



ROAD SIGNS FOR SUCCESS[®]

Your Weekly Guide on the Road to Maximizing Your Potential • February 7, 2007

By Sondra Whitt

I read a great article recently by management consultant Alan Weiss about how too many people “wish” their lives away. We *wish* we were ten pounds lighter, we *wish* the kids would behave better, we *wish* we had more money, we *wish* _____ (fill in the blank). The point is that we *wish* instead of taking action, “as though,” Weiss writes, “we’re powerless to master our own fate.”

As he points out, the opposite of wishing is to “make it so” like Captain Picard, commander of the Starship Enterprise, would calmly tell his navigator. Make it so — one of those things that is simple, not easy — or quick. In general, we’ve become conditioned to expect things to be as fast and easy as a fast-food order from the drive-through. This conditioning hasn’t done us any favors.

Terri Blackstock, in her novel *Last Light*, wrote about a sudden and unexplainable worldwide failure of all things motorized or electrical. Cars suddenly stopped where they were, airplanes dropped from the sky, air conditioners quit, generators didn’t work, water pumps failed to pump water, computers and watches stopped. Just think how much we depend on electricity and motors of any kind and how much at a loss we’d be without them. Of course, chaos reigned, with people hoarding food, stealing from neighbors, accusing, fighting, and killing. Until they came to the conclusion that they didn’t know how long this “blackout” was going to last and they’d better learn to survive and work together to do it.

It wasn’t easy to learn to wash clothes in a nearby lake, cook over a wood fire in the yard, ride a bike or walk if they wanted to get anywhere. In the beginning, they did a lot of “wishing,” and complaining, when their wishes didn’t come true. Especially the spoiled teenagers who couldn’t get where they wanted, who got tired of working so hard, and who were bored without their electronic toys. Tempers were short, people lost weight, hands became callused, muscles were built, loyalties were strengthened — people got tough, resourceful and truly understood interdependence. They learned what was really important and what was not. If they wanted something, *they* had to “make it so,” over and over, no matter how sick and tired they were of the whole situation.

Why do we “wish” instead of “making it so?” Weiss attributes it to simply not knowing what else to do, being afraid, being lazy, being unorganized or being unfocused. Sometimes we wish we’d known what to say to that verbal-bully. Why is it that we always seem to come up with some great comeback after they leave? We wish we weren’t so afraid to speak up, but what if they retaliate, or what if we’re wrong? Sometimes we don’t want to put out the effort it takes to be better but we still indulge in wishing we were. Or maybe our wishes are just vague as in “I wish I had a better life” when we really haven’t defined what *our* better life would be.

Weiss says that “wishing is to achievement as television is to aerobic fitness.” There are all kinds of fitness programs on television today. Watching them and wishing I were as fit as the instructors on them isn’t going to make me fit, doing the exercises along with the instructors will. “So stop wishing quite so hard, and start taking some action,” writes Weiss. “Life is about mastering your own fate, walking your own quarterdeck. That way you can guide the ship to the port of your choice, strong wind or slight, heavy seas or calm. You set the direction. Make it so.”