



## **Paradise is a State of Mind**

**by Robert Whipple: MBA, CPLP**

I do a lot of online teaching of leadership and business courses. My students live all over the globe and have interesting backgrounds. I have had a student write his assignments while on bombing runs in Iraq, and another individual participate in class while fleeing a hurricane bearing down on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. In one of my classes, there was a student living in Hawaii, so many of the other students were jealous of this individual, since we were having a rough winter on the United States Mainland.

At one point, a student who lived in Detroit was lamenting another dreary day, and he reached the breaking point. His comment to the student in Hawaii was, "Well, I have to take responsibility for my own misery. After all, I chose not to live in paradise." I immediately wrote to the complaining student reminding him that "paradise" is a state of mind rather than a state of the Union.

I believe human beings have the power to live in reasonable happiness most of the time, regardless of where they are located or what the conditions are. It all has to do with our attitude. Please understand, I am not being frivolous here, I am talking about true peace and contentment being possible even when circumstances are far from pleasant.

There are stories galore of POWs who have achieved a state of joy and gratitude for life even as they were being starved and tortured. One such individual was Viktor Frankel during WWII in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. Viktor was a psychologist in Vienna living a comfortable life when he was nabbed by the Nazis and brought to the camp. He was treated with disdain and was starved and beaten, like most POWs. He was curious about why some people survived, while most others quickly died. He described the survival instinct as the realization that there was something significant to live for, or something yet to do in their life. Once they were reminded of their purpose for living, they had the ability to endure their hopeless situation and survive.

In Viktor's own situation, he was able to use the power of visualization to rise above the incredible conditions of the moment and feel peace and joy, even among the dying and hopeless people. After the war, he wrote a book on his observations entitled *Man's Search for Meaning*.

What prison do you live in? Does it sometimes feel like you are suffering needlessly at work? Are the managers in your organization kind of reminiscent of prison guards, or at least schoolyard bullies? Do you feel there is little hope to be happy or content with the conditions that exist around you? If that describes you, then realize you are making a choice. You are choosing to not live in paradise when the opportunity is there for you to do so, or at least to improve your frame of mind significantly.

I am sure many of you are saying, "This author is crazy; he has no clue about the miserable existence I live here in this dungeon." Well, that is correct, I do not know your condition, but I do know the person most in control of your happiness is you. Choose to be happy or ignore this advice and remain miserable. I am not saying this is easy, because if it was, everyone would do it.

If you choose to change conditions for the better, get some material on mental imaging and start changing your life. The more depressed you are, the more you have to gain. Most of the time you cannot change the conditions being presented to you by the world, but most of the time you can control your attitude or reactions so that your state of mind is much more enjoyable.

This philosophy is not that profound, and we have all heard some form of it numerous times before. Some people call it "mind over matter." Norman Vincent Peale called it "The Power of Positive Thinking," while Earl Nightingale made the observation that "We become what we think about."

One helpful book is the classic, *Psycho-Cybernetics* by Maxwell Maltz (1960). Maltz became fascinated with the process of setting goals for his plastic surgery patients. He learned that the power of self-affirmation and mental visualization techniques were enabled by the connection between the mind and the body. He taught how developing a positive inner vision was a means of developing a positive outer vision. This led to the idea that a person's outer success almost never rises above the one visualized internally. Many contemporary philosophers such as Zig Zigler, Tony Robbins, and Brian Tracy have based much of their work on the theories developed by Maltz.

Unfortunately, when we are miserable, it is hard to remember that we can be in control if we want to assume that control. When you get depressed, try the visualization techniques. They can make a big difference in your life. Paradise is not as far away as it seems.

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