

Destiny in the balance

Most people seem to have to learn things the hard way. You'd think that, if a great discovery was made in one generation, that everyone who came after would know about it and use it for their own good. But often this is not the case when it comes to the great laws which determine our individual destinies.

Earl Nightingale told a story that illustrated this point:

"In a less economically developed country a group of labourers was hired to work on a farm. Now these people came from a small, very remote village where motor vehicles were virtually unknown. They were enjoying the new experience of being transported on the back of a truck when they came to the place where they thought they were supposed to get off. Without giving a thought, apparently, they just stepped off the back of this speeding truck! Fortunately, they fell on a soft part of the road, not a paved highway, but even so, the results of their unconventional method of disembarking were, to say the least, astonishing, at least to them. They went bounding, spinning, sliding and cart-wheeling along the dusty road for quite a distance before gravity and friction, working together, finally brought them to a halt.

"No one was seriously injured; in fact, by the time the terrified driver got back to them, they were laughing about the whole thing. The truck driver, in explaining the incident, later put the blame on their never having ridden in trucks before. Now that's the obvious answer, but it's really not the true

one. The amazing circus tumbling act on a remote farm road had been caused by ignorance of a law, a law that operates the same whether a truck, a car, an aeroplane, or any moving body is involved. Sir Isaac Newton gave us the law, and it goes like this: a body in motion tends to remain in motion until acted upon by an outside force. When the workers stepped off the back of the speeding truck, they were going the same speed as the truck itself. The outside force was gravity, which pulled them down the road, still traveling at the same speed and they were turned upside down because they didn't understand the principal law on which every human being in the universe operates; the law of cause and effect."

This law has been written thousands of times by the world's greatest minds in many forms. It's been expressed as "you reap what you sow" or that our rewards in life will always match our service. Sir Isaac Newton said: "For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction".

These are truisms and people tend to agree. If you fully embrace the idea then it will affect your every thought and action.

Nightingale encourages us to think of this law like a giant set of scales with two baskets. One basket is marked rewards and the other service. The scales will always balance so whatever we put into the basket marked service, the world will balance out by putting the equivalent in the basket marked rewards. Our actions, how we think, work, talk and conduct ourselves goes into the basket marked service. And the size, weight and nature of our service will determine the size, weight and nature of the rewards we receive. If you're unhappy with the rewards life gives you, look carefully at your service – how you're thinking, what you're doing. It's action and reaction; you're reaping what you sow; what you're putting out into the world will determine what you get back. It's simple, basic and true – yet often misunderstood.

If a business is not growing it needs to look at the contribution it's making, its service. An employee who is unhappy with their salary, must re-evaluate the service, the value, they're giving to the job.

Who do we serve? We each serve the people we come into contact with; our family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, customers, peers, our employer.

Our rewards are determined by how we serve this slice of humanity.

We are completely interconnected and interdependent. We need each other, and we literally cannot live without one another. Everything we do is possible because of another person: running the tap for a glass of water, turning on the light, getting to work whether by car or public transport, all of it is only possible because of other people and their service.

There are two types of reward: tangible rewards and intangible rewards. Tangible rewards include the money we earn, our home and car, the clothes on our backs. Intangible rewards include happiness, peace of mind, inner satisfaction and relationships with others. Whatever reward you're after, you must earn it first through service to others.

Really understand and accept this rule. You get out what you put in and there's no way round it. Trying to get round it will only end in failure and frustration.

That's not to say that accepting this rule and living with it is easy. You'll experience **constructive discontent**. Constructive discontent is caused by the gap between what you want – your goal – and where you are. Constructive discontent drives our continuing, upward spiral of civilisation, our progress as a species.

So you know what you want, you've set yourself a clear goal and you know it – you think about it regularly through the day. Now look objectively at where you are now. What is the gap between where you are and your goal? How can you increase your service so you can bridge that gap? You'll need to think creatively to do this. But it's worth it because your goal will be achieved through your individual effort.

Nightingale tells a story to illustrate his point:

"In California he became aware of two unhappy young people. The young man, was saying, "Well, I've tried everywhere, but no one wants to give me a job. I guess we'll have to go back home". It was apparent from their attitudes that they wanted to live in California but were almost out of money and unable to find a job.

“The man had said, “No one wants to give me a job”. He wanted someone to give him something, in this case a job. What might have happened if he had turned the whole idea around? What if he had said: “What do I know how to do that will serve some of the people in this part of the world?” Or: “How can I, or we, be of value to this community? The people here will be happy to supply us with the living we need if we can think of some way to serve them. What do they need or want that we can supply? Do they need a handyman, a first-class housekeeper, or both? Can we wash and wax their cars in their driveways so they look like new? Let’s buy a pad of paper and ballpoint pen and start thinking of all the things we can do to earn a living here. It’ll give us time to think of other ways, more profitable ways, but that wash and wax idea might grow into quite a service for the community. But let’s not stop there, let’s think of some more ways we can start, right here, and be of service to the people who live here.”

“There in the restaurant, instead of being depressed and considering themselves failures, they could have come up with a dozen or so ways in which they could have stayed in California and built a business for themselves. They didn’t need a job, they needed to THINK. There they were: two fine, bright, good-looking young people, with a world of opportunity beckoning to them, with two fine minds, and they were going to go back home. No one had ever told them about the gold mines they carried between their ears.”

Nightingale believed that most people would have reacted the same way as these young people. He goes on:

“George Bernard Shaw once commented, “I think I’m rich and famous by thinking a couple of times a week. Most people never think at all”. The young couple in California, conscientious as they were, were not sowing therefore they could not reap. They were putting nothing into the community, therefore they could expect nothing in return. To some this seems unfair, but it isn’t. Our job is to do the sowing; the rest will take care of itself. We’ve been given the equipment, all we are asked to do is use it.”

When I found myself in 2000 employed full-time in a good job in a great company but short of money, I looked to what service

I could offer my community for the solution. I saw adverts asking for tutors in the paper and thought “I can do that”. I gave private tuition for £20 an hour, offering a service to others and receiving the reward of plugging my financial gap in return. That humble side business ultimately led to us found Regent College – I saw a need in my community for a college where people could learn flexibly and affordably. The early years were hard work with limited financial reward. But by offering a service, and a high quality one, where it was needed, the business grew until today Regent Group has an investment arm as well as education and operates in the Middle East, India, the USA and Europe as well as the UK.

We all have huge potential. Nightingale compares that potential to a plot of land. Given a little attention – a few seeds tossed onto it – a barren plot of land shows life. But great things start to happen when we consider what we really want and work to make it happen. In the case of the plot of land, if we decide that we want a lawn and flowering borders, if we clear the land, turn the soil, plant, water and nurture the plants then we’re rewarded with a beautiful garden. The plot repays what we put in. It’s the same with our lives. We’ve been given the plot of land – our potential – it’s what we do with it that matters.

Nightingale observes that we can tell by looking at a place of business what it’s doing for the community by observing what the community has done for the place of business. Is the business thriving and growing, or is it just holding its own, or soon to go out of business? Whatever the situation, it’s a reflection of its service, how well its service, whatever it may be, is being accepted by the people. Is it meeting their needs and wants?

You must have staying power. Don’t jump from one thing to another. Avoid looking for short cuts or the pot of gold under the rainbow. You need to stick at a goal long enough to see it through. Succeeding takes time; it takes dedication, 100% commitment and creative thought. Keep asking yourself how you can broaden your service, and so increase your rewards

Excitement, ideas and effort will get you across the line. Your goal should bring the excitement while your ideas and effort will translate into service,

filling that basket so that rewards have to follow and balance the scales. Remember the truth: “As you sow, so shall you reap, all the years of your life”.

Nightingale advises that if you’re worried about your income or your future, you’re concentrating on the wrong end of the scale, the rewards end. Instead focus on increasing your service, become great where you are, and your income and your future will take care of themselves. Find a quiet place and contemplate your plot of ground, your life, and begin to sow the seeds which will bring you a bountiful harvest.

Think about how you present to the world. As discussed earlier, as well as the excellent attitude that you bring to each interaction and each task that you take on, bring the same spirit to how you present yourself. Look for where you can help others; your colleagues and your community. My first step as an entrepreneur was as a tutor, helping others to achieve their goals. Each stage of the development of Regent Group has started with what students need and how can I serve them. By delivering a service that people want and need, my business grew. Taking care that Regent College and all of the parts of the group are like a well-tended plot is important. Showing that we care, that we value what we are offering the world, speaks volumes. It shapes how the world responds to us in return. Look honestly at what service you offer the world. Demonstrate that you care about the quality of what you bring. If you’re not serving society, if you’re not showing high standards, tend your plot with greater care.

1. Start each day this week by asking how you can increase your service. Note down how you increased your service each day. At the end of the day reflect on the result of your efforts.

If you're struggling to see who you serve, remember that you serve every other human being you interact with. At work you serve your colleagues, your peers, your direct reports, your managers. You also serve your customers. If you work in business it should be clear who your customer is. If you work in the public sector your customer may be the tax payer or someone who uses your service (a parent or a pupil perhaps). If you are in a corporate support role your customer may be someone within your organisation or another stakeholder.

Day	How I'll increase my service today	Outcome
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

2. *Embracing constructive discontent*

Constructive discontent is caused by the gap between what you want – your goal – and where you are. Look objectively at where you are now. What is the gap between where you are and your goal? How can you increase your service so you can bridge that gap?

Your goal	Where you are now	How I can increase my service to bridge the gap

*What happened as a result of your action? Did you close the gap?
What will you do next?*