

From the Kitchen

18 July 2012



“Whether you think you can, or that you can’t, you are usually right.” (Henry Ford)

There are very few people who truly believe they can do anything they set their minds to. Such people are so rare that they become the subject of news items, even whole TV series. They are sometimes labelled ‘heroes’ or ‘freaks’. We are thrilled by their achievements and delight in their failures. The thrill comes from our wishing we could do extraordinary things and the delight comes from wishing we could do extraordinary things.

Everything we do comes from a mind-set. We have to envisage the deed before it can be manifested as action. People who run faster, throw farther or jump higher than anyone else see themselves doing just that before they do just that. Envisioning the thing does not guarantee the achieving of it, but the achieving is not possible without the prior vision.

We carry an image of the world and our place in it and we behave in the world according to that image. If we see the world as limiting us, it will. If we see it as supportive and enabling, it will support and enable us. This is not simply about positive thinking, because that has the ring about it of being good, as opposed to negative thinking. This is not about creating the world in a way that you are comfortable with. This is also not about wishful thinking or hoping that if you dream of something it will magically come to pass.

Achievement requires action but, for the action to lead to the achievement, you need to have a clear image of that achievement. This applies even in mundane, everyday things. To go to work by train requires more than an image of doing that – you need to go to the station and do so in time to catch the train. To eat a meal, you need more than a wish to eat and a vision of what it is you will eat – you need to cook or order take-away or go to a restaurant.

Unfortunately, many people allow instances of not achieving what they envisage as evidence that the process doesn’t work. Envisioning an outcome is a necessary precondition for achievement, but does not guarantee it. It is not the only condition of success; another important one is perseverance. Many inventors, for instance, have a clear vision of the end result but need many attempts to get there. Similarly, explorers may need to try and try again to reach a particular place.

Having an image of your goal, in whatever endeavour, is also important in order to take advantage of opportunities. We live in a sea of opportunities, but they will only show themselves as such if you can see that they can take you closer to a goal. Circumstances will be just that but, if you are clear about something you want to achieve, something in the circumstances can be seen by you as an opportunity to move closer to your goal.

If you habitually tell yourself that you can’t do something, nothing in your surroundings or circumstances will look like something that could help you do the thing you believe you cannot do. In fact, you are likely to be looking for evidence that you cannot do something and you will find it or, if such evidence doesn’t appear, you will interpret current events and circumstances to support your beliefs about yourself and your inability. You are also more

likely to hear people confirming that you can't, rather than those who might encourage you if you believed you could.

Even people who achieve outstanding success will often, in some way, be limited by their beliefs. There was a time when it seemed to be impossible to run a mile in under four minutes. When Roger Bannister finally did achieve this in 1954, it seemed to lift a barrier and other runners soon followed – John Landy beat Bannister's record by another 1½ seconds only 45 days later. This change cannot be explained simply by better training, better diet, performance-enhancing drugs or a change in the weather. The most likely explanation of the many runners achieving a mile in under four minutes is that the runners' thoughts about what was possible had changed.

If you want to achieve something that others have done before you, it is easier to envisage the achievement and the best road to that achievement has probably been mapped out. If your goal is something that has not been done before and there is no map, you need to keep the goal clearly in mind so that you may create your own map. You have then created something that others, who believe they can, may achieve more easily. Those who believe they can't will find it no easier than when no-one had yet achieved the goal; in fact, they may find in that very achievement the reasons for their belief in their own inability.