralph Waldo Trine

‘I will be what I will to be’
CHANGE YOUR LIFE BY CHANGING YOUR THOUGHTS

QUICK OVERVIEW

How many of us spend our lives lamenting our bad habits, but feeling powerless to change them? Whether we eat too much, spend too much, work too hard or not hard enough, everything we do is a habit and can be changed, according to the premise of Ralph Waldo Trine’s book Character Building Thought Power. Trine debunks the myth that we are victims and cannot control our destiny. Conscious act is preceded by a thought. Those thoughts lead to actions, which become habits if they are repeated enough. That’s why it’s critical to be conscious of what we are thinking and to control the flow of our thoughts. In period language, this book, now considered public domain, explains that thoughts will turn into action—and by controlling your thoughts, you have the ability to control your destiny.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

When Ralph Waldo Trine wrote Character Building Thought Power more than 100 years ago, there were no 12-step groups, no self-help books, no motivational seminars. But the concepts he discusses have played out in all of these formats ever since. If we are conscious of our thoughts and control them, we can change our actions and form more productive habits. Every day of our lives we are unconsciously forming habits. The goal is to make habit formation a conscious process. Trine stresses that habit formation and character building are entirely and absolutely within our control. Even the nature of something as inevitable as old age can be determined by the right thoughts and actions earlier in life. The impact of our thoughts and actions are cumulative—and can be positive or negative.

This week, take time to be quiet, use the power of positive mental suggestion and keep a careful watch over your thoughts. Doing so week after week will help you create a life of greater peace, success and happiness.

SUCCESS Points

From this book you will learn:

- The thoughts that dominate your brain will dominate your actions; your dominant actions will form themselves into habits
- If you don’t want to make something a habit, don’t think about it, don’t do it, and definitely don’t do it again
- Each person has the power to control their own life
- Success isn’t determined by your life’s conditions, but by how you meet those conditions
Unconsciously we are forming habits every moment of our lives. Some are habits of a desirable nature; some are those of a most undesirable nature. Some, though not so bad in themselves, are exceedingly bad in their cumulative effects, and cause us at times much loss, much pain and anguish, while their opposites would, on the contrary, bring us much peace and joy, as well as a continually increasing power. Is habit-forming, character-building, a matter of mere chance, or have we it within our control? We have entirely and absolutely. “I will be what I will to be,” can and should be said by every human soul.

Thought is the force underlying all. And what do we mean by this? Simply this: Your every act—every conscious act—is preceded by a thought. Your dominating thoughts determine your dominating actions. The acts repeated crystallize themselves into the habit. Whatever act you would not do—habit you would not acquire—you must look well to it that you do not entertain the type of thought that will give birth to this thought, this habit. It is a simple psychological law that any type of thought, if entertained for a sufficient length of time, will, by and by, reach the motor tracks of the brain, and finally burst into action. The thought is always parent to the act.

**ABSOLUTE CONTROL**

In the realm of our own minds, we have absolute control, or we should have, and if at any time we have not, then there is a method by which we can gain control, and in the realm of the mind become thorough masters. A simple effort to control one’s thoughts, a simple setting about it, even if at first failure is the result, and even if for a time failure seems to be about the only result, will in time, sooner or later, bring him to the point of easy and full control. Every earnest effort along any line makes the end aimed at just a little easier for each succeeding effort. We can, then, gain the full and complete power of determining what character, what type of thoughts we entertain.

Here we must say a word regarding a certain great law that we may call “the law of indirectness.” A thought can be put out of the mind easier and more successfully, not by dwelling upon it, not be attempting to put it directly, but by throwing the mind on to some other object by putting some other object of thought into the mind. This will in time become the absorbing thought in the mind and the danger is past.

There is nothing more true in connection with human life than that we grow into the likeness of those things we contemplate. A man’s character is the sum total of his habits. His habits have been formed by his conscious acts; but every conscious act is, as we have found, preceded by a thought.

**SACRIFICING PRESENT PLEASURE**

Always remember that the great and strong character is the one who is ever ready to sacrifice the present pleasure for the future good. Life is not for mere passing pleasure, but for the highest unfoldment that one can attain to, the noblest character that one can grow, and for the greatest service that one can render to all mankind.

Your every act—every conscious act—is preceded by a thought.

The question is not, *What are the conditions in our lives?* But, *How do we meet the conditions that we find there?* And whatever the conditions are, it is unwise and profitless to look upon them, even if they are conditions that we would have otherwise, in the attitude of complaining, for complaint will bring depression, and depression will weaken and possibly even kill the spirit that would engender the power that would enable us to bring into our lives an entirely new set of conditions.

Each one is apt to think that his own conditions, his own trials or troubles or sorrows, or his own struggles, as the case may be, are greater than those of the great mass of mankind, or possibly greater than those of anyone else in the world. He forgets that each one has his own peculiar trials or troubles or sorrows to bear, or struggles in habits to overcome, and that his is but the common lot of all the
human race. Each must grow the insight that will enable him to see what the causes are that have brought the unfavorable conditions into his life; each must grow the strength that will enable him to face these conditions, and to set into operation forces that will bring about a different set of conditions. The doing, however, must be done by each one for himself.

And so the way to get out of any conditions we have gotten into, either knowingly or inadvertently, either intentionally or unintentionally, is to take time to look the conditions squarely in the face, and to find the law whereby they have come about. And when we have discovered the law, the thing to do is not to rebel against it, not to resist it, but to go with it by working in harmony with it.

THOUGHTS ARE FORCES

The type of thought we entertain both creates and draws conditions that crystallize about it, conditions exactly the same in nature as the thought that gives them form. Thoughts are forces, and each creates of its kind, whether we realize it or not. For one to take time to see clearly the things he would attain to, and then to hold that ideal steadily and continually before his mind, never allowing faith—his positive thought-forces—to give way to or be neutralized by doubts and fears, and then to set about doing each day what his hands find to do, never complaining, but spending the time that he would otherwise spend in complaint focusing his thought-forces upon the ideal that his mind has built, will sooner or later bring about the full materialization of that for which he sets out.

There are those who, when they begin to realize that through the instrumentality of our interior, spiritual, thought-forces we have the power of gradually molding the everyday conditions of life as we would have them, in their early enthusiasm are not able to see results as quickly as they expect and are apt to think, therefore, that after all there is not very much in that which has but newly come to their knowledge. They must remember, however, that in endeavoring to overcome an old habit or to grow a new habit, everything cannot be done all at once. In the degree that we attempt to use the thought-forces do we continually become able to use them more effectively. Progress is slow at first, more rapid as we proceed. Power grows by using, or, in other words, using brings a continually increasing power. This is governed by law the same as are all things in our lives, and all things in the universe about us. It is the reiteration, the constant reiteration of the thought that grows the power of continually stronger thought-focusing, and that finally brings manifestation.

Personally I do not believe there is any such thing as chance in the whole of human life, nor even in the world or the great universe in which we live. The one great law of cause and effect is absolute; and effect is always kindred...
to its own peculiar cause, although we may have at times to go back considerably farther than we are accustomed to in order to find the cause, the parent of this or that effect, or actualized, though not necessarily permanently actualized, condition.

AGING GRACEFULLY

If one would have a beautiful and attractive old age, he must begin it in youth and in middle life. If, however, he has neglected or failed in this, he can then wisely adapt himself to circumstances and give himself zealously to putting into operation all necessary counter-balancing forces and influences. Where there is life nothing is ever irretrievably lost, though the enjoyment of the higher good may be long delayed. There comes by and by a sort of “rounding-up” process when long-lived-in habits of thought begin to take unto themselves a strongly dominating power, and the thought habits of a lifetime begin to come to the surface.

It is not a bad thing for each one early to get a little “philosophy” into his life. It will be of much aid as he advances in life; it will many times be a source of great comfort, as well as of strength, in trying times and in later life. We may even, though gently perhaps, make sport of the one who has his little philosophy, but unless we have something similar the time will come when the very lack of it will deride us. It may be at times, though not necessarily, that the one who has it is not always so successful in affairs when it comes to a purely money or business success, but it supplies many times a very real something in life that the one of money or business success only is starving for, though he doesn’t know what the real lack is, and although he hasn’t money enough in all the world to buy it did he know.

FINDING YOUR CENTER

It is well to find our center early, and if not early then late; but, late or early, the thing to do is to find it. While we are in life the one essential thing is to play our part bravely and well and to keep our active interest in all its varying phases, the same as it is well to be able to adapt ourselves always to changing conditions. It is by the winds of heaven blowing over it continually and keeping it in constant motion, or by its continual onward movement, that the water in pool or stream is kept sweet and clear, for otherwise it would become stagnant and covered with slime. If we are attractive or unattractive to ourselves and to others the cause lies in ourselves; this is true of all ages, and it is well for us, young or old, to recognize it. It is well, other things being equal, to adapt ourselves to those about us, but it is hardly fair for the old to think that all the adapting should be on the part of the young, with no kindred duty on their part. Many times old-age loses much of its attractiveness on account of a peculiar notion of this kind. The principle of reciprocity must hold in all ages in life, and whatever the age, if we fail to observe it, it results always sooner or later in our own undoing.

We are all in Life’s great play—comedy and tragedy, smiles and tears, sunshine and shadow, summer and winter, and in time we take all parts. We must take our part, whatever it may be, at any given time, always bravely and with a keen appreciation of every opportunity, and a keen alertness at every turn as the play progresses. A good “entrance” and a good “exit” contribute strongly to the playing of a deservedly worthy role. We are not always able perhaps to choose just as we would the details of our entrance, but the manner of our playing and the manner of our exit we can all determine, and this no man, no power can deny us; this in every human life can be made indeed most glorious, however humble it may begin, or however humble it may remain or exalted it may become, according to conventional standards of judgment.

To me we are here for divine self-realization through experience. We progress in the degree that we manipulate wisely all things that enter into our lives, and that make the sum total of each one’s life experience. Let us be brave and strong in the presence of each problem as it presents itself and make the best of all. Let us help the things we can help, and let us be not bothered or crippled by the things we cannot help.

The thing clearly to understand is this: That the thought is always parent to the act.
Applying Character-Building Thought Power to Your Life

• First, form your ideals. And then follow them continually, where ever they lead.

• Always remember that the great and strong character is the one willing to sacrifice the present pleasure for the future good.

• Life is not for the passing pleasure, but for the highest enlightenment one can attain, the noblest character one can grow and the greatest service one can offer to mankind.

• Resist the temptation to take shortcuts because they will not lead to real and lasting pleasure.

• Thoughts are forces and each one creates its own kind, whether we realize it or not.

• Rather than spending your days complaining about what bothers you, focus on your ideals and that will bring you closer to them.

• Learn to use the power of suggestion positively.

• It’s not the conditions of our life that define us, but how we meet them.

• In the realm of our own minds, we have absolute control.

To live to our highest in all things that pertain to us, to lend a hand as best we can to all others for this same end, to aid in righting the wrongs that cross our path by means of pointing the wrongdoer to a better way, and thus aiding him in becoming a power for good, to remain in nature always sweet and simple and humble, and therefore strong, to open ourselves fully and to keep ourselves as fit channels for the Divine Power to work through us, to open ourselves, and to keep our faces always to the light, to love all things and to stand in awe or fear of nothing save our own wrong-doing, to recognize the good lying at the heart of all things, waiting for expression all in its own good way and time—this will make our part in life’s great and as yet not fully understood play truly glorious, and we need then stand in fear of nothing, life nor death, for death is life. Or rather, it is the quick transition to life in another form.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

All life is from within out. This is something that cannot be reiterated too often. The springs of life are all from within. There is nothing that will bring us such abundant returns as to take a little time in the quiet each day of our lives. We need this to get the kinks out of our minds, and hence out of our lives. We need this to form better the higher ideals of life. We need this in order to see clearly in mind the things upon which we would concentrate and focus the thought-forces. We need this in order to make continually anew and to keep our conscious connection with the Infinite. We need this in order that the rush and hurry of our everyday life does not keep us away from the conscious realization of the fact that the spirit of Infinite life and power that is back of all, working in and through all, the life of all, is the life of our life, and the source of our power; and that outside of this we have no life and we have no power.

It is the attitude of the child that is necessary before we can enter into the kingdom of heaven. As it was said, “Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” For we then realize that of ourselves we can do nothing, but that it is only as we realize that it is the Divine life and power working within us, and it is only as we open ourselves that it may work through us, that we are or can do anything. It is thus that the simple life, which is essentially the life of the greatest enjoyment and the greatest attainment, is entered upon. We give so much time to the activities of the outer life that we do not take sufficient time in the quiet to form in the inner, spiritual, thought-life the ideals and the conditions that we would have actualized and manifested in the outer life. The result is that we take life in a kind of haphazard way, taking it as it comes, thinking not very much about it until, perhaps, pushed by some bitter
There is nothing more true in connection with human life than that we grow into the likeness of those things we contemplate.

experiences, instead of molding it, through the agency of the inner forces, exactly as we would have it.

In the highest character-building, such as we have been considering, there are those who feel they are handicapped by what we term heredity. In a sense they are right; in another sense they are totally wrong. We are now dealing with the real essential self, and, however old Adam is, God is eternal. This means you; it means me; it means every human soul. When we fully realize this fact we see that heredity is a reed that is easily broken. The life of every one is in his own hands and he can make it in character, in attainment, in power, in divine self-realization, and hence in influence, exactly what he wills to make it.

About the Author

Ralph Waldo Trine, who wrote more than a dozen books in his lifetime, was considered a pioneer in life-transforming thought. Trine was born in 1866 in northern Illinois and attended three colleges, including Johns Hopkins University. He married another writer and they had one son. After his studies, Trine became a special correspondent for The Boston Daily Evening Transcript. While working there, he built a small cabin on the edge of a pine grove as a testament to simple and peaceful living. He began writing books in his early 30s and continued writing for nearly 40 years. One of his books, In Tune with the Infinite, sold more than 2 million copies. Automaker Henry Ford attributed his success directly to Trine’s book and ordered enough to distribute copies to other high-profile industrialists. At the age of 91, having outlived his wife, Trine died at a retreat for religious professionals.

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed this summary of Character Building Thought Power, check out:

In Tune with the Infinite by Ralph Waldo Trine

Thoughts Are Things by Prentice Mulford

Your Invisible Power by Genevieve Behrend