

Control your thoughts



That the birds of worry and care fly above your head, this you cannot change; but that they build nests in your hair, this you can prevent. - Chinese proverb

Your thoughts are very influential; they affect your emotions, direct your behavior, and eventually shape your life. The good news is, as suggested by the proverb, you *can* control what you think about, particularly what you dwell on.

Psychology Professor Brian Little, in his must-read book, *Me, Myself, and Us*, shares a delightful anecdote that illustrates the fact that we can control our thoughts. He writes:

“I had the opportunity to attend grand rounds at a large psychiatric hospital where the demonstration for that month was about ‘thought stopping’ for reducing violent behavior. The demonstrator asked us to close our eyes and imagine, for about three minutes, a scene that made us frustrated and at least somewhat hostile. I had been deeply concentrating on (a particular) image and building up a nice wad of anger when the demonstrator’s voice screamed through the microphone: STOP!!! We all jumped and stopped simultaneously. Our instructor then asked us how many were still thinking about the event that made us hostile. None of us were. The next step in the demonstration was to show how we could incorporate this ‘cue word’ — STOP — whenever we wished to be diverted from a course of thinking that was creating hostility, anxiety, or another undesirable emotion.” (page 127)

Granted, we usually cannot control our *initial* thoughts because they are spontaneous and often come from sources beyond our control. But we do have a choice as to which thoughts we entertain and which ones we reject. For better and for worse, the thoughts that we pursue and leave unsanctioned influence us the most.

Here are some suggestions:

- Analyze all thoughts as to whether or not they are true. If they are true (“I may lose my job”), deal with them; if they are false or cannot be confirmed, refuse them.
- Even if thoughts are true, if they are negative, don’t dwell on them. If, indeed, you are going to lose your job, don’t let that issue monopolize your thinking.
- Choose to dwell on thoughts that are productive and those that will lead to positive outcomes.

I’m not suggesting a naive, feel-good, positive-thinking approach to life. Be realistic and aggressively

Think With Me - Reflections on life and leadership from Don McMinn

~~Thinking carefully about significant thoughts will change your life. Don McMinn can help facilitate that process.~~

pursue problems. I am advocating a controlled thought-life that balances good and challenging thoughts and one where bird nests don't form.

Sow a thought, reap an act.

Sow an act, reap a habit.

Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny.

Summary

What? - Control your thoughts because they deeply impact life.

So what? - Fortunately, you can control your thoughts but you must be intentional about doing so.

Now what? - Analyze your thoughts and control them.