

You Only Live Once

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No matter what you do with your life, never forget that there will only be one now. If you are not happy – change it quickly. We are only here for a flash. Time is definitely the most valuable asset we have. You should have control over how you spend your time and you should always have total control over your attitude and emotions. Even if you are incarcerated behind bars, you may not have control over your physical location, but you can still maintain your mind and thoughts.

If your house burns down, you can look at it negatively or positively. You could spend your life lamenting over lost possessions or you can thank your lucky stars that you were not lost in the fire too. You may have lost all of your material possessions and the roof over your head, but remind yourself that it could have been worse. Don't let the fire burn the smile off of your face.

If a loved one dies or leaves you, be thankful that you had that person in your life for the time that you did. Carry on their energy and legacy in your everyday life. Let their spirit drive and motivate you to do and carry out all of the good things that they did regularly. Let their soul live vicariously through you. Go out and do all of the things they didn't have time to do before they died. Learn from the good of those around you whether dead or alive and thrive on their positive energy.

Avoid negativity like the plague. You become like your surroundings so choose them wisely. Do your best to bring positivity to friends and family in their times of need, but avoid people who are constantly negative and drain your positivity. You probably know who I am talking about. There is probably someone you know who constantly complains, who is never happy or satisfied, but does nothing about it other than complain. You may feel as if they constantly rain on your parade. Get a big umbrella and shield yourself from that person!

In my opinion, there are 3 types of people in the world. The first type of person is someone who is inherently happy, strives to be their best, succeed, love, prosper and help as many other people as they can along the way. The second type of person is someone who may “waffle” between happiness and misery – confused about their own feelings and emotions. They are often jealous and may strive to do better just to outdo someone else while hurting others along the way. The third type of person is one that is inherently unhappy. They find happiness in their own misery and the misfortune and pain of others. Often this person is afraid of success and will sabotage themselves and others just to gain comfort in the negative state of misery that they have come to know.

I would like to share a story about a very influential woman who is at the top of my list of positive people. She changed my life in so many positive ways. Unfortunately, she will never know how much of an impact she had on me because most of her influence occurred on her death bed. Her name was Kathleen and she worked for me as a property manager and leasing agent for over a year. Kathleen was in her late thirties and was full of spirit and positive energy.

She was always the first one in the office in the morning and she was guaranteed to have a smile on her face no matter what was going on. Everyone she worked with and customers she dealt with were always very complimentary of her attitude and work ethic. At times, she may not have had the sales volume of the other agents because of the amount of time and effort she put into one-on-one service with her customers. As a sales manager, I recognized this and called it the “Kathleen Factor” which I applied to her sales quota with a grain of salt. I could always count on her to complete every deal in the most professional manner from beginning to end. She was very competitive, but only with herself. Well, she worked for me for almost a year before divulging that she was a breast cancer survivor. Over 5 years prior, she was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer and, after a double mastectomy and extensive radiation and chemo-therapy, her cancer went into full remission. For 5 years she got a clean bill of health from her doctor. She told me in a conversation that she felt like she was “living on borrowed time” and wanted to make the best of every moment of it. I can’t help but think that it was her positive attitude that helped pull her through the cancer in the first place. Everything was just fine and dandy in her life until one morning when she came into the office limping. I noticed it at the morning sales meeting and immediately questioned her condition. She shrugged it off, said she just had a stiff hip joint – “must have slept on it funny”. She carried on her normal routine all day showing third floor apartments, climbing steps, walking and getting in and out of her car. By the end of the day I could tell she was really struggling, but she insisted she was fine. Judging from the smile still on her face, I believed her. The next morning, however, I got a call from her about 30 minutes before work started telling me that she was going to the emergency room to get her leg checked out. In spite of the fact her leg was now totally paralyzed, she had taken the initiative to call and email all of her appointments for the day and let them know she would have to reschedule. She spent the entire day in the emergency room and was then admitted into a permanent room. When I called to check on her, I knew something was terribly wrong when she did not answer. Another leasing agent and I went to the hospital that night to check on her. After a long wait, we were allowed into her room. She was cheerful and happy to see us and informed us that they were doing some tests to find out what the problem with her leg was and she expected to be back on her feet and back to work in a day or so. I appreciated her high hopes and positive spirit, but quietly knew in my mind that there was a serious problem going on. The three of us chatted and joked for a while and I assured her that all of her clients and appointments would be covered. She expressed concern numerous times about how all of her pending deals should be handled – reiterating to me (her manager) the importance of following up on certain details with each of her clients. Even laid up in the hospital with sudden, unexplained paralysis in her leg she was genuinely concerned about her clients and my business. Well, I was equally concerned about her and I let her know it in a positive way. When I left with the other agent, we were both silent because no one wanted to state a bad case scenario. The very next morning, I got a call from Kathleen. With all of my heart I hoped that she would tell me she sprained her hip flexor and was in a leg brace and on her way home. Not the case. She came right out and told me in the most positive and cheerful voice that “I have another battle to fight. Apparently the cancer has returned in an advanced stage in my lymph nodes and has gotten into my spine causing some problems for the nerves in my leg. So I will not be back to work this week”. I didn’t know how to respond other than to tell her to forget about work for now. Her response was to remind me again how important it was to her that her clients were handled properly until she returned to work. I assured her they would be and I reported back to her with routine status reports. She spent the next couple of weeks in the hospital receiving various treatments and was then sent

home with an around the clock nurse to tend to her since she lived alone. I talked to her frequently, but didn't see her for a week or two. When she told me she was getting discharged from the hospital, she inquired if she could return to work in a limited capacity. Of course, she couldn't drive or climb steps so her position as leasing agent was not possible, but she requested to help out at the reception desk. Our receptionist was more than happy to take over some leasing duties and get out of the office for a while, so I made arrangements for Kathleen to come into work as receptionist the next day. When she showed up the next morning (her usual 30 minutes early) I was stunned, shocked and speechless. No matter how hard it was for me to try to contain my facial expressions and demeanor, it was just not possible. She struggled up the front sidewalk with the aid of her nurse and a walker. If the office had not been closed, I would have thought it was an elderly handicapped customer coming to inquire about property. Every bit of hair on her head was gone. She had nearly doubled in size as if someone had stuck an air hose in her and blown her up like a balloon. Physically, she had almost no resemblance to her previous self – except for one thing – the big smile on her face. I wanted to tell her to go home and lay down, but I knew how excited she was to be coming back to work. Plus, lying down and resting just wasn't in her nature. So I mustered up every bit of positivity I had in my body and did my best to keep a smile on my face as I met her at the door. For the next two days, she sat at the front receptionist desk and answered every call on the first ring and met every customer with a smile. When people inquired about her condition, she had no shame and simply told them that “she was dealing with some challenges”. Those two days at work brought her great happiness. She called many of her former customers to follow up and make sure they were happy. By being at the work, she brought a whole new positivity to the office and all of the employees. After two days, she became bedridden and was no longer able to function properly. Shortly after that, she was admitted to a hospice center. It took a great deal of motivation for me to go see her in that environment and condition, but I did. I will never forget my last visit with her. My business partner and I stopped by with flowers. She appeared to be half conscious and delirious, but finally recognized us and a big smile formed on her face. The nurse informed us that the cancer had spread rapidly to her brain and that she was losing motor functions and her ability to speak. I told her how much we missed her and wished there was something we could do for her. She began to mutter something to me. I strained to hear her as I bent down closer to her bed. She struggled to form a sentence and keep her thoughts straight, but after a couple of minutes I deciphered what she was saying. She was asking me if she still had a real estate license. That may have been the last time I cried in my life. I suppressed my emotions as best as possible and told her – “Of course you still have a real estate license. It is hanging on the wall in the office waiting for you to return to work.” She smiled with satisfaction and said nothing else. Those would be the last words I heard from her. The next day she passed away.

As a real estate broker, it is my responsibility to return all agent licenses to the State Board if an agent leaves my brokerage firm through change in employment or even death. One of the hardest things I ever had to do in my life was to remove her license off of the wall in the office. I made a photo copy of it before sending it back to The Board. I kept her license on my bulletin board above my desk as a reminder of her. With memories of her came a renewed sense of appreciation of life and people. I strived (as a manager) to live up to her level of customer service on a daily basis. I also dismissed things that used to stress me out and bother me with a “Kathleen style smile.”

I will never know what caused her cancer and if she could have done anything to prevent it, but I promised myself one thing – I would share her story with everyone in hopes that it would carry on her energy and legacy by making people smile and appreciate their lives, jobs and health more. It was an unbelievable situation to me – how fast someone’s health could deteriorate - yet how positive, happy and caring someone could remain during such an ordeal while facing eminent death. If this story made you cry, dry your eyes, crack a smile and go out and do your best today. You never know when you may wake up with a little pain in your leg.

If this story inspired or touched you – or if you or a loved one may be in this same unfortunate situation, please read and forward my **Health and Happiness Guide**.