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Home-Made Rules for Success

Elmer L. Towns

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T H I N K I N G Y O U R W A Y
T O T H E T O P

D R . E L M E R T O W N S

Home-Made Rules for Success

Thinking Your Way to the Top

By
Elmer Towns

Presented to
Destiny Image
2016

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11/17 16 15 14

Table of Contents

Home-Made Rules for Success

By
Elmer Towns

Chapter One: *Home-Made Rules for Success*

Chapter Two: *Home-Made Rules for Successful Thinking*

Chapter Three: *Home-Made Rules to Get Things Done*

Chapter Four: *Home-Made Rules to Influence Others*

Foreword

Home-Made Rules for Success

By: Elmer Towns

“Home-made biscuits, get ‘em while they are hot.” What does the phrase “home-made” mean? What about he’s wearing a home-made shirt. Or, the menu announces home-made soup. You know it doesn’t mean the cook made the vegetables, or the seamstress made the cloth, or the baker made the flour.

The downhome phrase, “home-made” means, “you assembled” or “you put it together.” It suggests that professionals didn’t do it, nor was it machine made, nor was it assembled in a factory. Home-made means made at home.

Home-made means you did it. When you advertise something homemade, it is something you did. You mixed the flour and called it biscuits. You sewed the shirt or you added vegetables in a pot and called it soup.

Home-Made Rules for Success

So, I put together some home-made rules for successful living. I have gotten a college education, all the way to a doctor’s degree. But as a kid on my grandfather’s farm in Sardinia, South Carolina, I began thinking how things would be in life . . . and family . . . and eternity. Delivering newspapers in Savannah, Georgia, I found some success following a few rules. Both on the farm and in educational institutions I began thinking how things would be in life. Therefore, you’ll find interesting my home-made rules for success.

Home-Made Rules for Successful Thinking

Not everyone has the same IQ, nor do they have the same educational advantages in their childhood or early schooling. Everyone thinks differently because they all were raised differently. But all can think better, and I believe all can think their way to a more successful life. Therefore, whatever your background or experience, this book *Home-made Rules for Successful Thinking* can improve your life.

Home-Made Rules to Get Work Done

Some people can get twice the work done in the same time; others only complete half their task. Why? Are they smarter or better motivated, or is it experience? No! Some have learned to just get more done than others; you can learn these lessons also. When I entered seminary I read a book on how to get more done in less time. I put a few of its suggestions into practice. Then I took a speed reading course at a university. I still benefit from its suggestions. Then I asked people who are successful how they get so much done. Some of their suggestions are found in these pages. But when I put them all together, it comes out *Home-Made Rules to Get Work Done*.

Home-Made Rules to Influence Others

I have been a pastor, a president of a small college and dean of a large one. Along the way I have had to work for a boss and be a boss. I have had people work for me when I wasn't the big boss, I worked for someone else and had to motivate people to get the work done. Along the way I've developed some home-made rules to motivate others to work and to work willingly and joyfully. These rules didn't come out of a book, but I've learned which principles will motivate them, and which don't. Some of these rules might work for you.

Conclusion

This booklet is not about Christian things that will lead to success in your life. It's not about prayer, but answers to prayer will lead to success. It's not about Bible reading, but God will give you a passion for success as you read His Word. It's not about Christians striving to do their best, or about "Christ in you" to motivate you to success. These are all necessary. I

assumed you have these spiritual “action-starters.” This booklet is about ideas that you can learn that will improve everything you do.

Homemade Rules for Success

By: Elmer Towns

1. **Hang up your clothes.** Part of growing up is learning to take complete control of your life and don't give that control to anyone else. Your mother told you to pick up your clothes, perhaps your school teacher told you to hang up your coat, and a college roommate said don't leave your stuff about. While someone else had control of your life, you should have been learning what you had to do. In this life, you have to pick up your own clothes.

To be successful in life, realize that God has given you the privilege of taking control of your mind – including your plans and decisions. If you give the control of your mind to someone else, they have control of your life.

Act on God's privilege, take control of your life and pick up your clothes, i.e., don't drop them on the floor. Don't leave messes for someone else to clean up. Take care of all of the messes you make in life. And whether you like it or not, you will end up cleaning up a lot of other people's messes. People who take control of themselves can do that for themselves and others. This rule won't make you a success, but it will point you in the right way.

2. **Close the door behind.** Sometimes people will yell at you, "Were you born in a barn?"

When you close a door, you shut off that which is behind. Closing the door means you close off that which is on the other side of the door. You must not let your past failures, your unpleasant experiences, and negative experiences control your future.

When you drag your negative experiences from yesterday into today, what does that make today? Another negative day. When you constantly relive your failures that happened yesterday, you have another day of failure. So what must you do, close the door on failures.

But even when you close the door you may remember what happened on the other side of the door. So learn from yesterday so you don't repeat

your failures. You must also stand on top of your failures to reach higher. After all, you have closed that door on your failures, so don't go back there! Don't fail again! Don't relive your failures in this new day. Live your future.

3. **Don't eat things that made you sick in the past.** One of the basic lessons in life is learning what not to do. This is one of the basic fundamental laws of nature. Yes . . . certain foods will make you sick . . . certain drinks like alcohol will leave you with a hangover and maybe wreck your car going home.

Every baseball player has struck out at the plate. He has heard the condemning words, "Strike three!" Once you strike out does not mean life is over. The game may be over, but you'll play it again. Tomorrow, you can learn how to hit the ball safely to the outfield or over the fence. But if you refuse to learn from yesterday, all you will do is strike out again tomorrow. Don't go around listening for someone to yell again, "Strike three!"

Learn from everything you do wrong; next time do it right.

I was a carpenter's helper in a shipyard in the summer of 1951, and my foreman was a man called "T". I don't know his real name, but every time I did something wrong, he said, "Nothing wrong with failure" Then he went on to explain, "Learn three things from every failure. First, why you did it wrong, and second, how to do it right the next time." Then "T" always emphasized this most important lesson: "Learn to never do it again."

4. **Always do a little extra to make sure you do enough.** Some people talk about going the extra mile. Why? Because they want to help others. Do the same thing so you make a contribution in life. Make it a habit to always do more than what is required of you. But always make sure you do enough by doing a little extra. Oh, there's another reason; you do a little extra because that's your character.

Years ago I instructed one of my granddaughters the day before her first job. "Show up 15 minutes early and start cleaning up the place, grab a broom, or a cleaning cloth or anything just to make sure the place you are going to work is clean, healthy and presentable. That will impress your boss." Then I said to her, "When it is quitting time, work an extra 15 minutes, and ask the boss what else you can do before you leave for the day. Do more than expected."

Why? Because when the boss needs someone to do extra jobs, or promotion, or a bonus; he will think first of you. Producers get ahead in life.

5. **Follow the lead car that knows where to go.** In life select a person who is leading the pack and follow him. Or, to put it another way, learn from pace makers, and do it the way they do it.

When I became a young pastor, I had to conduct three or four funerals. I was so green I didn't know where the cemetery was located. I was given a simple instruction, "follow the hearse, and before long you will know the way to every cemetery in town."

If you want to be successful, follow a successful person. He or she will lead you to success. They not only will show you what success looks like, they will show you how to do it, when to do it, and where to do it. But more than that, when you do it the way they have done it, then you will know why they are successful and then maybe you will be successful.

Remember, the lead dog will eventually get tired, and you can take over and lead the way.

YOUR FUTURE

Remember, the Creator gave Adam money, happiness, all of the other things for which people work. The Creator gave Adam the power to control his own life. He was told to "keep" the garden. Then he was told to name the animals. What did God give him? "God gave him control over his rational mind." No one else was given this control, and no one could dictate to Adam what to do, how to think or give direction in his life. God gave control to Adam.

Sin is what Adam did to himself. When he believed the snake, Adam let the snake's suggestions become a part of his thinking, and eventually the snake controlled Adam's life and destiny.

What can you learn from Adam's fall? The attitude of your mind shapes every aspect of your life, your spiritual, mental, emotional and financial wellbeing. Don't let any "snake" tell you how to think!!

So control your mind so you'll control what you become in life. Remember the story of the man who was a hobo riding the rails of the trains. He jumped in a refrigerator car and the door slammed shut. He couldn't get out. All he could find was a piece of chalk, and he spent the

night writing out a history of his life for those who would find his body. The next morning they found him dead and read the poorly written history of his life. They were amazed, because the refrigerator car was not activated, and it never got colder than 45 degrees in the car all night. He died because he planned to die. How are you planning to live your life?

Home-Made Rules for Successful Thinking

By: Elmer Towns

1. **Look at what you think.** Take a life-changing exercise; write down everything that comes to your mind in the next five minutes. Don't show it to anyone, you might embarrass yourself, and they might think less of you. Make a list of good thoughts, bad thoughts; all thoughts. Why did you do this? Because what you think is a reflection of who you are.

Remember the word *museum* comes from "to muse" which is a place to think. You go to a museum to think about the past. What about the word *amusement*? The prefix makes it a place not to think. When you seek amusement you give up the control of what you think. You let the amusement guide your thinking. When you go to the movies, attend a ballgame, or a concert, you think about what's before you. Yes, you think, but you are guided or controlled by the amusement. You don't think but someone or something else is thinking for you. When you attend an amusement you surrender to the moment, to just breathe. You may be thinking, but someone or something else is telling you what to think. They are controlling your mind. When something controls your thinking, it controls your future.

2. **Make a list of things you must do.** To change your future, make a list of the things you have to do. Why? Because when you re-arrange your thinking, you re-arrange your future. Therefore write your list of what you should do, or probably want to do. Make sure the list is complete, include all the things you want to do, and those things you have to do; even things you hate doing. Make the list as long as you can.

Do you usually procrastinate or rationalize or wait to do some things and quickly do others? Face your procrastination! Writing what you must do is the first step towards future action. The next step is putting a time limit on the things you have to do (see step 3). Now your future is focused in your mind. You may not do it, but focus your mind on what you must do and that is moving toward action.

3. **Put in order of priority on your list, first, second and so on.** Some things you can put off to the distant future, some things are for tomorrow, some scream NOW!

There are two ways to think about your future. First, you can think like a woman who is going shopping with a purpose and time constraints. She runs to the store to buy vanilla extract and eggs to finish baking a cake. So what does that picture tell you? Her thinking is controlling her future. When you write down things you need to do, you are living with purpose and completion. When you put limits on your actions and time, you begin to control your future.

The second way to think is seen by a woman who likes to shop. She doesn't plan to get anything, she wants to see the bargains, the new styles, and try on a few things that might fit. Her thinking may be lazy . . . escapism . . . or just plain dreaming. She may buy something, or she may not. Her emotions control her thinking and actions.

The apostle Paul said, "This one thing I do." Follow his example. Prioritize your list to control your destiny!

4. **Think with actions and pictures, not words or sentences.** You don't think in abstract words, just as you don't dream in outlines, on sentences, unless it represents a story. You think and dream in pictures and it is usually an action picture or event. So think about what you will do in the future about each thing on your list, i.e., how you will begin a project and what it will look like when you finish. Draw a picture in your mind of the things you plan to do.

Your brain has two sides, one side uses pictures, and the other uses abstract words. The picture side is action oriented, it gets things done. The abstract side will rationalize, speculate, or deliberate. It gives pleasure or enjoyment to life. Everyone needs that at certain times. But thinking that leads to success focuses on action and accomplishments.

One day Guttenberg got a picture in his mind of an object called a book. Technically it was called a codex; numbered pages glued to a spine, and it had a cover. He thought, "I can make that . . . one page at a time." And he changed the printing industry, and the world.

5. **Think stories.** When you think of a task, put actions to your thought. See yourself beginning, solving problems in your project, and moving to a conclusion. So tell yourself your story to yourself. It is the door to

successful thinking. Tell what you will be doing as you picture all the items on your list. Life is a story so turn your thinking into a story. Then follow the story line to its conclusion. Putting yourself into your story is the final step of thinking. Now you are ready for to move to success.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches, “Bring every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Notice it doesn’t say think about obeying Christ, or plan to obey Christ. It says “obedience” which means control your mind so you focus on Christ. Did you see that word *control*? If you control your mind, you control your future.

When you sit to dream about a vacation, the vacation controls your mind. You picture where you are going, the cost, and all the experiences. But most of all you picture yourself having fun. You bring your thoughts into obedience of your vacation. Why is it that you think more about your vacation than you do about the next ten years of your life? Make your list now!

Home-Made Rules to Get Things Done

By: Elmer Towns

Why is that some people get a lot done, but others who seem to work just as hard only get half as much done. How is that some people sit at their desk and dream . . . procrastinate . . . and can't get started. At the same time others plow through their work. The answer is not to work harder, but work smarter.

1. **Organize your desk to organize your work.** At the beginning of my ministry I learned to organize my work place, i.e., my desk at home, and later my desk at work. Work to be done comes in on the right, work completed on the left. So when I work I move projects from right to left. But a neat desk is not the answer. Make sure that you know where extra pens, stapler, scotch tape, and other tools that you need are to get your work done. To me that also means scissors, ruler, and for me highlighters and glasses. I am forever leaving my glasses in the wrong place so I have 3-4 extra pairs on my desk at the office and home.
2. **Stop handling paper twice.** How many times have you picked up a letter or interoffice memo only to looked at it then put it down? You plan to do something about it, or you need to think about it, or you need to talk to someone about it. Every time you pick up that paper, you eat up time.

Get in the habit of handling each piece of paper once. If you get into the habit of efficiently handling things on your desk, you'll handle your work a lot easier. So always try to do something once with every new task (piece of paper) by making a decision, dictating a letter, making a phone call, or putting it on your list to do.

If you handle a sheet of paper, then put it back in the right pile to be looked at again, you probably will do it again . . . and again . . . and again . . . and again.

3. **Live by a list.** When you make a list of work to be done, it does three things for you. First, it crystalizes in your mind what you need to do, how much work needs to be done, and what it is going to take to get it

done. Second, list-making moves you from thinking to action; you have done something constructive about the tasks you have to do. Third, you begin to solve the problem (knowing what you must do) when you write the list, you begin thinking about it and begin solving it even before you work on it. When I was a freshman in seminary I read a book on getting more done. It told me about the “in” box and the “out” box on my desk. It told me to keep work to be done on the right side of your desk and completed projects on the left side of your desk. Every time you look up from your work and see two piles, you are encouraged by what you have completed, yet motivated by what you still have to do.

4. **Let yesterday’s list flow into today’s list.** I cross off items when they get done, and those that were not completed yesterday, I add them to my list today. Usually they go at the top of the list.

Another thing about lists, you get the larger picture of all the tasks you have to do. That keeps you from being overwhelmed by so many things to do. You get overwhelmed or despondent when you don’t know how to get started and what to do first. Get your work kick-started by making a list. Then you know the size of your jobs, as well as how many jobs to get done.

And every time you make a new list, going through the routine of scratching off old items gives you get a sense of accomplishment. The very fact that you are moving through your work will motivate you towards the goal. People work hardest when they are goal oriented, but when you are working in a middle of a project and cannot see the beginning from the end; it is then that you get discouraged and want to give up, and get so frustrated you don’t know what to do. So when you don’t know what to do, make a list.

5. **Work by the clock.** I don’t mean watch the clock as you work, there are a lot of people who are “clock watchers” because they are counting the minutes before quitting time. That’s not what I mean.

As an illustration, I read by the clock. I know I can read around 100 pages in an hour, so when I have a 220-page book to read, I give myself a little over two hours to get it done. I stop several times while reading the book, just to clock myself to see if I am keeping on schedule to finish on time. What does that do? It kicks my mind into “action” rather than being a “passive reader.”

Most of us read faster when the topic is exciting and we want to learn more; but sometimes reading is boring and laborious. It is then that I have to read by the clock. Two things happen to me when I read by the clock. First I pace myself into my reading schedule, but second when I finish on time, I have a pride of completion. I know if I finish my last task on time, I can do the next one the same way.

6. **Make work fun.** Most people avoid punishment and hate to do dreary jobs. The more mentally tired we become, the slower we work, and the less productive our work. So do things to make work fun. First, work by the clock and plan to reward yourself when you get to the halfway mark or at some other point. Enjoy some grapes in the refrigerator, or go for a walk. Sometimes check up on the news bulletins on television, or some other enjoyable reward. Reward yourself, it is fun. And it works!
7. **Don't make the work place too easy.** When I make myself too comfortable while working, several things happen, I doze off to sleep or my mind wanders, or production slows down. So what do I do? I set up straight in a firm chair (not a Lazy Boy). I wouldn't read while lying at the pool, nor do I read in bed, nor any other restful place. I sit at my desk for action. That's where I read. That is when my physical body is alert and my mind is ready for work. Learn to work when you work by being physically prepared for it. Learn to relax when you relax with proper body posture.
8. **Work tools.** There is nothing wrong with using better tools to get the job done. When maize was introduced to the American colonies, they dug a deep hole to plant corn. It is the way the Indians did it, but it only produced a few dozen bushels per acre. Later they plowed and planted by the mule and got hundreds of bushels per acre. Today one farmer riding on a combine with air conditioning and diesel engine can produce thousands of bushels a day. He can do the work of 540 farmers. Is there anything wrong with success and production? So get and use all the electronic tools. Then learn to use them better.

When the Dictaphone came along, I immediately purchased one for magazine articles, school reports and all other work. My secretary was the first at Liberty University to have a computer and printer. She did more work with less student help than any other office on campus. If you visit the basement of my house, you will find 14 file cabinets all efficiently marked alphabetically or by the Dewey Decimal System, or business files. But there

came a day when my 14 files cabinets became obsolete. My secretaries began to file digitally.

First it was a computer, now you can't do without one. Next I had to have an iPad, and finally the cell phone can do most of what the other two can do. Update your tools to update your work habits . . . to get more done in less time.

Home-Made Rules to Influence Others

By: Elmer Towns

Have you ever tried to get someone to do what you wanted them to do, but they just didn't want to do it? Or, they just didn't care about a job. Have you noticed how hard it is to get people to obey, or to follow orders, or to keep a rule? Learn the law; people do what they want to do. The Bible describes them, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). Everyone is motivated by "I-me-my." Everyone lives for self and wants to please self. So begin where people are, get them to do what needs to be done, but make them think it is what they want to do.

1. **Push the Me button**: Everyone is motivated by one of the four "me" buttons. Touch them at their inner core to get their attention. The first button is: ***Protect Me***. Everyone wants to protect their reputation, retirement, and everything that they own. No one wants to get hurt, emotionally or financially. They will work harder to keep what they've got, so appeal to their self-preservation.

The second button is: ***Exalt Me***, everyone wants a little attention. Call it pride . . . self-esteem . . . self-importance. Everyone wants to be someone. So give them attention and find a way to compliment what they are doing. They deserve a little praise and they will work harder to get more.

The third button is: ***Accept Me***, i.e., social acceptance. God made us social beings, so people want to relate to others. They want to be accepted, so begin by opening the door of your heart to them. So relate to them, be a friend and be interested in them and interact in the things they do. Then they will do it better, faster and they will enjoy it more.

The final button is: ***Love Me***. Just as you must have water to live, so you must have love to make it through this life. Your success with people is measured by how deeply you love others, and how they give love back to you. To influence people, love them and make sure they know it and feel it. You love them for who they are, and the work they do. Then they will want to do more.

2. **Point at successful models.** Success stories motivate them to attempt to do the same as the hero in the story. People are motivated by the success of others, whether it is losing weight, having beautiful skin, or finding a life partner. And don't forget the power of failure. Sometimes people are motivated to success when they see why others failed. They learn what not to do and whom not to offend. Find out what they want to do, then point them to someone who is doing it well. To get them to sell, talk about the attitudes of a successful salesman. To motivate a mother, point out an ideal mother who raised successful children. Everyone needs a hero to motivate them to live above their limitations.
3. **Tell your story.** Share your personal successes to motivate others to take the same positive steps. Whether you tell your story, or they see you in action; your example will motivate them to reach higher, work harder, or sacrifice to make it happen.

But don't forget your negative testimony. We have all failed in life. Sometimes talk about your flop and what you did wrong; and what you would do differently next time. Let them learn from your failures so they won't do the same thing. Any boy who struck out in baseball can learn to keep his eye on the ball and improve his batting average; especially if he is helped by someone he admires. If the one he admires is a good example, it will motivate them to raise their batting average.

4. **Use a little soft soap to make a difference.** You can motivate with a compliment, or what some call "soft soap." When a teacher tells a student his report was wonderful, that motivates the student to give another report just like that one . . . or better. People are motivated to achievement, so tell them "good job!" A little honest accommodation . . . or soft soap . . . can change a life.

I tried to motivate my son by criticism and/or negative motivation. I did not realize what a frail ego he had. When I fussed at him because he did not make his bed, his closet was messy, and nothing was organized in his room; he gave up saying, "I know it . . . I can't make it."

Then positive motivation worked. Next when he made his bed, I didn't point out the wrinkles or the sagging sheets under the spread, rather I mentioned his choice of beautiful red decorations on the spread perked up the rest of the room. "That clean desk and clothes hung up make you look mature." Later in life when I commended him on his clean car he savored those compliments, and tried harder to get greater ones.

After he received his doctorate and three master degrees he finally confessed one day, “Every time you complimented me on doing something great . . . you put the bar higher for me to do greater the next time.”

But a warning about too many compliments. Make sure you are honest and truthful. Remember, soft soap is made out of 90% lye, and too much lye stings the skin and ruins whatever it is trying to clean.

5. **A needle will make you jump.** Some are motivated by praise and compliments. But others are smart enough to know that soft soaping may not be honest. There are those who are motivated to action when confronted by their failures or lack of effort. You have to stick 'em with a needle once in a while. Motivate them to greater action by pointing out what more they can do, how much harder they could try, and what greater rewards await them. Don't we all jump when stuck with a needle?

I have a daughter who worked hard to get compliments. When she got them, she sat down to munch on her praise like a Hershey chocolate bar. She savored every morsel, rolled it around in her mouth, and would lean back to savor the moment. Compliments killed her incentive.

I got home from teaching around 2:00 pm each afternoon, but my wife did not get home until 5:30 pm. So I would challenge the kids, “Hey kids, let's clean up the house for Mom!” I knew never to compliment my daughter before she finished cleaning the kitchen. When I did she would set back to enjoy her chocolate bar. After she washed and dried all the dishes and put them in the cabinet, I once said, “The sink has dirty wet spots.” Immediately she sprang into action drying it spotless and polishing the sink to a shine. After that our family joked, “Dry out the sink.”

There are a lot of people like my daughter in this world. They relax with compliments, but work feverously when pricked with a needle.

But remember when you insert the needle too many times the muscles lose their sensitivity and the skin will harden . . . it is no longer effective.

6. **Statistics will stick.** We seem to have gone crazy with statistics . . . sport averages . . . weather temperatures . . . school grades. Don't we look at statistics to find the best? We bought soap because it was 99.44/100 percent pure. We buy a certain brand because 75 percent of doctors recommend it.

Then use statistics to motivate others. If you don't know the averages, Google does! You will find Google is accurate 90% of the time.

7. **Bandwagon**. Perhaps the most effective way to influence others is to let them know what their friends are doing . . . or wearing . . . or eating! Peer pressure is a powerful tool to influence people. So use it to your advantage. Let others know what God is doing in the world of their buddies, or outside of it.

We use the phrase, “everyone is doing it” or “get on the bandwagon.” It is a subtle form of pressure, but it is effective. However, you can't do it by yourself. You need help, or you need others on the journey. It is a form of influence that originates outside yourself. Motivation comes from what their gang is doing, or how they dress, or where they go.

I was a youth pastor decades ago. I couldn't get my teens to have daily devotions. So when I worked with them individually, several started daily devotions. Then I publically told the youth group what their buddies were doing (#2 Point at successful models). Then I called on a few to give a public testimony of what they got out of devotions (#3 Tell your story). I told them what it would do for them (#1 Push the Me button). But finally, I pointed out that half our group was having daily Bible devotions (#6 Statistics will stick). What did that do? It put pressure on the rest to have daily devotions (#7 Bandwagon).

You can influence others. Do it because others need it! Do it because you'll be more effective! Do it because you'll like it and they will like you! But whatever . . . just do it!