

Against the Tide

Direct the Course of Your Life

By Robin Lee Kennedy

Have you ever been swimming and caught in a strong current? You're happily going along in tune with your rhythm and suddenly are pulled off course – in a direction you don't want to go. Initially you're unconcerned - after all you're a strong swimmer. Intuitively you swim faster – kick harder. As you see yourself drifting further and further from the shore, a tiny bit of panic sets in. You start to focus on your fatigue. You notice the heaviness in your arms. Your kicking becomes frantic as you realize that you might not make it. Fear overwhelms you. Swimming furiously against the current is exhausting – images of sinking down beneath the surface encompass you. You begin to think about your family, and how sad they'll be without you. You envision them at your funeral. Saddened by the image, your fatigue overwhelms you. It will be so much easier just to let go – to accept the terrible reality of your circumstances.

The Power of Your Thoughts!

And just when you feel like giving up, a spark ignites inside you. You choose more positive, empowering thoughts. You muster up the courage; see yourself on the beach - now miles away. Determination and belief drive you and – somehow – before you know it – you're standing on the beach. You can hardly believe that you made it. It seems surreal – as if it happened to someone else. Wow! The power of your thoughts!

I'm sure that you're aware of and at some point have even experienced the power your thoughts have to change your life. How being clearly aware of your choices, staying true to yourself and being accountable to yourself can empower you to reach your goals. In my case, growing up in an abusive and critical environment made me all the more determined to show the world who I was and what I had to offer. I won't claim it was easy, though.

Although we seemed to have plenty of financial resources, the conversation at home was always about lack. My sisters and I felt guilty asking for anything – even necessities. I clearly remember a time when I asked for some new school clothes; I was tired of the hand-me-downs from my two older sisters and wanted to fit in with my friends. My step-father said that money didn't grow on trees and if I wanted clothes so bad I'd have to earn the money and buy them myself...but good luck! The very suggestion that I couldn't do it was all I needed to go against the tide. Now I needed to figure out how.

We had waterfront property with a big river steps away from the house. Of course! The answer was right in front of me. I would learn how to fish and sell my catch to the local fish market - just down the road. Fortunately, I did have a fishing pole, a gift from my

Grandmother the previous Christmas. So I had the tools and was in the perfect location. Now I needed a plan. But first, I had to convince myself, and everyone else, that I could do this. So I marched into the fish market to share my intentions and negotiate a deal. The local fishermen who were dropping off their catch chuckled at my announcement. All but one. Charlie, who I knew through his daughter, did not. Pam was a schoolmate in whom I confided. She knew and told Charlie about my home life. Instead of snickering along with his contemporaries, Charlie was interested in my plan. Feeling proud as pie and just knowing that I could do this, I told him how I was going to make this happen. First I was going to focus on flounder because they were running and plentiful; the fish market bought tons from the experienced fisherman. Instead of undercutting their price, I was going to offer some “free” services to get on the good side of the owner of the fish market. Next I would buy a boat with the money I earned so I’d be able to place and monitor crab traps – crabs were much more profitable than flounder. Charlie said he’d think about my plan to see if he could come up with any ideas.

Then I began my advertising campaign, which was delivered verbally. I told anyone who would listen what I was up to. Everyone laughed at me, no one harder than my step-father. Everyone, except Charlie. People said things like “I hope you won’t be disappointed;” or “It’s too big a plan for a little girl.” But I didn’t listen. Neither did Charlie. Instead, he got a bunch of “the boys” together to show me the ropes. I went out on their boats and was allowed to keep my own catch. They helped me, guided me, and believed in me, because I believed in myself.

What happened? In just two seasons I was able to buy my own rowboat, which cost \$99 – a lot in 1962. I had also – with the help of my fishing friends – learned the crab trapping business and had my own traps set in the best spots. I had a growing bank account, purchased a 5HP motor for my boat, bought my own school clothes and gave the hand-me-downs to the Salvation Army. I was even able to buy special red shoes that I’d had my eye on. I was ten years old.

The Currents of Human Influence

Whatever your circumstances, you may find yourself from time to time pulled in a direction that you don’t want to go. Or perhaps you’ve had many dreams that lived short lives because of a belief you accepted.

Do outside influences direct your course? Or possibly it’s your own inner critic telling you that you can’t do something you’d really like to. Maybe you’re immune to the undertow and currents of human influence – others or your own. But, if you’re like most people, the path of least resistance is the one you most often take. Particularly, if your belief or desire is unpopular or unproven.

Do you see repeated situations in your life? Do your relationships – both personal and professional – seem to follow a pattern?

Direct the Course of Your Life!

If you're making some connections to your own life experiences, there is good news. Your destiny is in your hands. You *can* direct the course of your life. It is possible to focus your energy on creating the things that you want, if you're willing to go against the tide.

It Takes Conscious Choice and Effort

Going against the tide is a simple process, but not an easy one. It takes courage to step out of your comfort zone and take control of your future and perseverance to stay on course and resist habitual patterns. These habits have gotten you to where you are now, and it's time to form new ones that will take you where you want to be.

So if it's not easy, how can it be simple? The simplicity lies in recognizing the power of your thoughts and words and making focused decisions about which ones to empower. Thought leaders such as Dr. Wayne Dwyer and Dr. Deepak Chopra speak about the power of thought. In fact, it has been scientifically proven that our thoughts are energy that must materialize in the real world. So, if we're creating our future anyway, we might as well do it consciously. Yes, I am saying that you have the power to breathe life into what you truly want. And I'm reminding you that it takes conscious choice and effort.

Doubts That Multiply!

Notice what happens when another person or your inner critic says that you can't do something- or that an idea you have just won't work. Suddenly your doubts multiply and you give in to them. Your enthusiasm and belief in yourself wanes – you might even retract your idea. In some cases, you feel embarrassed that you actually believed it had merit. So, it's back to the "status quo" or the belief that it just can't happen for you. The current was just too strong for you to go in a different direction. Silently, grudgingly you dive back into stagnant waters.

Choose a Positive Focus

As a contrast, consider what happens when you speak positively about something you want or believe in. Your energy is contagious and people buy into your idea. You react to their enthusiasm with more positive thoughts and energy and before you know it, there is a collective belief and mindset that begins to grow and multiply. The air feels electric; the energy palpable. Suddenly you're going where you want and pulling others along with you – caught up in your enthusiastic wake.

What would it be like if you chose positive thoughts and words about everything? Notice that I pointed to a choice. Everyone has negative – even self-deprecating - thoughts from time to time. However, we all have the ability to decide whether to pursue a particular thought or not. We can choose to go with a positive current. Starting to sound complicated? It's not. In fact, it's a pretty straightforward process.

The Process: Awareness, Truth and Accountability

First you need to **become aware** – to be awake to the moment and keenly observant of what is - to be observant of all possible and probable outcomes of any choice or action. To live in awareness is to *not* pretend that you don't know. It is to *not* do things subconsciously, but instead make conscious choices and decisions and understand their impact. Clarifying your values helps you to make choices that serve you. In my case, being a young girl keenly aware of the impact my home life was having on my image to the world around me, and choosing a path that I understood completely would not be supported by that home, my actions were chosen carefully, in neat succession, to meet my goal. What is important to you? What are your "must haves" in order to be happy? What things really irritate you? Behind most irritants is a value being stepped on.

Next you need to tell the **truth** – to yourself. Are you living by your values? If not, what gets in the way? Your values can motivate you to stretch beyond the comfortable status quo. They give you the why for doing something new or uncomfortable. Are you on autopilot? How willing are you to navigate uncharted waters by altering your ready acceptance of negative thoughts or discouraging input? Can you identify the naysayers and supporters in your own life? In yourself? Had I been willing to give in to the views of my stepfather, I would have achieved nothing.

Last comes **being accountable** – again, to yourself. I took control of my circumstances by making choices and taking actions that were not influenced by the will or view of others. My success or failure would not be the result of anything outside of my own actions, without excuses and regardless of how toxic the world around me could be. Will you take responsibility for making your outcomes the best they can be? How accountable will you be for getting yourself to the shore?

By being aware, telling the truth and being accountable to yourself you'll find that instead of fighting against the tide, you'll create your own flow and your own current. You'll get in tune with your own rhythm; find the best places to cast your line and life's ebbs and flows will be much easier to navigate.