

New York Times BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF
The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

JOHN C.
MAXWELL

THE COMPLETE

101
COLLECTION

WHAT EVERY LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW

*Attitude, Self-Improvement, Leadership,
Relationships, Success, Teamwork, Equipping,
AND Mentoring*

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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson.
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Published in association with Yates & Yates, www.yates2.com

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Portions of this book have been previously published in *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player*, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, *The 360° Leader*, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, *Developing the Leader within You*, *Failing Forward*, *Your Road Map for Success*, *The Winning Attitude*, *Winning with People*, *Talent Is Never Enough*, and *Leadership Gold*.

ISBN: 978-1-4002-0395-6 (HC)

ISBN: 978-1-4002-8108-4

Printed in the United States of America

12 13 14 15 16 QG 6 5 4 3 2 1

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PREFACE

I've been passionate about personal growth for most of my life. In fact, I've created and pursued a plan for growth every year for the last forty years! People say that wisdom comes with age. I don't believe that's true. Sometimes age comes alone. I wouldn't have achieved any of my dreams had I not been dedicated to continual improvement. If you want to grow and become the best person you can be, you've got to be intentional about it.

At the same time, life is busy and complex. Most people run out of day long before their to-do list is done. And trying to get to the bottom line in just about any area of life can be a challenge. Did you know that more new information has been produced in the last thirty years than in the previous five thousand? A single weekday edition of *The New York Times* contains more information than most people in seventeenth-century England were likely to encounter in their lifetime.

That's why we've developed this series of 101 books. We've cherry-picked the essentials in subjects such as leadership, attitude, relationships, teamwork, and mentoring and put them into a format that is easy to read. And now for the first time, we've combined all six of the 101 books in one volume.

In many of my larger books, I go into my subject in great depth. I do that because I believe it is often the best way to add value to people. But the 101 series is different. Each 101 book is an introduction to a subject, not the "advanced course." I believe these concentrated versions will help you on your way to significant growth in specific areas of your life.

I hope you enjoy this volume, and I pray that it serves you well as you seek to improve your life and achieve your dreams.

ATTITUDE

101

WHAT EVERY LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW

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Portions of this book were previously published in *The Winning Attitude*, *Failing Forward*, *Your Roadmap for Success*, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, and *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Maxwell, John C., 1947–
Attitude 101 / John C. Maxwell.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7852-6350-0

1. Success—Psychological aspects. 2. Attitude (Psychology). I. Title.

BF637.S8 M3415 2002

153.8'5—dc21

2002011491

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THE IMPACT
OF ATTITUDE

HOW DOES ATTITUDE IMPACT LEADERSHIP?

Attitude is always a “player” on your team.

Growing up, I loved basketball. It all started for me in the fourth grade when I saw a high school basketball game for the first time. I was captivated. After that, I could usually be found practicing my shooting and playing pickup games on my small court at home.

By the time I got to high school, I had become a pretty good player. I started on the junior varsity team as a freshman, and when I was a sophomore, our JV team had a 15-3 record, which was better than that of the varsity. We were proud of our performance—maybe a little too proud.

The next year, critics who followed high school basketball in Ohio thought our team had a chance to win the state championship in our division. I guess they looked at the players who would return from seniors from the previous year’s varsity team, saw the talent that would be moving up from the JV, and figured we would be a powerhouse. And we did have a lot of talent. How many high school teams in the late 1960s could say that all but a couple of players on the team could dunk the ball? But the season turned out far different from everyone’s expectations.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

From the beginning of the season, the team suffered problems. There were two of us juniors on the varsity who had the talent to start for the team: John Thomas, who was the team’s best rebounder, and me, the best shooting guard. We thought playing time should be based strictly on ability, and we figured we deserved our place on the team. The seniors, who had taken a backseat to the previous year’s seniors, thought we should be made to pay our dues and wait on the bench.

What began as a rivalry between the JV and varsity the year before turned into a war between the juniors and the seniors. When we scrimmaged at practice, it was the juniors against the seniors. In games the seniors wouldn’t pass to the juniors and vice versa. The battles became so fierce that before long, the juniors and the seniors wouldn’t even work together on the court during games. Our coach, Don Neff, had to platoon us. The seniors would start, and when a substitution became necessary, he would put not one but five juniors in the game. We became two teams on one roster.

I don’t remember exactly who started the rivalry that split our team, but I do remember that John Thomas and I embraced it early on. I’ve always been a leader, and I did my share of influencing other team members. Unfortunately, I have to confess that I led the juniors in the wrong direction.

What started as a bad attitude in one or two players made a mess of the situation for everyone. By the time we were in the thick of our schedule, even the players who didn’t want to take part in the rivalry were affected. The season was a disaster. In the end, we finished with a mediocre record and never came close to reaching our potential. It just goes to show you, rotten attitudes ruin a team.

TALENT IS NOT ENOUGH

From my high school basketball experience I learned that talent is not enough to bring success to a team. Of course, you need talent. My friend Lou Holtz, the outstanding college football coach, observed, “You’ve got to have great athletes to win . . . You can’t win without good athletes, but you can lose with them.” But it also takes much more than talented people to win.

My high school teammates were loaded with talent, and if that were enough, we could have been state champions. But we were also loaded with rotten attitudes. You know which won the battle between talent and attitude in the end. Perhaps that is why to this day I understand the importance of positive attitude and have placed such a strong emphasis on it for myself, for my children as they were growing up, and for the teams I lead.

Years ago I wrote something about attitude for my book *The Winning Attitude*. I’d like to share it with you:

Attitude . . .

It is the “advance man” of our true selves.

Its roots are inward but its fruit is outward.

It is our best friend or our worst enemy.

It is more honest and more consistent than our words.

It is an outward look based on past experiences.

It is a thing which draws people to us or repels them.

It is never content until it is expressed.

It is the librarian of our past.

It is the speaker of our present.

It is the prophet of our future.¹

Good attitudes among players do not guarantee a team’s success, but bad attitudes guarantee its failure. The following five truths about attitudes clarify how they affect teamwork and a leader’s team:

1. ATTITUDES HAVE THE POWER TO LIFT UP OR TEAR DOWN A TEAM

In *The Winner’s Edge* Denis Waitley stated, “The real leaders in business, in the profession, in the community, in education, in government, and in the home also seem to draw upon a special cutting edge that separates them from the rest of society. The winner’s edge is not in a gifted birth, in a high IQ, or in talent. The winner’s edge is in the attitude, not aptitude.”²

Unfortunately, I think too many people resist that notion. They want to believe that talent alone (or talent with experience) is enough. But plenty of talented teams out there never amount to anything because of the attitudes of their players.

Various attitudes may impact a team made up of highly talented players:

<u>Abilities</u>	+	<u>Attitudes</u>	=	<u>Result</u>
Great Talent	+	Rotten Attitudes	=	Bad Team

Great Talent	+	Bad Attitudes	=	Average Team
Great Talent	+	Average Attitudes	=	Good Team
Great Talent	+	Good Attitudes	=	Great Team

If you want outstanding results, you need good people with great talent and awesome attitudes. When attitudes go up, so does the potential of the team. When attitudes go down, the potential of the team goes with it.

2. AN ATTITUDE COMPOUNDS WHEN EXPOSED TO OTHERS

Several things on a team are not contagious: talent, experience, and willingness to practice. But you can be sure of one thing: attitude is catching. When someone on the team is teachable and his humility is rewarded by improvement, others are more likely to display similar characteristics. When a leader is upbeat in the face of discouraging circumstances, others admire that quality and want to be like he. When a team member displays a strong work ethic and begins to have a positive impact, others imitate him. People become inspired by their peers. People have a tendency to adopt the attitudes of those they spend time with—to pick up on their mind-sets, beliefs, and approaches to challenges.

The story of Roger Bannister is an inspiring example of the way attitudes often “compound.” During the first half of the twentieth century, many sports experts believed that no runner could run a mile in less than four minutes. And for a long time they were right. But then on May 6, 1954, British runner and university student Roger Bannister ran a mile in 3 minutes 59.4 seconds during a meet in Oxford. Less than two months later, another runner, Australian John Landy, also broke the four-minute barrier. Then suddenly dozens and then hundreds of others broke it. Why? Because the best runners’ attitudes changed. They began to adopt the mind-sets and beliefs of their peers.

Bannister’s attitude and actions compounded when exposed to others. His attitude spread. Today every world-class runner who competes at that distance can run a mile in less than four minutes. Attitudes are contagious!

3. BAD ATTITUDES COMPOUND FASTER THAN GOOD ONES

There’s only one thing more contagious than a good attitude—a bad attitude. For some reason many people think it’s chic to be negative. I suspect that they think it makes them appear smart and important. But the truth is that a negative attitude hurts rather than helps the person who has it. And it also hurts the people around him.

To see how quickly and easily an attitude or mind-set can spread, just think about this story from Norman Cousins: Once during a football game, a doctor at the first aid station treated five people for what he suspected might be food poisoning. He soon discovered that all five people had bought drinks from a particular concession stand at the stadium.

The physician requested that the announcer advise people in the stadium to avoid buying drinks from the particular vendor because of the possibility of food poisoning. Before long, more than two hundred people complained of food poisoning symptoms. Nearly half the people’s symptoms were so severe that they were taken to the hospital.

The story doesn’t end there, however. After a little more detective work, it was discovered that the five original victims had eaten tainted potato salad from one particular deli on the way to the game. When the other “sufferers” found out that the drinks in the stadium were safe, they experienced

miraculous recoveries. That just goes to show you, an attitude spreads very quickly.

4. ATTITUDES ARE SUBJECTIVE, SO IDENTIFYING A WRONG ONE CAN BE DIFFICULT

Have you ever interacted with someone for the first time and suspected that his attitude was poor yet you were unable to put your finger on exactly what was wrong? I believe many people have this experience.

ATTITUDE IS REALLY ABOUT HOW A PERSON IS.
THAT OVERFLOWS INTO HOW HE ACTS.

The reason people doubt their observations about others' attitudes is that attitudes are subjective. Someone with a bad attitude may not do anything illegal or unethical, yet his attitude may be ruining the team just the same.

People always project on the outside how they feel on the inside. Attitude is really about how a person is. That overflows into how he acts. Allow me to share with you common rotten attitudes that ruin a team so that you can recognize them for what they are when you see them.

An inability to admit wrongdoing. Have you ever spent time with people who never admit they're wrong? It's painful. Nobody's perfect, but someone who thinks he is does not make an ideal teammate. His wrong attitude will always create conflict.

Failing to forgive. It's said that Clara Barton, the founder of modern nursing, was once encouraged to bemoan a cruel act inflicted on her years earlier, but Barton wouldn't take the bait.

"Don't you remember the wrong that was done to you?" the friend goaded.

"No," answered Barton, "I distinctly remember forgetting that."

Holding a grudge is never positive or appropriate. And when unforgiveness occurs between teammates, it's certain to hurt the team.

Petty jealousy. An attitude that really works against people is the desire for equality that feeds petty jealousy. For some reason the people with this attitude believe that every person deserves equal treatment, regardless of talent, performance, or impact. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. Each of us is created uniquely and performs differently, and as a result, we should be treated as such.

The disease of me. In his book *The Winner Within*, highly successful NBA coach Pat Riley writes about the "disease of me." He says of team members who have it, "They develop an overpowering belief in their own importance. Their actions virtually shout the claim, 'I'm the one.'" Riley asserts that the disease always has the same inevitable result: "The Defeat of Us."³

A critical spirit. Fred and Martha were driving home after a church service. "Fred," Martha asked, "did you notice that the pastor's sermon was kind of weak today?"

"No, not really," answered Fred.

"Well, did you hear that the choir was flat?"

"No, I didn't," he responded.

"Well, you certainly must have noticed that young couple and their children right in front of us with all the noise and commotion they made the whole service!"

"I'm sorry, dear, but no, I didn't."

Finally in disgust Martha said, “Honestly, Fred, I don’t know why you even bother to go to church.”

When someone on the team has a critical spirit, everybody knows it because everyone on the team can do no right.

A desire to hog all the credit. Another bad attitude that hurts the team is similar to the “disease of me.” But where the person with that disease may simmer in the background and create dissension, the credit hog continually steps into the spotlight to take a bow—whether he has earned it or not. His attitude is opposite that of NBA Hall of Fame center Bill Russell, who said of his time on the court: “The most important measure of how good a game I played was how much better I’d made my teammates play.”

Certainly there are other negative attitudes that I haven’t named, but my intention isn’t to list every bad attitude—just some of the most common ones. In a word, most bad attitudes are the result of selfishness. If one of your teammates puts others down, sabotages teamwork, or makes himself out to be more important than the team, then you can be sure that you’ve encountered someone with a bad attitude.

5. ROTTEN ATTITUDES, LEFT ALONE, RUIN EVERYTHING

Bad attitudes must be addressed. You can be sure that they will always cause dissension, resentment, combativeness, and division on a team. And they will never go away on their own if they are left unaddressed. They will simply fester and ruin a team—along with its chances of reaching its potential.

Because people with bad attitudes are so difficult to deal with and because attitudes seem so subjective, you may doubt your gut reaction when you encounter someone with a bad attitude. After all, if it’s only your opinion that he has a rotten attitude, then you have no right to address it, right? Not if you care about the team. Rotten attitudes ruin a team. That is always true. If you leave a bad apple in a barrel of good apples, you will always end up with a barrel of rotten apples. Attitudes always impact a leader’s effectiveness.

President Thomas Jefferson remarked, “Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.” If you care about your team and you are committed to helping all of the players, you can’t ignore a bad attitude.

Dealing with a person whose attitude is bad can be a very tricky thing. Before you try to address the issue, you would benefit from a closer look at attitudes and how they affect an individual.

HOW DOES ATTITUDE IMPACT AN INDIVIDUAL?

Your attitude and your potential go hand in hand.

What is attitude? How do you put your finger on it? Well, attitude is an inward feeling expressed by behavior. That is why an attitude can be seen without a word being said. Haven't we all noticed "the pout" of the sulker, or the "juted jaw" of the determined? Of all the things we wear, our expression is the most important.

Sometimes our attitude can be masked outwardly and others who see us are fooled. But usually the cover-ups will not last long. There is that constant struggle as the attitude tries to wiggle its way out.

My father enjoys telling the story of the four-year-old who had one of those trouble-filled days. After reprimanding him, his mother finally said to him, "Son, you go over to that chair and sit on it now!" The little lad went to the chair, sat down, and said, "Mommy, I'm sitting on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside."

Psychologist/philosopher James Allen stated, "A person cannot travel within and stand still without." Soon what is happening within us will affect what is happening without. A hardened attitude is a dreaded disease. It causes a closed mind and a dark future. When our attitude is positive and conducive to growth, the mind expands and the progress begins.

ATTITUDE DETERMINES SUCCESS OR FAILURE

While leading a conference in South Carolina, I tried the following experiment. I asked the audience, "What word describes what will determine our happiness, acceptance, peace, and success?" The audience began to express words such as *job, education, money, time*. Finally someone said *attitude*. Such an important area of their lives was a second thought. Our attitude is the primary force that will determine whether we succeed or fail.

For some, attitude presents a difficulty in every opportunity; for others it presents an opportunity in every difficulty. Some climb with a positive attitude, while others fall with a negative perspective. The very fact that the attitude "makes some" while "breaking others" is significant enough for us to explore its importance. Here are seven axioms about attitude to help you better understand how it impacts a person's life:

ATTITUDE AXIOM #1: OUR ATTITUDE DETERMINES OUR APPROACH TO LIFE

Our attitude tells us what we expect from life. Like an airplane, if our "nose" is pointed up, we are

taking off; if it is pointed down, we may be headed for a crash.

One of my favorite stories is about a grandpa and grandma who visited their grandchildren. Each afternoon Grandpa would lie down for a nap. One day, as a practical joke, the kids decided to put Limburger cheese in his mustache. Quite soon he awoke sniffing. "Why, this room stinks," he exclaimed as he got up and went out into the kitchen. He wasn't there long until he decided that the kitchen smelled, too, so he walked outdoors for a breath of fresh air. Much to Grandpa's surprise, the open air brought no relief, and he proclaimed, "The whole world stinks!"

How true that is to life! When we carry "Limburger cheese" in our attitudes, the whole world smells bad. We are individually responsible for our view of life. That truth has been known for ages and is contained in Scripture: "For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."¹ Our attitude toward our action in life help determine what happens to us.

It would be impossible to estimate the number of jobs lost, the number of promotions missed, the number of sales not made, and the number of marriages ruined by poor attitudes. But almost daily we witness jobs that are held but hated and marriages that are tolerated but unhappy, all because people are waiting for others, or the world, to change instead of realizing that they are responsible for their own behavior.

ATTITUDE AXIOM #2: OUR ATTITUDE DETERMINES OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE

All of life is impacted by your relationships with people, yet establishing relationships is difficult. You can't get along with some people, and you can't make it without them. That's why it is essential to build proper relationships with others in our crowded world.

The Stanford Research Institute says that the money you make in any endeavor is determined on 12.5 percent by knowledge and 87.5 percent by your ability to deal with people.

$$87.5\% \text{ people knowledge} + 12.5\% \text{ product knowledge} = \text{Success}$$

That is why Teddy Roosevelt said, "The most important single ingredient to the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people." And why John D. Rockefeller said, "I will pay more for the ability to deal with people than any other ability under the sun."

When the attitude we possess places others first and we see people as important, then our perspective will reflect their viewpoint, not ours. Until we walk in the other person's shoes and see life through another's eyes, we will be like the man who angrily jumped out of his car after a collision with another car. "Why don't you people watch where you're driving?" he shouted wildly. "You're the fourth car I've hit today!"

Usually the person who rises within an organization has a good attitude. The promotions did not give that individual an outstanding attitude, but an outstanding attitude resulted in promotions.

ATTITUDE AXIOM #3: OFTEN OUR ATTITUDE IS THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

History's greatest achievements have been made by men who excelled only slightly over the mass

of others in their fields. This could be called the principle of the slight edge. Many times that slight difference was attitude. The former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir underlined this truth in one of her interviews. She said, "All my country has is spirit. We don't have petroleum dollars. We don't have mines of great wealth in the ground. We don't have the support of a worldwide public opinion that looks favorably on us. All Israel has is the spirit of its people. And if the people lose their spirit, even the United States of America cannot save us."

Certainly aptitude is important to our success in life. Yet success or failure in any undertaking is caused more by mental attitude than by mere mental capacities. I remember times when Margaret, my wife, would come home from teaching school frustrated because of modern education's emphasis on aptitude instead of attitude. She wanted the kids to be tested on A.Q. (attitude quotient) instead of just the I.Q. (intelligence quotient). She would talk of kids whose I.Q. was high yet their performance was low. There were others whose I.Q. was low but their performance was high.

As a parent, I hope my children have excellent minds and outstanding attitudes. But if I had to choose an "either-or" situation, without hesitation I would want their A.Q. to be high.

A Yale University president some years ago gave similar advice to a former president of Ohio State: "Always be kind to your A and B students. Someday one of them will return to your campus as a good professor. And also be kind to your C students. Someday one of them will return and build a two-million-dollar science laboratory."

There is very little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. The little difference is attitude. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative.

ATTITUDE AXIOM #4: OUR ATTITUDE AT THE BEGINNING OF A TASK WILL AFFECT ITS OUTCOME MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE

Coaches understand the importance of their teams' having the right attitude before facing a tough opponent. Surgeons want to see their patients mentally prepared before going into surgery. Job seekers know that their prospective employer is looking for more than just skills when they apply for work. Public speakers want a conducive atmosphere before they communicate to their audience. Why? Because the right attitude in the beginning ensures success at the end. You are acquainted with the saying, "All's well that ends well." An equal truth is, "All's well that begins well."

Most projects fail or succeed before they begin. A young mountain climber and an experienced guide were ascending a high peak in the Sierras. Early one morning the young climber was suddenly awakened by a tremendous cracking sound. He was convinced that the end of the world had come. The guide responded, "It's not the end of the world, just the dawning of a new day." As the sun rose, it was merely hitting the ice and causing it to melt.

Many times we have been guilty of viewing our future challenges as the sunset of life rather than the sunrise of a bright new opportunity.

For instance, there's the story of two shoe salesmen who were sent to an island to sell shoes. The first salesman, upon arrival, was shocked to realize that no one wore shoes. Immediately he sent a telegram to his home office in Chicago saying, "Will return home tomorrow. No one wears shoes."

The second salesman was thrilled by the same realization. Immediately he wired the home office in Chicago saying, "Please send me 10,000 shoes. Everyone here needs them."

ATTITUDE AXIOM #5: OUR ATTITUDE CAN TURN OUR PROBLEMS INTO BLESSINGS

In *Awake, My Heart*, J. Sidlow Baxter wrote, “What is the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity? Our attitude toward it. Every opportunity has a difficulty and every difficulty has an opportunity.”²

When confronted with a difficult situation, a person with an outstanding attitude makes the best of it while he gets the worst of it. Life can be likened to a grindstone. Whether it grinds you down or polishes you depends upon what you are made of.

While attending a conference of young leaders, I heard this statement: “No society has ever developed tough men during times of peace.” Adversity is prosperity to those who possess a great attitude. Kites rise against, not with, the wind. When the adverse wind of criticism blows, allow it to be to you what the blast of wind is to the kite—a force against it that lifts it higher. A kite would not fly unless it had the controlling tension of the string to tie it down. It is equally true in life. Consider the following successes that were accomplished through a positive attitude.

WHEN CONFRONTED WITH A DIFFICULT SITUATION, A PERSON WITH AN OUTSTANDING ATTITUDE
MAKES THE BEST OF IT WHILE HE GETS THE WORST OF IT.

When Napoleon’s school companions made sport of him because of his humble origin and poverty, he devoted himself entirely to his books. Quickly rising above his classmates in scholarship, he commanded their respect. Soon he was regarded as the brightest in the class.

Few people knew Abraham Lincoln until the great weight of the Civil War showed his character.

Robinson Crusoe was written in prison. John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress* in the Bedford jail. Sir Walter Raleigh wrote *The History of the World* during a thirteen-year imprisonment. Luther translated the Bible while confined in the castle of Wartburg. For ten years Dante, author of *The Divine Comedy*, worked in exile and under the sentence of death. Beethoven was almost totally deaf and burdened with sorrow when he produced his greatest works.

When God wants to educate someone, He does not send him to the school of graces but to the school of necessities. Great leaders emerge when crises occur. In the lives of people who achieve, we read repeatedly of terrible troubles that forced them to rise above the commonplace. Not only do they find the answers, but they also discover a tremendous power within themselves. Like a groundswell far out in the ocean, this force within explodes into a mighty wave when circumstances seem to overcome. Then out steps the athlete, the author, the statesman, the scientist, or the businessman. David Sarnoff said, “There is plenty of security in the cemetery; I long for opportunity.”

ATTITUDE AXIOM #6: OUR ATTITUDE CAN GIVE US AN UNCOMMONLY POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

An uncommonly positive perspective is able to help us accomplish some uncommon goals. I have keenly observed the different approaches and results achieved by a positive thinker and by a person filled with fear and apprehension. For example, in ancient Israel when Goliath came up against the Hebrews, the soldiers all thought, *He’s so big we can never kill him*. David looked at the same giant and thought, *He’s so big I can’t miss*.

George Sweeting, former president of Moody Bible Institute, tells a story about a Scotsman who

was an extremely hard worker and expected all the men under him to be the same. His men would tease him, “Scotty, don’t you know that Rome wasn’t built in a day?” “Yes,” he would answer, “I know that. But I wasn’t foreman on that job.”

Individuals whose attitudes cause them to approach life from an entirely positive perspective are not always understood. They are what some would call a “no-limit people.” In other words, they don’t accept the normal limitations of life as most people do. They are unwilling to accept “the accepted” just because it is accepted. Their response to self-limiting conditions will probably be “why?” instead of “okay.” Certainly, they have limitations. Their gifts are not so plentiful that they cannot fail. But they are determined to walk to the very edge of their potential and the potential of their goals before accepting defeat.

They are like bumblebees. According to a theory of aerodynamics, as demonstrated through the wind tunnel tests, the bumblebee should be unable to fly. Because of the size, weight, and shape of its body in relationship to the total wing span, flying is scientifically impossible. The bumblebee, being ignorant of scientific theory, goes ahead and flies anyway and makes honey every day.

The future not only looks bright when the attitude is right, but also the present is much more enjoyable. The positive person understands that the journey of success is as enjoyable as the destination. Asked which of his works he would select as his masterpiece, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, at the age of eighty-three, replied, “My next one.”

A friend of mine in Ohio drove eighteen-wheelers for an interstate trucking company. Knowing the hundreds of miles he logged weekly, I once asked him how he kept from getting extremely tired. “It’s all in your attitude,” he replied. “Some drivers ‘go to work’ in the morning, but I ‘go for a ride in the country.’” That kind of positive perspective gives him the “edge” on life.

ATTITUDE AXIOM #7: YOUR ATTITUDE IS NOT AUTOMATICALLY GOOD BECAUSE YOU ARE A RELIGIOUS PERSON

It is noteworthy that the seven deadly sins—pride, covetousness, lust, envy, anger, gluttony, and sloth—are all matters of attitude, inner spirit, and motives. Sadly, many people of faith carry with them inner-spirit problems. They are like the elder brother contained in the parable of the prodigal son, thinking that they do everything right. While the younger brother left home to live a wild life, the elder brother chose to stay home with his father. He wasn’t going to spend *his* time sowing wild oats. Yet when the younger brother returned home, some of the elder brother’s wrong attitudes began to surface.

First was a feeling of self-importance. The elder brother was out in the field doing what he ought to do, but he got mad when the party began at home—his father would never let him have one for himself!

That was followed by a feeling of self-pity. The elder brother said, “Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and you have never thrown a party for me. But when your son who wasted all your money comes home, you give him a big celebration.”³

Often people overlook the true meaning of the story of the prodigal son. They forget that there are not one but two prodigals. The younger brother is guilty of the sins of the flesh, whereas the elder brother is guilty of the sins of the spirit. His problem is his attitude. At the end of the parable, it is the elder brother—the second prodigal—who is outside the father’s house.

And that is a good lesson for all of us to remember. A poor attitude will take us places we don't want to go. Sometimes it can even take you completely out of the game. On the other hand, a good attitude puts you in the place of greatest potential.

Perhaps you're not sure if your attitude is where it ought to be. Or maybe you are leading someone whose attitude isn't as positive as it could be. How do you address that? First, you need to know how a person's attitude is formed. That's the subject of the next chapter.

THE FORMATION OF ATTITUDE

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