

7 Lessons to Grow your Life – Cheryl Richardson

Here are the seven lessons that can change your life.

1. **Spend more time on the who rather than the what.** What you do will always be less important than who you become. Knowledge is great but it will never take you as far as your courage, your integrity, your reputation for someone who keeps his or her word, or your commitment to be of service to others in an important way. As you go through life, you will face challenges and obstacles. When you do, get in the habit of asking yourself the following three questions:

- How can I grow from this experience?
- What qualities of character am I being called to develop?
- How can I use this event to make me a better person?

2. **Follow your heart.** Pay far more attention to what you think than what everyone else thinks. The most important relationship you'll ever have is with you. When I think about the regrets I've heard from adults over the years, the biggest ones always have to do with listening to everyone else but themselves. Start now. Make your own rules and follow them. At the end of your life, the most important person you'll have to answer to is you.

3. **Develop a strong "maverick muscle."** Be willing to bend the rules, learn how to disappoint others gracefully, get comfortable with people not liking you, and always strive to be an original thinker. I have a little sign in my office that says: "No Guts, No Glory" and I use it to remind me to go against the grain whenever necessary. Allow yourself to be the unique spirit that you were meant to be. Trust me. Your willingness to rock the boat will set you apart from 95% of the people you meet throughout your life.

4. **Build your courage muscles.** Starting tomorrow, practice doing one small thing a day that frightens you. Learn to water ski, ask someone out on a date, go for that promotion you keep dreaming about, or learn to dance. Small acts of courage strengthen your ability to take even bigger leaps later on like deciding to write your own book or run for political office. If you really want to build your courage muscles, take a public speaking course. Twenty years ago I allowed someone to drag me to a Toastmaster's Meeting - an international speech club - and it changed the course of my life forever. Courage builds confidence and confident people rarely settle for less.

5. **Don't go to the hardware store for milk.** When you're excited about doing something new, make sure you turn to those people who will encourage you to take a chance - the ones who believe in you rather than those who tell you why an idea won't work. Surround yourself with positive people - the kind of people who challenge you to reach beyond your fear rather than play it safe. There will always be people telling you why an idea is risky, or why you can't do something. That advice is usually based on the mistakes they've made or the chances they didn't take because they were afraid. Always remember this: Someone's past does not equal your future. When faced with a naysayer, smile, say thank you, and turn around. Stick with positive people who believe in you. Remember, if you needed milk, you wouldn't go to the hardware store. (By the way, you're mom was right. You *do* become who you hang around with. Choose your friends wisely :).

6. **Live by this mantra: Where there's a will, there's a way.** Don't give up, especially when things get hard, and don't ever let anyone or anything put limits on you.

7. **Stay connected.** Your use of technology - email or texting, for example - will never replace the value of a live connection with someone. Every now and then pick up the phone and call a friend or visit a loved one rather than send an email or text message. Too often I've seen technology draw a wedge between people. When we come to the end of our lives, it's who we loved and who loved us that matters most. Make "in-person" time a priority.

Finally, at the time you were born you were given an amazing gift - a gift that most of us forget about, as we grow older. It's the power to design your own unique life. You are an artist. The canvas is your life. From this moment on, take ownership of this gift and use it wisely. If you do, your life will become an extraordinary work of art. Congratulations!

-Cheryl Richardson