



***Rudy*: How to Stay Inspired**

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Posted on hdbkpersonality.com August 5, 2005

If the movie *Rudy* doesn't inspire you to at least consider trying harder to reach your personal goals, you're probably a hopeless case. Notice that I didn't say you *are* hopeless if you failed to get up from in front of the TV to actively work on achieving your lifelong aspirations. Becoming inspired and acting on that inspiration are two different things. So how did Rudy do it? How did he stay inspired to the extent of continuing to work toward his goal of attending the University of Notre Dame and playing football there, despite not being much of a student and being "5-foot-nothin'" and weighing "a hundred and nothin'" and having "hardly a speck of athletic ability," as his friend Fortune, the head groundskeeper at Notre Dame stadium, described him?

The answer is suggested by the movie but unfortunately is not emphasized there. For an explicit statement of Daniel "Rudy" Ruettiger, Jr.'s secret to success at Notre Dame and then later on in getting the *Rudy* movie produced and finally in his career as a motivational speaker is contained in his self-help books, where he advises readers to "act as if you were absolutely certain that you will succeed." He doesn't say that you need to *be* absolutely sure of eventual success. That would be impossible for most people. What he is saying is that your doubts and fears should not influence your commitment or how you act everyday. The trick is to keep working persistently even when you have doubts and fears. Isn't that uncomfortable? Terribly, yes. And don't the doubts and fears skyrocket out of control when you fail? Temporarily, sure, but then you remind yourself of your dreams and suck it up and try harder. Being tough means doing exactly that.

We all have doubts and fears on the one side and hopes and dreams on the other. Right now, you pay attention to both, but at different times. When you aren't actively trying to fulfill your deepest aspirations, you often live in a world of dreams. And while in your dream world, you tend to pay scant attention to your doubts and fears. When your

dreaming inspires you to actually begin working toward your goals, you usually find that your mind quickly switches to focusing on your doubts and fears to the extent that your hopes and dreams often vanish from your thoughts. Your problem is that your life is out of synch. Is it any wonder that you are not getting anywhere? To succeed, Rudy found that you have to live in a middle place, where hopes, dreams, doubts, and fears all coexist and vie for your attention. His point is that you should act on your hopes and dreams while actively combating your doubts and fears. Taking Rudy's road to success means pushing your mind out of its comfort zone. This is essential because your mind's comfort zone is your do-nothing zone.

Take a moment to ask yourself why you continue to buy self-help paraphernalia. I think you will find that an important part of the answer lies in what these books and tapes and CDs and gizmos promise. In one way or another, they all promise to banish your doubts and fears, thus giving you an emotional high that will underpin the stamina and stick-to-it-iveness and resilience you need to eventually succeed. So you try them and stay with them for a while and maybe even see some improvement, but then you stop and revert to being the same old you, until you find something else to try, at which point the cycle repeats itself. What keeps you doing this is the thought that if you had stayed with one of these systems, you actually would have succeeded.

Theoretically that is true, but it is also true that the problem is not just you. The plain fact is that there are no gimmicks that can assure success. The only things that can are hard work and self-discipline and mind control to continually draw your attention away from your doubts and fears and toward your dreams. There is also nothing that will keep you constantly pumped with the self-confidence that will guarantee that you won't give up and quit. Advertising that promises that some book or tape or CD or contraption will do that for you is a deception. It is alluring because it tells you what you need to believe. You need to believe it because you can't see how you could possibly keep from quitting otherwise.

Why? Because you sense that you are ruled by your emotions. When you are feeling self-confident, you act self-confidently and energetically and you get things done. When you don't feel self-confident or energetic, you wait until you do. You wait, that is, until you are "in the mood," and you hope to find some self-help gadget that will keep you in that mood. Well — face it — you are never going to be in the right mood long enough to meet your life goals. Here's why.

Your brain is an information-processing machine that constantly looks to information stored in memory to help you do things. So when you want to do something it has done before, it checks into its memory banks and says, oh yes I know how to do that, and then confidently executes the task the way it successfully did it before. Its confidence is reflected in your feelings, so doing something you've done before becomes a no-brainer and you feel supremely confident while doing it. When, however, you set out to do something you have never done before, your brain again checks its memory, but this time finds nothing helpful there. So it immediately starts sending out doubt and fear messages, which make their way to your emotions. And since it doesn't feel self-confident, you don't, either.

Setting out to achieve lifelong goals means taking a chance with your life because it means continually asking yourself to do things you have never done before, thus opening yourself to the possibility of failure. Your brain knows this, and no amount of psyching up is going to fool it into thinking any differently. That, in a word, is why most self-help paraphernalia can't deliver on the promise of providing you with a constant emotional high while you reach for a new life. If you don't have a track record of success in memory for your mind to find, there is no amount of visualization or biofeedback or happy-talk inspiring stories or whatever that will make your mind believe that it is there. And without this track record in memory, there is no basis for self-confident emotions. So self-confidence will always be fleeting and it will always vanish just when you need it most.

What you need to do is free yourself from being a slave to your emotions. As Rudy said and did, you need to act even when emotional support is not there. Are you going to have to do this forever? No. As you continue working toward your goal, you will build a basis in memory for self-confidence. So gradually your initiatives will gain emotional support. Actually you will start feeling better about yourself very quickly. The problem is that it won't happen immediately. You are going to have to struggle at first, and while you are struggling it will seem as if the struggle will never end. Just remember, change is inevitable, because as you accumulate small successes, those successes are registered in memory, and the more of them there are, the more basis for self-confidence there will be. In a very real sense, you change by acting as if you were what you want to be until you are. Initially that will seem to you to be phony posturing, but that feeling is itself phony because it merely tells you what you already know, namely, that you haven't yet established a basis in memory for feeling differently.

If emotional support will be absent initially, how do you keep from quitting? You don't. You quit time and time again, especially at first. Remember, even Rudy quit the football team when it looked as if he might not get a chance to dress for the last game. You quit, but you just don't quit forever. You pick yourself up and go back at it. And gradually you quit less and go longer between bouts of quitting. You change by making yourself change, and that takes time. There is nothing that will make you change overnight. As long as there is a part of your old self around, that old self is going to affect your actions by leading you to give up. But as the old self goes away, the tendency to quit will, as well.

Is it possible that one time you quit, you will give up forever? Sure, people give up every day. You can, too. Giving up is so common that there is a familiar phrase for it: it is called "settling down." You can settle down with a lesser life. But if you do, you will have to exert mind control to keep your hopes and dreams out of your thoughts or resort to drugs or alcohol to accomplish the same thing. You cannot settle down and hold onto your dreams at the same time. So you can either exert mind control in the service of your dreams or exert it to purge your life of them. It's your choice. But just remember: You have only one life, and with each passing day you have a little less left. What you do with what remains depends on your commitment today.

What I've just told you is what almost no self-help guru will tell you, because, quite frankly, you, like most people, would rather not believe it. So don't believe it. Go out and buy every self-help book and tape and course and widget there is that will promise you an

easy and effortless path to achieving your life goals. Give all of them a good solid try. Take years. Take decades, if you need to. And when you've got all of that out of your system, come back to what you are reading today.

It is important to realize that if you are at the self-help stage of self-realization, you are on the bottom rung of the ladder to success, and are therefore much more inhibited than you will be eventually. You are perhaps so inhibited that you may even buy your self-help paraphernalia online, so you won't be seen doing it by a sales clerk. It's nothing to be ashamed of. You'll become more assertive the way Rudy did it, by acting on your dreams, by initially taking small steps. As soon as you do, of course, your doubts will be triggered big-time and you will become extremely impatient with yourself. You'll seem to be taking millimeter-size steps toward a goal that will seem miles away. All of this is natural and normal under your present circumstances and all of it must be combated. These feelings are trying to beat your dreams down, so you have to exert mind control to keep your dreams at the forefront. Again, your mind's comfort zone is your do-nothing zone, so you must continually drag your mind, kicking and screaming, out of its comfort zone in order to eventually succeed.

One way of combating the feeling that you are getting nowhere is by keeping a notebook, as I suggested in the Introduction. Once you begin actually taking steps toward your goal, you will start feeling that you are working on the goal all of the time and that the payback in progress you are achieving is very small. What is happening is that you're spending a lot of time fretting about working toward your goal and only a little time actually working, but you tend to count everything as work time. The point of keeping the notebook is to help you distinguish between the two, to provide you with indisputable evidence that you aren't getting very far because the time you actually spend working is very small. What you do is log in the time and date when you begin actually working toward your goal and log out when you stop. This will not only clearly demonstrate that you are not working very much, it will give you a near-term goal, a time to beat. So if previously you actually worked toward your goal only 30 minutes, you try to work 45 minutes or an hour or more the next time. Also keep weekly totals and work to beat each week's record. And don't forget to keep asking yourself the question that Rudy asked himself, namely, "Did I do everything that I can do?"

When you do this, I guarantee that you will start feeling better about yourself, because you will have a record of accomplishment to point to and build on and because you will demonstrate to yourself that you actually can take steps toward your goal, even when you have doubts and fears. One of the main reasons for your impatience is the fear that you will not be able to stay the course, because you never did in the past. By doing it, you build a record of accomplishment in memory so when your brain checks back it begins finding reasons for hope. That finding becomes reflected in your feelings, so you begin feeling more hopeful and more committed to reaching your goal.

There are things you can do to make your work easier. One is a defensive maneuver and the other is a set of offensive maneuvers. Our brain doesn't just check into the memory of past accomplishments in producing the way we feel about ourselves, it also checks on how other people seem to perceive us. It lifts our spirits a bit to have people around us who have faith in us and who think what we are doing is important, just as it drags us down to have people around us who constantly criticize us and belittle our dreams. The

defensive maneuver I talked about involves assessing your friends and relatives in relation to your life goals. Do they understand your life goals? Do they support your efforts to achieve such goals? Or do they ridicule you or try to discourage you — or would, if you told them about them? After you've sorted out your friends and relatives in this way, begin taking steps to maximize your time with your supportive friends and relatives and minimize your time with those who are unsupportive. It is essential that you protect yourself from naysayers to the extent that you can.

Rudy had only one supportive friend in his hometown of Joliet, Illinois. Everyone else, including all of his relatives, ridiculed Rudy and tried to discourage him from even thinking about going to Notre Dame and trying to play football there. So when his one true friend died in an accident in the steel mill, Rudy did a very wise and courageous thing — he protected him from the naysayers by leaving town, even though Notre Dame would not accept him as a student and he had no money to rent an apartment in South Bend. He probably could have made up the courses he needed to get into Notre Dame by attending Juliet Community College, but doing that would have meant experiencing negativity each day coming from his relatives and friends. So he cut himself off from all of that, and this made his task easier — not easy, to be sure, but definitely easier. He enrolled in St. Joseph Community College in South Bend, where he initially had no friends to support him, but at least he didn't have anyone to discourage him, either, and that was a big advantage over staying in Joliet.

Loosening old ties is a tough thing to do. When Rudy's father reminded him that he was a Ruettinger, that he was a part of that culture, something inside Rudy undoubtedly agreed with him, and it made him feel guilty to try to break free. His father played on that guilt in attempting to pull him back. You are going to see yourself in your negative friends and relatives, too. But that is the part of you that you need to leave behind, so as hard as it is, you need to limit your time with the negative people in your life. You don't need to stop loving them. You just need to recognize that being with them is bad for you right now, and that until you are more assertive, it is best that you minimize your time with them.

The offensive maneuver I talked about is really a three-pronged attack. First, begin cultivating new friendships with people who are supportive and, better yet, who are working toward similar goals. Seeking new friendships can be scary, because it means possibly exposing yourself to more negativity — and many of the new people you will expose your dreams to will react negatively. But there will also be people who will amaze you with their supportiveness. You just need to keep trying because those few who will amaze you are out there.

Finding people who will amaze you with their supportiveness means talking a lot about your dreams to other people. That is something good to do whether or not you are seeking new friends, because people can help you in unexpected ways, even they are skeptical about your dreams. As soon as Rudy got to Notre Dame, he went to see Father Cavanaugh, who was not very encouraging at first but who did lay out a course of action for Rudy to follow, which Rudy would not have had otherwise. Rudy also snuck into Notre Dame Stadium and made friends with Fortune, the groundskeeper there, and told him of his dreams. Again, Fortune was skeptical, but the friendship led unexpectedly to a job and a place to stay rent-free. He also met a teaching assistant at St. Joseph Community College who agreed to help him study, not because he believed in Rudy's

dream but because he hoped Rudy would help him meet girls. But the friendship was helpful and he did quickly become a supportive friend. Rudy even introduced himself to Coach Parseghian, who didn't know what to make of him but who probably remembered him when Rudy applied for the football team.

You should talk a lot about your dreams to people not only because they may help you in unexpected ways but also because doing that in itself commits you more firmly to your quest. As I indicated, one of your problems right now is your lack of assertiveness in pursuing your dream. One way to increase your assertiveness is to raise the stakes in the bet you are making on yourself. Keep your dream secret, and there's not much to be lost when you fail and quit. Tell the whole world of your dream and now the stakes are very high because quitting will mean explaining to every one you know why you did so. And back up your talk with actions. Openly live your new life in small ways. Rudy, for example, paraded his interest in Notre Dame by wearing the Notre Dame jacket his friend bought him everywhere he went in Joliet and in the steel mill and while going to St. Joseph Community College. You need to begin wearing your dreams on your sleeve, instead of keeping them secret.

And don't forget prayer. Prayer is psychologically beneficial even if you don't believe in it, even if you think that those who pray are merely talking to themselves. Prayer can make God's presence real in your life as yet another supportive friend, if you believe, but if you don't, use prayer time to refocus yourself on your goals. Talk to yourself before going to sleep. Review your day and anticipate and prepare for the challenges you will face in the day to come.

As I said, you will meet many people who will react negatively to talk of your dreams. It is important to be clear about why they react that way. It is understandable that someone who has known you for years might be skeptical. They don't have any memories of you doing great things in the past, so they have no reason to think you would do great things in the future. The same goes for your relatives. But what of the strangers you encounter who don't know you — why are they often so negative? And what of your friends and relatives who are more than skeptical, who are negative even to the point of being openly hostile?

It is clear that Rudy and his older brother were competing for his father's affection and that this competition provided at least some of the reason why his older brother was hostile to him, because he saw talk of Notre Dame as an attempt to gain an advantage with their father. But what of Rudy's father who also seemed more negative than can be described as being merely skeptical? Interestingly the answer is provided in the movie in the scene in which Rudy is at the bus station and about to leave for Notre Dame. His father comes to see him off, and starts feeding him the "you're a Ruettiger" pitch. He tells him that going to Notre Dame and being on the football team there are things that other kinds of people do, not Ruettigers. He tells him that you need to be rich and smart to do those things, and that he shouldn't reach so high because he can have an okay life as his family always has by taking laborer-type jobs and living securely if not particularly well in the lower middle class way.

Seeing that he is getting nowhere, he for the first time tells Rudy a story about his own father, who saved enough money to bring his family to America from someplace in

Europe and who made a good life for himself and his family by working in the stockyards in Chicago. His father always had the dream of owning a farm, and he acted on that dream by using every last cent to buy a couple hundred cows and a piece of land in the country. Within a few months, all of the cows had died of some disease, leaving his father without a source of income. And since it was the Depression, he couldn't sell the land and he couldn't find a job. So one day he just abandoned the family. The point of the story was that it is dangerous to follow your dreams and that, if you do so, you will not only hurt yourself but those you love, too.

It is clear that Rudy's father took the lesson he preached to heart in his own life. He stopped pursuing his own dreams early on and started taking the safe course instead of the most desirable one. His own compromised approach to life was what he preached to his kids, and that was what everyone except Rudy came to believe. To understand his father's vehemence in defending his own way of life, all you need to do is to ask yourself what would happen if Rudy were to succeed. If Rudy succeeded, if a person like him (a Ruettiger) succeeded in reaching high, it would open old wounds in his father, because it would force him to face the fact that he possibly sold his own life short.

There are plenty of people around who have sold their own lives short and who are now using either drugs or drink or overwork or something to keep from recognizing that fact. So along you come and start talking about dreams and about living the best life possible — is it really surprising that they are not grateful to have you around, that they spew invective in your direction? It is painful to settle down with an undesirable life and more painful yet to be reminded of that. When you come along with your dreams, you remind them of who they once were and how far from that person they have become. Being not ready to take chances with their lives any longer, they react with open hostility to you. But you shouldn't take it personally, because it is more of an expression of who they are than who they think you are. They would rather drag you down with them than risk being inspired by you to reach higher.

But these people who have settled down with a lesser life are not the only kind of person out there. There also are people like Rudy's friend at the steel mill who bought him the Notre Dame jacket, people who may not be pursuing their dreams at the moment but who at least are open to the possibility of doing so and who are inspired by people like Rudy and you. The movie doesn't tell us directly about any effect that Rudy's success had on his father but it does end with a very interesting fact, that Rudy's five younger brothers all received a college education. It would seem that Rudy's success did inspire his father, if not to do anything for himself, at least to see to it that his younger sons had a chance for a better life.