

Take Responsibility for Your Life

BY W MITCHELL

International Keynote Speaker • Author • National & Business Leader • Triumphant Victor



When you take responsibility for your life, you take responsibility for where you are going to go next.

*“You can’t change the direction of the wind
but you can adjust your sails.”*

Jonathan Swift

The fireball was about three meters high and a meter wide. The flame was blue and searing, with the peculiar, intense heat of petrol burning in the open air. Even standing fifty feet away, on the corner of 26th and South Van Ness street, you would have felt the increase in temperature on your face and hands - a warmth that easily cut through San Francisco's gentle, early summer.

And, you would have had company, too - a mysterious bonfire in the middle of a suburban intersection, definitely draws a crowd. But this is only what I've been told. I can't comment, personally, on the fireball's external dimension and characteristics.

You see, I was in the middle of it!

That's how my book, *The Man Who Would Not Be Defeated*, starts. It tells of my experience of being involved in an horrendous motor cycle accident, which left me with burns to 65 per cent of my body, my face and fingers literally burnt off.

Life has many twists...

That was the first of the many twists in my life. Obviously, I survived the fire or I wouldn't be here writing this. I also survived a plane crash four years later, although it left me paralyzed from the waist down and permanently in a wheelchair.

What surprises most people is, neither accident has held me back from living a full and fruitful life. In spite of what happened to me, I went on to become a successful businessman, (sometimes) successful politician, environmental activist, a speaker and author. And today, I travel the world spreading my message of hope: It's not what happens to you in life, it's what you do about it. You can read all about my experiences and the lessons I learned, in my book (*Editor's note: now available through this magazine - see canter pages).

Just about all of us are born with the same set of equipment. Hands, eyes, ears, the ability to think and so forth. True, some people are brighter than others but the real question in life is, 'What are we going to do with this equipment?'

People tell me I'm quite special but I believe all of us have the ability to do what I've done. But all too often, we spend our lives deciding why we can't do something. As Jonathan Swift said, "You can't change the direction of the wind but you can adjust your sails."

All of us have the ability to make those important decisions that can change our lives, in a big way or a small way.

For instance, it's hard to quit smoking or quit eating M&Ms. I understand that. Fact is, however, smoking is a very conscious effort. You have to choose to do it. Firstly, of course, you have to make a conscious decision to purchase the cigarettes. You then have to open the pack, light the match and inhale. We make a choice to smoke - nobody forces us to do it.

Look at Olympic athletes. How many choices did that person have to make before they were able to stand up there and receive that gold medal? You're not a failure if you don't make it. You're a failure if you allow yourself to be limited in this world by other people's actions and beliefs.

I talk a lot about responsibility, the ability to respond. But do we choose to respond? We must recognize that we are in control. People tell me after hearing me that I've changed their lives - I'm their excuse. I love it but the fact is, they simply used me to trim their sails. Everything I know, I've learned from someone else. Maybe I just string the words together better than others.

Many professional educators use the example of the baby walking. A baby attempts to walk millions of times and fails millions of times. The baby doesn't succeed, hits its head, smashes its face, looks ridiculous and it's downright dangerous.

In fact, the baby fails and fails, if you choose to call it 'failure'. Then, one day, he or she will take their first step. It's not failure is it? It's called, learning; the baby is learning to walk. They're not mistakes - they're experiences. They either shut you down or you make it to the goal line.

Truth is, there are tons of things I've given up on in life. But to me, the saddest thing is people who don't do anything; nobody does everything. Instead of people focusing on what they can do, they focus on what they can't do.

Focus on what you can do...

Before my accident I could do 10,000 things. Now I can do 9,000 things. I can either spend the rest of my life focussing on the 9,000 things I can do or the 1,000 things I can't do. The choice is mine - it's up to me.

We're all programmed at birth. Anthony Robbins tells about the little computer each of us gets when we're born. It's blank. Then somebody programs it for us, with programs like 'totally worthless', 'relationships suck' -all kinds of inconsistent messages. Nobody gives us an owner's manual. It's amazing we're not all lemmings. However, all of us can make the decision to reprogram.

We can make the decision to be responsible. The key word is focus. When you take responsibility for your life, you take responsibility for where you are going to go next.

The longest journey begins with a single step. By changing one small behavior, you can make a huge amount of difference. You also need tools. All of us have the same tools; it's how we choose to use them.

Experts once chopped up Einstein's brain, to see if it was different. It was no different to anyone else's brain; the difference is what he chose to do with it.

If I was to point out one beacon, it is simply that I take responsibility.