

SELF-HELP MEANS HELPING OTHERS

I have read countless books that discuss various methods of improving one's life and career. I have always found it interesting that these books are almost always classified as self-help. The first self-help book ever written is generally considered to be Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*, originally published in 1859. The book begins with the sentence "Heaven helps those who help themselves." The principle that self-help seems to be founded on and seems to revolve around, is that people need to take charge of themselves in order to improve their lives. Most books that fall within this classification generally offer the same prescription for improving any area of life:

- Discover what you want!
- Have a positive attitude!
- Create big goals!
- Have discipline!
- Follow through!
- Believe in yourself!
- Keep trying, even when you fail!

Virtually any self-improvement book you may read and any self-improvement seminar you may attend will give you some variation of this advice. I am not criticizing any of this advice, because it works and can help people become very successful. These are concrete, guiding principles that have been proven over many years and in many cases. For example, if you do not follow through with whatever you are seeking to achieve, then it is unlikely you will ever amount to much; you need to follow through. If it were my decision, I would make sure that all schools instruct people about these various principles of self-improvement, because they are so incredibly important. Far too many people are nowhere near reaching their potential because they do not understand the basics of self-improvement.

There is a real difference between long-term success and short-term success. Familiarizing yourself with the principles of self-improvement can help you advance in your career and life for a while, but they are not the be all and end all of what it really takes to succeed in the long term. When the economy is good, the people who follow general self-improvement advice can always do well for a time. For example, they can more easily get jobs and, depending on market conditions, get one raise and promotion after another. There is nothing wrong with this; however, to experience consistent and long-lasting success, a completely different set of skills becomes necessary.

Real self-improvement and self-development has nothing to do with you. In fact, the people who really end up succeeding in their work are usually those who believe that becoming better means the following:

- helping others discover what they want
- helping others have positive attitudes
- helping others create big goals
- helping others have discipline
- helping others follow through with their goals
- helping others believe in themselves
- helping others keep trying even when they fail

It is like this in every industry and every career path I know about. If you name any profession, I will point out how becoming good at the profession requires you to put others first, and how the more you do this, the more success you will find.

Currently, we are in a horrible hiring market for attorneys. One of my jobs is running a **legal recruiting firm**. Over the past several months, I have seen numerous recruiters fail at their jobs. Many of these legal recruiters got into the business initially because they wanted to make money; they liked the lifestyle associated with being a recruiter, and they had lots of other reasons for choosing the job, all of which revolved around them. These recruiters tend to be suffering the worst in this economy. Conversely, the recruiters who got into the business because they view it as an outlet to help others have continued doing incredibly well. Most likely this is because the best attorney candidates can sense whether their recruiters really want to help them. The attorneys trust these recruiters and flock to them.

The self-improvement we seek starts with helping others. Making everything all about ourselves is a huge epidemic in our society, whether one analyzes people in politics, sports, business—or just daily life.

I love watching politics from the sidelines. The longer you watch politicians, the more you realize that a lot of them are crooked and are only in it for themselves, not to help others. The politicians are often, it seems, more concerned with getting bribes, steering lucrative contracts to friends, and otherwise benefiting from their position of power. Instead of being concerned about their constituents and society at large, they are often more concerned with making sure that their own needs are met. There will always be scandals such as those with the former Illinois governor, Rod Blagojevich, because the idea of "self-improvement" for many people means enriching themselves at others' expense.

Not too long ago, I met a guy who owns a sports book casino. Since he is taking millions of dollars in bets a day during the sports season, he told me that he and other casino owners have learned that there is a ton of graft and so forth in college sports, for example. It is not uncommon for college football games to be fixed. The casinos can often pick this up due to betting patterns. When games occur that appear to be fixed, the casinos will usually observe players making ridiculous errors and appearing to throw the game. In these cases, the athletes are obviously more concerned with themselves than their team or fans.

The same thing happens in business. Many executives get to high places in business and suddenly you see them doing all sorts of things that are more about them than about others. Whether it is an executive doling out stock options that are backdated or some other misdeed, executives are continually under fire for being more concerned with their own "self-improvement" than helping the people around them. This is something I see all the time with high-ranking executives and others: They simply care more about themselves than their customers, coworkers, or anyone else.

The key to your own success is simple: *Nothing you do in your life is about you. You simply cannot succeed in your life if you believe it is all about you. It is never about you and never will be about you.*

Ignoring this concept can be dangerous and can crush your chances of success. Your goals and aspirations need to be far greater and larger than focusing solely on your goals and what you want. Whatever you are seeking in your life, you will only find it when you are working to fulfill the goals and aspirations of others.

Detroit is a fascinating city to me in so many respects. There was so much wealth there at one time, which was brought about by the automobile industry. Now, over the past five years, homes there have gone down in value by up to four times, as industry and the economy have suffered due to the weakening state of the auto industry. In reality, though, the city has been collapsing for years and has been going downhill for my entire lifetime. One of my first memories is when, in the early 1970s, Detroit started to proclaim itself "the Renaissance City," and the Renaissance Center was built in downtown Detroit. The idea was that the city was on its way back, experiencing a revival. The problem with this, however, was that the city was not really going to come back. I believe a switchover had occurred in the psychology of the automobile companies in Detroit, from focusing on "what can we provide to the people" to "what the people can provide to us." Simply stated, the automotive companies became insular and more concerned with their own needs and wants than with providing an exceptional product and service to the American public.

Throughout the United States, there are all sorts of towns like Atchison, Kansas, which grew up and thrived at one time due to the railroads coming through. When the train diminished in importance and other forms of transportation became prominent, these towns lost a great deal of their wealth and became shells of their former selves. Detroit is another one of these towns too, and there are countless others. If these towns had been more concerned with what they could give, instead of what they could take, then my thought is that they would still have prospered, no matter what had happened.

Lately, I have been reading lots of articles in newspapers, magazines, and so forth about people who formerly had high-level jobs in investment banks and similar "big" employers, who are now doing things like working in restaurants, or in sporting goods stores for close to minimum wage.

"I was making \$150,000 a year, and now the best job I can get only pays \$11.00 an hour!" is the sort of statement you read in these articles again and again.

The articles are always the same and they drone on about how the person at issue can no longer afford to go out to eat, how they are selling their house, and how they are so frustrated that employers are not responding to their applications.

I have a ton of sympathy for these people. The employment market is bad; however, I often notice there is a problem with the psychology of the people I am reading about when I study these articles. The problem is that, more often than not, the people complaining about the job market and their employment situation are focused on themselves and their woes—instead of being focused on what they can provide for others.

In fact, a lot of these unemployed people might not have lost their jobs or had difficult times finding a new job if their focus had been 100% on others. These sorts of articles lead me to question the ultimate value these people were providing, to begin with.

- In almost every case, when people lose their jobs, they are not focused enough on their employers' needs.
- In almost every case, when an employer goes out of business, it was not focused enough on others' needs.
- In almost every case, when people have a difficult time **finding a job**, they are not focusing enough on another's needs when they are interviewing and putting together their application materials.

Nothing you do in this life is all about you. Your career is not all about you. The company you work for is not all about you. Your family is not all about you. Your friends are not all about you. It is always all about the other person. Your life and the opportunities out there are so much larger and all encompassing than you.

Most people spend their time asking questions about themselves and pondering over themselves. They ask questions about what they can do to be better, questions about their goals, questions about their future. Constantly looking within one's self can actually get in the way of success.

You are one person and the world is made up of billions of people. You are always going to find more answers and more satisfying answers when you look outside of yourself instead of inside yourself. When you provide value, help, and support to others, this will provide you with more spiritual, psychological, financial, and other benefits than any other self-improvement concept out there.

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