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**I quote; therefore, I am**  
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"Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." - Oscar Wilde, De Profundis, 1905

Don't do as I quote; do as I do

As one who works in the self-help arena, I've been noticing an ever-increasing phenomenon these days and that is, throwing around quotation after quotation in the sense that the quote will, what? will support one's own movement towards change or transformation or that it will spur another towards change and transformation or that it might be taken as a sign of one's wisdom, intelligence and the like?

Perhaps, it's the not-too-recent media focus on the sound-bite, or the more recent social networking emphasis on living a 140-character-or-less lifestyle.

In either case, my curiosity centers around "not what I quote" but "do I live what I quote?"

I think quotes have a place, depending on how we use them. Do motivational quotes on corridor and office walls honestly and truly motivate? Do success quotes in sports arenas, locker rooms, and in schools really produce successful athletes and students? Do pithy management and leadership quotes truly result in inspired leaders and managers? Do love and relationship quotes lead to healthier and more conscious relationships? (And, by the way, the same might be said of affirmations, or books, or visualizations, but that's another reading.)

"I hate quotations. Tell me what you know." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Do quotes "work?"

In my experience, yes, but in few cases. How so?

Some folks have actually changed their lives partially as a result of "living" quotes. A vast majority, however, cannot seem to integrate the sentiment, message or inspiration of a quote into their actual, daily do-ing and be-ing – at work, at home, at play and in relationship - in a sustainable, long-term, self-disciplined way to effect true and real change, to self-responsibly forward the action of their life and become a new, different person.

If you Google "self-improvement quotations," you'll come up with some 10,700 hits; "management quotations," 17,999; "leadership quotations," 36,100; relationship quotations, 9,940, and "success quotations," 20,700 (This does not include other descriptors such as "sayings," "quotes" and the like.)

I quote success; I am success - there is a difference

Let's look at success quotations as an example. What do these success quotes have in common?

"A man is a success if he gets up in the morning and gets to bed at night, and in between he does what he wants to do." - Bob Dylan

"Try not to become a man of success, but rather to become a man of value. He is considered successful in our day who gets more out of life than he puts in. But a man of value will give more than he receives." - Albert Einstein

"Just as the tumultuous chaos of a thunderstorm brings a nurturing rain that allows life to flourish, so too in human affairs times of advancement are preceded by times of disorder. Success comes to those who can weather the storm." - I Ching No. 3

"The successful man is the average man, focused." Anonymous

"Getting what you go after is success; but liking it while you are getting it is happiness." Anonymous

So, what do they have in common?

What these quotes have in common is that they're all someone else's quotes, someone else's notion of success. And this is important. Why?

Because I'm curious how many people's lives - tens, hundreds, thousand, millions – have actually been demonstrably changed for the better, over the long-term, as a result of reading one or more of someone else's quotes? I suspect few, very few. Why?

What I often find are folks who share, quote or think about someone else's neat, cool, pithy quotation as a "nice idea," but have never consciously taken the time to internalize, integrate, chew on, digest and deeply reflect upon so it becomes part of their own cellular, molecular make-up, their being. Instead, beyond the time it takes to utter or write a 140-character idea-string, they often return to a life that's characterized by misalignment, dis-harmony, imbalance, confusion, self-doubt and overwhelm. They want "success" or happiness, or a better way of being a leader, manager, partner or spouse from someone's else's dream, aspiration or quote; but, it's not working.

Don't quote the quote; be the quote

For me, the most important tool for success in life is reflection, deep reflection which many cannot or will not undertake, then goal delineation, planning and conscious self-management and self-discipline to be(come) the quotation. Many, living lives of indecision, dis-harmony and self-deceit, find they can only quote the quote, not be the quote.

Sometimes, folks do incorporate the quotation as a "living" quotation. For example, they define "success," or "relationship," or "motivation" as "results." But, achieving results without learning something about one's self often leads to an incomplete and often "un-success-ful" "lived

quotation" in the short or long term. Do-ing alone (i.e., results), without be-ing, is not a solid formula for success, or happiness, or successful leading, managing or relating. The "successful" Bernie Ebbers of Enron, or Bernie Madoff, or Arnold Schwarzenegger who ended up in ignominy and infamy are testaments to this.

These folks who accomplish results ("success?") but without personal growth, often wonder why they don't feel better, alive, fulfilled. They often admit they don't experience good health, energy, enthusiasm for life, fulfilling relationships, creative freedom, emotional and psychological stability, a sense of well-being, and peace of mind. They are "successful," after all. So, what "off?"

So, what does quoting get you?

Many of us love quotes – about life, love, relationships, leading, managing and the like. But these quotes are simply ideas, each a tiny molecule in the brain. Unless "operationalized," and practiced, as a practice, the idea can be gone in an instant. Then what? Another quote, another 140-second feel-good moment?

For many, the idea, the sentiment, the quote is quickly obliterated just as if they had written in the sand on the beach - ephemeral - wiped out in a moment.

For others, the idea, like a "success" quotation is engraved in an indelible way in their brain, their psyche and their being. They are a living embodiment of the quote. Big difference.

So, I guess there are quotes and there are quotes. It's what we do with them, and why, that matters.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Do you often quote others? Why? What does quoting others get you?
- Do you incorporate others' quotes into the fabric of your daily life – i.e., the way you live life at work, at home, at play and in relationship?
- Can you recall the last ten quotes you shared? Last five? Last one?
- Has your life changed, truly changed, as the result of any quotes you took to heart? Were you truly inspired and motivated to be or act differently, consistently?
- Do you ever feel empty, unhappy, or unfulfilled even though you know a lot of "happy" quotations? Do you live in a prison of self-defeating or self-limiting thoughts even though you "know" a lot of motivational and inspirational quotations? Why is that?
- Do you ever use quotations to persuade others you're intelligent or wise?
- What might happen if you never used quotes? How might that make you feel? If you seldom or never used quotations, would you feel lacking or deficient? Why?
- Is your self-worth partially defined by how often, how much, you use quotations?
- Did you grow up around quotations? Who did your parents or primary caregivers quote?
- Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "*I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.*" Does that make sense to you?

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Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, www.truenorthpartnering.com, or [pvajda\(at\)truenorthpartnering.com](mailto:pvajda@truenorthpartnering.com), or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda