

The \$25,000 Idea

A successful life is built on the foundation of successful tasks — each completed in the pursuit of perfection — one day at a time.

by [Earl Nightingale](#)

A goal sometimes seems so far off and our progress often appears to be so painfully slow that we have a tendency to lose heart. It sometimes seems we'll never make the grade. We come close to giving up — falling back into old habits, which, while they may be comfortable, lead to nowhere. Well, there's a way to overcome this inevitable barrier to success, and here is the secret: Every great achievement is nothing more than the collection of smaller achievements done to perfection. Even the "impossible" has been accomplished through the relentless pursuit of success, one day at a time.

Have you ever seen a bricklayer starting a new building by putting the first brick in place? You are struck by the size of the job he has ahead of him. But one day, almost before you realize it, he's finished. All the thousands of bricks are in place, each one vital to the finished structure, each one sharing its portion of the load. How did he do it? Simple, one brick at a time. And so is the pursuit of success and greatness.

A lifetime is composed of days, strung together into weeks, months, and years. A successful life is nothing more than a lot of successful days put together. As such, every day counts.

Just as a stone mason can put only one stone in place at a time, you can live only one day at a time. And it's the way in which these stones are placed that will determine the beauty, the strength of the tower. If each stone is successfully placed — with care and quality — the tower will be a success. If, on the other hand, they're put down in a hit-or-miss fashion — irrespective of quality — the whole tower is in danger. Seems simple. Yet, how many people do you know who live like this — focused on "just getting through" each day instead of on the "success" of each day. Which are you focused on?

The Habit of Success

Do each day all that can be done that day. You don't need to overwork or to rush blindly into your work trying to do the greatest possible number of things in the shortest possible time. Don't try to do tomorrow's or next week's work today. It's not the number of things you do, but the quality, the efficiency of each separate action that count.

To achieve this "habit of success," you need only to focus on the most important tasks and succeed in each small task of each day. Enough of these and you have a successful week, month, year, and lifetime. Success is not a matter of luck. It can be predicted and guaranteed, and anyone can achieve it by following this plan.

But most people live a life of quiet mediocrity and never achieve the success they truly desire because they get impatient. They want easy success or none at all. They see the path to success as a frustration, an impediment. Each day spent short of the ultimate goal is viewed as a time of failure and as an annoyance. As such, they get distracted by hundreds of little things that each day try to get us off our course. Yet the successful among us know the truth: If the end goal is all we desire, we simply cannot put in the time and effort it takes to be a success when it counts — each day — and therefore cannot lay the foundation for tomorrow's success.

Pay no attention to petty distractions. Enjoy the easy days and shake off the bad days. Stay steadily on your track. Concentrate on each task of the day from morning to night and do each as successfully as you can. Know full well that if each of your tasks is

performed successfully, or at least the greater majority of them, your life *must* be successful.

The \$25,000 Idea

Now how do we separate the important tasks from the unimportant? Did you ever hear of the single idea for which a man was paid \$25,000? And it was worth every penny of it. The story goes that the president of a big steel company had granted an interview to an efficiency expert named Ivy Lee. Lee was telling his prospective client how he could help him do a better job of managing the company, when the president broke in to say something to the effect that he wasn't at present managing as well as he knew how. He went on to tell Ivy Lee that what was needed wasn't more knowing but a lot more doing. He said, "We know what we should be doing. Now if you can show us a better way of getting it done, I'll listen to you and pay you anything within reason you ask."

Well, Lee then said that he could give him something in 20 minutes that would increase his efficiency by at least 50 percent. He then handed the executive a blank sheet of paper and said, "Write down on this paper the six most important things you have to do tomorrow." Well, the executive thought about it and did as requested. It took him about three or four minutes.

Then Lee said, "Now number those items in the order of their importance to you or to the company." Well, that took another three or four or five minutes, and then Lee said, "Now put the paper in your pocket. And the first thing tomorrow morning take it out and look at item number one. Don't look at the others, just number one, and start working on it. And if you can, stay with it until it's completed. Then take item number two the same way, then number three, and so on, till you have to quit for the day.

"Don't worry if you've only finished one or two; the others can wait. If you can't finish them all by this method, you could not have finished them with any other method. And without some system, you'd probably take 10 times as long to finish them and might not even have them in the order of their importance.

"Do this every working day," Lee went on. "After you've convinced yourself of the value of this system, have your people try it. Try it as long as you like. And then send me your check for whatever you think the idea is worth."

The entire interview hadn't taken more than a half-hour. In a few weeks the story has it that the company president sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000 with a letter saying the lesson was the most profitable, from a money standpoint, he'd ever learned in his life. And it was later said that in five years this was the plan that was largely responsible for turning what was then a little-known steel company into one of the biggest independent steel producers in the world. One idea, the idea of taking things one at a time in their proper order. Of staying with one task until it's successfully completed before going on to the next.

For the next seven days try the \$25,000 idea in your life. Tonight write down the six most important things you have to do. Then number them in the order of their importance. And tomorrow morning, go to work on number one. Stay with it till it's successfully completed, then move on to number two, and so on. When you've finished with all six, get another piece of paper and repeat the process. You'll be astonished and delighted at the order it brings into your life and at the rate of speed with which you'll be able to accomplish the things that need doing in the order of their importance. This simple but tremendously effective method will take all the confusion out of your life. You'll never

find yourself running around in circles wondering what to do next.

The reason for writing down what you consider only the most important things to do is obvious. Handling each task during the day successfully is important to the degree of the importance of the tasks themselves. Doing a lot of unnecessary things successfully can be pretty much of a waste of time. Make certain that the tasks you take the time to do efficiently are important tasks, tasks that move you ahead steadily toward your goal.

Remember that you need not worry about tomorrow or the next day or what's going to happen at the end of the month. One day at a time, handled successfully, will carry you over every hurdle. It will solve every problem. You can relax in the happy knowledge that successful tasks make successful days, which in turn build a successful life. This is the kind of unassailable logic no one can argue with. It will work every time for every person.