

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!!

On page 17 of the Recidawareness manual I came across a particular query that has had me thinking and thus, the reason for this essay; since I tend to think better when writing. The question in mention is: Have you ever asked yourself what is your purpose? Well, the reason this question has affected me so much is because as a foolish youngster, I was quick to respond to it and say proudly that my purpose in life was to be a "thug" till death do me part. And since I did not plan on living very long, it seemed very simple and true to me at the time.

Fortunately, that is no longer my purpose and I have now committed myself on a 180 degree turn around and can now much more proudly and unequivocally say that my new purpose in life is to be at peace and content with myself, others, and surroundings.

Those that know me from the past may say: "he's just saying that now because he's in prison serving a couple of life sentences and more, and has no other choice." Well, to those naysayers I simply respond that that is not the case; since prison is an ideal place to continue being a "thug" since one is surrounded by so many, if not the majority so yes, I do have a choice. Not only that, but from the moment I was arrested, I had the option to continue being a "thug," get a sweet deal, but chose not to. Additionally, during my incarceration the temptations have been many, since vices like

drugs, alcohol, gambling, and opportunities to commit immoral and delinquent acts are plentiful hence, I thank God for helping me make the right choices and not allowing me to succumb and fall deeper in disgrace. Now, with the aforementioned being clarified, allow me to manifest how I plan to achieve my new purpose.

When this Recidawareness course began, I recited a very personal essay about an experience I had many years ago that finally caught up with me and transformed my life considerably for the better. In that essay I alluded to how I allowed another person's action affect and dictate my emotions in a negative way, and how a very wise, older friend, whom I have since considered a father figure, God bless his soul, gave me one of the best, if not the best, advice I've ever received. In essence this is what he advised me: "Son, under no circumstance allow anything or anyone to affect your emotions in a negative way. Once you allow that you cease control of your emotions and could no longer consider yourself a true man."

Sure enough, due to my immaturity, ignorance, foolish pride, and ego, I chose not to understand him, did not adhere to his advice, and refused to follow through. Luckily for me, through very harsh occurrences (which were mostly brought about by my ego and foolish pride), many personal experiences, and not so personal experiences, I believe I have found my purpose in life to live at peace and content with myself, others, and surroundings. I credit this accomplishment by seeing and treating life as a game or sporting event. Yes gentlemen, I now see life as a game and my goal is to not only

win, but also to enjoy the journey to the fullest.

Allow me now to explain my analogy between life and a game and how I plan to win. As a kid growing up and participating in various organized sporting events, I was always encouraged and obligated by the coaches to practice, practice, practice, and in that way make myself a better athlete. If the sport were basketball, I had to practice my ball handling, passing, shooting, free throws, lay ups, and so forth. If it were baseball, I had to train in batting, catching, throwing, sliding, and other things. If it were soccer, I definitely had to exercise in dribbling to get past defenders, passing and receiving the ball, positioning and anticipating where the ball was going, my heading the ball, and an array of other things to better myself and be successful in the competition.

Now that you most likely get where I'm coming from, in my game of life I encourage and discipline myself to do the same: practice, practice, practice. I practice the things I feel will help me succeed and accomplish my purpose in life by doing the following: I meditate and reflect alone with frequency because it is in true solitude that I really identify and find myself. I try my best to always think, speak, and act positively; practice the ancient discipline of yoga along with it's eight different branches to help keep me grounded and firm in my purpose. I try to read good, entertaining fictional and non fictional books, and when a self-help book falls into my lap, I devour it's contents as well. I challenge my mind constantly by doing very challenging numbered puzzles (sudokus); try my best to stay away from

gossip and if it finds me, I treat it positively and minimally. I try to socialize only with positive individuals and when a negative one appears in my path, I run like hell!:-) I do my best not to tell lies and if it's necessary for one, I prefer to keep my mouth shut. I try to keep myself, thoughts, and few belongings as organized and compartmentalized as possible; if I have something pending, I follow my dear mother's advice and do it immediately without procrastination, and if there's nothing I can do about it, I do exactly that: nothing. And when I say nothing, I mean not even worry about it. I exercise my body in a very intense manner and in doing so, prepare my heart to utilize it's oxygen much more efficiently so that my resting heart rate becomes lower and can deal with pumping my blood more adequately and in this manner, deal much better with stress. When things do not go my way, I do not take it personal and accept the fact that it could always have been worse to soften the impact. I try to never jump to conclusions or make assumptions, since in the past I was wrong most of the times, if not always. If there is anything I can do for someone less fortunate than I, I do so without thinking it twice. I try dearly to be very understanding, respectful, and considerate of others; procure not to engage in arguments or heated discussions, since they rarely, if ever, conduce to anything positive. If for some reason I come across something that does not belong to me, I return it immediately. And if it is a borrowed item, try to take better care of it than if it were my own.

I also try to always be appreciative and truly say "thank you"

for any assistance I receive, no matter how small and I also make it my duty to never, ever give a bad advice, no matter how tempting.

Dear comrades, although there may be other practices I engage in to reach and accomplish my purpose in life, they seem to have escaped my thoughts for now. But I could not end this section without saying last but not least: a day does not go by without me getting on my knees and thanking the Lord for all my blessings and asking Him for more. Something that those who know me from the past would find extremely difficult to believe, but that is truly the case.

At this moment my dear friends, please do not misinterpret the aforementioned and think that through such practices I aim to be perfect; never that. But it does imply that when I do "mess up," I can be humble enough to accept it, learn from it, make amends and therefore, reduce my errors and live a much better and purposeful life.

After this very personal account on how I practice to win in my game of life, I would like to conclude that my aim is not to garner sympathy, praise, nor even your scorn, but simply to encourage all of the participants that have already taken the first step by enrolling in this beautiful course to continue making the necessary changes in ourselves and become much better men, simple as that.

P.S. If in the future I run across any of you and am not following through on these practices, please call it to my attention; it will be dearly appreciated.

Thank you very much for your attention and God bless.

Ernesto Cole.