

IT'S NOT WHAT I KNOW...

IT'S HOW I LEARNED IT



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RECOGNITION AND RELEVANCE: WHEN WE FEEL WE COUNT

When I look back at the driving forces in my life, at what made me come to conclusions and make decisions, there were many factors and incidents, but it seems that most were driven by a need for recognition . . . getting an “Atta boy!” Getting things done right, striving for perfection, being the best that I could be, and getting the recognition from a parent, friend, or colleague made it worthwhile. Later, as I began to grow personally, my puffed-up moments came when I was able to provide counsel, encouragement, and recognition to others for their accomplishments.

At first, I sought recognition and relevance. When I learned how important these elements were to the accomplishment of any goal, I gained personal recognition. It was the comfort that comes over you when you finally realize that you don’t know everything and that the world does not revolve around you. It was no longer about me. It was about helping other people.

The process took many years, and finally recognition of me was no longer my motivating force. It was recognizing the accomplishments of others. If I helped others become successful, I could stick my chest out . . . my puffed-up moment. My self-esteem became a blend of enthusiasm and empathy, of honor and humility, of persistence and patience, and of listening and learning. *When you think you know, you probably don’t. When you think you know everything, you don’t. When you know that you know everything, it time to shut up, sit down, and listen.*

But is that so different than what drives most people in their lives? I believe we all strive for recognition. We have to believe we count. We must

feel that we are relevant in our family, society, and our circle of influence. We need signals in our life that reinforce that feeling and belief. It's not until we achieve it that we can begin to see it in others.

FATHER'S WISDOM

My dad said, "Get a good education, get a good job, then work for yourself. Be your own boss. Once you get an education, no one can take it away from you."

He said, "Use your head instead of your back. It will last a lot longer. It's harder to wear out."

Let's look at his advice. He didn't say that he would get me the education. He never graduated from high school. He could only teach me about life from his perspective. The message was that I would have to get the education. I would have to seek it out and learn.

There are only two places to learn . . . the books we read and the people we meet. Even though I didn't know at the time, my future was going to depend on the influence of the people with whom I associated. It would depend on my persistence to learn. See book list in bibliography

Dad said get a good job . . . whatever that is. It would be up to me to get the good job. No one would just give me the job. A job is only a means to survive. *You get paid what your employer feels it will cost him to replace you.* A job requires a skill for the task. In a job, you are working for someone else's vision. A job is the quick fix for survival.

A career, however, is a means to a lifestyle. A career demands vision, knowledge, skill, attitude, and persistence. A career is a long-term destination to a dream, vision, and lifestyle. So I would have to either learn a skill to have a job for survival, or I would have to pursue a vision of self-reliance by "working for myself." If it was to be, it was up to me.

I'm not sure my dad knew just how insightful and powerful his advice was. It would be useless if I didn't believe. What does this mean to a six- or eight-year-old? I was learning it by example. I watched Dad develop ideas and start businesses, and he got me involved in my own paper route business at nine years old. I didn't know enough to not understand. I thought this was what I was supposed to do.

By the time we moved to the farm, I started hearing it more often. As a teenager, I reached that age where I already knew more than Dad. I thought I knew all about business. After all, I owned most of the cattle and all the hogs on the farm. I really didn't appreciate the business principles yet, but I progressed from "Get a good education" to "Go to college" and most importantly, "You can be anything that you want to be."

What great encouragement for a young person. But the one thing

that was missing was the verbal “Good job, Brian.” Looking back, I knew Dad felt it, but he felt he needed to keep the pressure on in order to help his son become successful. Just “Good job.” That’s all I needed. I could plow a field for eight hours, and the best I got was “Rows are a little crooked” or “Why did you let it rain and let the bales of hay get wet?” It was tough. It was frustrating. It was disheartening at times. But I was determined to succeed and be my own boss . . . and to always be an encouragement to the people around me.

Was this determination for success because I wanted recognition or a lifestyle? I believe we all need recognition, but how we pursue, understand, and acclimate to recognition will determine the quality of our lifestyle.

So which comes first?

1. Do we determine the lifestyle that we want and gain recognition for our accomplishment?
2. Do we seek recognition in our life and let our pursuit of recognition determine our lifestyle?

LEVELS OF RECOGNITION

There are five levels of recognition which can directly influence and/or determine our lifestyle.

1. Recognition as a person . . . a human being
2. Recognition of our growth and development
3. Recognition of accomplishments
4. Recognition of achievements
5. Recognition of outstanding achievements

I. RECOGNITION AS A HUMAN BEING

It is a fundamental need that we feel that we are recognized as a human being. That recognition can come from within but also must come from our environment. You know you are a person, but do you feel that the people around you or that society knows that you are here? When do we know that we are here?

An infant feels basic recognition from its mother. Have you ever seen an abandoned kitten or puppy? Not until you pick them up do you notice a comfort come over them. They become part of something. In this case, they become part of your existence. It’s basic and is applicable to the human being.

In parts of the world where life is not valued and people are expendable, people will strive or fight for recognition. Animals have the “big dog,” the leader of the pack. How did that dog become the leader? Through recognition. If he was not recognized as the leader by the rest of the pack, he would not have been the lead dog. If he felt he was the lead dog but was not recognized by the rest of the pack, he would not be the leader. He had to achieve recognition. Basic recognition is an animal instinct.

A baby calms down when his cries are recognized. A child often acts out for attention. “Just let me know that I’m here.”

2. RECOGNITION DURING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

We get recognition as we grow and develop. Simply getting a little taller, moving to the next shoe size, or getting to sit in the front seat are all part of growing up. We need to be recognized by others that we are a little taller. We know we are taller, but we want to have someone else acknowledge this development. That’s what grandparents are for.

When no one notices our growth, we emphasize this development. “Mom, my shoes are tight.” “There’s no room in the car seat.” “I can dunk the basketball.” “I can beat you to the bus stop.” I . . . seek recognition.

Growth and development will occur regardless of recognition, but we need to know that other people know we are growing. If we don’t feel recognized, we may take steps to get that attention. Some people will do things to get attention. We might just see this as immaturity, but to the individual, it is fulfilling a need.

Suppose that a person not only does not get attention/recognition but is put down, thus making him feel less important. This will become a form of recognition that, if accepted, digested, and internalized, will be that individual’s identity. We might identify them as having low self-esteem.

Can a person who has low self-esteem change? Can their interpersonal vision be changed? Absolutely! They weren’t born with low self-esteem. They acquired it through lack of recognition or negative recognition. If they feel that they cannot achieve positive recognition, they will regress and acclimate to a low self-esteem.

Therefore, recognition is important during the growth and development of an individual. The type of recognition will greatly influence the emotional development of the individual. Positive recognition will lead to high self-esteem and greater achievements. Negative recognition will lead to low self-esteem and underachievement.

As we will see, recognition is a necessary part of our being. Without it, the individual will focus energy to get it. The type of recognition, positive or negative, will set the course and tempo of future achievements.

3. RECOGNITION OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

I differentiate accomplishments from achievements in that accomplishments are reaching certain levels of growth, development, and personal and societal benchmarks. Learning to tie shoelaces is an accomplishment. Tying them so that they can be untied would be an achievement.

Graduating from high school may be an accomplishment. Graduating number 1 in the class is an achievement. It is all relevant. In some cases, having a school to go to may be an accomplishment and simply to complete a few grades may be an achievement. That said, the individual in a society without schools who has a school to go to is recognized for “going to school.” That is an accomplishment. In a society with schools, where you are expected to go to school, graduation is an accomplishment. So accomplishments are individual and recognition reflects on the individual accomplishment.

The individual will progress through the recognition hierarchy based on the foundation created at the previous level. This progress will depend on the amount and type of previous recognition. It will be influenced by personal growth and development, societal and cultural factors, and past accomplishments.

If our growth and development is acknowledged as an achievement and we are recognized for these achievements, then this recognition will be part of our thinking.

4. RECOGNITION OF ACHIEVEMENTS

As accomplishments become recognized as achievements, the individual becomes energized. I'm not sure there are negative achievements, and thus positive recognition of a negative achievement may be an oxymoron. It is important that the individual who strives to achieve does so for the sake of the achievement. If the achievement is simply for the recognition, then when they don't get the recognition, they act out for recognition and discount the achievement.

We see this in professional athletes, celebrities, and politicians who begin to believe their hype and get distracted from the great things that they have achieved and focus on recognition and status. *Personal recognition, knowing oneself, is most important and is permanent. It is self-proclaimed and only changed from within.*

If you don't know who you are, you will depend on recognition from the people around you . . . from society. This type of recognition can be fleeting and fickle. The field goal kicker can kick fifty consecutive field

goals and is recognized as the best until he misses one field goal that would win the game. If he knows himself, he knows he is a good kicker. If he listens to the commentary of the game, *he* lost the game and will feel he has lost recognition. *Depend on you to understand you, and you will have all the recognition and motivation to achieve great things.*

5. RECOGNITION OF OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS

When I see individuals who are recognized for outstanding achievements, I'm always amazed at their expression of humility. In order to accomplish outstanding achievements, it takes patience, persistence, focus, dedication, knowledge, and strong personal understanding of oneself. These are the attributes of attitudinal development, which are more important than skills.

Skills are important but can be discounted by attitudinal dysfunction. How often do we see a very skilled athlete who is on track to make outstanding achievements only to be sidetracked by a change in his attitude? He forgets who he is and starts to believe what other people think of him.

When you think of outstanding athletes, leaders, actors, scientists, businessmen, or family members, you rarely see an individual exhibiting arrogance, impatience, disrespect, and lack of dedication and focus. You will see humility, compassion, patience, leadership, and understanding . . . all attitudinal qualities.

SUMMARY:

Recognition is a necessary ingredient in our personal growth and development throughout our life. It is said, "Babies cry for it, men die for it, and the elderly survive on it."

We should understand who we are, self-recognition. Seek positive self-recognition through understanding ourselves.

We should strive to help others by recognizing their accomplishments.

Say "Great job" to the flight crew who landed with only two bounces.

Say "Thank you" to the store clerk.

Say "Make it a great day," instead of "Have a nice day."

Ask "How are you doing today?" And then stop for a moment to listen.

Saying thank you is "recognition" to the listener. You don't know at what level in the recognition hierarchy that they are functioning, but it will be important to them. Remember that they know who they are, but they appreciate the fact that you also know who they are. They want to be recognized and relevant.

"Make it a great day!"