



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T DO YOUR BEST

"We need only to perform successfully each act of a single day to enjoy a successful day. If you will only do each day the things you know you should do and do them as well as you can, you can rest assured that you will be successful all the years of your life."

A former nuclear-submarine officer tells about an interview he had with the distinguished and formidable Admiral Hyman Rickover, head of the U.S. Submarine Service. Here's the story in his words:

"I had applied for the nuclear-submarine program, and Admiral Rickover, and we sat in a large room by ourselves for more than 2 hours. He let me choose any subject I wished to discuss. Very carefully, I chose those about which I knew the most at the time – current events, seamanship, music, literature, naval tactics, electronics, gunnery – and he began to ask me a series of questions of increasing difficulty. In each instance, he soon proved that I knew relatively little about the subject I had chosen.

"He always looked right into my eyes, and he never smiled. I was saturated with cold sweat. Finally, he asked me a question and I thought I could redeem myself. He said, 'How did you stand in your class at the Naval Academy?' Since I had completed my sophomore year at Georgia Tech before entering Annapolis as a plebe, I had done very well, and I swelled my chest with pride and answered, 'Sir, I stood 59th in a class of 820!' I sat back to wait for the congratulations – which never came. Instead, Admiral Rickover asked another question, 'Did you do your best?'

"I started to say, 'Yes, sir,' but I remembered who this was and recalled several of the many times at the academy when I could have learned more about our allies, our enemies, weapons, strategy and so forth. I was just human. I finally gulped and said, 'No, sir, I didn't always do my best.'

"He looked at me for a long time and then turned his chair around to end the interview. He asked me one final question, which I have never been able to forget – or to answer. He asked, 'Why not?' I sat there for a while, shaken, and then slowly left the room."

The former submarine officer who told that story was Jimmy Carter, former governor of Georgia and president of the United States.

Admiral Rickover made a lot of people nervous in his presence and as a result of his questions. But with regard to the question, "Did you do your best?" how would you

stack up these days? In the midst of world competition managed by bright, hardworking people, we must do our best – every day, all over again.

Our job, then, is to play out the role we have undertaken to the best of our ability. Success is nothing more or less than this. We become dull or bored or uneasy with ourselves only when we shirk what we know full well we should be doing. The happiest and most contented people are those who, each day, perform to the best of their ability.

A lifetime consists of years, months, weeks and days. The basic unit of a lifetime is a single day. And a single day in our careers is made up of certain acts that each of us must perform. We need only to perform successfully each act of a single day to enjoy a successful day. If you will only do each day the things you know you should do and do them as well as you can, you can rest assured that you will be successful all the years of your life.

You don't have to run around in circles trying to do a great many things. It is not the number of acts you perform but, rather, the efficacy with which you perform the ones you do that counts. Don't try to do tomorrow's or next week's work today. Just do today's as best you can, and leave tomorrow's for tomorrow. And remember that it's important not to slight a single act during the day, because sometimes we do not know how really important some little act may be.