Pushing to the Front
by Orison Swett Marden

Break the Barriers
Determination makes anything possible.

QUICK OVERVIEW

Orison Swett Marden believed leaders are ordinary people with extraordinary persistence and perseverance. In his century-old, 500-plus-page tome, Pushing to the Front, the self-improvement master explains that there are no true barriers if one’s thoughts are lifted to the height of human possibility. The book is filled with applicable, relevant life lessons, as well as hundreds of quotes from famous individuals and real-life stories based on the experiences of the day.

An overriding theme Marden expresses is that while no one can become rich by expecting to be poor, if prosperity is our singular focus, we lose sight of what really matters: ideals and character. The book’s length may overwhelm some, but it is well organized and divided into 60 chapters by theme. Those who take the time to work their way through it will acquire a wealth of inspirational material.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

Too often, we focus on the big things in our lives—the promotion we’re hoping to get, the new house we want to buy, an event we see as the turning point in our economic fortunes. But as Marden points out, the little things in life create the big things. History is full of evidence supporting his theory of little things making a big impact: A cow kicked over a lantern in a Chicago barn and burned down half the city. A spark fell on some combustibles and led to the invention of gunpowder. The absence of a comma in a bill written more than 100 years ago cost the government $1 million.

It’s important to focus on the details of your life, on the day-to-day small acts that can take you places you’ve dreamed of reaching. Every day is a little life, and our whole life is but a day repeated, Mardens. He also reminds us that the

SUCCESS Points
In this book you’ll learn:

• It’s not what you know but what you do that makes a difference
• The importance of making the most of what you have and what you are
• The necessity of standing up for what you believe in, regardless of the pressures of the world around you
• How the habits you form will shape the direction of your life
strength of a chain lies in its weakest link. The next time you’re not sure what to do next, professionally or personally, keep his advice in mind. Take the right small step, and you’ll get where you need to go.

The lack of opportunity is ever the excuse of a weak, vacillating mind. Opportunities! Every life is full of them. Every lesson in school or college is an opportunity. Every examination is a chance in life. Every patient is an opportunity. Every newspaper article is an opportunity. Every client is an opportunity. Every sermon is an opportunity. Every business transaction is an opportunity—an opportunity to be polite, to be honest… to make friends. Every proof of confidence in you is a great opportunity. Every responsibility thrust upon your strength and your honor is priceless. Existence is the privilege of effort, and when that privilege is met like a man, opportunities to succeed along the line of your aptitude will come faster than you can use them.

It is the idle man, not the great worker, who is always complaining that he has no time or opportunity. Some young men will make more out of the odds and ends of opportunities, which many carelessly throw away, than others will get out of a whole lifetime. Like bees, they extract honey from every flower. Every person they meet, every circumstance of the day, must add something to their store of useful knowledge or personal power.

He who improves an opportunity sows a seed which will yield fruit in opportunity for himself and others. Every one who has labored honestly in the past has aided to place knowledge and comfort within the reach of a constantly increasing number.

Joe Stoker, rear brakeman on the accommodation train, was exceedingly popular with all the railroad men. The passengers liked him, too, for he was eager to please and always ready to answer questions. But he did not realize the full responsibility liked him, too, for he was eager to please and always ready to exceedingly popular with all the railroad men. The passengers

Some Thoughts on Quality

- Never be satisfied with “fairly good” or “good enough.”
- Accept nothing short of your best.
- Put such a quality into your work that anyone who comes across anything you have ever done will see character in it, individuality in it, your trademark of superiority upon it.
- Your reputation is at stake in everything you do, and your reputation is your capital. You cannot afford to do a poor job, to let botched work or anything that is inferior go out of your hands.
- It is just the little touches after the average man would quit that make the master’s fame.
- No other characteristic makes such a strong impression on an employer as the habit of painstaking, carefulness, accuracy.
- If there is that in your nature which demands the best and will take nothing less; if you insist on keeping your standards in everything that you do, you will achieve distinction in some line provided you have the persistence and determination to follow your ideal.
ten paces before he heard the puffing of the express. Then he ran for the curve, but it was too late. In a horrible minute the engine of the express had telescoped the standing train, and the shrieks of the mangled passengers mingled with the hissing escape of steam.

Later on, when they asked for Joe, he had disappeared; but the next day he was found in a barn, delirious, swinging an empty lantern in front of an imaginary train, and crying, “Oh, that I had!”

He was taken home, and afterward to an asylum, for this is a true story, and there is no sadder sound in that sad place than the unceasing moan, “Oh, that I had! Oh, that I had!” of the unfortunate brakeman, whose criminal indulgence brought disaster to many lives.

“Oh, that I had!” or “Oh, that I had not!” is the silent cry of many a man who would give life itself for the opportunity to go back and retrieve some long-past error.

“There are moments,” says Dean Alford, “which are worth more than years. We cannot help it. There is no proportion between spaces of time in importance nor in value. A stray, unthought-of five minutes may contain the event of a life. And this all-important moment—who can tell when it will be upon us?”

POSSIBILITIES IN SPARE MOMENTS

“All hour in a man’s life has its own special work possible for it, and for no other hour within the allotted span of years, and once gone it will not return.” —Noel Paton

“What is the price of that book?” at length asked a man who had been dawdling for an hour in the front store of Benjamin Franklin’s newspaper establishment.

“One dollar,” replied the clerk.

“One dollar,” echoed the lounger. “Can’t you take less than that?”

“One dollar is the price,” was the answer.

The would-be purchaser looked over the books on sale awhile longer, and then inquired: “Is Mr. Franklin in?”

“Yes,” said the clerk. “He is very busy in the pressroom.”

“Well, I want to see him,” persisted the man.

The proprietor was called, and the stranger asked: “What is the lowest, Mr. Franklin, that you can take for that book?”

Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute; What you can do, or dream you can, begin it.

“One dollar and a quarter,” was the prompt rejoinder.

“One dollar and a quarter! Why, your clerk asked me only a dollar just now.”

“True,” said Franklin, “and I could have better afforded to take a dollar than to leave my work.”

The man silently laid the money on the counter, took his book, and left the store, having received a salutary lesson from a master in the art of transmuting time, at will, into either wealth or wisdom.

Time-wasters are everywhere.

GREATER THAN WEALTH

A man may make millions and be a failure still. Money-making is not the highest success. The life of a well-known millionaire was not truly successful. He had but one ambition. He coined his very soul into dollars. The almighty dollar was his sun, and was mirrored in his heart. He strangled all other emotions and hushed and stifled all nobler aspirations. He grasped his riches tightly, till stricken by the scythe of death; when, in the twinkling of an eye, he was transformed from one of the richest men who ever lived in this world to one of the poorest souls that ever went out of it.

“The truest test of civilization,” says (Ralph Waldo) Emerson, “is not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops; no, but the kind of man the country turns out.”

Character is success, and there is no other.

PAYING THE HIGHEST PRICE

A blacksmith makes five dollars’ worth of iron into horseshoes, and gets ten dollars for them. The cutler makes the same iron into knives, and gets two hundred dollars. The machinist makes the same iron into needles, and gets sixty-eight hundred dollars. So it is with our life material which is given us at birth. Do something with it we must.
We cannot throw it away, for even idleness leaves its curse upon it. One young man works his up into objects of beauty and utility. He mixes brains with it. Another botches and spoils his without purpose or aim until, perhaps late in life, he comes to his senses and tries to patch up the broken and wasted pieces; but it is a sorry apology to leave, in payment for a life of magnificent possibilities.

“Why, my lord,” said a flippant English clergyman to the Bishop of Litchfield, “it is the easiest thing in the world to preach. Why, very often, I choose my text after I go into the pulpit, and then go on and preach a sermon, and think nothing of it.”

“Ah, yes,” said the bishop, “that agrees exactly with what I hear your people say, for they hear the sermon, and they, too, think nothing of it.”

The world is full of subjunctive heroes who might, could, would or should be this or that but for certain obstacles or discouragements—prospectuses which never become published works. They all long for success, but they want it at a discount. The “one price” for all is too high. They covet the golden round in the ladder, but they do not like to climb the difficult steps by which alone it can be reached. They long for victory, but shrink from the fight. They are forever looking for soft places and smooth surfaces where there will be the least resistance, forgetting that the very friction which retards the train upon the track, and counteracts a fourth of all the engine’s power, is essential to its locomotion. Grease the track, and, though the engine puffs and the wheels revolve, the train will not move an inch.

Work is difficult in proportion as the end to be attained is high and noble. God has put the highest price upon the greatest worth. If a man would reach the highest success he must pay the price himself. No titled pedigree, no money inherited from ancestors with long bank accounts, can be given in exchange for this commodity. He must be self-made or never made.

All would like to succeed, but this is not enough. Who would be satisfied with the success which may be had for the wishing? You can have what you desire, if you will pay the price. But how much do you want to succeed? Will you pay the price? How eager are you to strive for success? How much can you endure? How long can you wait?

**Increase Your Personal Presence**

- Love your fellow human beings and remember that it is a privilege to have the power to help others.
- The secret of pleasing is being pleasant yourself.
- Everybody is attracted by lovable qualities.
- It pays to cultivate popularity.
- The power to please is a tremendous asset.
- A willingness to be accommodating endears others to you.
- You must give much in order to get much.
- Look upon everyone you meet as holding a treasure.
- First impressions do count.
- Be honest and open, and people will admire you. Secretiveness repels as much as frankness attracts.
- Cultivate the art of being agreeable.

**FINDING VICTORY IN DEFEAT**

One of the first lessons of life is to learn how to get victory out of defeat. It takes courage and stamina, when mortified and embarrassed by humiliating disaster, to seek in the wreck or ruins the elements of future conquest. Yet this measures the difference between those who succeed and those who fail. You cannot measure a man by his failures. You must know what use he makes of them. What did they mean to him? What did he get out of them?

I always watch with great interest a young man’s first failure. It is the index of his life, the measure of his success-power. The mere fact of his failure does not interest me much; but how did he take his defeat? What did he do next? Was he discouraged? Did he slink out of sight? Did he conclude that he had made a mistake in his calling, and dabble in something else? Or did he up and at it again with a determination that knows no defeat?

There is something grand and inspiring in a young man who fails squarely after doing his level best, and then enters the contest again and again with undaunted courage and redoubled
Finding Your Niche

Nature never duplicates man. She breaks the pattern at every birth. The magic combination is never used but once.

We must not jump to the conclusion that because a man has not succeeded in what he has really tried to do with all his might, he cannot succeed at anything. Look at a fish floundering on the sand as though he would tear himself to pieces. But look again: A huge wave breaks higher up the beach and covers the unfortunate creature. The moment his fins feel the water, he is himself again, and darts like a flash through the waves. His fins mean something now, while before they beat the air and earth in vain, a hindrance instead of a help.

Very few of us, before we reach our teens, show great genius or even remarkable talent for any line of work or study. The world has been very kind to many who were once known as dunces or blockheads, after they have become very successful; but it was very cross to them while they were struggling through discouragement and misinterpretation. Give every boy or girl a fair chance and reasonable encouragement, and do not condemn them because of even a large degree of downright stupidity; for many so-called good-for-nothing boys, blockheads, numskulls, dullards, or dunces, were only boys out of their places, round boys forced into square holes.

energy. I have no fears for the youth who is not disheartened at failure.

“It is defeat,” says Henry Ward Beecher, “that turns bone to flint, and gristle to muscle, and makes men invincible, and formed those heroic natures that are now in ascendency in the world. Do not, then, be afraid of defeat. You are never so near to victory as when defeated in a good cause.”

Failure becomes the final test of persistence and of an iron will. It either crushes a life, or solidifies it. The wounded oyster mends his shell with pearl. No man is a failure who is upright and true. No cause is a failure which is in the right. There is but one failure, and that is not to be true to the best that is in us.

EDUCATION BY ABSORPTION

The uneducated man is always placed at a great disadvantage. No matter how much natural ability one might have, if he is ignorant, he is discounted. It is not enough to possess ability, it must be made available by mental discipline. The first thing to do is to make a resolution, strong, vigorous and determined that you are going to be an educated man or woman; that you are not going to go through life humiliated by ignorance; that, if you have been deprived of early advantages, you are going to make up for their loss.

You will find that the whole world will change to you when you change your attitude toward it. You will be surprised to see how quickly you can very materially improve your mind. Go about it with the same determination that you would use to make money or learn a trade. There is a divine hunger in every human being for self-expansion, a yearning for growth or enlargement.

Man was made for growth. The world is a great university. From the cradle to the grave, we are always in God’s great kindergarten, where everything is trying to teach us its lesson; to give us its great secret. Very few people learn to use their eyes. They go through the world with a superficial glance at things. Yet the eye was intended for a great educator. The brain is a prisoner, never getting to the outside world. It depends upon its five or six servants, the senses, to bring it material and the larger part of it comes through the eye. The man who has learned the art of seeing things looks with his brain. If we go through life like an interrogation point, holding an alert inquiring mind toward everything, we can acquire great mental wealth, wisdom which is beyond all material riches.
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If you enjoyed Pushing to the Front, check out:

Reinvention: How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life by Brian Tracy

Strategic Acceleration: Succeed at the Speed of Life by Tony Jeary

How to Be the Person Successful Companies Fight to Keep by Connie Podesta

About the Author

Orison Swett Marden, a prominent American New Thought movement writer, published several books, Pushing to the Front being his first. Born in New Hampshire in 1850, Marden lost his mother when he was 3, followed by his father four years later. He and his siblings were shuffled from relative to relative, and young Marden had to work to earn his keep. Marden put himself through Boston University and later Harvard, and afterward studied at an oratorical college and a theological seminary. After a successful career in the hotel business, Marden started writing down his philosophical ideas while in his 40s, leading to the 1894 publishing of Pushing to the Front. Three years later, he founded SUCCESS magazine.

Marden believed success came from within and that one’s focus should be on personal development. “The golden opportunity you are seeking is in yourself,” he wrote. “It is not in your environment; it is not in luck or chance, or the help of others; it is in yourself alone.” Marden passed away at age 74.

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