

26/07/2003

Our attitude towards life is the magic word for success

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MALAYSIAN businessmen have been put through the wringer over the past few years. Just as they were happily recovering from the 1997 Asian economic downturn, came 9/11. This was followed by the senseless US war against Iraq and then the dreaded SARS. Each took a heavy toll on the nation's economy, severely punishing the private sector.

Gone are the days when all businessmen had to worry about were inflation and interest rates. Today, coping with the unexpected has become the norm.

Ask any business leader for his recipe for staying afloat during those gloomy days and you will most certainly get a one-word reply.

The success gurus call it the most important word as far as the results we get from life are concerned. The magic word is "attitude".

It is our actions, feelings or moods which determine the actions, feelings or moods of others towards us. This in turn controls, to a surprising extent, our success or failure.

As William James (Harvard: 1869) wrote: "It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult undertaking which, more than anything else, will determine its successful outcome."

Since everything operates on the law of cause and effect, it is our attitude towards life that will determine life's attitude towards us. The Hindus call this "karma".

It is a Sanskrit noun meaning deed or action. Every deed, good or bad, receives due retribution. ("Do unto others what you would wish them to do unto you", is the Christian exhortation.)

In Hindu thought, "karma" has been combined with the doctrine of transmigration of souls, making it possible to explain apparently undeserved pleasure or pain as a result of deeds done in a previous existence.

The Buddhists are said to interpret "karma" strictly in terms of cause and effect.

I have a friend whom I'll call Kuppu Swami. This chap who is intelligent, well-qualified, witty and articulate has, unfortunately, adopted a defeatist attitude towards life. He suspects everyone he meets in his line of business, which is advertising, of trying to do him in.

Each time he is invited to pitch for a particular project he psychs himself for failure. He gives his colleagues endless reasons why he thinks he will not get the job. And, you know what, has always been proved right.

To him and all other doubting Kuppu Swamis let me say this: Good attitude, good results. Bad attitude, bad results. Expect the worst, that's what you'll get. If you adopt an attitude of failure, you are whipped even before you start.

In a sense, looking at the people around us is like looking in a mirror. We are reflections of ourselves.

Actually, our thoughts are very precious because each and every one of them serves to create our future. As someone said: "Be careful of what you think because it will come to pass."

Without exception, all motivational speakers talk to their audiences about positive affirmations. It may take some doing to gain control over our thoughts but the rewards are worth it. Our power lies in the thoughts we choose to think today.

Science of Mind writer Louis Hay says: "We can think happy thoughts. We can think positive thoughts. We can say 'yes, I can do it'. By our actions

we will be an example for our children.

The great Sufi mystic, Rumi, told his followers: "Don't be like a rider who gallops all night and is never aware of the horse that is beneath him."

Rumi was, of course, urging his people to adopt an attitude of gratitude which is a legitimate pathway to spirituality.

Unfortunately, there are millions of people like my friend Kuppu Swami leading narrowed, darkened, frustrated lives simply because they take a defensive, doubtful attitude towards themselves and life.

Attitude, as the experts say, is the reflection of a person. What's going on in the inside shows on the outside. Our attitude is incalculably powerful. It can bring about marvellous results for us all.

How often have we seen successful people sailing through life from one success to another? Sure, they occasionally slip up. But do they give up? No, Sir. They shrug it off and head right out again.

No matter what a person does, wherever you find someone doing an outstanding job and getting outstanding results you will find a person with a great attitude. Come to think of it, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Malaysia Boleh slogan generates an attitude. A great one.

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