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THE CHOICE IS YOURS: TODAY'S DECISIONS FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

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John C. Maxwell is an NYT #1 Best Selling Author, speaker, and pastor focusing on leadership. Internationally respected he has sold more than 18 million books and was named the No. 1 leadership and management expert in the world by Inc. Magazine.

SUMMARY:

Life is a matter of choices, the book starts out. Each day you are faced with choices in one or multiple important areas of your life, and the decisions you make, however small they may seem, create the course of your life. Whether it be the the difficult road that forms you into the person you desire to be, or the easy road: the choice is yours.

Attitude is a Choice:

4 Truths of Attitude:

1

No matter what, your attitude is a choice. You can't choose what happens to you, but you can choose the attitude you use to get through it.

2

Make a positive attitude your priority. It's easier to maintain the right attitude than to get back to a good attitude after losing it.

3

Your attitude determines your actions. If you have a good attitude you're going to react better to adversity and so will the people around you.

4

The people you lead reflect the attitude you possess. If you have any responsibility for others - as a boss, parent, or leader - remember that the attitude of your people is a reflection of your own.

Roger Crawford was born with several deformities and had only 1 leg, yet he became a professional tennis player. His parents raised him with as much love as possible and tried to give him as normal a life as possible. Never let him take advantage of others using his disability.

Later in life he met another man with the same disabilities and was at first excited that this older man might be a mentor for him. However this man had a completely different attitude and because of that, never held down a job long, complained constantly, and blamed all of his problems on everyone else.

They had the same start at life, but the attitude they were raised with resulted in them leading vastly different lives from each other. This is a testament to how important your attitude is for you, and also how it affects the people around you and in your care.

Character is a Choice:

Insight Into Character:

1. Gifts and talents are given to us, but we control our character.
2. We earn others trust with our character.
3. Strong positive character leads success with people.
4. Strong character communicates credibility and consistency.
5. Our character colors our perspective.
6. Your limits in life are determined by the character you cultivate.

Values are a Choice:

You make choices about what you value every day, sometimes consciously, most of the time unconsciously. In order to discover the unconscious values, look at how you spend your time and money.

To know where you need to focus on change, conduct a value audit and then ask yourself if you're living by values that run contrary to your ideals, philosophy, or theology:



Look at your calendar:

What are you spending your time doing?



Review your budget:

Where is your money going?



Think about your passions:

What do you spend all day thinking about or talking about?

How to Live Out Your Values With Integrity:

1. Be clear about what your values are
2. Look at your values daily
3. Practice them purposefully.
4. Make decisions in line with your values
5. Teach your values to your family
6. Give public recognition to others who uphold the same values
7. 7. Celebrate your values regularly

Self Discipline is a Choice:

In college Olympic hall of famer, Bill Toomey wasn't a stand out athlete. He had a "bag of tricks theory" that there was no one big move you could make in training or competition but rather there are thousands of little things to do.

Bill would do his workouts with a partner, and then while his partner showered, he'd go do the entire workout again. He attributes this self discipline to achieving his decathlon world record and getting into the Olympic Hall Of Fame.

Six Keys to Self - Discipline:



Key 1

Train yourself to make good use of your time.



Key 2

Study yourself, identify your strengths, and build on them.



Key 3

Know your priorities.



Key 4

Give your time to the people who produce results.



Key 5

Make decisions quickly even with limited information.



Key 6

Take action whenever possible.

Commitment is a Choice:

In order to develop commitment you need to realize that it usually begins with some struggle. There is no special talent or ability or condition, it is simply a choice made over and over again. To strengthen your commitment muscles, start with small commitments daily.

There are several enemies of commitment, such as believing that life should be easy or that success is a destination. Having an attitude of negative thinking along with a lifestyle of giving up will destroy commitment. As well as an irrational fear of failure, lack of vision, and acceptance of what other people think you should do or be.



Teachability is a Choice:

President Theodore Roosevelt led a full and active life but always made time for learning. Even while in the white house he took up boxing and judo lessons. After completing his final term as President of The United States, he lead a scientific expedition in Africa sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute, and co-led a group to explore the uncharted River of Doubt in Brazil. The man was always striving to learn and improve himself and that is how he came to live such an uncommon life.

Initiative is a Choice:

Everyone gets into a rut from time to time. You only need to do a few things to get out and get moving. First accept responsibility for your own life and know where you want to be.

Then divide your dream into bite size, manageable tasks and finally get started!

Don't hope for inspiration, create your own incentive to change.

Passion is a Choice:

Passion opens the door for achievement. When you are passionate about what you are doing it is easy to commit and you don't need to force yourself to follow through. If anything sometimes you may have to force yourself to stop.



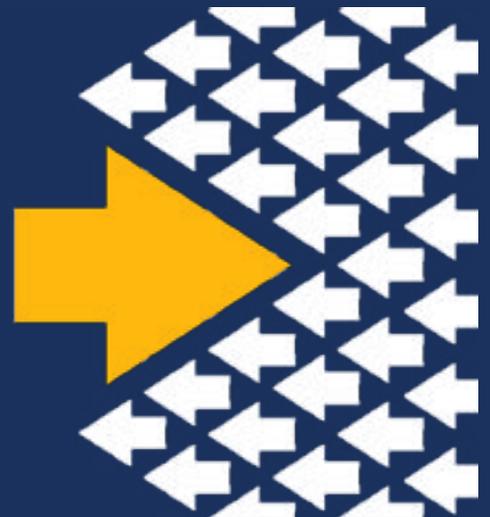
In your life you will meet two kinds of passionate people. Passionately positive, and positively negative. Keep yourself away from the negative people. Maxwell refers to these people as fire fighters.

Fire fighters/negative people are people who focus on what's wrong with an idea, are very doubting, cause dissension, hate change, love to use words like "yes, but...", and keep people with great potential from moving up in life.

Courage is a Choice:

Most people think that courage is only standing up in the middle of danger or great stress, when in fact courage is an everyday value. In order to lead from the front, where you're an easy target, you need to muster up the courage to move forward. Courage is seeking the truth, even when we know it could be painful.

We utilize courage to change instead of remain in our comfortable bubble. To keep to our convictions when others challenge them or try to pressure us into doing things we know are wrong. We need courage to learn and grow even when it will show others our weaknesses by asking for help. And to take the high road when others treat us badly.



Responsibility is a Choice:

Most people only take responsibility for their life when it's comfortable or easy. If you want to grow and become better, you need to take responsibility all of the time.

Especially when it's difficult.

If something could go wrong, when the stakes are high, and especially after failure it's important to take responsibility instead of blaming others.

You always have some responsibility in the situation, even if you don't want to admit it. By taking responsibility where you should, you'll develop stronger character and self discipline.

Growth is a Choice:

If you want to grow, you need to surround yourself with people further along than you.

Start by spending time with great people.

Don't be discouraged if you don't know those people. Find mentors and consume their content. Listen to their podcast, get their books & DVDs, read their blogs, etc. Visit places that inspire you, and attend events that will prompt you to pursue growth.

Use these 4 phases of development as a guide to find the people you need to assist you during your current phase of growth:

Enthusiastic Beginner - You need someone to help give direction.

Disillusioned Learner - You need someone to coach you.

Capable But Cautious - You need supporters to encourage you.

Self-Reliant Achiever - You need people to resource your dreams.

Relationships are a Choice:

Exercise for growth:

Compliment 3 people a day for 30 days and pay attention to changes in them, in yourself, and in the relationship that you have with them. Remember, no one is without some decent quality.



There are four basic levels of relationships:

1. **Surface Relationships** - No strong commitment from either person
2. **Structured Relationships** - Built on routine encounters, they might be tied to a specific place, common interest or activity.
3. **Secure Relationships** - Trust begins to develop & people reach a certain comfort level and friendships are tested.
4. **Solid Relationships** - The highest of all relationships, people share complete trust and confidentiality.

Ten things to know about people and how to use it to build better relationships:

1

People are insecure, give them confidence.

2

People like to feel special, sincerely compliment them.

3

People look for a better tomorrow, show them hope.

4

People need to be understood, listen to them.

5

People lack direction, navigate for them.

6

People are selfish, speak to their needs first.

7

People get emotionally low, encourage them.

8

People want to be associated with success, help them win.

9

People desire meaningful relationships, provide community.

10

People seek models to follow, be an example.

Communication is a Choice:

You need to make listening a priority in your life. People who don't listen aren't gaining wisdom and create failure in other areas of their life because their failure to listen spreads to those around them.

They don't hear what is not being said, so they can't meet their partner/childs/customers/employees needs, and their people stop communicating with them.

Keep in mind that people tend to communicate their feelings and attitudes:

- 7% through words
- 38% through tone of voice
- 55% through nonverbal signals.

There are four communication styles that people naturally gravitate toward:

1

The Retaliation Style - People who use this style feel that they have the right to inflict pain on others because they have received pain.

2

The Domination Style - People who use this style force or manipulate others. They destroy the personhood and self-worth of others.

3

The Isolation Style - These people seek separation, and they never develop a sense of community with others. Isolators destroy any hope of personal development or growth.

4

The Cooperation Style - These people recognize the value and contribution of others, and seek common ground. They build trust and add value to themselves and others.

Encouragement is a Choice:

In order to become an encourager you must appreciate the power of encouragement. Believe in people and build relationships through encouraging and doing what you encourage others to do. People often will rise to the level of expectations you have for them so show them how important they are to you or your organization and give them a reputation to uphold.

Remember to reward what you value and hold more celebrations to motivate people to keep trying. Encourage participation and ownership and you'll see many people will stretch to meet the challenge.

Servanthood is a Choice:

In 1942, when he knew that his unit was going to have to surrender to the Japanese, Lt. Colonel Philip Toosey chose to stay with his men instead of shipping out. He knew that leaving would weaken the morale of his men and would result in many not making it through alive. While being a POW, Toosey always looked out for the other POWs under him, even at risk of great harm to himself. His loyalty and commitment to improving the working conditions of POWs under him paid off in getting the Japanese to improve conditions for the POWs.

He was dedicated to serving the needs of those under his command and as a direct result made things better for many other people not under his command. After the war, he took 3 weeks off and then went back to his military service. His dedication to serving others and putting their needs above his own wants changed the course of hundreds if not thousands of lives.

Love is a Choice:



- 1. Love People Now:** You never know what's going to happen tomorrow or if you will see tomorrow at all.
- 2. Love is Vulnerable:** When you open your arms to another, you make yourself an easy target, do it anyway.
- 3. Love is Powerful:** Love has the power to change the world. When you love others, anything is possible.
- 4. Love Only Lasts with Hard Work:** If you want a relationship to last, you will have to give up other things for it.
- 5. Love is Unconditional:** If there are strings attached, then it isn't really love.

Key Quotes:

1. "The measure of a person's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out."
-Thomas Macaulay page 22
2. "When we love something it is of value to us, and when something is of value to us, we spend time with it, time enjoying it, and time taking care of it."
- Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck page 33
3. "You don't make decisions because they are easy. You don't make decisions because they are cheap. You don't make decisions because they are popular. You make decisions because they are right."
-Theodore Hesburgh page 37
4. "One half of knowing what you want is knowing what you must give up before you get it."
-Sidney Howard page 49
5. "Things may come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle."
-Abraham Lincoln page 62
6. "If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, then we did it. If anything goes real good, then you did it. That's all it takes to get people to win football games for you."
-Paul "Bear" Byant page 122

Key Takeaways:

- No matter what, attitude is a choice
- Conduct a value audit, then live your values with integrity
- Train yourself to make good use of your time
- To strengthen your commitment, start small
- Don't wait for inspiration, start now
- Surround yourself with people who are positive influences
- Courage is sticking to your convictions when others challenge them
- Take responsibility when it's difficult, especially after failure
- Use encouragement and compliments to build solid relationships
- Make listening a priority
- You don't know what is going to happen, love people now

The ONE Action You Should Take:

Do you ever feel like your life is out of focus and you're not sure what to do?

Often times people find themselves living lives that run contrary to their ideals, philosophy, or theology and aren't sure how to get back on track.

This exercise will help you clear out the things in your life that run contrary to your values so that you can become the person you desire to be.

Clear out some time on your calendar, grab a notebook and find a quiet space to answer these questions:

1. Look at your calendar - what are you spending your time doing?
2. Review your budget - where is your money going?
3. Think about your passions - what do you spend all day thinking about or talking about?

Reflect on your answers, are these things what you want to be known for? Are these things leading you toward your best life? What of these needs to change?