



USA TODAY

September 2018

Don't Tell Me I Can't Do It!

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Destiny hands everyone a mixed bag of grapes, both sweet and sour; but that doesn't mean that the sour grapes should become the determining factor in how you experience the precious gift of life. When life doesn't go in your intended direction and the course needs to be redirected, don't let anyone tell you it cannot be done. Instead, when the going gets tough, reject a victim-like mentality and choose an alternate path. To do this successfully, here are five practical life-affirming principles that, when adopted, will help you navigate through life's challenges as you seek to realize your dreams. The principles are: 1) Recognize life as a journey 2) Flex your muscles 3) Reframe the concept of failure 4) Learn from hurt to create new opportunities 5) Live life today.

(1) Recognize life as a journey

People may discount the statement, "recognize life as a journey," thinking it's just cliché. But, it's probably one of the best metaphors available for this time on earth called "life." When life is seen as a journey, it poses questions about its destinations along the way. When seeking the answers, know that some will represent great effort and some will inspire dread. Some will feel miraculous, and some will remain elusive.

Life isn't only a journey, but also a mystery unfolding. The mystery is presented to you, every day, with the unexpected. (It's that free will that determines whether you stay the course.) The outcome has a great deal to do with your attitude. When you're presented with an unfortunate situation or an unexpected twist, how you react has a great deal to do with the outcome. Say, for example, you're let go from a job. It's a crush to your ego, to your bank account, to your family, and to your general wellbeing, especially if you valued the job. However, being let go can turn into an opportunity. That is, with the right attitude—upbeat versus doom perspective—you can take control of the matter and discover new possibilities on the horizon. When one door closes, it leaves room for another to open. If you play the lead character in your life, then you're aware that the choice is entirely up to you. Remember, turbulent times can be calmed by acknowledging that life is precious—a gift to be treasured. And, that includes getting fired, losing a loved one, not passing the bar exam, having a miscarriage, and the list goes on. But in order for you to see its impact over the long run, it must first be seen

as a gift. Thinking positively enables you to find the surprises destiny has in store. The vicissitudes of life, the ups, the downs, the good, and the bad—they're all so precious. Embrace it all. You Can Do It!

(2) Flex your muscles

This principle is critical to leading “the good life,” in whatever way you choose to measure. Although it refers to muscles, it doesn't mean only physical strength. You can also flex your muscles of authority, respect, knowledge and experience. Stated differently, it simply means doing what needs to be done, even when others have given up. It means taking charge of a situation even when doing so will zap the last bit of energy you have remaining. This isn't to deny the reality that sometimes, no matter how much effort is put forth, progress remains elusive. This is when it's time to question whether you need the help of others. On some level, asking for assistance is also a way of exerting your strength. It takes a strong person to admit the need for help. Then, once the help is there, it requires strength to delegate, guide, and learn to trust. The process of learning comes more easily to some than others. Still, the best policy is to trust, but always verify. Along the way, count on certain efforts never reaching fruition, or perhaps being put off indefinitely. This could be anything from a relationship, to a job promotion, to rebuilding a car or creating an entire media campaign. Anything that comes as the result of effort—blood, sweat, and tears—means someone had the audacity to flex their muscles to begin with.

Watching that effort somehow fall apart can hurt. Yet, that pain cannot take precedence over the fact that, in order to take the chance, muscles had to be flexed in the first place. A business might be forced to close its doors; a romantic relationship may not withstand irreconcilable differences; or the response to an ad campaign might be drastically low—but the effort was made to reach these conclusions. Now it's time to face the humility of this downturn by mending its impact. In a sense it means flexing your muscles of resilience in order to bounce back. Remember, hardships are often the precursor to strength. There is no failure. You Can Do It!

(3) Reframe the concept of failure

With this notion, the most significant idea to keep in mind is that success and failure are largely self-defined. Ask any two people to explain what success means to them, and it's highly unlikely that they will give the same or similar answers. There are some people who are determined to settle for nothing less than the very best, and they know deep down that there is no such thing as failure. They recognize failure is a concept of the feeble-minded. Sure, there can be disappointments, roadblocks and obstacles, but those are what make the joy of accomplishments that much greater.

Think about it. There are few enduring rewards for those who blithely accept limitations and choose to entertain only those goals that seem realistic from a distance. That's not to say there isn't a price to pay for ambition— independently following your dreams comes with consequences. Both ambition and independence require a healthy sense of pride and a stubborn, even obstinate indifference to other's opinions. So, if fear of failure is what's hampering action, remember that the most difficult goals to achieve are also the most rewarding to enjoy. That's what makes them worth chasing. Once you really dive into something and get your hands dirty, that's when you better understand that of which you are capable. And, as can be expected, typically you'll find you can accomplish far more than you ever thought possible. Keep this mantra in mind: “Don't tell me I can't do it!”

(4) Learn from hurt to create new opportunities

It bears repeating: hurt brings opportunity for growth and healing. In fact, every painful story has the potential for a happy ending. Instead, many times people resist the onslaught of anger and sadness under these circumstances. But, like everything else in life, the unpleasant feelings that exist in the aftermath of hurt are

gifts in disguise. By receiving these gifts with gratitude, you may find that the emotional release helps you embrace new opportunities with a clear mind. In the end, you will emerge stronger on the other side of your struggles.

Often, personal traumas strengthen people over the long run. Knowing this outcome is possible can make enduring the short-term unpleasantness worthwhile. One area where this notion really works is when it's time to initiate peacemaking. Opening the door for reconciliation, even before the other party asks forgiveness, can bring anyone an opportunity for personal development and growth. In other words, deciding to be the first to raise the white flag can only beget further strength and willpower. Everyone is capable of buying into those thoughts about taking the easy way out and quitting when things look bleak. They can be very convincing. Feeling lost and hopeless can coerce a person to throw in the towel, as can listening to the naysayers who never get tired of discouraging the risk takers. During these highly impressionable moments of vulnerability, hold on tight to your dreams and decide not to accept the negative rhetoric. This is the time to roll up your sleeves and face the day, even though it promises to be difficult. You Can Do It!

(5) Live life today

Death comes for everyone eventually, but not everyone truly lives before it does. Although Steve Jobs is an exception, what he says about death is very telling: "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Almost everything, all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important."

Life is a game to play, a challenge to meet, an opportunity to capture—there must be thousands of quotes out there encouraging people to live life to its fullest. First, decide what 'living life to its fullest' means to you. Then go out there and do it. Live life today. The past is gone. The future may never be. Think about it: death gives meaning to life. Life is short, which is just one more reason to live in the moment! You Can Do It!

Navigating life's challenges

What does it mean to chase your dreams? It's not unusual for many to shy away from identifying and reaching their dreams. In fact, considering your capabilities and making choices based on them can be an exceptionally daunting task. For starters, it requires a certain degree of reflection—the kind for which you plan and set aside time. Think about the distractions that consume your day and understand that reflection cannot occur at stoplights or while changing a diaper. Instead, find the occasion to really open your mind and think, scrutinize, deliberate, muse, compare, envision, and visualize the past, present, and future. In a setting that allows for this kind of reflection, learning the extent of your capabilities is more comprehensible and accessible.

Don't tell me I can't do it

"Don't tell me I can't do it" is a mantra that encourages individuals not to accept the status quo when there are dreams, goals, and desires to pursue. Yes, everyone faces obstacles, but learning how to address them is a choice. Living a life of abundance and doing it with courage is part of the decision not to settle for less than the best. Personal growth is an ongoing activity that should always play a large part of becoming and experiencing the wonder of life's journey. You are forever in the process of evolving until you are "no more."

The five core ideas presented here are available to anyone looking for a process to help guide their lives. Envisioning life as a mysterious journey brings you closer to taking ownership of that life. Flexing your muscles of experience during this journey helps you do what needs to be done, regardless of the level of difficulty or energy required. Reframing the concept of failure encourages you to get your hands dirty, in order to discover

what you're really dealing with. Learning to create new opportunities from hurtful situations builds resilience, which leads to greater strength over the long run. Finally, deciding to build a meaningful life, and adamantly denying anyone who claims it "can't be done" supports the mantra of optimism: Live life today. The past is gone. The future might never be.

About the Author



Dr. Erica Miller holds her Ph.D. in clinical psychology and has written extensively on topics of positive psychology, longevity, overcoming challenges, and living life to its fullest. Her most recent book, "Chronologically Gifted: Aging with Gusto," made her an international bestselling author. In addition to having a private practice, Dr. Miller was the founder and executive director of Miller Psychological Centers, a chain of mental health clinics throughout Los Angeles and Orange County. Currently, in addition to public speaking, she is CEO of a family real estate business in Austin, Texas. For information, please call 805 496-8850 or visit www.drericamiller.com.