

Think about thoughts

They will drive your desires or frustrate your future

“Whoever works his land will have plenty to eat, but the one who chases unrealistic dreams has no sense.”¹

By Richard Palmquist

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We have a choice in life. We can “suck seed” or “spit pit.” Most of us would like to succeed. How to do it? That's the challenge. To succeed you must get something done. To get something done, you have to know what needs doing. To know what needs doing, you must think consistent thoughts. To act correctly, you must think correctly.

Thoughts precede action. Thoughts produce action. That seems simple, but it is not easy. The relationship between thought and action, action and creativity, is a law of nature we ignore at our peril. A popular DVD titled *The Secret* deals with how thoughts create the things of success. The content of the DVD is correct, but it explores only half the story. What we will attempt to do in these pages is to place that secret of natural law into a realistic context, going beyond hypothesis to methods matching real life.

Our examination of these methods will admittedly be simplistic. We will take a superficial look at the tools controlling creativity. Our purpose is to identify what you will explore if you wish to improve your ability to fulfill your life's purposes. Most presentations of nature's laws governing creativity present only one side of the picture. There are two forces involved. Thoughts do create things; however, the events of life often thwart those thoughts.

We will discuss the importance of willpower, explaining how it generates vision by harnessing imagination. We will show how vision identifies goals we must target – goals that must be wrapped in deliberate affirmations – all within the structure of our desire for success.² When the desire for success wraps those goals in affirmations, we see purposes fulfilled.

Willpower generates imaginary processes creating good thoughts. Those creative thoughts, however, can be thwarted by bad thoughts. Good thoughts create advances toward our purposes, but all the while they are opposed by troubling events, part of the experience of life. Our purposes can only be reached when we find a way to control our thoughts, so that the adversities of life are neutralized. That will be the quest of this study.

Picture this complex pattern as the train of success traveling day by day down tracks with the possibility that some fat cow (unexpected life events) will need to be shoved aside by a special cowcatcher.³ How do we put that cowcatcher in place?

Willpower controls imagination; imagination produces thought

The Secret presents countless sound bites and reports of success. Most viewers, however, will not find in the documentary the secret of how to overcome the struggles of daily life as they apply the power of thought over things. The DVD's advice can lead to discouragement, even despair. When success eludes us, failure can lead to depression, or worse. Thought does have power over things, but the train of success needs an effective cowcatcher.

Imagination feeds thoughts that control the things happening in life. How can we control our imaginations to cause them to serve purposes leading to success? When one of life's cows falls onto our tracks, it is easy to become a whiner. Oswald Chambers warns, “If you have the whine in you, kick it

1 Proverbs 12:11, “GW” version.

2 If you have read my book *Einstein, Money and Contentment*, you will see here a two part function (essential and dynamic) working within a structure leading to a result, just as we see working in the laws governing electricity. Within the structure of vision, willpower drives imagination: the result is goals. Those goals become the essential driven by affirmations within the structure of success: the result is the fulfillment of purpose.

3 A cowcatcher is a large metal device at the front of a locomotive. It shoves aside any object that might derail the train.

out ruthlessly. It is a positive crime to be weak in God's strength.”⁴

Only if we think thoughts pleasing to God and drive our imagination in the direction of God's purpose for our lives can we effectively reach goals. As we step forward reaching each goal we roll further on the track toward our purpose. The powerful thought-rules of nature fuel this process. The Psalmist extols, “*How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them*”⁵

Anybody whose life is given over to serving God and to fulfilling high purposes leading to a life of success should read and apply Romans 12:1-2; then consider the verse that follows: “*I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith.*” Many who try “will-power-enabled-imagination-fueled-positive thought life” are subject to disappointment. We become disappointed when we expect a result based upon a faulty understanding of ourselves. This sort of unrealistic expectation can feed depression.

Even with an accurate self concept, however, some “cows on the track” to success must be expected. If we understand that the train moving toward success needs a cowcatcher, we live in reality. To ignore this principle is to court disaster and to risk derailment and failure. The question is, “Do we have the willpower to attach a cowcatcher to our engine of success?” If so, how do we do it?

German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883) advised, “*One supreme fact which I have discovered is that it is not willpower but fantasy-imagination that creates. Imagination is the creative force. Imagination creates reality.*” Wagner, correctly understood, says it is not enough to possess willpower. You must use that willpower to imagine the goals you will reach to accomplish the purpose for your life. Prayer involves this deep level of thought. It is on a similar plane to imagination. “*All things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.*”⁶ Seeking is an act of our will. We ask for what we seek. Confident visualization is the tool giving us the ability to receive – to succeed in creating a new reality, a new thing to contribute to our future success.

Creative words, subject to our willpower, drive imagination. This process is more powerful than an army. If we want to stay on track and move at full speed, we will “*be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*”⁷ “*[speaking] evil of no man, not ... contentious ... gentle, showing all meekness toward all men*”⁸ “*... speak[ing] the things which befit the sound doctrine*”⁹ “*putting away falsehood, speak[ing] truth each one with his neighbor: for we are members one of another*”¹⁰ as we use this process of creativity to fulfill life's purpose for us.

Let's take a deeper look into the conflict between our positive thought processes and their vulnerability to things that can get in our way. The cows on the tracks of life need to be recognized and pushed aside.

What power do good thoughts have against bad thoughts? When bad thoughts repel good thoughts, how do we cancel their effect?

Good thoughts repel bad thoughts; bad thoughts repel good ones

How can you apply the dynamic of correct thinking to counteract events you cannot control? That is the adventure. You will not get started if you are like many who ignore the need. Those slackers, when they think of making a plan, would **P**refer a **L**ovely **A**fternoon **N**ap. Good thoughts create good things, but the things that happen to us often create bad thoughts. If you understand this reality, you can begin controlling your thoughts, shoving aside the cows blocking your purpose.

4 Chambers' daily devotions: *My Utmost For His Highest*, April 14.

5 Psalm 139:17

6 Matthew 21:22

7 James 1:19

8 Titus 3:2

9 Titus 2:1

10 Ephesians 4:25

If we combine the approach of *The Secret* with a technique that helps us defeat the obstructions of ordinary life, we will find our vision wrapping around will-power-driven imagination to define goals. Those goals, fortified by our recognition of reality, will produce affirmative results, fulfilling the purposes that bring reality to dreams. This process, in a word, is “attitude.”

NASA helped teach us the meaning of “attitude.” Attitude is how a space vehicle “leans” as it speeds toward its goal in space. Our mental attitude defines how we lean toward the positive or the negative as we approach the events of life. Good thoughts do create good things; however, it is just as true that the things that happen to us can stir angry, negative and destructive thoughts – thoughts that like fat cows can block the tracks – stalling our engine and feeding disappointment.

Martin Luther King's “I have a dream” speech would have become only a disappointing frustration were it not for the power of that crowd on the Mall in Washington, D.C. His expression of the dream combined with the political power of those who heard him created the fulfillment. The fanciful dream alone would have failed if it were not for the political power of his followers. Ironically, King's life ended in failure if you believe it was necessary for him to have seen his dream come to reality. He died. What more profound frustration could accompany any dream?

Yet, King's dream lived. It was not self-oriented: it didn't depend upon King. His continued life was not essential to his dream. His clear thoughts created things that moved society. You might say King's thoughts moved mountains, despite his death.

There are two choices in dealing with the issues of thoughts that lead toward success. We can be dedicated in our thinking in order to meet our own needs, or we can concentrate on meeting the needs of others. There is irony in this choice. If we are dedicated to trying to gain selfish advantage, we may experience temporary gain, but the only path to prosperity and to having an abundant satisfaction of our own needs, is to find a way to meet the needs of others. Unselfish humility is the power source of a successful dream. Thoughts that succeed are thoughts that seek to serve others. According to King's FBI files, he had his share of selfish thoughts and improper behavior, but his status as a sociological revolutionary is a product of a well-thought, profoundly-spoken purpose, meeting society at the point of its perceived need.

We cannot control some of life's happenings. King should not be blamed for stepping onto the balcony of his motel for a breath of fresh air, the last act of his life. The shooter was beyond King's control. The opposition manifested by the assassin, however, was a cow on King's tracks all through his public life. He could not control those who opposed him, but he did have control over how he responded to his enemies. His attitude disdaining violence and shaming injustice is what caused his dream to be fulfilled. His thoughts took on a life of their own, and they created change even though the dreamer was gone.

As we prepare for an effective future, we have three choices. We can take charge, determine to follow someone who is in charge, or we can sit by and watch the world go by, hoping the rain will not melt our cardboard shelter. “Lead, follow or get out of the way.” There are people who seem to live with a cloud over their heads. Remember Al Capp? He was a popular cartoonist when many reading this were still in diapers. He created a character who had a rain cloud always over his head. His name was Joe Bfstplk. (Capp explained the name with no vowels was pronounced by making a “raspberry” sound.) This man who insisted on living in grief may have caused millions of cartoon readers to start their day with a chuckle, but his life was not creative.

An old German poem goes, “*Into each and every life some rain must fall*” (my translation). But no one who enjoys having rain wet down every crevice of his experience can live a successful life. Joe's cloud was a thought – a thought that created the cloud-thing. Joe's success train was stalled by the cow of negative expectations.

A tragic example of this expectation of an unpleasant life is the hilarious routine enjoyed for many years during the TV comedy “Hee Haw.” The singing group of hillbillies would come before the cameras and whine:

*Gloom, despair, and agony on me.
Deep, dark depression, excessive misery.
If It weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all.
Gloom, despair, and agony on me.*

That was the chorus. Each week on Hee Haw a new verse would go with it.¹¹ It was rib-splitting fun to experience it each week. I enjoyed that segment so much that my family was aware I believed it fit my life. So, at my seventieth birthday party, a glum-faced chorus of family members sang it to me, as I rolled on the floor in side-splitting laughter.

Seriously, though, that song can be poison. It is a cow on the track to success. Any idea or suggestion that all you experience is bad luck is the bringer of just that: bad luck. You get what your thoughts attract. A grumpy TV character was told by the storekeeper, “They broke the mold when you were created.” The grump replied, “They had to. It was cracked.” The retort might be funny and it could be viewed as healthy self-deprecation on the part of the grump, but that thought is a cow on the track to success.

Some thoughts come to us moment by moment that are genuinely beyond our control. If it rains the day you planned to paint your shed, a positive thought is derailed. Is the sun so hot today that you could not mow the lawn? Another thought-spoiler, beyond your control, derails a good thought. However, the shed can be painted later, and mowing the lawn a day late will not kill the grass. The question remains, how do we shove the fat cows of unpleasant interruptions to our plans over to one side? How do we attach an habitual cowcatcher to our thinking habits to nullify the disasters that a few bovine-blessing-blockers throw in front of us? These silly examples are only illustrations helping us view the larger issues of life. “Disasters” like rainy days that keep us from yard work are not cows on the tracks; they are more like snails on the sidewalk of life.

Our task is to learn to use our thoughts to create good things in life even when bad events skew our minds toward bad thoughts. Somebody says to you, “They must have thrown away the mold when you were created.” If you respond, “They had to; it was cracked,” look out. Those words encourage thoughts that plop cow-things on your tracks. If those thoughts begin to define what you think of yourself, the engine of success will grind to a halt.

Those who seek justice in this world often experience the injustice they disdain. For example, if you continually fill your mind with “Judges are unfair,” you are likely soon to stand before an unfair judge. If they (accurately) keep telling their neighbors that the IRS is not lawfully authorized to do what it does, someday they will be hosting an oppressive IRS auditor. I know this from personal experience. Thoughts about judges attract the judge-type who is in central to their thoughts. Negative thoughts about the IRS cause you to act in a way that the IRS will find you and perhaps crush you under foot with the sort of brutality the IRS agency exercises each day.

A better solution is to say, “We need to find a way to reward and to praise judges who abide by the law and dispense justice.” Just how you cast the IRS in a positive light, I am not sure; but it is better not to think of that agency than to stew over it. You receive, you create, the product of your thought. Thoughts become reality. The struggle between “thoughts-in-control-of-things” and “things-that-disturb-thoughts” will be determined by your view of the cup half full. If you see a cup as half empty, getting control of the things of your life, working toward success until your dream is real, might be

¹¹ For details see www.heehaw.com

difficult. If you can see the cup half full, you will be a more successful thinker: your thoughts will be more likely to fuel your purposes, and your dreams should progress toward fulfillment.

To succeed, you must think success. Positive thoughts attract and create positive results. Thoughts do create things. However, to keep your thought-train on track, you need a great big cowcatcher out front to keep you from what the Bible warns against. The Bible advises us to avoid instability. It calls this lack of integrity being “double-minded.”¹²

How can we focus? How can we think only positive, never negative thoughts? How can we consistently become single-minded? How can we maintain a stable path toward success? Our thoughts define that path.¹³ Once the path is in place, how do we make certain to create only successful actions, avoiding setbacks? Our thoughts are subject to conflicting forces. The Apostle Paul put it this way. He wrote that it was difficult for him to behave the way he wanted to act.¹⁴ If Paul himself complained that he could not think straight, could not keep his thoughts and plans on a consistent path with integrity, what hope do we have? How can we hope to succeed if our thoughts are that tricky to control?

As I have waited my turn in line at Bank of America, I have often experienced long lines. Years ago, several times in a row, just as I reached the coveted first position in line, a teller's window would close. There were six tellers. Now there are five. I had to wait. Why is that? I allowed my thoughts to be overwhelmed by those experiences. I began to expect Bank of America to seek not to serve me. What a foolish thought. The former head of Bank of America and I graduated from the same college. Once I was denied a loan by my local bank manager and Tom contacted him. The next day I had my loan. Nevertheless, so long as I expected the teller to close her window, I would often find the window closed just in time to deny me prompt service.

E. Stanley Jones wisely wrote, “*Whatever gets your attention, gets you.*” He also wrote this helpful and practical poem. I always recite it before sitting in the dental chair:

*Take that fear
by the ear
and say, “See here.
If the thing I fear
were really here,
it would not be half so bad
as you, the fear.”*¹⁵

If fear drives you to say, “I don't have a green thumb;” don't be surprised when your plants die.

It is true that bad things do happen to good people. Robert Schuller, Sr., has often said, “*Life's not fair; but God is good.*” Some parents fear the bad influences of public schools, a well-founded fear, only to have a child come back from a church youth camp with a full vocabulary of profanity. Schuller does not deny facts seeking to derail patterns of good thinking. Instead he overpowers them, keeping thought life on a high, creative, positive track toward success, shoving aside the cow-powered negative.

During the days when missionaries were making a positive impact upon the tribes of central Africa, a clever con man decided to get rich by cheating tribal leaders. He knew the missionaries had paved the way for him to be accepted by the tribal chiefs. He would go into a tribe and by sleight of hand he would seem to change ordinary sand to gold flakes. He would gain the confidence of the chief,

12 James 1:5-8 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and upbraids not ... it shall be given him ... let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubts is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

13 Proverbs 23:7: *“As he thinks within himself, so is he.”*

14 Romans 7:19-21 *For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practice. I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present.*

15 E. Stanley Jones was a Methodist missionary to India. See *The Way*, published by Abingdon Press, Page 96.

who would then beg him to sell him the secret of how to convert dirt to gold. The con man would be offered every valuable up to the daughter of the chief in return for the secret. So, the con man would “reluctantly” agree to take the wealth of the chief in return for telling the chief a few meaningless jumbled words. After the chief had memorized the “magic formula,” the con man would warn, “Be sure, chief, never to allow yourself to think of a yellow monkey hanging by its tail when you say those words. If you think of the monkey, the dirt will not turn to gold.”

To escape execution, to be sure nobody exposed his trick, the con man planted a negative thought in the mind of the chief, thus placing the responsibility for failure on his victim and allowing his successful escape with his ill-gotten gain. The power of negative thought allowed the con man to escape Africa with enough illicit wealth to last him a lifetime. Although he lost the true wealth of integrity in the process, his scheme demonstrates the power of negative thought to drive away the effect of positive thought.

Moses sent spies out to “case” the land promised to Israel. Only two of the men came back with good reports. Caleb and Joshua were rewarded for their refusal to whine. They lived in hope. Their hope was realized. The other spies died before the nation of Israel succeeded in gaining God's promise.

Perhaps you would like to be an entertainer, a singer or a stand-up comic, but you believe you will never make it? Why? Because you look in the mirror and see ugly; you see public revulsion. Here is a cure for your erroneous imagination. Go to www.prairiehome.org and look at a picture of the face of Garrison Keillor. Then check out your face again. Not so bad, is it? Keillor attained his prominence, reached the level of his purpose in life, because he thought the thoughts he thought. Success is not out of reach for him. Why should you think it is out of reach for you? You won't if you imagine yourself into a position that matches your willingness to apply your talents and to work toward a realistic goal.

Does that send a chill up your spine, a thrill of fear? Fear sometimes is helpful because it can create healthy caution. However, if your train toward success is going to fulfill your purposes, you will change fear to curiosity. If any Illinois farm boy could have lived with the excuse that his roots would keep him from reaching his destiny, it was my father. Herman Palmquist was reared by a loving mother and a demanding, sometimes unfair and dictatorial father. To earn the right to attend high school, my dad had to rise early and milk cows and do other chores, sometimes for neighboring farmers, in order to provide part of the financial resources for his family. His older brothers stayed on the farm instead of attending school themselves in order to give Dad a chance to reach his goal of high school graduation. In a brief autobiography, Herman told of attending Coyne Electrical School after high school. Once there, he was asked, “What do you want to become?” He replied, “Chief Electrician” (at a generating plant.) That is exactly what he became as he worked his way through the ranks of Iowa, Illinois Gas and Electric Company. Though Dad had a quick temper, he never allowed the “I-quit” cow to block the engine of his successful life.

Assuming your train is on track, next you will deal with methods that will activate your cowcatcher, enabling you to keep your success thoughts on track by using your cowcatcher to keep you moving toward success. Success is more likely for the person who understands that the engine of the train of success is powered by God Himself. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us ...*”¹⁶ It is ultimately God's power that will give power to your will as you shove aside the cows that block the tracks on your way toward living your highest purpose.

If we allow ourselves to be taken over by, to be controlled by God's Holy Spirit, we can affirm with Paul, “*the Spirit also helps our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*”¹⁷ Remember that word

16 Ephesians 3:20

17 Romans 8:26

“groanings.” Do you ever talk to yourself? Try it. Your “thinker” listens to your voice, and these thoughts, even groans, control your future.

Thoughts create things; things impact thoughts

We learn in the study of language that a noun is a word symbolizing “people, places and things.” But there is a sense in which we can view even relationships, events, conditions of life, situations, meetings, even group action as “things.” We need consistent thoughts that create the “things,” the goals, that feed our purposes. What brings consistency to our thoughts? Control. Is it possible to control our thoughts in a way we experience integrity in our thinking?

Watch *The Secret* and you might bask for a moment in the delusion that you could become invincible. Listen to a motivational speaker, and he could charge you with the same enthusiasm. Dip back into reality, though, and you could toss in the towel. You might even lose hope. We need to learn how to push away the effect of the experiences of life – the cows that sometimes block the tracks of the train of success. Avoid the desire to “spit pit.” Without hope you may as well get off the success train.

Misplaced hope is worse than no hope. No matter how clearly you think, you live in a real world. The adverse thoughts of others, the accidents of life and ordinary circumstances can keep you from following in your experience the direction pointed by your thoughts. When you align your hopes and dreams with objective reality you sharpen the point of that out-front blade of your cowcatcher.

Thoughts are like fire. They can serve us just as fire cooks food and welds metal. But thoughts can destroy just as wildfires blacken forests. Have you ever thought that your successes and failures, your good memories and bad, your merit and sin is a product of what you think? Our thoughts control our actions and our actions control our lives. Do the things in your life control your thoughts, or do your thoughts control the things in your life? It is up to you. That's true, but learning how to do it might help. Control: that is the issue; but before we try to learn how thoughts can be controlled, let's discuss the relationship between thoughts and things.

There are people who need no alarm clocks. They wake up when they tell themselves to awaken: no need for a raucous bell to ring. They simply roll out when it is time. Why? The thought properly implanted is all the body needs in order to lean out of bed exactly on time for breakfast. This power of thought can define purpose, fulfill goals and guide us to the destination of our dreams.

However, what if a correctly perceived purpose stimulates a proper cluster of goals, wrapped in adequate willpower? What if creative imagination is focused in your mind, when late one night a careless driver slams into the side of your car, sending you to the hospital? “*The best laid plans often go awry.*” We sometimes are moved in the opposite direction than we intend. For example, consider the hard-working pastor. It was Saturday afternoon. He had just finished replacing the concrete sidewalk in front of the parsonage next to the small church. As he was showering, his wife shouted, “The children from your Sunday School class are writing in your fresh cement.” Throwing a towel around his mid-section, the pastor raced barefoot to the front yard and shouted disgust at the children. When he returned red-faced to the house, his wife commented, “Honey, I thought you loved those children.” He retorted, “I do love them in the abstract, but not in the concrete.” Life threw an unexpected cow at the pastor – across the tracks of his path toward success. How would your cowcatcher have responded?

In contrast to the pastor's quick temper there are people who use the power of thought as a tool of deliberate deception. Professor Harold Hill, of *Music Man* fame, developed such a “Think System.” This con man saw his job as selling musical instruments and uniforms, collecting the cash, then escaping town in the middle of the night. He knew nothing about music. So, he developed a fake thought system. In the movie he tells his young students that they are to hum and think the Minuet in G. Did his plan work? In the fantasy of Hollywood perhaps: don't try it, though, because in real life if you lean toward learning a skill you must work toward learning how to do it step-by-step. The script

writer of the *Music Man* allows us to guess that it was the musical talents of Marian the librarian who taught musical skills to the members of the boys' band. She did it out of her love for Professor Hill. That kind of think system, even though kept secret, works just fine. The fanciful thinker/dreamer like Professor Hill is surprised occasionally by a special gift that fulfills his dream-need. It is better to dream a fantasy than to have no dream at all.

Visualized imagination is the feeder to successful thoughts. The DVD *The Secret* effectively explains how thoughts create things. We usually think of things as those tactile objects we feel, smell or touch with our fingers. However, attitudes directing our future are things as well. The intangibles of life are as subject to the power of imagination, thought and purpose as are the objects we see. Besides, as well pointed out in *The Secret*,¹⁸ all those things we can see and touch consist of molecules, atoms and electrons that cannot be seen, the chief element of each being open space. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews affirms, “*the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*”¹⁹ Avoid trying to turn this fact into a career in magic. You can take it too far, but it is nevertheless true that mankind, created in God's image, is able to use thoughts and words to change surroundings.

Do you want to succeed in this quest? If so, your thoughts must control your response to unexpected things.

Talk to yourself; what you hear can control your thoughts

We can control our thoughts, bringing those things into our lives that will fulfill great purposes. Or the things in our lives will control our thoughts and we will languish in the futile dream of living better days. Control is the issue. How do we control our thoughts? The answer is not easy, but it is simple to suggest. Talk. We talk to ourselves. Our imagination-ears are always wide open. Psychologists tell us our subconscious minds cannot tell the difference between reality and what is imposed on our minds. What you experience by watching TV is seen by your deep self as being identical to your own life experiences. The advantage of this strange fact is that a repeated affirmation has the same power as encouragement from a friend. So, talk positive thoughts to yourself, even if those thoughts are the deep groanings of prayer stimulated by the Holy Spirit. If we speak aloud the thoughts that honor high aspirations, putting noble thoughts into forceful words, speaking those words (in private) aloud, we can take control of our imagination, direct our thoughts and watch our dreams become reality.

For example, discipline your child with, “Hey stupid! Can't you do anything right?” Try it. Your result will be that your child will work hard to live up to opinion of him or her. Report cards will be heavy with D's and F's. When you feed negative expectations you get negative behaviors, exactly what you asked for, and you throw a cow across the success tracks of your child. How can we keep from involving ourselves with uninvited cow-things? Before we can attempt to control things that happen, we must learn how to control our thoughts. The good has power over the bad thought; but in the experiences of life, troubling events beyond our control almost automatically cancel good thoughts.

When you have had a head cold and you are feeling better, someone might ask, “How is your cold?” You should reply “much worse, meaning I am a lot better.” Who wants a cold to be better? How foolish. Control that thought, and your health will be more likely to improve. Bad thoughts and good thoughts are at war with each other. Your track toward success does not need to be cluttered by the fat

18 *The Secret* DVD begins by explaining the “Law of Attraction.” The documentary accurately explains that our positive thoughts attract those things we think about. However, the film is wrong when it declares: “Like attracts like.” The laws of magnetism are clear. “Like attracts unlike.” The North pole of a magnet attracts the South pole of another magnet. This substantial error made it impossible for the writers of that movie to explain that Thoughts are like Thoughts and Things are like Things. Thus, it is natural for our thoughts to attract things, and for things to impact our thoughts.

19 Hebrews 11:13

cow of bad thoughts derailing your good thoughts.

An example of how I have tried to put this principle to work through the years is the advice I have given my children and grandchildren when they are ready to start the engine and leave for home after a visit with us. I don't say "Don't have an accident." I say, "Drive safely." Then I make the mistake of saying "Stay away from trucks and don't tailgate." The thought "driving safely" attracts safe driving. Thinking about staying away from trucks, though, could mean a driver would be drawn to trucks, and warning against tailgating could cause a driver to do just that, to move too close to the car ahead.

My first job in radio at KTIS, Davenport, Iowa, required me to visit advertisers to ask if they wanted to change their scripts. As I would write new copy, once in awhile I would use the phrase, "don't forget." That seemed to me to be good advice for the listener. But the sales manager came to me one day and suggested a better way to put it. He advised me to say "remember," instead of the negative "don't forget."

An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life. "*A fight is going on inside me,*" he said to the boy. "*It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, self-doubt, and ego. The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.*" The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "*Which wolf will win?*" The old chief simply replied, "*The one you feed.*"²⁰

We need to focus on God's creative Word (His thoughts) that created the Universe. In Hebrews 11:3 we find, "*By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the Word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear.*" What are those objects we call things? Immanuel Kant²¹ coined the term "thing-in-itself" meaning the reality that underlies perceptions. Things are objects, beings or entities. Anything can be a thing. (Pardon the pun).

The success train speeds down the track. The engine of purpose is powered by God's Holy Spirit. The coal car fueling your quest is loaded with the coals of appropriate goals. The thought-cars you are pulling along are all on track and you are moving fast. Is this the time for pride and over-reaching? Take the warning seriously we find in Luke 12. The successful farmer, with pride, determined he was doing so well that he needed to build bigger barns. His business reasoning went off track, and God told him, "*You foolish one, this night is your soul required of you; and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?*"²²

Instead, God tells us: "*Be not anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. For the life is more than food, and the body than raiment. Consider the ravens, that they sow not, neither reap; which have no store-chamber nor barn; and God feeds them: of how much more value are you than the birds!*"²³ Confidence is the correct attitude for our success train.

The point of driving the success train toward a purpose is futile unless God is the one Who defines that purpose. Unless you have experienced the breath of God's Holy Spirit giving life to your spirit, unless you have realized the depths of your depravity, the potential eternal death you deserve because of it, and the remedy for your problem earned for you through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, even though you make these laws of nature work for you, even though you gain what you view to be success, in the end it will be all dust and ashes. To live in harmony with the eternal perspective of God's definition of success, you need your success train to be on His track.

20 A native American legend

21 Google "Dr. Stephen Palmquist" for more about Kant. His interpretation of Kant has challenged philosophical academia.

22 Luke 12:20

23 Luke 12:21-24

So, good thoughts have the power to help us fulfill our goals, and bad thoughts are always ready to cancel the effect of good thoughts; but is it as simple as cleaning house? Not according to Luke, where we learn, *“The unclean spirit when he is gone out of the man, passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and finding none, he says, I will turn back to my house: and when he comes, he finds it swept and garnished. Then he goes, and takes to him seven other spirits more evil than himself; and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.”*²⁴

If we recognize the struggle between bad thoughts and good thoughts, the next thought we think would be, “How can I feed the good thoughts, keeping them vital enough to shove aside the bad-cow events of life?”

Our thoughts control things. What underlies those thoughts? What stimulates, feeds into and makes up the content of our thoughts? In grade school, we learned spelling by a method long since abandoned by more empowered, less effective modern educators. We were told to visualize. The teacher would say, *“I have written a word on the board. I want you to write down the word on your paper. Then, cover the word and close your eyes and picture the word, each letter, in your mind's eye. Then, write the word again. Compare the two writings. Keep doing that until you have learned how to spell that word.”*

The pure oxygen that combines with the goal-fuel in the coal car of your train of success is confident speech. Talk to yourself. When you have gained confidence in what you tell yourself, when you know your affirmations are in tune with God's will for your life, speak those affirmations to others, when appropriate.

Years ago I managed a radio station. It belonged to a friend who trusted it to me, and I worked for him without salary. On my desk drawer I “spoke” the slogan in words taped there, “If you earn it, you will own it.” Before too many months went by, I did own that station: and it is from the sale of the station that my wife and I could retire debt free in a way that – so long as we continue to live responsible financial lives – our bills will be paid for as many months as we need to be concerned about money.

I would find myself thinking that thought of success. I would repeat, “If I earn it, I will own it;” and when I was not thinking those words, I would be living in the light of that thought. God does not need repetition. Matthew writes, *“... in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”*²⁵ God needs to see in us a consistent dedication in the attitude of our heart. He doesn't need to hear the same words over and over again. However, frail humans like you and me are different. Repeated affirmations help fuel the engine of success. The more repetition of the affirmed, positive thoughts you point toward the realization of your goals, the more weight you add to your effective cowcatcher. If you are diligent in this practice, you will find those wandering-bad-thought-cows will begin to avoid you. They seek the path of least resistance.

Positive affirmations are the fuel-igniters of the process of goal fulfillment powering our success. However, as you fuel success by confident affirmation, be aware of what the Apostle Paul warned when he wrote *“[we] believed, and therefore did I speak, we also believe, and therefore also we speak.”*²⁶ The point is that without well-founded belief all the confident speech you conjure will be meaningless, leading nowhere. Wisdom is the key. Solomon wrote: *“My son, if your heart is wise my heart will be glad: Yes, my heart will rejoice when your lips speak right things.”*²⁷ Wisdom filters life's confusion, blowing away the “chaff-cows,” identifying the “wheat-thoughts” worthy of deeply convicted belief.

24 Luke 11:24-26

25 Matthew 6:7

26 2 Corinthians 4:13

27 Proverbs 23:15-16

Balance is the key. Try riding AMTRAK through Oklahoma, and you will experience the need for balance. When the tracks are uneven, the train sways. Too much imbalance, and you will not have to think about success. You will concentrate on picking up the pieces.

Sing about it.

Let the weak say, "I am strong. "
Let the poor say, "I am rich. "
Let the blind say, "I can see. "
It's what the Lord has done in me.

As we began this journey, I promised we would discuss hope. One day, I had a blowout. I was driving just one mile per hour, turning slowly. The curbing slanted downward in a slope allowing traffic into the commercial parking lot. My right front Michelin rubbed softly against the curbing and suddenly I knew I had a flat tire. That's a cow on the tracks. Not good. However, I immediately thought, "I have just experienced

Have
Only
Profitable
Experiences."

How is a blowout profitable? Perhaps most blowouts are not profitable. However, this one did not happen at 65 mph on the freeway. I waited safely for the tow truck, and the next day my car's four new "shoes" were ready for the long trips just ahead.

Hope is an attitude. It pushes aside any surprise cow that might want to block your track of life. Is your cowcatcher big enough to turn any event into profit that will keep you on a single-minded track toward success? Start today to turn your thoughts into the things that will help you reach the goals that fuel your vision that will fulfill the God-implanted purpose of your life.

This is not the end; make it your beginning

We have learned that willpower generates imaginary processes. Those processes stimulate the good thoughts that bad thoughts will seek to nullify. Focus on good thoughts and you will advance toward life's purposes for you. While you advance, troubling events – part of ordinary life – will oppose you. Your purposes will be reached when you deliberately control your thoughts, neutralizing the adversities of life.

Here is a to-do list to help you start:

1. Open your imagination. Quietly meditate, notepaper in hand, to come up with a purpose you should work to fulfill. Prayer will help you focus. If you do not pray, either learn how, or be aware that even your successes will be futile, eventually leading nowhere. Only eternal values have any worth.
2. After you identify the purpose you should accomplish, list goals you must reach in order to reach your purpose.
3. Expect opposition: thoughts and experiences that seek your defeat. Don't be surprised by them.
4. In a few words write those expectations that will make your first goals happen. These affirmations, often spoken aloud, will be the fuel driving your train of success.
5. When your first goals have been met, start over again, broadening your vision.
6. Continue the process.
7. Stay focused, schedule set times to do this work, until your dreams become reality.

If we are to be creative we need vision to define purpose and goals yielding to our spoken words.

"In the beginning was the Word"²⁸

*"The LORD of hosts hath sworn ... as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand."*²⁹

28 John 1:1

29 Isaiah 14:24