

## **Do the Small Things First**

by **Lou Stoops**

Big things often begin small. People often ask me how to become a writer, or how to become a speaker, or how to become an actor. My answer is always the same: write, speak, act. When I give these answers, they often just stare at me with eyes that betray their disappointment. They were really desiring some mystical short-cut that would land them on the best-seller's list, or propel them to stages where thousands of eager people would hang on every word, or launch them on to the big screen. Well, I'm sorry to say I have no mystical short cuts, not for those careers or any other. It takes smart and hard work to be successful in any endeavor.

The problem with so many people is that they despise starting out small. They want the big "payoff" and they want it right now. It just doesn't work that way. To be successful in a chosen enterprise requires knowledge and experience. We all attempt new things with a real learning curve. Over time, as we learn more and do more, we'll grow into success.

To do big things, be willing to do small things. Find out what it is you want to do and then learn as much as you can about it. Read books, magazines and professional journals. Network with people who are already doing what it is that you want to be doing. Ask them questions. Tap into their knowledge and experience.

Write out a list of tasks that you can begin right now that will place you on the road to where you want to be. Each task, when successfully completed, will lead to new ones. In this often-tedious process, you will gain the necessary knowledge and experience that will carry you to each new level.

Here are some important things I would have you to remember:

1. **Don't Be Afraid of Change**

One of the reasons people seek short cuts is a fear of change. Small steps speak of a thousand little changes that must be experienced before arriving at the destination. Because they perceive that to be too painful, they seek instantaneous success, believing that to be less painful.

As creatures of habit, our aversion to change holds us back. A journalist named Ellen Goodman was right in observing, "We cling to even the minor routines with an odd tenacity. We're upset when the waitress who usually brings us coffee in the breakfast shop near the office suddenly quits, and are disoriented if the drugstore or the cleaner's in the neighborhood closes...We each have a litany of holiday rituals and everyday habits that we hold on to, and we often greet radical innovation with the enthusiasm of a baby meeting a new sitter."

The changes that come to us along the way of our learning enable us to be ready when success finally does arrive. Rise too quickly before you've educationally and experientially ready, and you'll really feel the pain.



2. Understand that the joy is in the journey.  
This is more than just a nice sentiment. When you reach a level of success, you'll discover that new goals have been birthed in your heart. You'll never really arrive at a place where you can say; "There it is, now I'm done." There will always be new levels to move toward. If you expect complete satisfaction to come from some accomplishment in your life, you'll be sorely disappointed. Your life is the journey. Set a course with a clear destination in mind, but along the way, enjoy the view.
  
3. Don't get caught up in how long it takes.  
This is very important. Big things require big effort over time.

Some years ago when James Garfield, who went on to become President of the United States, was principal of Hiram College in Ohio, a father asked him if a particular course his son was taking could be simplified so that he could complete it in a shorter time.

"Certainly," Garfield replied, "But it all depends on what you want to make of your boy. When God wants to make an oak tree, He takes a hundred years. When He wants to make a squash he requires only two months."

When you dream about doing big things, start by doing small things. Don't get discouraged, you'll get where you want to go. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. said it well, "The secret of success is to do the common things uncommonly well."