



Reaching Beyond Excellence

3 RBE rules to Excellence

In January I was traveling to a conference in Portland, Oregon for the weekend. That morning, while changing planes in Atlanta, I began to feel tired and achy. Somewhere over Tennessee I realized I was catching the flu. By the time I reached Portland, late in the afternoon, I could barely walk. I took the train from the airport downtown which dropped me off two blocks from my hotel. It felt like the longest walk of my life to the front door and the lobby. I fell across the desk. Frank, the desk clerk greeted me with a compassionate smile. I told him that I was sick and needed to get to my room as soon as possible. He pointed to a large man in a bellman's uniform and said, "He can carry your bags and YOU to your room if you need him to."

Once in the room I collapsed on the bed and called home. "I am too sick to stay here," I said. "I will be coming home on the first flight tomorrow morning." The moment I hung up there was a knock at my door. There stood a young lady, about half my age, with a tray. "My name is Elise," she said. "I understand we're not feeling well. May I come in?" I looked dazed. She stepped in and set the tray down on the table. "Frank told us how sick you were so we brought you some homemade soup, a Sprite, some water and a mint. We also all signed this get-well card for you. Now you eat all of this soup Mr. Mathis or you won't get well!" When she left I felt so bad I sat down and cried. It took two hours to eat the soup in the condition I was in. Elise was right, though. After eating the soup, I felt better and stayed for the conference. By the time I got down to the lobby to thank Frank and his team they had all gone home for the weekend.

On my return home I called the Customer Service line for the hotel chain and told them my story. The representative was so moved he called the Portland hotel and told Frank's manager. She called all of the employees out that had signed my card (yes, I kept it) and thanked them in front of the entire staff. "This is the type of service we strive for every day," the Customer Service Representative told me, "and it should be rewarded."

What is excellence? John Maxwell says that efficiency is getting the right job

done and effectiveness is getting the job done right. Excellence, then, is getting the right job done right. I am surprised at how many times I go in for service, or to a fine restaurant and get sub-par service. I've also seen some great efforts to reach beyond the norm. The Air Canada pilot who got onto a computer terminal in Boston and routed me to Calgary when my United flight was cancelled. The manager in Washington, DC who gave me a bottle of champagne to compensate me for problems at check-in. A waitress who gave our party complimentary dessert when the meal was not brought out on time. The world needs more people who try to reach beyond excellence as Frank and his staff did.

I know that People who Reach Beyond have several qualities in common. If you are going to excel in your career and your life, you need to adopt and practice these skills on a daily basis. Here is how I know this:

1. People who Reach Beyond Re-invent themselves in the face of change.

They see times changing and they change themselves to stay ahead of the tide. I think of people like Oprah Winfrey who capitalized on the "new trend" of doing a nationwide talk show; Bill Clinton, who faced with the lowest Presidential ratings changed his leadership style when Republicans took both houses of congress two years into his first term; Steve Schirippa who was a casino waiter and went on to become one of the stars of the hit HBO series, "The Sopranos;" women who find a new career like designing children's clothes, public speaking, executive coaching or health care administration when they become divorced or widowed.

Suze Orman dropped out of college because of a learning disability and traveled cross country to California, where she secured a job as a waitress earning \$400 a week. She had dreams, though. As she shared her vision with her most loyal customers one day, a friend handed her a no-interest loan for \$2,000, to be paid back in ten years. As other customers contributed over the next few months, she amassed \$50,000 and began fulfilling her dream.

Suze had no knowledge about investing, so she took the money to a brokerage firm and it was put into the volatile oil market. It quickly turned down and she lost all of her investment. Devastated she panicked over how to pay off her investors. Eventually the brokerage firm took responsibility for the failure to secure her money, but it started her to question whether she could do a better job with her own money than paying someone else to do it poorly. First she secured a job with the same brokerage, but disagreeing with their business practices, she soon started her own financial investment firm.

Everything seemed to be going Suze's way until the day she showed up for work and found out that all of her records and money had been stolen by a former employee and business partner. Computer files, software, client records and contact information were all taken from her in the middle of the night. Once again she found herself broke and destitute.

She discovered a spiritual side of success and financial freedom. She felt that all that had happened in her life was a gift that she was to be grateful for, rather than embittered. “The lesson I learned was that my attitude toward money had made me poor and that with that attitude no amount of money could have made me rich. Money doesn’t bring courage, I learned. It’s the other way around. Once I took the lesson to heart, I began to rebuild my life.” Her spiritual side of finances influences her advice to her clients. “Get out of debt, avoid expensive purchases and free yourself from the use of credit cards,” she says. People who Reach Beyond go inside and find an inner strength to re-invent themselves. They constantly look for ways to be better at who they are and what they do.

2. People who Reach Beyond Overcome Barriers. They have the ability to stick with a task or an objective when anyone else would simply quit and walk away. They keep trying against all odds. They, in the words of Winston Churchill, “never, never, never give up!” People like, Thomas Edison who had a learning disability; Abraham Lincoln, who lost most elections he entered; Amelia Earhart who broke gender barriers to become an aeronautical pioneer; Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder who fought both physical and racial barriers to become famous entertainers and Mohandas Ghandi who non-violently overcame racial and cultural barriers to free his country of India from foreign occupation.

My favorite story, though is about a young man born into poverty in Mississippi. His father left home when he was very young to become an actor in Hollywood. As if all of that wasn’t enough, he had a natural stutter. It plagued him so much that he refused to speak to anyone. His mother sent him to live with her parents in Michigan. They thought he was mute because he wouldn’t speak. In school he failed class after class until a teacher noticed that he could speak with excellence if he memorized an assignment. “

The teacher encouraged the young man to seek out a career in the theater, where memorizing lines and speaking would be his strength. At first he refused, still carrying a grudge against the actions of his father. Finally, he relented and began to take drama lessons. Today he has one of the most famous voices in the media. He still has the stutter, but no one would know it hearing him speak in movies, on stage and television. His name is James Earl Jones, the voice of Darth Vader in Star Wars. He persevered when the odds were against him and continues to do so today. People who Reach Beyond keep on trying when society, physical limitations and cultural objectives get in their way.

3. People who Reach Beyond Externally focus themselves for the benefit of others. They think of how to make this world a better place to live in and that

sets them above the crowd. Jack Canfield wanted to put into a book the ideas on how to have a better life. He was met with rejection after rejection by publishers before he finally got "Chicken Soup for the Soul" published. The same is true for Rhonda Byrne, author of "The Secret." I think of people like Bob Macauley, Founder and Chairman of the AmeriCares Foundation who rescued orphans from Viet Nam a great personal expense.

Steve Jobs is never satisfied with the way things are. His goal of making the computer a personal item anyone could own was achieved with the Apple Computer. Steve became interested in music as a new marketing vehicle. When asked why he never became involved with the handheld computer device (PDA's), he said that if you go back hundreds of years, you find people in business not looking for methods of data entry, but loving music. Steve wanted to find a way to bring music to everyone through computer technology. Napster and Kazaa had revolutionized music file-sharing, but done so illegally. Steve sought to find a method of internet music downloads that satisfied both the artists, the music industry and consumers. This became the birth of the iPod, Apple's device to play MP3's (Music files) downloaded exclusively through Apple's iTunes music store and software.

At first only a few music companies signed on but eventually Jobs secured contracts with the five major production companies. People like Steve Jobs want to find ways to make life better for everyone and in turn they become successes themselves. Yes, they make money off of their ideas, but they do so with the satisfaction that they have given back to others more than they receive for their ideas and actions.

4. People who Reach Beyond have a positive attitude about themselves.

They seek to be a better person every day. Their main competition is themselves. They know that their attitude is a choice. A choice they make that is influenced primarily from within. They don't blame their failures on others or circumstances. Instead they embrace failure as a friend and learn from it to do better next time. I get my inspiration from people like Tim Allen, star of television's Home Improvement and many movies; Eleanor Roosevelt who said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."; and Olympic Gold Medalist Florence Griffith-Joyner who said, "People don't pay much attention to you when you are second best. I wanted to see what it felt like to be number one."

Jim Stovall was a very good high school football player in Oklahoma. His dream was to play football for the Oklahoma University Sooners. But during a routine physical at age 17 he was told that he was progressively losing his sight. By 19 he was legally blind. His athletic dream dashed, he sat in front of his television and listened to old movies. He tried several jobs assisting handicapped children but hadn't found true happiness. Then one day in his early twenties while

listening to more old movies on television, he got the idea of narrating the movies so blind people could hear what was happening on the screen.

Almost everyone told him that his idea was ridiculous. At every turn he was met with discouragement, but undaunted he would just work harder. First he started a local television show in Tulsa and interviewed any producer, director or star as they passed through town. He produced narrations for the movies in his basement. Several trips to New York (and more discouraging comments later) he formed what is now known as the Narrative Television Network. Today he is a famous speaker and Network executive. His advice: "When people tell you that your idea won't work, ignore them and they'll go bother someone else." People who Reach Beyond Excellence know that attitude is a choice. They choose the positive every time they can.

It was December and I was speaking in Portland, Oregon again. I was staying near the same hotel of the experience I wrote about earlier. I wanted to personally thank Frank for his selfless act of kindness to me several years earlier. I went to the desk clerk and inquired if Frank was on duty. To my dismay he told me that Frank no longer worked for the hotel. I looked dejected, but he suddenly said, "Oh you can find him. He was made Manager of our hotel across the river in Vancouver early last Spring." Frank's lifestyle of helping others has paid off in big ways. It has furthered his career while making people's lives and the hotel chain better for his actions. Frank learned that there is value in Reaching Beyond in life. You will, as well when you make these skills habits in your daily routine. Think about nothing else. Become the person that you want to be. You will find that Reaching Beyond Excellence will be the goal of everyone around you as you influence their lives with your own.

Permission is granted to reprint this article provided the following paragraph is included in full:

Jim Mathis, CSP is an international Certified Speaking Professional, executive coach and trainer. To subscribe to his free personal and professional development newsletter, please send an email to: subscribe@jimmathis.com with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject. An electronic copy will be sent out to you every month. For more information on how Jim and his programs can benefit your organization or group, please call 888-688-0220, or visit his web site: www.jimmathis.com.