

Eight Pillars of Prosperity

Pillar Four System



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This "Pillar" is taken from the Eight Pillars of Prosperity by James Allen. The fourth pillar - System - is foundational to most of my coaching, products, and programs. I share it here with the hope that you'll see the value that having a system for everything you do is a key to your success. Any comment that I make from this point on will be highlighted to make it easy to identify.

System is that principle of order by which confusion is rendered impossible. In the natural and universal order everything is in its place, so that the vast universe runs more perfectly than the most perfect machine. Disorder in space would mean the destruction of the universe; and disorder in a man's affairs destroys his work and his prosperity.

All complex organizations are built up by system. No business or society can develop into large dimensions apart from system, and this principle is preeminently the instrument of the merchant, the business man, and the organizer of institutions.

My speciality has always been to build a system for achievement. Complexity broken down to its simplest components and put into a reproducible fashion is my definition of a system. Remember - Simple Makes Awesome Easy! The value of this cannot be underestimated.

I'm not that systematic manager in the next paragraph, but the identifier and creator of those systems.

There are many departments in which a disorderly man may succeed - although attention to order would increase his success but he will not succeed in business unless he can place the business entirely in the hands of a systematic manager, who will thereby remedy his own defect.

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All large business concerns have been evolved along definitely drawn systematic lines, any violation of which would be disastrous to the efficiency and welfare of the business. Complex business or other organizations are built up like complex bodies in nature, by scrupulous attention to details. The disorderly man thinks he can be careless about every thing but the main end, but by ignoring the means he frustrates the end. By the disarrangement of details, organisms perish, and by the careless neglect of details, the growth of any work or concern is prevented.

Disorderly people waste an enormous amount of time and energy. The time frittered away in hunting for things is sufficient, were it conserved by order, to enable them to achieve any success, for slovenly people never have a place for anything, and have to hunt, frequently for a long time, for any article which they require. In the irritation, bad humor, and chagrin which this daily hunting for things brings about, as much energy is dissipated as would be required to build up a big business, or scale the highest heights of achievement in any direction.

Orderly people conserve both their time and energy. They never lose anything, and therefore never have to find anything. Everything is in its place, and the hand can be at once placed upon it, though it is in the dark. They can well afford to be cool and deliberate and so use their mental energies in something more profitable than irritation, bad temper and accusing others for their own lack of order.

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There is a kind of genius in system which can perform apparent wonders with ease. A systematic man can get through so great a quantity of work in such a short time, and with such freedom from such exhaustion, as to appear almost miraculous. He scales the heights of success while his slovenly competitor is wallowing hopelessly in the bogs of confusion. His strict observance of the law of order enables him to reach his ends, swiftly and smoothly, without friction or loss of time.

The demands of system, in all departments of the business world, are as rigid and exacting as the holy vows of a saint, and cannot be violated in the smallest particular but at the risk of one's financial prospects. In the financial world, the law of order is an iron necessity, and he who faultlessly observes it, saves time, temper, and money.

Every enduring achievement in human society rests upon a basis of system; so true is this, that were system withdrawn, progress would cease. Think, for instance, of the vast achievements of literature the works of classic authors and of great geniuses; the great poems, the innumerable prose works, the monumental histories, the soul - stirring orations; think also the social intercourse of human society, of its religions, its legal statutes, and its vast fund of book knowledge think of all these wonderful resources and achievements of language, and then reflect that they all depend for their origin, growth, and continuance on the systematic arrangements of twenty six letters, an arrangement having inexhaustible and illimitable results by the fact of its rigid limitation within certain fixed rules.

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Again; all the wonderful achievements of mathematics have come from the systematic arrangement of ten figures; while the most complex piece of machinery, with its thousands of parts working together smoothly and almost noiselessly to the achievement of the end for which it was designed, was brought forth by the systematic observance of a few mechanical laws.

Herein we see how system simplifies that which is complex: how it makes easy that which was difficult; how it relates an infinite variety of details of the one central law or order, and so enables them to be dealt with and accounted for with perfect regularity, and with an entire absence of confusion.

The scientist names and classifies the myriad details of the universe, from the microscopic rotifer to the telescopic star, by his observance of the principle of system, so that out of many millions of objects, reference can be made to any one object in, at most, a few minutes. It's this faculty of speedy references and swift dispatch which is of such overwhelming importance in every department of knowledge and industry, and the amount of time and labor thus saved to humanity is so vast as to be incompatible. We speak of religious, political, and business systems; and so on, indicating that all things in human society are welded together by the adhesive qualities of order.

The time that it takes to identify and create a system for success is never wasted. It does however take time. But it's an investment for the future. Permanent prosperity, which is the subject of the Eight Pillars book, requires a serious look into the future. By focusing on the long term you open up pathways for deep thought that results in solutions before hidden.

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System is, indeed, one of the great fundamental principles in progress, and in the binding together, in one complete whole, of the world's millions of human beings while they are at the same time each striving for a place and are competing with one another in opposing aims and interest.

We see here how system is allied with greatness, for the many separate units whose minds are untrained to the discipline of system, are kept in their places by the organizing power of the comparatively few who perceive the urgent, the inescapable, necessity for the establishment of fixed and inviolable rules, whether in business, law, religion, science, or politics in fact, in every sphere of human activity for immediately two human beings meet together, they need some common ground of understanding for the avoidance of confusion; in a word, some system to regulate their actions.

Life is too short for confusion; and knowledge grows and progress proceeds along avenues of system which prevent retardation and retrogression, so that he who systematizes his knowledge or business, simplifies and enhances it for his successor, enabling him to begin, with a free mind, where he left off.

This is why the investment of time to identify and create a system is essential. Life is too short. It is also the primary reason many fail to do so.

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Every large business has its system which renders its vast machinery workable, enabling it to run like a well balanced and well oiled machine. A remarkable business man, a friend of mine, once told me that he could have his huge business for twelve months, and it would run on without hitch till his return; and he does occasionally leave it for several months, while traveling, and on his return, every man, boy and girl; every tool, book, and machine; every detail down to the smallest, is in its place doing its work as when he left; and no trouble, no difficulty, no confusion has arisen.

There can be no marked success part from a love of regularity and discipline, and the avoidance of friction, along with the restfulness and efficiency of mind which spring from such regularity. People who abhor discipline, whose minds are ungoverned and anarchic, and who are careless and irregular in their thinking, their habits and the management of their affairs, cannot be highly successful and prosperous, and they fill their lives with numerous worries, troubles, difficulties, and petty annoyances, all of which would disappear under a proper regulation of their lives.

Highly successful entrepreneurs are in love with the process far more than the product. The products can be interchangeable. They unimportant as far as the process is concerned. Mary Kay Ash said that she created the perfect system for women to become independent and successful, then starting looking for a product to fit into the system. This is backward to most would be entrepreneurs. BUT it underscores the value of the process.

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An unsystematic mind is an untrained mind and it can no more cope with well disciplined minds in the race of life than an untrained athlete can successfully complete with a carefully trained competitor in athletic competitor in athletic races. The ill disciplined mind, that thinks anything will do, rapidly falls behind the well disciplined minds who are convinced that only the best will do in the strenuous race for the prizes of life, whether they are material, mental, or moral prizes. The man who, when he comes to do his work, is unable to find his tools, or to balance his figures, or to find the key of his desk, or the key to his thoughtless, will be struggling in his self made toils while his methodical neighbor will be freely and joyfully scaling the invigorating heights of successful achievement.

The business man whose method is slovenly, or cumbersome, or behind the most recent developments of skilled minds, should only blame himself as his prospects are decadent, and should wake up to the necessity for more highly specialized and effective methods in his concern. He should seize upon every thing - every invention and idea - that will enable him to economize time and labor, and aid him in thoroughness, deliberation and dispatch.

System is the law by which everything - every organism, business, character, nation, and empire is built. By adding cell to cell, department to department, thought to thought, law to law, and colony to colony in orderly sequence and classification, all things, concerns and institutions grow in magnitude, and evolve to completeness. The man, who is continually improving his methods, is gaining in building power; it therefore behooves the business man to be resourceful and inventive in the improvement of his methods, for the builders - whether of cathedrals or characters, business or religions - are the strong ones of the earth, and the protectors and pioneers of humanity.

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The systematic builder is a creator and preserver, while the man of disorder demolishes and destroys, and no limit can be set to the growth of a man's powers, the completeness of his character, the influence of his organization, or the extent of his business, if he but preserve intact the discipline of order, and have every detail in its place, keep every department to its special task, and tabulate and classify with such efficiency and perfection as to enable him at any moment to bring under examination or into requisition to the remotest detail in connection with his special work.

A system contains these four ingredients:

- Readiness
- Accuracy
- Utility
- Comprehensiveness

Readiness is aliveness. It is that spirit of alertness by which a situation is immediately grasped and dealt with. The observance of system fosters and develops this spirit. The successful General must have the power of readily meeting any new and unlooked for move on the part of the enemy; so every business man must have the readiness to deal with any unexpected development affecting his line of trade; and so also must the man of thought be able to deal with the details of any new problems which may arise.

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Dilatoriness is a vice that is fatal to prosperity, for it leads to incapability and stupidity. The men of ready hands, ready hearts, and ready brains, who know what they are doing, and do it methodically, skillfully, and with smooth yet consummate despatch are the men who need to think little of prosperity as an end, for it comes to them whether they seek it or not; success runs after them, and knocks at their door; and they unconsciously command it by the superb excellence of their faculties and methods.

Accuracy is of supreme importance in all commercial concerns and enterprises, but there can be no accuracy apart from system, and a system which is more or less imperfect will involve its originator in mistakes more or less disastrous until he improves it.

Inaccuracy is one of the commonest failings, because accuracy is closely allied to self-discipline, and self-discipline, along with that glad subjection to external discipline which it involves, is an indication of high moral culture to which the majority have not yet attained.

If the inaccurate man will not willingly subject himself to the discipline of his employer or instructor, but thinks he knows better, his failing can never be remedied, and he will thereby bind himself down to an inferior position, if in the business world; or to imperfect knowledge, if in the world of thought.

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The prevalence of the vice of inaccuracy (and in view of its disastrous effect it must be regarded as a vice, though perhaps one of the lesser vices) is patent to every observer in the way in which the majority of people relate a circumstance or repeat a simple statement of fact. It is nearly always made untrue by more or less marked inaccuracies. Few people, perhaps (not reckoning those who deliberately lie), have trained themselves to be accurate in what they say, or are so careful as to admit and state their liability to error, and from this common form of inaccuracy many untruths and misunderstandings arise.

More people take pains to be accurate in what they do than in what they say, but even here inaccuracy is very common, rendering many inefficient and incompetent, and unfitting them for any strenuous and well sustained endeavor. The man who habitually uses up a portion of his own or his employer's time in trying to correct his errors, or for the correction of whose mistakes another has to be employed, is not the man to maintain any position in the work a day world; much less to reach a place among the ranks of the prosperous.

There never yet lived a man who did not make some mistakes on his way to his particular success, but he is the capable and right minded man who perceives his mistakes and quickly remedies them, and who is glad when they are pointed out to him. It is habitual and persistent; inaccuracy which is a vice; and he is the incapable and wrong minded man who will not see or admit his mistakes, and who takes offence when they are pointed out to him.

The progressive man learns by his own mistakes as well as by the mistakes of others. He is always ready to test good advice by practice, and aims at greater and ever greater accuracy in his methods, which means higher and higher perfection, for accuracy is perfect, and the measure of a man's accuracy will be the measure of his uniqueness and perfection.

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Utility or usefulness is the direct result of method in one's work. Labor arrives at fruitful and profitable ends when it is systematically pursued. If the gardener is to gather in the best produce, he must not only sow and plant, but he must sow and plant at the right time; and if any work is to be fruitful in results, it must be done seasonably, and the time for doing a thing must not be allowed to pass by.

Utility considers the practical end; and employs the best means to reach that end. It avoids side issues, dispenses with theories, and retains its hold only on those things which can appropriate to good uses in the economy of life.

Unpractical people burden their minds with useless and unverifiable theories, and court failure by entertaining speculations which, by their very nature, cannot be applied in practice. The man whose powers are shown in what he does, and not in mere talking or arguing, avoids metaphysical quibbling and quandaries, and applies himself to the accomplishment of some good and useful end.

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That which cannot be reduced to practice should not be allowed to hamper the mind. It should be thrown aside, abandoned, and ignored. A man recently told me that if his theory should be proved to have no useful end, he should still retain his hold upon it as a beautiful theory. If a man chooses to cling to so-called "beautiful" theories which are proved to have no use in life, and no substantial basis of reality, he must not be surprised if he fails in his worldly undertakings, for he is an unpractical man.

Did you catch that? *"That which cannot be reduced to practice should not be allowed to hamper the mind."* Pragmatism is very sensible. Only allowing your mind to focus on the things that move your agenda forward frees up space and allows focus.

When the powers of the mind are diverted from speculative theorizing to practical doing, whether in material or moral directions, skill, power, knowledge, and prosperity increase. A man's prosperity is measured by his usefulness to the community, and a man is useful in accordance with that he does, and not because of the theories which he entertains.

The carpenter fashions a chair; the builder erects a house; the mechanic produces a machine; and the wise man moulds a perfect character. Not the schismatic, the theorists and the controversialists, but the workers, the makers, and the doers are the salt of the earth.

Let a man turn away from the mirages of intellectual speculation, and begin to do something, and to do it with all his might and he will thereby gain a special knowledge, wield a special power, and reach his own unique position and prosperity among his fellows.

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Comprehensiveness is that quality of mind which enables a man to deal with a large number of related details, to grasp them in their entirety, along with the single principle which governs them and binds them together. It is a masterly quality, giving organizing and governing power, and is developed by systematic attention to details. The successful merchant holds in his mind, as it were, all the details of his business, and regulates them by a system adapted to his particular form of trade.

The inventor has in his mind all the details of his machine, along with their relation to a central mechanical principle, and so perfects his invention. The author of a great poem or story relates all his characters and incidents to a central plot, and so produces a composite and enduring literary work. Comprehensiveness is analytic and synthetic capacity combined in the same individual. A capacious and well ordered mind, which holds within its silent depths an army of details in their proper arrangement and true working order, is the mind that is near to genius, even if it has not already arrived.

Every man cannot be a genius nor does he need to be, but he can be gradually evolving his mental capacity by careful attention to system in his thoughts and business, and as his intellect depends and broadens his powers will be intensified and his prosperity accentuated.

Every man can follow a genius system of thought. Albert Einstein said, "It's not that I'm gifted or intelligent. I just stick with problems longer."

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