

Ensuring Choice, Not Chance, Determines Your Destiny

When circumstances seem to dictate one path when you had planned on another, realize that you may not have power over what happens initially, but you are in command of your response. Grasping this leads to the ability to challenge the situation and forge your own way.

By Jill S. Tietjen, P.E., F.SWE

Gender. Skin color. Height. Body shape. These physical characteristics can't and shouldn't determine your life path. They occurred by chance: You inherited them from your parents (and you didn't get to choose your parents!). Attitude. Work ethic. Motivation. These characteristics are your choice. By making choices, and not allowing chance to rule your life, you will determine your destiny.¹

Attitude

"I can't do that." These words should be banished from your vocabulary. Conversely, if someone *tells* you that you can't do something or women can't do something, then go for it!

Emily Howell Warner, the first woman commercial airline pilot and an inductee into the National Women's Hall of Fame, was told that women couldn't fly planes. She knew better. Of course, women could. *She* could fly a plane! She wanted to become a commercial airline pilot. They said that women couldn't be commercial pilots. It took 10 years of determination and persistence before she proved "them" wrong; but prove them wrong she did. Was it easy? No. Did she encounter hostility and rejection along the way? You bet! But, her attitude was that she was going to fly planes. Her attitude was her choice.

Julie Krone became the first woman jockey to win a Triple Crown race. When Krone was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 2013, she indicated that conditions at the facilities and racetracks where she trained and raced were not "perfect." But, she could control her attitude, focus on what she needed to do, and ignore naysayers and

those who said she (and women) didn't belong and couldn't be jockeys. The more she worked on her attitude, the better she raced, and the more she won. By the time she retired (for the second time), she had won more than 3,700 races, and she is the leading female thoroughbred horse-racing jockey of all time.

Your attitude is your choice.

Work ethic

Thomas Edison said, "Most people don't recognize opportunity because it comes dressed in overalls and looks like work." It took Edison 1,000 attempts to perfect the lightbulb. He did not view *any* of those attempts as failure; he viewed them as lessons to be learned on what did not work.

Never give up. Never say something is not your job. If it needs to be done, it might become your responsibility to see that it does get done. Passion,

your knowledge and your skills. Try new things. Work hard and work effectively. SWE offers so many opportunities for you to expand your skill base. Take advantage of all of these. Learn to budget, manage projects, motivate colleagues, perform strategic planning, speak in public, or whatever skill will be of most benefit to you. All of the skills that you learn in a volunteer setting (and all of the work ethic that you develop) will transfer to the workplace.

Your work ethic is your choice.

Motivation

In real estate, the three key words that determine the value of a property are: location, location, location. In life and work, the three key words that lead to personal and professional success are motivation, motivation, motivation.

This means you will do whatever it takes to complete the task in front of

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determination, and persistence — these characteristics will mark you as a "can do" kind of person. You can be the person who accomplishes, lives up to her commitments, is dependable, and always comes through. It will make you promotable and serve you well in all areas of your life.

Volunteer for assignments. Stretch

you. When you don't know what to do, you'll ask, you'll think, you'll figure something out. And, most of the time, you will accomplish the project. You'll learn new skills, you'll inspire other people in your life, and you'll become the "go-to" person.

One of my friends epitomizes this characteristic. Her nickname at a previ-

ous company was "do most." She could do most anything she was asked. Get a power plant on line on time and under budget. Done. Get a filing for a rate case completed. Done. Get a resource plan completed and conduct a competitive

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bidding solicitation for new-generation resources. Done. Today, she is the CEO of an electric utility.

Motivation. Motivation. Motivation. Your level of motivation is your choice.

I am hopeful that you will allow your choices — not chance — to determine your destiny. You can let chance impede you in your life's goals. Or you can choose how to live your life and what your attitude, work ethic, and motivation will be. It is truly your choice. ■

Note: 1. The author acknowledges nuclear physicist Shirley Ann Jackson, Ph.D., president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, who used this concept on the occasion of her acceptance remarks of the Trustees Award of the New Jersey Inventors Hall of Fame. Dr. Jackson has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

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