

EXTREME ESTEEM

Always Do Your Best

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“When you do your best, you learn to accept yourself. But you have to be aware and learn from your mistakes. Learning from your mistakes means you practise, look honestly at the results, and keep practising. This increases your awareness.”

-- Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements*

When I was a kid in school and brought home news that I had fared poorly on a test, mom would always ask me, “Did you do your best?” Sometimes, I could honestly answer yes; other times I would hang my head, kick the ground, and admit that I hadn’t done my best.

I learned a valuable lesson one day when I brought home a school project and explained – exasperated – that I had done my best, worked my hardest, and yet received only a modest mark. Mom told me that my best effort was all anyone could ask of me. She told me that I never had to feel bad, guilty, or disappointed if I had truly done my best.

“Always do your best,” she said. “No more and no less.”

Many years later, I had the pleasure of reading Don Miguel Ruiz’ *The Four Agreements*. I was surprised and delighted to discover that Ruiz’ fourth Toltec agreement was my mother’s old admonition: always do your best.

Says Ruiz, “Everything is alive and changing all the time, so your best will sometimes be high quality, and other times it will not be as good. When you wake up refreshed and energized in the morning, your best will be better than when you are tired at night. Your best will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick, or sober as opposed to drunk. Your best will depend on whether you are feeling wonderful and happy, or upset, angry, or jealous.”

I was intrigued when Ruiz recommended we avoid trying to do more than our best. If we try too hard to force our performance, we may overdo it, deplete our body and go “against ourselves.” It could even take us longer to accomplish our goals.

Ruiz is not suggesting we cease striving to improve our performance. Always doing our best will result in consistent improvement. Despite our best efforts, the truth is we cannot deliver 110 per cent. Our best is just that – 100 per cent of our best effort at the time.

When we always do our best, we are taking action. And by developing the attitude of always doing our best, we find ourselves doing it because we love it, not because we’re expecting a reward. Most people do exactly the opposite: they only take action when they expect compensation, a reward, and often they don’t enjoy the action.

In *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz cites the following example: “Most people go to work every day just thinking of payday and the money they will get from the work they are doing. They can hardly wait for Friday or Saturday, whatever day they receive their money and can take time off. They are working for the reward, and as a result, they resist work. They try to avoid the action and it becomes more difficult, and they don’t do their best”.

On the other hand, if you take action just for the love of doing it, without concern for compensation, you may find that you enjoy every action you do. Rewards will come, but you will not attach to them. And chances are the reward will be more than just monetary.

When you do your best, you don’t give your inner critic the chance to find you guilty. There are no regrets. You don’t subject yourself to needless frustrations, self-judgment, and guilt.

Always do your best. Toltec wisdom or simple motherly advice? Wise words either way.