

Be Like Teddy (Theodore Roosevelt)

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To be exactly like someone else is like changing the proverbial frog into a prince. It is neither plausible nor possible to carry through to reality. Among over 4700 species of frogs you'll find an endless array of shapes, colors and habits. People, also, come in different shapes, colors and habits. I propose that everyone can be assessed and evaluated to determine their individual traits, habits, and characteristics; especially ones belonging to an individual such as Teddy Roosevelt. These results can then be applied to one's own lifestyles and behaviors and thus, be like Teddy. Well, maybe not exactly like him, but similar.

Why choose Teddy as an example? Because, I was/am impressed with his many exploits and accomplishments. These included being a noted historian (chronicled 'The War of 1812'), and zoologist who wrote/published two treatises on birds and insects before he was 18. He was also a taxidermist, politician (Governor of New York and President), deputy sheriff, cowboy, horseman, naturalist (started the National Parks System), Chair of the New York City Police Commission, an adventurer, soldier who headed the Rough Riders during the Spanish American War, and the only President (26th) awarded both the Nobel Peace Prize and the Congressional Medal of Honor.

I could have chosen you, the reader, or anyone else in this world. Every person has a story in them about the use of their inner drive that has helped them to overcome certain problems, issues, and conflicts during their lifetime. Every one shares sister/brotherhood characteristics with Teddy. So, this essay could be entitled...Be like You.

You might also ask...what is the point of being like Teddy? In fact; we do not have the same intellect, physical abilities and personality traits he possessed. Also, most of us did not have a privileged upbringing like Teddy to include personal tutors, a wealthy father, and a beautiful home. It really doesn't matter. My contention is that we should be able to look at Teddy's polymathic life and identify basic traits and beliefs that guided him throughout his life time. Again, traits that each of us can apply to our own daily life.

So let us take a closer look at Teddy's life. As mentioned before, he did grow up in a privileged environment; but, not without its trials and tribulations. He was a sickly, reclusive, and timid (bashful) child with poor eyesight. He was gangly, thin, and had a hyperactive temperament who was sometimes bullied. He suffered acutely from asthma and frequent bouts of cholera morbus. He also faced various other obstacles and challenges throughout his life. In spite of all these, he relied upon a firm inner determination (Grit) to rise above them. Thus, evidencing that Teddy is an excellent person to use for this essay.

My quest is to determine which traits in such an accomplished person could give one the inner drive and fortitude to accomplish such deeds and tasks. We now need to dissect and evaluate Teddy's inner drive, traits, and determination. Which traits do we use? First, we will need to look beyond and rule out those traits such as looks, physical abilities, and intelligence that are genetically inherent and unique to each individual. We should focus only on those distinctive qualities that can be beneficial to us; without the use of plastic surgery, advanced degrees, drugs and/or therapy, etc. Thus, we will need to evaluate nurtured qualities instead of nature (genetics). These qualities must be ones that are understandable yet modifiable to our own psycho-social being/self.

Like Teddy, we are all nurtured/shaped/influenced by the physical, psycho-social, and cultural environments surrounding us. It is like having a surreal cloud that hovers above and beside us. It includes our friends, neighbors, coworkers, teachers, preachers, coaches, pets, the government, work, schools, clothing, entertainment/ recreational/physical/spiritual activities and home, etc. Some would say we are influenced by even the time and date of birth, (i.e., birth sign). All play an integral part in our upbringing; yet, none is as profound as our family and/or mentors who influenced us at the start of life's journey.

Looking back, Teddy's father had the most influence upon nurturing Teddy's character. Theodore Roosevelt Sr., who was a caring and beloved father to Teddy stated; 'take care of your morals first, your health next, and finally your studies while in pursuit of your interests/passions.' Teddy followed this advice and began a regime that focused on the body, mind, and spirit. He started a rigorous exercise program for his body and health. He did not smoke or drink. For his mind, he became a voracious reader, excelled in natural science, and taught Sunday school for his spiritual aspect. By the time he was 18 he was a champion level boxer (later boxed for Harvard University), written two articles on natural science, an avid rower, hunter, and above all was a loving brother to his three siblings.

Based on the previous paragraphs, one should be able to see that Teddy had to nourish his inner spirit (grit). In the middle 19th century it was called Pluck. What is pluck/grit and how do we use it to our advantage? Ideally, Grit is doing something for the greater good, even though people might say you can't and/or even though you have limited health, abilities, etc.

Grit is defined in the Merriam-Weber dictionary as ‘unyielding courage’. The thesaurus portion further reveals grit (n) as ‘backbone, pluck, guts, spunk, vitality, the strength of mind that enables a person to endure... pain, hardship, (see also fortitude). (Related words); determination, purposefulness, resoluteness, bravery, courage, fearlessness, endurance, stamina, tolerance, heart, mettle, spirit, boldness, brass, cheek,chutzpah, hutzpah, nerve, etc.

Let me use an analogy when describing Teddy’s grit. You have all heard the adage that ‘money does not grow on trees’. My contention is that grit doesn’t grow on trees. It is actually the root system and so, an essential part of the tree. This unseen part keeps the tree upright even with the threat of violent winds. It serves to bind the tree to mother Earth. Yes, grit keeps us grounded during troubling times and like the root system, anchors us and provides us with psychodynamic nutrients.

Again, based on his life’s challenges and the resultant accomplishments, Teddy had grit with a capital G. One can get a better insight into his character traits and driving forces by reading one of his favorite quotes penned by Jim Rohn. It reflects upon his inner attitude about how he would handle life’s challenges. It reads: ‘Be Strong, but not rude, Be kind, but not weak, Be bold, but don’t bully, Be humble, but not shy, Be proud, but not arrogant.’

Other quotes written by Teddy, also shed light into his inner-self include:

‘To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.’ ‘Become better - not better than anyone else; but, better than the person you were yesterday.’ ‘It is no use to preach to someone if you do not act decently yourself.’ ‘Life is not always easy. For that matter, life is not earned doing

something that is easy and without striving (effort).’ ‘The greatest challenge in life is discovering who you are. The second greatest challenge is being happy with what you find.’ ‘If you kick the person in the pants who is responsible for most of your troubles, you wouldn’t be able to sit for a month.’ ‘The worst lesson that can be taught to a person is to rely upon others and to whine over our suffering.’ ‘Complaining about a problem without posing a solution is called whining.’

Finally, I would like to propose a method suggested and used by Teddy’s father to help us be more like Teddy. It involves using a simple math equation... a simple fraction, with the numerator (above the fraction line) being a problem and the denominator (below the fraction line) denoting effort needed to solve/rectify the problem. Again: I contend that everyone has the inborn drive and capability to carry on no matter what the problem entails. We just need to load the ammunition (Effort) into this equation’s denominator.

$$\frac{\text{Numerator}}{\text{Denominator}} = \frac{\text{Problem/Goal/Challenge}}{\text{Effort / Grit}} = \text{Solution based on increasing the effort/s in order to keep the fraction constant/balanced.}$$

About the denominator (Efforts); below are examples of efforts taken from readings (Biographies by Edmund Morris, Elting Morison, and Henry Pringles) about Teddy that assisted in his endeavors to overcome obstacles and challenges: Hopefully, they can assist you in your Life’s journeys.

- The number one effort placed in the denominator of life is to read. Again, as a voracious reader, Teddy read everywhere he went. He not only read many books, he wrote many as well. In Mr. Morison’s 1913 Roosevelt Autobiography, Teddy stated that “Books...if really read, really assimilated will enable persons quite unconsciously to furnish

themselves with much ammunition they will find of use in the battle of life.”

- Strive to be of service in a worthy endeavor, to make things better. As NY Police Commissioner, Teddy incorporated various positive changes. He would always strive to improve work methods, improve the environment, etc. He was always action oriented. His first biographer, Mr. Elting Morison, wrote that he ‘worked so hard to translate his beliefs into action.’
- Stay focused on your own goals, passions, and interests. Believe in only worthy causes.
- Be dedicated/disciplined about your goals and efforts. Teddy dedicated time each day towards his mind, body and spiritual goals.
- Work on efforts to enhance/ maintain balance in Mind, Body (health), and Spirit. He did not waste time and his daily to-do list included studying, reading, and physical activity (i.e., hunting, rowing, swimming, boxing, etc.). He would always take time to commune with nature.
- Stand up for yourself, friends and family. Honor your father and mother. He adored his parents and siblings.
- Do not waste time, money or food. For example, the above simple fraction/equation becomes a constant (balanced) when the numerator...say reduced income becomes balanced when the denominator shows reduced spending.
- Hard focused work...‘will always even the playing field’. He became highly focused on whatever endeavor he was involved with; (i.e., Teddy could spend hours focused/concentrated on the behavior of an ant colony and on the coloration, courtship, flight and song of birds. Later, wrote recognized papers on both issues). Again, he was very focused and used good time management techniques for both work and play.

Always finished what he started.

- Be self-disciplined, enthusiastic and enjoy yourself. Per Elting Morison, Teddy's first biographer who actually knew Mr. Roosevelt wrote that 'to all occasions, he brought the same excited delight with which he filled "the bully pulpit" of the presidency.'
- He lived in the moment, did not dwell on the past and tried to make the future brighter.
- Reduce Hurry, Worry, and Curry (food)
- Try to stay positive. One way is to increase your interactions with positive and creative people. He claimed he was always happy because of his family and friends/mentors.
- Be a problem solver, not a whiner. You better have a solution ready if you presented him with a problem. Complain less.
- Be aware of and alert to any problems. If found, make an effort to solve the problem.
- Maintain control over one's ego. Do not brag. Based on an article from the New York Sun on September 5, 1898, Teddy gave a moral precept to his Rough Riders about letting their heroic escapades during the Spanish American War go to their heads... 'Don't get gay and pose as heroes', he warned. 'Don't go back and rely on your laurels for they will wither.'
- Have faith in yourself. Believe you can. Teddy says; 'Believe you can and you are halfway there.' Be able to walk your talk.
- Talk less and listen more.
- Be courteous: he always dressed and acted in a gentlemanly way.
- Try to set a good example at all times. Be like Teddy's father who set the example for his children... He worked hard, provided meals for the homeless before going to church,

etc. Make the effort to be good, do good, and see good whenever you can.

- Take time to have fun. Teddy loved to dance.
- Common sense always over rides intelligence. So use it.
- It is okay to make mistakes. Teddy quoted...”The only person who never makes mistakes is a person who never does anything.” Per Dalai Lama: ‘when you realize you’ve made a mistake, take immediate steps to correct them.’
- Never give up. Teddy never backed down from a problem.
- Accept criticism and learn from it. Remember, it is just someone’s opinion.

Quote from Theodore Roosevelt, 1910

“It is not the critic who counts; not the person who points out how a strong person stumbles... The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly, who errs, who comes up short again and again... but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends themselves in a worthy cause, who at the very best knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if they fail, at least fails while daring greatly.”

- Again, believe in possibilities: Teddy said ‘if you believe, you are halfway there’.
- Think You Can...Then Take the First Step.

In conclusion, be like Teddy and realize that ‘life is a great adventure ... accepts it in such a spirit’. Now, make an effort to write your own storyBe Like You

Bully for You.