

LESSON 2

Acres of diamonds

Earl Nightingale tells a story that I first heard from Bob Proctor. This story teaches us all that we have huge opportunities at our feet if only we have the wisdom to see the opportunities and act on them. Let me share it with you.

Russell Herman Conwell was born in 1843. He would go on to have a profound effect on the lives of millions of people. He became a lawyer, then a newspaper editor and finally a clergyman. It was during his church career that an incident occurred which was to change his life and the lives of countless others.

One day a group of young people came to Dr Conwell in his church and asked him if he'd be willing to teach them. They wanted a college education but didn't have the money to pay for one. He told them to let him think about it and come back in a few days. After they left, an idea began to form in Dr Conwell's mind. He asked himself, "Why couldn't there be a fine college for poor but deserving young people?"

And before very long the idea consumed him. Why not indeed! It was a project worthy of 100% dedication, complete commitment and, almost single-handedly, Dr Conwell raised several million dollars with which he founded Temple University, one of the USA's leading schools.

He raised the money by giving more than 6,000 lectures all over the country, and in each one of them he told this story – Acres of Diamonds. It

was a true story, which had affected him very deeply, and it had the same effect on his audiences. The money he needed to build the college came pouring in.

The story was the account of an African farmer who heard tales about other farmers, who had made millions by discovering diamond mines. These tales so excited the farmer that he could hardly wait to sell his farm and go prospecting for diamonds himself. So, he sold the farm, and spent the rest of his life wandering Africa searching unsuccessfully for gems. Finally, the story goes, worn out and in a fit of despondency having not found any diamonds, he threw himself into a river and drowned.

Meanwhile, the man who had bought his farm happened to be crossing the small stream on the property, when he suddenly saw a bright flash of blue and red light through the stream bottom. He picked up the stone and later put it on his mantelpiece as an interesting curiosity.

Several weeks later, a visitor picked up the stone, looked closely at it, weighed it in his hand, and nearly fainted. He asked the farmer if he knew what he'd found. The farmer said no, that he thought it was a piece of crystal. The visitor told him he had found one of the largest diamonds ever discovered.

The farmer had trouble believing him. He told the man that his stream was full of such stones, not as large perhaps as the one on the mantelpiece, but they were sprinkled generously throughout the stream bottom.

The farm that the first farmer had sold so he could go in search of a diamond mine, turned out to be the most productive diamond mine in all of Africa. The first farmer had owned acres of diamonds but had sold them for practically nothing in order to look for them elsewhere.

The moral is clear: if the first farmer had only taken the time to learn what diamonds looked like in their rough state, and then to thoroughly explore the land he owned before looking elsewhere, all of his wildest dreams would have come true.

Nightingale explains that the importance of this story is the idea that each of us is in the middle of our own acres of diamonds. If we have the wisdom

and patience to intelligently and effectively explore the work we're doing, to explore ourselves, we'll usually find the richest rewards, whether they be financial or intangible, or both. Rather than thinking that the grass is greener elsewhere we should make sure that we know what we already have, it might be just as good or better that what we're searching for.

If the next person's pasture (or grass as the British saying goes) appears to be greener than ours, it's possible that they're taking better care of it.

Don't waste your life going from one thing to another, or looking for a shortcut, or an easy win like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. You need to stick with one thing for long enough to find success.

Whatever your goal is, it may be that you can reach it through what you're doing now. One of the USA's most successful meatpacking companies was created when a farmer was paralysed by polio and forced to find another way of making a living from his farm: he got the idea of producing exceptionally good meat products on his farm. His farm had always had acres of diamonds, he didn't see them until he needed.

Here is a task: Thoroughly explore what you're currently doing. What possibilities are there that you haven't explored? Hopefully you chose your career for good reasons (if there aren't good reasons and you're unhappy in your work that's a different consideration). Dr Russell Conwell is a good example of being willing to change direction when the need arises (remember this when we explore service in *lesson 4*).

Another instructive story Nightingale shares is that of a man in Arizona with a small petrol station. One day sitting at his desk and watching through the window while one of his attendants filled a man's car with fuel, he watched the customer standing about waiting. He realised that the customer had money to spend if the things he needed or wanted were available and conveniently displayed where he could see them. So he began adding things to his petrol station shop: fishing tackle, then fishing licenses; hunting and camping equipment; rifles, shotguns, ammunition, hunting licenses. He found an excellent range of aluminium fishing boats and trailers. He bought up the property around his petrol station and added a car parts department. He'd always stocked cold soft drinks and

sweets, but now he added fancy chocolates. Before long, he sold more chocolates than anyone else in the state!

He stocked thousands of things his customers could buy while waiting for their cars to be serviced. All the products he sold also guaranteed that most of the petrol customers in town would come to his station so he sold more petrol. The bonanza grew and grew. It all started with a man watching a customer standing around with money in his pockets and nothing to spend it on and using his mind to see the opportunity.

Others would have lived and died with a small service station, and they do. The man saw the diamonds. Many people seeing a wealthy customer – whether it's at a petrol station or a shop or in a meeting – might say to themselves: "I ought to be in his business". Don't think like that. Instead realise that there is as much opportunity in one business as another. To take advantage of those opportunities we need to think creatively, to think in new directions rather than trying to copy what others are already doing.

The opportunities are there, it's our job to find them. Take the time to stand back, look at your work as an outsider might, and ask: "Why do I do it that way? How might I capitalise on what I'm doing or multiply the outcome?"

Keep things as they are if you're happy. But finding the diamonds hiding in ourselves and in our work is hugely rewarding. If you're looking for the diamonds you'll never get bored or complacent or find yourself stuck in a rut. A rut, it's been said, is a grave with the ends kicked out.

Some of the most inspiring businesses in the world came from a very small idea, in a very small area in the beginning; Amazon is the best example of this. If something is needed in one town, then the chances are it's also needed in all towns and cities all over the country, maybe even the world. Regent Group started from me and my wife and dad spotting a simple need in our community; students' need for supportive and affordable learning.

Ask yourself how good you are at what you're presently doing? Do you know everything there is to know about your work? Are you the best you can be at your work? How would your work compare to the work of others in your line of business?

The educator and author JB Matthews wrote: “Unless a person has trained himself for his chance, the chance will only make him ridiculous. A great occasion is worth to a man or woman exactly what his preparation enables him to make of it.”

Nightingale compared the human race to a convoy in time of war. The whole army slows down to protect the slowest and, as they march through the dust, they miss the diamonds beneath their feet.

He says that the first thing we need to do to become a diamond miner is to break away from the crowd, and stop assuming that because millions of people are living that way, it must be the best way. It is not, it's the average way. The people going about life the best way are way out in front, so far ahead of the crowd you can't even see their dust anymore. Those are the people who live and work on the leading edge, the cutting edge; and they show the way for the rest of us.

It takes curiosity and imagination to know that diamonds don't look like cut and polished stones in their rough state. To mine your own acres of diamonds, you need to develop **intelligent objectivity**, the ability to stand back and look at your work as a stranger would look at it. What industry or profession is your job in? Do you know everything you can about your industry or profession? Are there opportunities for change or innovation of some kind? How can you please your customer, give them something more?

There are opportunities all around, those precious diamonds. Ask yourself whether you've been looking for them, scrutinising your work and the industry you're in from all angles. It's likely that there are other, possibly better, ways of doing what you do. Do you know what they are? Consider how your job will be done in five, 10, 20 years time. The world is evolving and improving, technology is advancing at an incredible pace – can you take advantage today? Can you move closer now to what will eventually be done?

Nightingale reminds us that there's no growth of any kind without risk:

“We start running the risks when we get out of bed in the morning. Risks are good for us – they bring out the best in us; they brighten the eye and

get the mind cooking; they quicken the step and put a new, shining look on our days. Human beings should never be settled. It's OK for chickens and cows and cats, but it's wrong for human beings. People start to die when they become settled. We need to keep things moving.

“Don't try to run away from your troubles, overcome them. We're not trying to escape our frustrations, but to triumph over them. To do that, get on course and stay there. Know your goal, the thing you want most to do, the place in life you want most to reach. See it clearly in your mind's eye and keep moving towards it. It may seem impossible at times, but you will get there.

As human beings we overcome our problems not by running away from them, but by facing them. No sooner do they we solve one set of problems, than we start looking around for new and more difficult problems to solve. If you find yourself stuck, dreaming of escaping to a far-flung destination, by all means think about it. It's a good distraction. But then get back to your goal – more about that later – and get down to work.

Tackle one thing at a time. And soon you'll be spotting diamonds all over your world, and what you need to do will be clear. It's normal to feel like running away from it all occasionally. But sticking around and solving your problems by working through them makes you a successful person.”

I found my own acres of diamonds in north-west London in the year 2000. Tharshiny and I started our partnership in 1996. Between 1996 and 2000 we tried many business ventures. We can think of a dozen, but ALL FAILED. I was working full time in a great job in investment management but needed a few extra pounds to make ends meet. I started offering tutoring for £20 an hour but saw the opportunity for more and set up Regent College with my wife and late father. This was the beginning of Regent Group, a business heading towards being a British unicorn, in other words, a private business valued at \$1bn, by 2030.

Spend an hour a day with a piece of paper or a digital pad, and dissect your work. Take it apart and look at what makes it up. There's opportunity there – look for your acre of diamonds.

Think honestly and carefully about your current work.

How good you are at what you're presently doing? How do you compare to others in the same business? What can you do to improve?

Do you know everything there is to know about your work? How can you increase your knowledge?

Spend an hour each day for a week dissecting your work. Write your notes below. Use the prompts to help.

***Day 1:** Focus on what is going well in your work (strengths, relationships, what you enjoy)*

***Day 2:** Focus on what is not going well in your work (weaknesses, challenging relationships, what you avoid)*

***Day 3:** What does the future of your work look like? What skills will you need? What changes are ahead?*

Day 4: *How could things be done differently in your work right now? What are the opportunities? What barriers are there to making these changes? How could you overcome them?*

Day 5: *What is the biggest problem in your work or industry? What can you do to address this?*

Day 6: *How could you make your customer happier (even if you work in the public sector there's someone who is your customer: it may be the tax payer or a parent or pupil)? What frustrations do they face? Can you ease these?*

Day 7: *Review everything you've come up with this week. What are the most important points to take forward? What will you start doing tomorrow? What will your work look like in a week, a month, a year using what you've learned this week?*