

To Strive or to Settle?

How Choosing Between these Options Determines Life's Course



We all know the age-old adage: Anything worth having is worth working for. From the time we are children we are taught the importance of hard work. Parents and teachers spend much energy and time hammering home the value of a solid work ethic to their young charges. Stories like *Johnny Appleseed* and *The Little Engine that Could* teach kids virtues such as perseverance and tenacity. In a word, we are taught from a young age to *strive*.

At some point along the continuum of childhood, kids begin to realize that actually achieving the lofty goals they have set for themselves—in scholastics, athletics, the arts, or just cleaning their room—takes a whole lot of effort. Being faced with the reality of how much work and time is involved in realizing a specific goal, young people find themselves at a

crossroads. Will they choose to make the required effort to achieve the goal, or will they give up? Arriving at this juncture will occur countless times throughout one's life: To strive for excellence/success/fulfillment, or to settle for whatever life doles out.

Each individual has their own unique motor that moves them through life. Some people come equipped with the zippy engine of a Ferrari, and some putt along with the engine of a golf cart. This innate sense of drive and determination—or the lack thereof—is prewired into our personalities, our DNA even, but it doesn't necessarily dictate whether or not we will be strivers or settlers.

So what makes the difference? Why do some individuals hold out for the mate of their dreams, certain of the important traits they covet in a potential spouse and unwilling to accept less, while other people settle for someone who may not even deserve them? Why do some of us have loads of ambition and gumption galore, where others sit around waiting for opportunities to land in their laps?

High Hopes

Could it be that the one key factor that propels certain people to reach for the stars is the virtue of hope? When someone feels hopeful about achieving something—be it a scholarship to the college of their dreams or that coveted position at work or a loving life

Just what makes that little old ant
Think he'll move that rubber tree plant
Anyone knows an ant, can't
Move a rubber tree plant

But he's got high hopes, he's got high hopes
He's got high apple pie, in the sky hopes

So any time your gettin' low
'Stead of lettin' go
Just remember that ant
Oops there goes another rubber tree plant

partner—and they can actually imagine attaining the goal, they are more apt to do whatever it takes to realize it.

Hope is a natural motivator. When we believe in our hearts that our dreams can be realized, it fires us up with possibilities and keeps us moving forward, overcoming obstacles in our way. Desirous thoughts such as “I hope I get that promotion,” or “I hope he asks me out” can propel action that may cause these aspirations to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Sadly, some people have lost all hope. Life may have dealt them too many devastating blows and they have become resigned to merely exist, unable to move past despair. Hope has the power to get us back on our feet after a major setback in life. Without hope we would never get out of bed in the morning.

Other people never felt hope in the first place. They live their lives fixating on the here-and-now with no eye to the future and what possibilities may await. Risk-taking and goal setting are not in their repertoire, not part of their natural mindset. Instead of proactively carving out their futures by sticking to a plan and forging onward based on a hopeful outcome, those without hope passively wait for life to happen *to* them.

Finding Hope

It is a mystery why certain individuals are hopeful types, those doers and achievers who take an assertive role in directing the outcomes of their lives. Why do some people seem to have an abundance of hope fueling them along while others don't have that fire in the belly?

Regardless of whether you are born with a hopeful heart or not, it is possible to still take charge of your life by actively

choosing to change your mindset. Maybe it won't come naturally. Maybe it means getting some life coaching or taking a college course in assertiveness training.

Adapting the traits of a hopeful person might take some effort for the hopeless or hope-challenged, but it can be done. Just perusing the self-help section in a bookstore may result in finding the perfect book to help you transform from a passive spectator in life to a participant. But as you open that book in search of changing your life for the better, don't forget to also open your heart to the prospect of discovering the awesome beauty of hope.