

## On Three Empowering Personal Qualities

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I've concluded that there are three personal qualities—or attributes, or characteristics—that particularly contribute to living well. You don't have to be born with them, you can acquire them. It won't happen overnight, so it will require diligence, but you'll see progress in this direction and note the payoffs that come from possessing these qualities and that will keep you going.

The three:

1. *A positive mental outlook.* People who are happy and productive don't spend their time complaining and blaming and stewing over what isn't right and finding reasons not to do things. They find good things to do and reasons to do them. Deciding that everything is messed up and nothing is worth doing works for a while, or seems to. Slacking off with schoolwork or your job or with your wife and bagging the gym workouts you did four times a week and vegging out with ballgames and pizza and Budweisers makes life easy, no heavy lifting until bedtime. The problem comes in that as time goes along you feel vaguely, and then not so vaguely, depressed and down on yourself, and you notice you're getting fat and that both your boss and your wife look the other way when you come into their space and your dog goes into the other room.

2. *The willingness to work hard.* If you want to feel good about your life, you have to work hard. Really, really, really hard. Your mind and body will always give you reasons not to work hard—"Hey, cool out, we can do that tomorrow." No. Take charge of yourself and work hard today. That's the way to be happy tomorrow. That's a rule you have to learn and play by. If you don't, mediocrity if not failure, and the blahs if not outright unhappiness, will become your lot in life.

3. *Self-control*. When you decide you're going to do something, you do it, period. Most often, our problems aren't that we don't know what to do to make things better in our lives. Deep down we have a good idea of what to do, or at least something that's worth trying. But we don't do it. You have to learn to carry through on what you commit yourself to doing. You told yourself you were going stick to your diet and now you want to eradicate the top layer of a box of bon bons? Eat a salad. If you say you are going to write your mother an email, do it. "Oh, I forgot" doesn't cut it. Results, not reasons for not getting results. Every moment of every day provides opportunities to practice self-control. You say you are going to work in the garden for an hour tonight, work in the garden for an hour tonight.

The next time things aren't going well and you're feeling down, check out how you are doing with a positive mental attitude, hard work, and self-control. You might find that getting it together in one or more of those three areas will pick things up for you.