

Ownership—# 1 of Eight Keys

Ownership is the quality of accountability and responsibility. The ability to be counted upon and the willingness to take responsibility for the choices we make.

I was born in Warton Ontario. As a child at six, I still remember going downtown and sitting on the bench in front of the old barber shop appropriately named “Skin and Bill’s.” One Saturday afternoon, I was sitting on a bench outside the barber shop where men would sit, chew and spit tobacco into a can a safe distance away from the bench. It was pretty gross to watch; but for a child, it was the essence of manhood in that small town. On this particular day while I was waiting for my dad to come and pick me up, a native indian was sitting beside me at the end of this bench. He was somewhat slumped over in the heat of the noon day sun. The old native spoke, not directly to me but to what seemed an anonymous audience. He spoke softly in a very slow drawn out fashion. He talked about his grandson whom I suspect he thought looked a little bit like me; but, as he joked, he said, “he looked more like an indian than you.” He told me this story which, because of my age, I could only piece together later in life. I just remember the part about good and evil in all of us.

His Story: He began to speak about a battle that goes on inside all people. I couldn’t tell if he was talking to me, his grandson, or an imaginary friend. He said, “My son, the battle is between two ‘wolves’ inside us all.

One is Evil. It has anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is Good. It has joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.”



I asked him: “Which wolf wins?”

The old grandpa simply replied, “The one you feed.”

I have remembered this story for my whole life because it is about the power of choices, positive thinking, being a good person and about being in control. I have always sensed that there is a negative voice inside and a positive voice; and that, if I pay attention to the negative side, then negative things happen. And, if I pay attention to the positive side, positive things happen.

Learning to be positive is an attitude that can be controlled until it becomes a part of you. Everyone has seen those people who are negative and those who are positive. The trick is to surround yourself with positive people. Should there be someone negative near you, influence them to think positively and/or move away from them. We have choices each and every day to think, be and act positively. When we do that, great things happen. Feed the good wolf.

Leaders today need clarity of vision and to sustain their integrity and character. The highest level of maturity is to be real, genuine and authentic without a need to impress, pretend, feel ashamed, or fear. Inherent in this definition is a person’s willingness to take full and complete responsibility for his or her thoughts and resultant actions. This person is free to stretch, make mistakes and grow. When people abdicate this responsibility by placing blame for their thoughts and actions on someone or something else, they can become powerless victims of circumstance.

Leaders need to demonstrate a respect for others by controlling their own thoughts and to act as a model for others. Those who take full and complete responsibility for their thoughts and actions discover one of the greatest secrets of success: “The only thing we can control in this life is our thoughts.” These people give up the senseless and futile attempt to



control situations and people. Instead they focus their energy on controlling what can be controlled—their thoughts.

As a result, they are transparent to the need to impress, pretend, feel ashamed, and fear. They are confident, comfortable in their own skin, capable of addressing serious issues and situations on a moment's notice—ready to serve others. As masters of their thoughts, they have become the captains of their destiny and they bless everyone around them. The choice is simple. Be a victim imprisoned by circumstance or be a captain free to sail the wide oceans of life.

We are not our thoughts. These are just thoughts. We are metacognitive beyond thought. And if we are not our thoughts, who are we? We are the observer and chooser of our thoughts. We have thoughts and these thoughts belong to us, but that's not who we are. Consider the captain and owner of a sailboat. He can guide the boat and choose the direction. The boat is his, he is the captain, but he is not the boat. He can step back and observe his boat even while it is sailing and can make choices based upon his observations. For the most part, he is in control of where his boat will sail. So we, too, can become the captain of our thoughts.

Like the sea captain, you are the observer. You observe all at your command (your thoughts) and then choose the actions you will take. Your task is to become a master Observer / Chooser. This is the essence of true success. Success begins with a conscious choice and choosing again and again and again in every moment until you have shed your old skin and developed a new habit of being you.

How do leaders demonstrate these self-control elements in their thinking? Some fake it with a smile and use positive team behavior signs around the office. However, others can feel the lack of congruency in their behavior and attitude. If you do fake it, it won't be long before others pick it up. The key of success here is to actually practice the internal power of positive thinking until it becomes a part of your very being. It needs to be practised in every aspect of your life.



To demonstrate this powerful thinking to my children, I would work a real life situation for them. Whenever we were in the car together and I was looking for a parking spot, even at the worst of times, Christmas shopping, I would say, “Let’s take the parking spot at the front. There’s always one at the front just waiting for us.” The parking lot would appear jammed with lots of cars circling. At first, they would say, “Yea, sure, Dad!” However, time after time, I would pull into a space at the front. Many times someone would pull out just in time for me to pull in. My girls would ask me, “How did you know they would pull out for you?” My response would always be the same. “You have to believe that there is a spot there for you. If there is any doubt in your mind, then it won’t happen. You must believe it. It is the power of positive thinking.” Now sometimes I would redefine where the front was. For example, there might be a spot open right at the front of the side of the building and it is the closest spot to the front door. Creative parking 101, I would call it. My overall intent was to demonstrate the power of positive thinking. If you believe anything hard enough, you can “Make It Happen!”

Once you take ownership and control over your thoughts, then those thoughts become your actions. From that position forward you become responsible and accountable for all choices. This is the “Ownership Key” for true success in life.

This is the first of “Eight Keys For Success In Life.”

