

John Maxwell: Today Matters Time Warner Book Group, 2004.

Summarised by George Wells

This summary was written as a weekly email to the staff in George's Department. The "Some things to think about" sections are by George and were geared for the staff in their context.

1. Today often falls to pieces – what's the missing piece?

This next series is based (again!) on one of John Maxwell's books: Today Matters, Time Warner Book Group, 2004. In it Maxwell spells out a philosophy of carpe diem: how to get the most out of each day. I found it very helpful, and very practical when I read it and I hope you do too.

In his usual style, Maxwell boils his philosophy down into twelve distinct points, dealing with different aspects of our daily lives. However, the first few chapters lay a general foundation, and that is where we start, with "Today Often Falls to Pieces - What Is the Missing Piece?".

He begins the chapter with a quote from a book he used to read to his children. The book is called "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day"; written by Judith Viorst.

"I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard... and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."

From there on young Alexander's day goes from bad to worse. While this was a humourous kiddies' tale, which Maxwell and his children thoroughly enjoyed, he makes the point that we often have days when things seem to fall apart (maybe not quite as dramatically as for Alexander, but still "horrible, no good" days). He asks how often we have bad days? If you were to rate the past day on a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate it? And on what basis would you judge it? "Would it depend on how you feel? Would it be determined by how many items you've checked off your to-do list? Would you score your day according to how much time you've spent with someone you love? How do you define success for today?"

Maxwell believes that we often judge our success inappropriately, and that this problem leads us to make poor decisions on how to spend our day, and so the day falls apart.

He then deals with a number of misconceptions concerning success:

1) We believe success is impossible - so we criticise it

He quotes M. Scott Peck's opening words in "The Road Less Travelled", stating that "Life is difficult". People often give up when faced with difficulties, which leads to a lack of success, and hence the perception that success is impossible. This can also lead to a critical attitude towards people who do succeed. Maxwell quotes the writer Ambrose Pierce, who said that success was "the one unpardonable sin against one's fellows"!

2) We believe success is mystical - so we search for it

This is the "silver bullet" problem. Somewhere there must be a magic key that will unlock success. He points to the popularity of diet and management fads as evidence of our propensity to search for an instant solution. Again, he quotes another author, who points out that success in sports, the arts, business, etc. takes time and effort.

3) We believe success comes from luck - so we hope for it

Every now and then someone is "discovered" in unlikely circumstances and rapidly rises to prominence in some field, but the reality is that most successful people have worked long and hard to reach the top of their field.

4) We believe success is productivity - so we work for it

Maxwell criticises this as a "one-dimensional" view, and asks is a retired person is unsuccessful, or if a day spent resting is unsuccessful. "A strong work ethic is an admirable trait, but hard work alone doesn't bring success". People may pour a lot of energy into pointless endeavours, or may sacrifice health, relationships,

etc. to hard work.

5) We believe success comes from an opportunity - so we wait for it

This is the "if only" syndrome. People believe they just need a lucky break: the right promotion, adequate funding for a new venture, etc. Maxwell quotes John Wooden, the great basketball coach: "When opportunity comes, it's too late to prepare". One has to put in the necessary preparation in order to be able to succeed - and often only once the preparation is done will the opportunity arise (who is a venture capitalist going to trust with his funds: someone well prepared, or someone who has just been waiting for the right break?).

6) We believe success comes from leverage - so we power up for it

Maxwell uses the example of Saddam Hussein who used power to achieve "success". "But like all people who use and abuse power to get ahead - whether an arrogant corporate CEO or bloody dictator - he failed in the end".

7) We believe success comes from connections - so we network for it

This arises from the perception that "it's not what you know, it's who you know". While relationships are good, and can add to our success, in themselves they cannot create success (otherwise all the relatives and friends of successful people would be guaranteed an easy life!).

8) We believe success comes from recognition - so we strive for it

"If you were named teacher of the year or awarded an honorary doctorate by a prestigious university, would that mean success?" Some people define success in this way and work toward the goal of some kind of public recognition.

9) We believe success is an event - so we schedule for it

While Maxwell has been conducting leadership training seminars and workshops for over thirty years, he does not believe that a single event can change someone's life. While events can be catalysts, providing tools and inspiration, they do not guarantee success.

A closing quote for today;

"People create success in their lives by focusing on today. It may sound trite, but today is the only time you have. It's too late for yesterday. And you can't depend on tomorrow. That's why today matters".

Some things to think about:

1) How would you rate the past day on a scale from 1 to 10? Why?

2) Did any of the misconceptions about success strike a chord with you? Why?

Last week we began laying the foundation of Maxwell's book "Today Matters", and we continue with that this week.

Having described a number of misconceptions about success, Maxwell turns to focus on why today matters so much, and why we don't always grasp that as we should. He sees three reasons for this:

1) We Overexaggerate Yesterday

Many people either ride on their past successes or dwell on their past failures. Even worse than living on past accomplishments, some people focus on what they could have done had things gone differently for them.

"Almost any opportunity that went unpursued looks golden now that it's too late to go after it".

On the negative side, many people lead embittered lives, dwelling on the negative things that have happened to them. Maxwell tells of an 83-year old woman who still has issues with the fact that on her fifth birthday her father gave her younger sister the best lollipop!

Maxwell used to have a sign on his desk to help counteract these kinds of attitudes. It read: "Yesterday Ended Last Night". No matter how good or bad the previous day has been, today is a new day.

2) We Overestimate Tomorrow

Most people when asked what the future is likely to hold for them will tend to believe that things will get better (the book includes a short quiz to underscore this point). While in itself that is not a bad thing, it needs to be based on more than simple hope - you need to have some kind of plans and a strategy for improving your life. "Hoping for a good future without investing in today is like a farmer waiting for a crop without ever planting any seed"!

3) We Underestimate Today

"Today is the only time we have within our grasp, yet many people let it slip through their fingers. They recognize neither today's value nor its potential... If we want to do something with our lives, then we must focus on today. That's where tomorrow's success lies."

Maxwell then introduces the idea that there are a few essential areas on which we need to focus daily in order to bring a balanced, successful approach to life. He states that all we need to do is to make firm decisions (or commit to definite goals) in these areas - the rest then simply becomes a matter of managing the implementation of those decisions on a day-to-day basis.

He ends the chapter with the counter-example of Oscar Wilde. Wilde was intelligent and gifted, and enjoyed an excellent school and university education. His potential to succeed was excellent. Yet he ended his life in despair and failure. While in jail he wrote:

"I must say to myself that I ruined myself, and that nobody great or small can be ruined except by his own hand... Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still..."

"I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the housetop. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace. There is only one thing for me now, absolute humility."

Wilde's lack of focus had led him to ruin, and he died penniless at only 46. Maxwell believes that this (and less dramatic failure) can be prevented by living purposefully today.

A closing quote:

"One today is worth two tomorrows; what I am to be, I am now becoming" - Benjamin Franklin.

Some things to think about:

- 1) Can you think of anyone whose life is affected by past negative experiences, or who lives on the basis of past successes?
- 2) How well do you manage to focus on today?

2. *Today Can Become a Masterpiece*

Chapter two of Maxwell's book "Today Matters" continues the introductory material, before the central section. Despite the fact that I have read it before I still found myself getting goosebumps as I reread Maxwell's motivation for the practices he describes (although I doubt that my summary will have anything like the same impact!). The chapter is entitled "Today Can Become a Masterpiece".

He opens with some penetrating questions: "How would you describe your life? Are you achieving what you desire? Are you accomplishing the things that are important to you? Do you consider yourself a success? How do your prospects look for the future?". Maxwell states that he can spend just one day with a person and be able to tell whether they will be successful or not. His reasoning comes back to the central message of the book: settling several critical issues for your life and then managing them on a daily basis lays the foundation for your success (or lack of it). "You will never change your life until you change something you do daily... Every day of your life is merely preparation for the next". In a few, short sections he deals with some aspects

of this preparation.

1) You Are Preparing For Something

Is your daily behaviour preparing you for success or for failure? He quotes his father as saying "You can pay now and play later, or you can play now and pay later. But either way, you are going to pay". As a practical example he cites his own habit of collecting and indexing quotes, stories, etc. that he can use in his workshops and books. As he says, this is not a fun activity, but the wealth of material that he has amassed since he started the practice in the 1960's has given him a treasure trove for his speaking and writing (1200 files worth!).

2) Preparation Today Gives Confidence Tomorrow

Here Maxwell uses the analogy of preparing for an exam. Thorough preparation means a student can enter an exam with confidence. The same applies to practising a sport before a major event, and many similar endeavours. In the same way, daily discipline can allow us to face the future with confidence.

3) Preparation Today Gives Success Tomorrow

Here Maxwell quotes John Kotter, a lecturer at Harvard Business School and author of "Leading Change": "Most people don't lead their own lives - they accept their lives". This refers to the reactive, rather than proactive, way many people live. This is also one of the key points in Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits". Letting circumstances or other people dictate your agenda is not a recipe for success. Benjamin Disraeli said "The secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes".

Maxwell then describes some of the philosophy of one his personal heroes, John Wooden, a hugely successful basketball coach. In 2003, Maxwell was able to spend a day with Wooden (then in his nineties). Wooden coached his teams on the basis of the importance of "today". One of his sayings was the phrase on which the title of this chapter is based: "Make today a masterpiece".

This begs the question of how we go about this. Maxwell believes it takes two critical factors: (1) Decisions, and (2) Discipline. Good decisions alone may give one a goal, but without results. Discipline that is not based on good decisions is likely to lead to a regimented life that falls short of its full potential. He then deals with each of these factors independently.

Good Decisions Today Will Give You a Better Tomorrow

Some people drift aimlessly or reactively through life, without realising that only they can make the decisions that will make a difference. In extreme cases, people make terribly negative decisions (such as an alcoholic who keeps frequenting bars). Of course, good decisions may be difficult. Maxwell quotes Theodore Hesburgh:

You don't make decisions because they're EASY;

You don't make decisions because they're CHEAP;

You don't make decisions because they're POPULAR;

You make decisions because they're RIGHT.

Furthermore, you need to what the critical areas in your life are that require good decisions. Maxwell has identified twelve (his "daily dozen");

- 1) Attitude: choose and display the right attitudes
- 2) Priorities: determine and act on important priorities
- 3) Health: know and follow healthy guidelines
- 4) Family: communicate with and care for your family
- 5) Thinking: practice and develop good thinking
- 6) Commitment: make and keep proper commitments

- 7) Finances: make and manage money properly
- 8) Faith: deepen and live out your faith
- 9) Relationships: initiate and invest in good relationships
- 10) Generosity: plan for and model generosity
- 11) Values: embrace and practice good values
- 12) Growth: seek and experience improvements

Each of these needs to be the subject of careful thought, decisions and then an ongoing process of daily management. While the list may seem long, the step of taking the critical decisions in each of these areas can actually make them quite simple to manage. "You can settle an issue once and for all, and you won't have to revisit it daily".

This has two advantages. Firstly, decisions can be made without the decision-making process being clouded by emotion (conversely, a reactive approach leaves itself open to being influenced by the emotions of the moment). Secondly, once a decision is made it merely has to be managed - this is simpler (and more consistent) than trying to base daily actions on spur-of-the-moment decisions.

The Disciplines You Practice Today Will Give You a Better Tomorrow

As already mentioned, good decisions without discipline simply leads to underachievement or even failure. Discipline is essential: "Everyone wants to be thin, but nobody wants to diet. Everyone wants to live long; not many want to exercise".

While discipline may be unpleasant, failure and regret are not exactly pleasant alternatives. Using health and exercise as an example, Maxwell points out that thirty minutes of exercise in the morning might be hard/unpleasant, but the immediate effect is often a positive one on the rest of the day. On a regular basis, the short, temporary discomforts of exercise have life-changing benefits.

A closing quote:

"The bookends of success are starting and finishing. Decisions help us start. Discipline helps us finish."

Some things to think about:

- 1) Is your daily behaviour preparing you for success or for failure?
- 2) Of Maxwell's twelve key areas, which do you think you have well managed in your own life, and which still require some work?

This week we continue with the second, introductory chapter of Maxwell's book "Today Matters": "Today Can Become a Masterpiece". Last week we introduced the "daily dozen" key areas that require critical decisions to be taken and then managed on a daily, disciplined basis. The next section takes a practical look at how to get started and how to manage this process.

Maxwell makes the point that getting started is often the hardest part of any endeavour (e.g. an exercise programme, or a diet). He offers a few tips to help overcome the inertia.

1) Start With Yourself

Maxwell quotes Gandhi: "Be the change you want to see in the world". Often we focus on the changes we would like to see in others (our spouses, children, colleagues, etc.). Gandhi's point is that we should focus on changing ourselves first, and act as examples for those around us. This approach can produce confidence and contentment, rather than frustration.

2) Start Early

The earlier you settle the key decisions for your life and start to manage them proactively, the greater your

chances of success (it's like a compound investment account in many ways). As he works through each of the "daily dozen" issues in detail in subsequent chapters, Maxwell shares his personal journey in each of the areas. He counts himself fortunate to have settled many of these decisions relatively early in his life (9 out of the 12 before he turned 30), but even he only faced the twelfth decision (in his case health) in his fifties.

3) Start Small

Trying to make a big change decision can be daunting. Focusing on the first step, rather than the ultimate goal, not only simplifies the situation but success in the first step brings about confidence to face the subsequent steps. Prioritising the steps to be taken helps prevent distraction. Maxwell also points out that we may need to take some initial steps without knowing exactly what the subsequent ones will be: a fuller understanding will come as the journey unfolds (I know this has often been the case in my life).

4) Start Now

Hesitation can be fatal. We have all heard about people who reach the end of their lives filled with regrets at the things they never achieved. Don't put off a key decision until some "ideal" time (e.g. "when the house is paid off...", "when the kids leave home...", "when I retire..."). "Today matters. The way you spend today really can change your life. But the first decision you must make is to begin".

Maxwell then provides some practical tips on how to apply the principles that he covers in each of the twelve following chapters.

1) Review the decisions and ask yourself, "Which good decisions have I already made?"

Most people have already made good decisions on several of the key issues. Some of these may have been unconscious, others may have been the subject of careful deliberation. "[Recognise and acknowledge] the positive steps you've already taken."

2) Identify the decisions you still must make

You may never have tackled some of the key areas in your life, or may find that you need to reevaluate previous decisions (particularly, reactive, or subconscious ones). "Acknowledge your need to change."

3) Choose one of those decisions and determine to make it this week

Don't try to sort out an entire key area in your life at once. Select one aspect of it, make a decision and implement that (i.e. take one step at a time). Maxwell points out that a danger with a book like this is that one can be tempted to tackle too much at once (hopefully these week-by-week summaries help somewhat with the pacing).

4) Learn the disciplines that go with each decision

Each chapter has suggestions on specific ways in which the decisions can be managed on an ongoing basis. Self-discipline, and learning new habits is not easy and takes time. Take encouragement from small successes.

5) Repeat the process until you've mastered each of the "daily dozen"

Work through the twelve areas one at a time. Maxwell admits to still battling with the discipline of exercise, which ties into the area of health issues that he only tackled relatively late in his life.

He ends this chapter by returning to the account of his day with John Wooden, the highly acclaimed basketball coach. In preparation for their meeting Maxwell had studied all Wooden's books and all the background material he could find. During their lunch Maxwell peppered him with questions about his leadership philosophy and his recipe for success.

One of the questions Maxwell asked was what Wooden missed most about coaching (Wooden was 92 at the time of the interview - long retired). Wooden's answer was very surprising: "Practice"! In one of his books Wooden wrote: "I never dreamed about winning... What I was dreaming about each year... was trying to produce the best basketball team we could be. My thoughts were directed toward preparation, our journey, not the results of the effort (such as winning national championships). That would simply have shifted my

attention to the wrong area, hoping for something out of my control. Hoping doesn't make it happen."

As Maxwell probed the subject of practice, Wooden pointed out that preparation determines success. Giving a 75% effort at practice one day cannot be recovered by giving 125% the next day - 100% effort is required every day.

Maxwell: "As I listened to him speak, something steeled within me. Before I met Coach Wooden, I had wanted to write 'Today Matters'. After meeting him I felt I had to write it. Everything he was saying to me seemed to confirm what I believed about how tomorrow's success can be found in what you do today".

After they had their lunch they went back to Wooden's home and continued their discussion. As Maxwell admired his trophies and mementoes, Wooden would deflect the praise to his teams. As he was about to leave Maxwell mentioned that he had heard that Wooden carried his personal philosophy around with him all the time. Wooden offered him a copy of the small card containing a few key statements. One of them was:

"Make each day your masterpiece".

Some things to think about:

Maxwell asks the following 12 questions in the book, and suggests that you answer them honestly as you prepare to go through the subsequent chapters.

- 1) Is your attitude a plus or a minus today?
- 2) Are your priorities keeping you focused today?
- 3) Is your health enabling you to succeed today?
- 4) Does your family situation provide support today?
- 5) Is your thinking mature and productive today?
- 6) Have your commitments been kept today?
- 7) Have your financial decisions been solid today?
- 8) Has your faith been active today?
- 9) Are your relationships being strengthened today?
- 10) Has your generosity added value to others today?
- 11) Are your values giving you direction today?
- 12) Is your growth making you better today?

3. Today's ATTITUDE Gives Me Possibilities

This week we begin the first of the twelve central chapters of "Today Matters", which each deal with one of Maxwell's Daily Dozen. The first is Attitude, and the chapter is entitled "Today's ATTITUDE Gives Me Possibilities".

Maxwell opens by conceding that it is possible to succeed while having a poor attitude, and giving a couple of examples (Sigmund Freud is one). In such cases, success is devoid of usually happiness, and may be short-lived. More commonly, a positive attitude is required in order for us to achieve success.

Maxwell lists a number of points which describe the impact of our attitude on our daily life:

- 1) Your attitude at the beginning of a task affects its outcome more than anything else

Maxwell turns a well-known saying around and states that "All's well that begins well"! Whether it's a sportsman preparing for an event or a businessman entering into a difficult negotiation, attitude is vitally important. "The confident person increases his chances for success. The pessimist invites the negative outcomes he expects".

If we regularly face situations that bring out negative attitudes in us, we need to adjust our attitude. "When you approach a task - especially an important one you don't relish - fix your mind on facts, not on your

feelings".

2) Your attitude toward others often determines their attitude toward you

Maxwell tells the tale of a complaining mother out shopping with her daughter just before Christmas. After a bad experience with a shop assistant, she commented that she would never go back to that store, saying "Did you see that dirty look she gave me?". The long-suffering daughter's response: "She didn't give it to you, Mom. You had it when you went in!"

Starting an interaction with a person on a positive note will usually result in them responding in a like manner. Likewise, being short with someone will often result in an negative response. "If you want to enjoy mostly pleasant interaction with people as you go through your day, treat others well".

3) Your attitude can give you a winner's perspective

This is perhaps most obvious in sports (Maxwell recounts an anecdote of a boxer), but also applies in other areas. A positive attitude can mean the difference between winning and losing, whether it's a sports match or a business deal.

4) Your attitude - not your achievements - gives you happiness

Maxwell quotes Samuel Johnson: "He who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the grief which he purposes to remove". I am reminded of Covey's description of Victor Frankl choosing not to let his circumstances (a Nazi prison camp) determine his thinking.

5) Your attitude is contagious

We've all experienced this: being around someone positive (or negative) tends to rub off on us. A mentor of Maxwell's grouped people as "polluters" or "purifiers" depending on whether they would tend to pull a group down or lift it up.

A positive attitude was one of the "daily dozen" which Maxwell discovered very early - in his teen years. While he was not the best basketball player in his school team, the coach made him the captain, because of his positive attitude, which the coach saw rubbed off on the other players. In this and other situations Maxwell realised that his positive outlook was having positive effects in his life and determined to keep a positive attitude.

Our attitude is something that we control - it's not determined by our genetics or circumstances (as Frankl demonstrated). Maxwell gives some guidelines to help foster a positive attitude:

1) Take responsibility for your attitude

Maxwell tells a story from early in his marriage. His wife, Margaret, had been asked to speak to a group of wives of leaders and he went along to support her. During a question and answer session, one of the ladies in the audience asked "Does John make you happy?". Maxwell knew he was a good husband and looked forward to the answer to this question. When Margaret's response was "No, he doesn't", he wanted to run from the room! However, she continued with her answer: "The first two or three years we were married I thought it was John's job to make me happy. But he didn't. He wasn't mean to me or anything. He's a good husband. But nobody can make another person happy. That was my job". She had learned a valuable lesson that many people never learn: each of us is responsible for our own attitude.

2) Decide to change your bad attitude areas

Most people have some particular areas in their life where their attitude needs improvement - perhaps a specific activity or a relationship. These need to be the focus of some determined action to change our attitude.

3) Think, act, talk, and conduct yourself like the person you want to be

Sport coaches teach the importance of visualisation. Believe that you can improve - the actions will follow.

4) Place a high value on people

Attitude is most apparent in our interactions with other people. "You can't dislike people and have a good attitude at the same time". Look for opportunities to help people, see the best in them and help them to develop their strengths.

5) Develop a high appreciation for life

Many people have a terribly negative view of their lives, and complain incessantly about their circumstances. Their glass is always half-empty. "[Appreciation] is a matter of perspective".

Maxwell then turns to how we manage the transformation of our attitudes. He sums this up as follows: "Every day I will make the adjustments necessary to keep my attitude right". He gives several guidelines:

1) Recognise that your attitude needs daily adjustment

No matter how positive a person is, some days it will be difficult to maintain a positive attitude, or there may be some specific areas where we struggle. For Maxwell, patience with people has always been difficult. He checks himself daily and makes a point of apologising to people with whom he has been impatient. He suggests starting each day with an "attitude check" and watching for familiar warning signals.

2) Find something positive in everything

In most difficult situations or trying circumstances we can find positive aspects. Focusing on these will help us maintain a positive attitude.

3) Find someone positive in every situation

Try to associate with positive people rather than negative ones. Their attitude can be an example and an encouragement.

4) Say something positive in every conversation

Paying compliments and giving praise not only helps others, but also lifts us up. This was the essence of the message of the "How Full Is Your Bucket" series we did at the beginning of the year (see: <http://listserv.ru.ac.za/pipermail/cs-staffdev-l/2005-February/date.html>).

5) Remove negative words from your vocabulary

Try to catch yourself before saying "I can't...", "If only...", "I'm afraid...", etc. Rather, try to express yourself in positive terms.

6) Express gratitude to others daily

An attitude of thankfulness helps us with our focus on the positive, but this needs to be expressed.

Maxwell ends the chapter with a lengthy example. In this case it is that of Lance Armstrong. He tells how Armstrong grew up in difficult circumstances - his mother was a young, poor single-parent. Lance had poor ball skills and so gravitated towards sports like running and swimming. When he started to compete in triathlons he discovered his aptitude for cycling and soon became quite successful in the USA. He wanted to prove himself in European professional cycling and travelled to Spain where he had a terrible race, coming last. "What carried him through was natural ability, a fiery competitive nature, and an incredibly positive attitude. The words of his mother were constantly in the back of his mind: 'Make an obstacle an opportunity. Make a negative a positive. If you can't give 100 percent, you won't make it. Never quit!'"

Of course, at what seemed to be the height of his career as a professional cyclist, Armstrong was diagnosed with testicular cancer that had spread throughout his system, into his lungs and his brain. His doctors told him he had a 50/50 chance, but actually believed his likelihood of survival was only 3%. "Through it all, Armstrong managed his attitude so that he would remain positive". One of his mottoes is "Hope is the only antidote to fear". Of his cancer treatment he said "I thought being depressed would be detrimental... I have to say it was a very positive time in my life".

As we know he overcame the cancer and went on to win a record seven consecutive Tours de France (no one else has ever won more than five).

A closing quote from Armstrong:

Without belief, we would be left with nothing but an overwhelming doom, every single day. And it will beat you. I didn't fully see, until the cancer, how we fight every day against the creeping negatives of the world, how we struggle daily against the slow lapping of cynicism. Dispiritedness and disappointment, these were the real perils of life, not some sudden illness or cataclysmic millennium doomsday.

And another I came across recently:

An optimist sees an opportunity in every calamity; a pessimist a calamity in every opportunity.

(Winston Churchill)

Maxwell suggests some exercises that can help us improve our attitude:

- He suggests identifying one discipline that we can make a daily effort to implement in our lives.
- List the negative attitudes you have, and then alongside them list a positive response (or opposing attitude). Pick one item from the list each day and focus on working on the positive aspect.
- Thank or praise someone today.
- Find a positive quotation or motto for the week and place it somewhere you will see it regularly.
- Begin your interactions with people on a positive note (e.g. smile and greet a shop assistant before they do so).

Some things to think about:

- 1) Do you know anyone who is perennially positive? What is their effect on you when they are around?
- 2) Would you say you were a pessimist or an optimist? How can you improve your attitude?

4. Today's PRIORITIES Give Me Focus

The second of Maxwell's Daily Dozen deals with Priorities, and the chapter is entitled "Today's PRIORITIES Give Me Focus". Again, I find it quite reminiscent of one of Stephen Covey's habits (the third): "put first things first".

As usual Maxwell opens with an example - that of Howard Hughes. Hughes inherited his father's hugely successful company at the age of 18. "He was intelligent, and the whole world was open to him". Wisely, he appointed a management company to run the business while he decided what direction he should follow. The first was movie production, an area in which he rapidly excelled. However, after some time he became distracted, started to have affairs with actresses and eventually his wife divorced him. After that he turned to aircraft design, and again became very successful. He designed many cutting-edge aircraft and invested in aircraft production and airlines. But again, by the mid-1940's he had lost focus (and a great deal of money). From there he invested in various movie ventures, airlines, hotels and casinos, supported all along by the income from his father's company. He became increasingly reclusive and eccentric, and drifted apart from his second wife.

"There are those who would call Hughes a success because of his wealth; he was the [USA's] first billionaire and at one time the wealthiest person in the world. But when I read about Hughes, I see a broken life of unfulfilled potential. He was unable to sustain any long-term relationships... And the only companies he owned that thrived are the ones he either never ran or eventually relinquished control of... He died alienated and alone".

The answer to avoiding this kind of life is to focus, and, in order to focus, we must have clear priorities on which to focus. This comes down to how we utilise our time.

Maxwell quotes Myers Barnes: "Einstein understood time management is an oxymoron. It cannot be managed". Since we cannot manage time, we must manage our use of it.

Maxwell makes the point that in his youth he thought that he could do everything he wanted to do, but he realised (quite early on) that this was not true and that he would need to prioritise his goals. "Excellence comes from doing the right things right. You've got to let go of the rest". He suggests thinking about how you would spend your time if you knew that you had only a few months left to live.

External pressures and our own desires leave us with a wide range of activities clamouring for our attention each day. Our priorities help us to focus on those that will bring success.

Maxwell tells how he came across the Pareto Principle in his 20's, while studying for a business degree. Essentially, this principle states that focusing on the top 20% of our priorities will bring an 80% return. This revolutionised Maxwell's life. He gives three steps that can help bring about positive change in this area of your life:

1) Take back today

Don't let other people set your agenda.

2) Ask yourself three questions (in this order):

a) What is required of me?

What do I HAVE to do today? There are activities that we cannot avoid.

b) What gives me the greatest return?

Some activities produce more results/greater success than others. What are these areas for you?

c) What gives me the greatest reward?

Focusing on what we must do and what will bring the greatest results are fine, but if we do not feel fulfilled, we will probably not be happy. However, this needs to be the third consideration - our society is full of examples of people who seek rewards first.

Answering these three questions helps us know what we do not need to do each day (which in some ways is more important than knowing what to do). Maxwell quotes William James: "The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook".

3) Stay in your strength zone

Maxwell makes the point that no one wants average. If we're choosing a restaurant or a movie or a contractor, we don't pick the average/OK one. We need to play to our strengths. In order to determine exactly where our strengths lie, Maxwell gives four tips:

a) Trial and error: we need to be prepared to take risks and try new activities. If something is a disaster, move on!

b) The advice of others: ask people you trust for advice.

c) Personality tests: there are many tests that will help provide guidance to your innate abilities, and may suggest latent strengths you are unaware of.

d) Personal experience: carefully evaluate how you have done something in the past.

Maxwell then turns to five daily habits that can help us manage our priorities.

1) Evaluate priorities daily

Circumstances change, and we need to reassess our priorities. While our values remain constant, the methods we use to achieve our goals need to be flexible.

2) Plan your time carefully

Maxwell plans his schedule forty days at a time, and starts each day, knowing exactly what is planned for that day. He tells the story of Charles Schwab, a successful American businessman, who employed a management consultant to help him improve his company's productivity. The advice he received was simple: write down an ordered list of the six most important tasks you need to do for your company. Start with the first and work

at it until it is completed. They do the same for the second, and so on. After a few weeks Schwab was amazed at the results, and his company soon became the leader in its field.

3) Follow your plan

This sounds obvious, but it is remarkable how low priority tasks and interruptions can distract us from our goals. Apparently, a survey of American executives showed that most of them only get to the most important activities in the middle of the afternoon!

4) Delegate wherever possible

Delegation needs to be handed carefully (many people hang on to their tasks out of pride or insecurity, others delegate carelessly). Maxwell's guideline is to delegate anything that someone else could do at least 80% as well as he could do it himself. He also makes a point of providing support, guidance and encouragement so that the person's performance on the task will improve over time. Often, the person becomes better at the task than Maxwell himself, which he finds "rewarding", rather than threatening.

5) Invest in the right people daily

Maxwell quotes a friend of his: "we spend priority time with problem people when we should be spending it with potential people". I often feel that we spend too much of our time focusing on the poor students (as in the one's who don't pull their weight) and not enough on those who are fully committed to their learning. In his business setting, Maxwell uses the following list of criteria to help him determine where to invest his effort with the people he leads:

- value to the team
- natural ability
- responsibility
- timing
- potential
- mentoring fit

He closes with another story, this time of the USA's 2003 National Teacher of the Year, Betsy Rogers. Rogers is an incredibly dedicated teacher who had spent most of her career teaching in a relatively poor, rural community. She felt that being a part of the community was important so she and her family moved into the area. She is very involved with her students, their families and the wider community. She has invested in herself, studying for three postgraduate degrees. As National teacher of the Year, she was expected to tour the country and the world as a "spokeswoman for education". Needless to say, this kind of exposure meant she could have had her pick of teaching posts, or well-paid administrative positions in education. Her goal: to find a rural school with underperforming children. A supervisor described her as "one of those extraordinary naturals for whom teaching is not only her vocation, it is her joy, her daily discovery and her avocation". Rogers explains her attitude: "I was taught that we are here on this earth to serve". In short, she knows her priority and focuses on it daily.

A closing quote from the British Prime Minister, William Gladstone:

"He is a wise man who wastes no energy on pursuits for which he is not fitted; and he is wiser still who from among the things he can do well, chooses and resolutely follows the best".

Some things to think about:

1. How careful have you been with your time in the past? What effect has this had?
2. Consider carefully the three questions Maxwell posed:
What is required of me?

5. **Today's HEALTH Gives Me Strength**

Last year we started John Maxwell's book, "Today Matters". We covered the introduction and the first two important issues that need a strong, daily focus in our lives: Attitude and Priorities.

This week we continue with the third of Maxwell's "Daily Dozen" factors for successful living. It deals with Health, and the chapter is entitled "Today's HEALTH Gives Me Strength".

Maxwell opens the chapter with the admission that this is an area which he struggles with and in which he is far from being an "expert". He had always been very healthy (in thirty years he never missed a public engagement due to illness!), and this led him to neglect the basic disciplines of diet and exercise. He led a very hectic and busy lifestyle, with numerous speaking engagements and attendant travel demands, and built up his companies from nothing. "Maintaining a lifestyle at that pace meant that I rarely exercised, I didn't eat well, and I was overweight. But I didn't worry. Every year I took a physical and received an excellent report from my doctor. So I simply took my health for granted".

All that changed in 1998. At the company's annual Christmas function he suffered a massive heart attack and was rushed to hospital. Luckily, he had recently formed a friendship with a cardiac specialist who arranged for the best local cardiac team to take on his case. They operated through the night and removed the offending clot, using a brand new treatment that had only recently been developed. If Maxwell had had his heart attack even a year earlier, he probably would have died. Fortunately, he suffered no permanent damage and was able to make a complete recovery.

Thus, from his own experience, Maxwell speaks to those of us who perhaps take our health for granted as he did, or at least don't take the necessary disciplines as seriously as we should. He starts with a reminder of the importance of health: how it affects every area of our lives (emotional, intellectual and spiritual). As he points out, even a relatively minor complaint (like a tooth ache) can affect our mood, our ability to focus and our ability to take part in spiritual activities such as prayer. "You can escape from a lot of things that might hurt you... [b]ut you can't get away from your body".

In addition, as well as potentially affecting the "quantity" of our lives, poor health has an impact on our quality of life. He quotes Zig Ziglar (a management/leadership expert) who asks whether the owner of an expensive race horse or an expensive pedigree dog would allow it to smoke, drink and carouse?! Abusing our bodies will affect our quality of life.

Maxwell also reminds us that it is far easier to maintain good health than to regain it. Prevention is better than cure! "People are funny. When they are young, they spend their health to get wealth. Later, they will gladly pay all they have trying to get their health back"!

Maxwell then returns to the experience of his heart attack and the effect this had on him. This required a daily discipline of healthy eating and exercise. In order to keep this kind of commitment, he gives a number of suggestions:

1) Have a purpose worth living for

A powerful life-goal that motivates you is a good reason to keep healthy. This may be something like your family, or the deeper good that your work or other activities may bring. A strong sense of purpose can help provide the necessary motivation for following through on the disciplines of healthy eating and exercise. Noticing that Maxwell was passing up desserts after his heart attack, a friend asked if he had lost the "craving for desserts". Maxwell's answer: "No, but my craving for life is greater".

2) Do work you enjoy

Having to work at something we don't enjoy can cause enormous stress and attendant health problems. There are two aspects to this: (a) we need to do work that we think is important, that is aligned with our values; and (b) we need to do work that does not force us to function in an area of personal weakness (e.g. public speaking is a nightmare for many people - Maxwell, on the other hand, finds it incredibly energising).

3) Find your pace

Many people lead their lives either too slowly (i.e. lazily) or too fast (and run the risk of burnout/breakdown). We need to find our own pace (it is an individual characteristic, and it is dangerous to compare your pace to that of others).

4) Accept your personal worth

We need to have a healthy sense of self-worth, that is independent of what other people may think of us (or, even worse, what we think they may think of us). A poor self-image can lead to many self-destructive behaviours (addictions, eating disorders, etc.).

5) Laugh!

"We should never take life or ourselves too seriously". All of us have weaknesses and foibles that can either be cause for depression or a source of healthy self-deprecation. "If you can laugh at yourself loudly and often, you will find it liberating. There's no better way to prevent stress from becoming distress".

Maxwell then turns to the practicality of daily disciplines to maintain a healthy life. No great surprise here - they are diet, exercise and stress-control. In Maxwell's case, following his heart attack, he committed himself to daily eating low-fat foods and exercising for at least 35 minutes. Apparently, 85% of cardiac patients cannot keep up a healthy lifestyle for more six months! Maxwell threw himself into the new routines very successfully. Then, just over two years after his heart attack, disaster struck - his specialist congratulated him on his progress and told him that he need no longer consider himself a "heart patient". Maxwell took this as permission to relax the discipline slightly, and slowly slid back into bad eating habits, while letting his exercise schedule slip. And a holiday in London did not help (Maxwell confesses to a predilection for fish and chips!). His daily commitment slipped "to most days, to some days". He has now recommitted himself to his daily healthy lifestyle.

1) Eat Right

"The key to healthy eating is moderation and managing what you eat every day". Maxwell is no believer in crash diets and fads. He also focuses on today: don't worry about what you might have done wrong yesterday - get it right today. Get advice from a doctor, if necessary.

2) Exercise

"Most people I know either love exercise and do it excessively or they hate it and avoid it completely". However, a regular, reasonable exercise schedule is the ideal. The health benefits of physical fitness are well known (Maxwell quotes a researcher who lists the benefits of helping prevent heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, diabetes and osteoporosis, and possibly some cancers and clinical depression). The payoffs from exercise are often small and slow in coming, but one needs to focus on a consistent exercise regime. On his doctor's recommendation, Maxwell walks on a treadmill for at least 35 minutes, at least five days a week. You will need to find a form of exercise that suits you. Again, Maxwell suggests seeking medical advice, if necessary. Join the Health Suite. Get a bicycle! Whatever it takes for you.

3) Handle Stress Effectively

In the past, most disease was caused by infection. Today stress is often the cause. Maxwell gives some questions produced by the British National Association for Mental Health to help determine your level of stress:

- Do minor problems and disappointments bother you more than they should?
- Are you finding it hard to get along with people (and them with you)?
- Have you found that you're not getting a kick out of things you used to enjoy?
- Do your anxieties haunt you?
- Are you afraid of situations or people that didn't bother you before?
- Have you become suspicious of people, even your friends?
- Do you every feel that you are trapped?
- Do you feel inadequate?

Positive answers to many of these questions may be an indication of unresolved stress in your life. While we all face pressure, how we deal with that determines whether we experience stress or not. Maxwell identifies four areas of potential stress and how he deals with them:

- Family Problems: communication, unconditional love, time together
- Limited Options: creative thinking, advice from others, tenacity
- Staff Productivity Problems: immediate confrontation with the person and addressing the issue
- Staff Leaders with Bad Attitudes: removal"

People are probably one of the main causes of stress (whether family or co-workers), and problems in this area need to be handled as soon as possible - delay will cause stress.

Maxwell ends off this chapter by pointing out that it is never too late to start (or restart) the disciplines of healthy living. He tells the story of an American fitness expert, Jack LaLanne, who devoted his life to fitness, most notably producing a long running TV exercise programme, and inventing many of the machines used in modern gyms. He is now almost ninety and still incredibly active (his current goal is a 26 mile, underwater swim from Catalina island to Los Angeles!).

A closing quote from Jack LaLanne:

"I never think of age, I think about today; I don't think about tomorrow. I think about this moment and what I am going to do".

Some things to think about:

How would you rate your health? What single, practical step can you take to improve it, if necessary?

How would you rate your stress levels (use the British National Association for Mental Health questions to help if you wish)? How could you reduce your stress levels, if necessary?

6. Today's FAMILY Gives Me Stability

This week we move on to the fourth of Maxwell's "Daily Dozen", which deals with a vitally important issue: Family. The chapter is entitled "Today's FAMILY Gives Me Stability".

Maxwell starts with the stories of two nineteenth century families from the New York area: the Jukes (a pseudonym) and the Edwards. Both were the focus of some sociological studies, but were very different from each other. The original patriarch of the Jukes family was Max Jukes, born between 1720 and 1740. He had eight children (some of them illegitimate), he was a heavy drinker and often out of work. The researcher who studied the Jukes family managed to track about 700 of Max's 1200 descendants. Of these, 25% lived in poverty, 20% had criminal records, 8.5% were habitual thieves and 7% were prostitutes. At least one employer in the area kept a list of Jukes on hand to ensure that none of them would be employed in his factory. The family name was used as a general term of reproach. While researchers in the late 19th century saw this as proof of a genetic predisposition to crime, more recent research has dispelled genetics in criminal behaviour - the Jukes appalling history was rooted in their upbringing (of course, there were also a few members of the family who managed to make a success of their lives).

The Edwards family, on the other hand, was descended from Jonathan Edwards, a theologian and president of Princeton University. He and his wife had eleven children, and remained happily married until his death. A researcher traced 1400 of their descendants and found:

- 13 college presidents
- 65 professors
- 100 lawyers, including a law school dean
- 30 judges

- 66 doctors, including a medical school dean
- 80 holders of public office (senators, mayors, governors and even a Vice President)

Needless to say, they also had their "black sheep", but the pattern is clear: "A good family is an incredible advantage in life".

While most families are unlike either of these extremes, it is true that families have a huge impact on their members, for good or bad. And, while we cannot affect our past, we can affect the future, particularly of our children, by providing a strong family foundation for their lives. Maxwell spells out a number of advantages that can be found in a strong family:

1) A Safe Haven in a Storm

Life is tough. The demands placed on us at work, at school, in modern city living, etc. are difficult to deal with. A warm, supportive home provides shelter in such an environment.

2) A Photo Album of Memories

Even children in dysfunctional families find good memories to cling to. If you reflect on your childhood, you will be able to recall happy occasions and favourite moments.

3) A Crucible of Character

"More than any other single factor in a person's formative years, family life forges character". Even as adults we are shaped by the ongoing experience we have of our families - they form our "primary environment".

4) A Mirror Reflecting Truth

"To grow, you have to know yourself. You must know your weaknesses and strengths". A loving, supportive family provides the right nurturing environment to face yourself and let that lead to personal growth. A family "filled with unconditional love... [that] allows family members to be open about their mistakes and shortcomings... a safe place to fail".

5) A Treasure Chest of Most Important Relationships

Good families tend to produce children who in turn have good families (and vice versa): we tend to reproduce the patterns we grew up with. Apparently, Mother Theresa was once asked "What can we do to promote world peace?". Her answer: "Go home and love your family".

Maxwell realised the importance of family relatively late in his life at the age of 39. This was precipitated by his observation of the failing marriages all around him (including many couples who he and his wife had thought had strong relationships). Observing these failures, brought Maxwell to the point of realising that he had to make a firm commitment. For him, "Success meant having those closest to me love and respect me the most". This put his family squarely in the centre of his priorities.

He moves on to give a number of general guidelines for helping to build a strong family:

1) Determine Your Priorities

Maxwell admits that he got this wrong when he was young and newly married. He was putting all his time and energy into his job and his wife was getting very little attention. Fortunately, he realised what he was doing before too long, and began to deliberately make time for her. He quotes research that shows that parents today spend 40% less time with their children than was the case for previous generations. We all know the horrific divorce statistics in our society.

2) Decide on Your Philosophy

A family should have a philosophy or a mission, that encapsulates its values. Maxwell and his wife mapped out their own philosophy in the early years of their marriage (which he gives in the book), and then raised their children in line with values. Stephen Covey has written a book that deals with this (The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families), which friends of mine have found helpful in forming a family philosophy/mission. Maxwell's main guideline is to keep it simple - "Whittle [it] down to the nonnegotiables".

3) Develop Your Problem-Solving Strategy

Hollywood romances have done families a great deal of harm, by frequently portraying a totally unrealistic picture of marriage, suggesting that it's all easy. "Marriage isn't easy. Family isn't easy. Life isn't easy. Expect problems, stay committed, and develop a strategy for getting through the rough times". Maxwell tells of friends of his who developed "fight rules" (she is quiet and he is "energetic, and verbal"!) to manage their approach to disagreements. Maxwell suggests that families work out a conflict-resolution strategy (at a conflict-free time!). This should promote three factors: "(1) better understanding; (2) positive change, and (3) growing relationships".

From these three guidelines he moves on to present some practical advice:

1) Put Your Family in Your Calendar First

When planning ahead, Maxwell explicitly schedules time for family (holidays, time with his wife - both for "dates" and just to be with her - and time for his children and now his grandchildren: for sports events, school performances, etc.). Someone expressed the perfect balance very well: "you should never let yourself feel that you ought to be at work when you're with your family, and you should never feel that you ought to be with your family when you're at work".

2) Create and Maintain Family Traditions

Maxwell issues the challenge to try to remember all your childhood Christmas and birthday gifts, then to try to recall all your childhood holidays. His conclusion: time is more important than things. Traditions allow us to focus on time with our families. "Traditions give your family a shared history and a strong sense of identity". These can be quite small things (my mother used to make some biscuits only when we were going on holiday, as pad kos - to this day those types of biscuit transport me back to those holiday trips). "Give thought to how you want to enjoy holidays, mark milestones, and celebrate rites of passage in your family". Traditions can arise from one's family philosophy, from your and your spouse's families, from cultural backgrounds, etc. Whatever you do, "Give traditions meaning and make them your own".

3) Find Ways to Spend Time Together

During the 1980's and 1990's there was a period when it was fashionable to talk about spending "quality time" with one's family. However, Maxwell points out that there is no substitute for "quantity" in this area. When his children were small he gave up golf for an extended period. There are four aspects that he and his wife identified:

- Significant events (birthdays, sports matches, etc.)
- Significant needs (in crisis, your family must take precedence)
- Fun time (good bonding often takes place when simply having fun)
- One-on-one time ("Nothing lets another person know you care more than your undivided attention").

4) Keep Your Marriage Healthy First

Children derive a great deal of security and a healthy example from observing their parents' relationship. Theodore Hesburgh said: "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother". Maxwell states that this calls primarily for commitment ("discipline and commitment" are far more important than feelings).

5) Express Appreciation for Each Other

"If people don't receive affirmation and appreciation at home, there's a good chance they won't get it". This comes back to unconditional love, and is not performance-based.

6) Resolve Conflict as Quickly as Possible

Maxwell has already touched on this in the guidelines above, but it is critically important. "Every family has conflict, but not all families resolve it positively. A family's response to problems will either promote bonding or be destructive. Do it quickly and effectively, and you bring healing".

Maxwell closes the chapter with the story of Karen Hughes, one of George Bush's closest advisors. She worked with him as governor of Texas and through his campaign for the White House. When he became President, he appointed her as his closest advisor. BusinessWeek described her as "the highest-ranking woman in the White House - indeed in any administration in American history". Bush himself said, "I don't want any important decision made without her in the room". But in 2002, she resigned and moved back to Texas. Her reason: "tom move [her] family home to Texas". She and her husband wanted to be close to their daughter and granddaughter, and to see their son through his last years of high school. Soon after she left, George Bush was asked by the King of Morocco why she had gone. His answer: "because her husband and son will be happier in Texas, and she had put her family ahead of her service to my government. And I am extremely grateful for that approach and that priority".

In Maxwell's words: "She chose her family over her career. Not many people in her position would do that... For Karen Hughes, today's family gives her stability".

Some things to think about:

How would you rate your family life on a scale from 1 to 10? What one practical step (perhaps one of Maxwell's suggestions above) could you take to improve it?

How well does your family resolve conflict? Do you have a "problem-solving strategy"?

7. Today's THINKING Gives Me an Advantage

The next of Maxwell's "Daily Dozen" is "Today's THINKING Gives Me an Advantage".

As usual, he opens with a story. In this case it is the story of the A&P grocery company. This started out in the mid-1800's when George Hartford convinced his employer to go into the tea business. They bought tea in bulk off the clipper ships and sold it direct to the public, eliminating the middlemen. After four years the business was booming and they started to sell groceries in addition to tea. In 1869 Hartford bought out his employer, and the business continued to boom. By 1880 they had expanded to more than 95 stores. Hartford's sons then became involved in the company and did even better than their father. George Jnr. led them into manufacturing their own products (cutting costs and increasing profits), while John focused on customer satisfaction and introducing new services. He introduced the idea of a "cash and carry" store in 1912, which was a huge success (within six months the prototype had driven a traditional A&P store in the same area out of business!). Two years later they had 1600 of the new cash-and-carry stores open. In 1916, the sons took over from their father and nine years later they had almost 14 thousand stores.

In the 1930's the grocery store industry was going through a major shift. The Hartford brothers recognised this, changed their thinking and very successfully managed the transition to the era of supermarkets. While the total number of outlets fell (by a factor of six) the business continued to boom. By 1950, A&P was the largest privately-owned company in the world, with sales of \$3.2 billion. The only company with greater sales was General Motors! In the 1960's, customers' shopping habits started to change again, demanding new superstores with a greater variety of products and brands and with all the services they wanted under one roof. The shift in the market was no greater than the one the company had very successfully managed in the 1930's, but the Hartfords were no longer in charge. Ralph Burger had taken charge of the company in the 1950's. Burger had a very conservative mindset and was focussed on maintaining income and the company's history. He was obsessed with trying to emulate what he thought John Hartford would have done if he was still in charge. His motto was "You can't argue with 100 years of success"!

Rather than thinking innovatively, as John Hartford had done, he tried to repeat Hartford's previously successful strategies. One indication of this was an experiment they tried with a prototype store called the Golden Key. This was allowed to evolve in response to customer feedback and rapidly started to resemble a modern superstore. The company's response was to shut down the experiment because they didn't like the results of the experiment! Today A&P has less than 700 stores, operating under a motley collection of trade-names. "It seems unlikely that the company will ever regain the status of profitability it once possessed". The failure was one of poor thinking.

Maxwell quotes Claude Bristol: "Thought is the original source of all wealth, all success, all material gain, all great discoveries and inventions, and all achievement". He then goes on to list three reasons for focusing on thinking as an important daily discipline.

1) Good thinking precedes good results

No matter field you may be involved in, success comes as a result of intentional, focused effort. "Success doesn't come by accident. People don't repeatedly stumble into achievement and then figure it out afterward".

2) Good thinking increases your value

Good, creative ideas are the backbone of success in any organisation. "Ideas have helped to create great companies and to drive [the U.S.] economy... Ideas are the foundation for everything we build, every advance we make".

3) Poor thinkers are slaves to their surroundings

Poor thinkers are often baffled by the problems and obstacles that they face. They are reactive, rather than proactive. They may find their direction dictated by better thinkers around them.

Maxwell notes how he was encouraged to develop strong thinking skills by his father who challenged all his children to read every day. When he was 14, Maxwell read "As a Man Thinketh" by James Allen and resolved to be a good thinker. He gives some advice for incorporating good thinking in your day.

1) Understand that great thinking comes from good thinking

At a dinner party one evening a person told a funny story about how he had overheard a customer in a bookstore ask for a simple book on MS-DOS, "...something like DOS for dummies". The customer, the shop attendant, and the person retelling the story all had the same information, but John Kilcullen, a guest at the dinner, had the inspiration and went on to launch the wildly successful Dummies series of books. The anonymous customer's good idea became a great idea in the hands of a "thinker". Thinking skills can, and must, be practised. Only by working on bad ideas, mediocre ideas, etc. will you start to learn what are good ideas, and even great ideas. "Once the ideas start flowing, they get better. Once they get better, they keep improving".

2) Recognise that there are many kinds of thinking

Maxwell has written an entire book on the subject of thinking ("Thinking for a Change", Warner Books, 2003). In it he identifies eleven different thinking skills:

- big picture thinking
- focused thinking
- creative (out-of-the-box) thinking
- realistic thinking
- strategic thinking
- possibility thinking
- reflective thinking
- questioning popular thinking
- shared thinking
- unselfish thinking
- bottom-line thinking

Some people (Maxwell mentions academics particularly!) tend to focus only on their "thinking strength" and neglect or undervalue other types of thinking.

3) Maximise your strengths and staff your weaknesses

Everyone has particular strengths, which they should seek to develop and master. Areas of weakness should

be compensated for by making use of a circle of advisors. If you're in a position to hire people who work for you, you can look out for employees that will compensate for your weaknesses, but even if you're not you can make use of friends, colleagues and family. Maxwell uses his wife and his brother, as well as his employees, to compensate for his own weaknesses.

Maxwell then gives some specific, practical tips to help with daily thinking.

1) Find a place to think

This might be a specific room (perhaps a study at home), a place (Maxwell used a spring and a large rock at different times in his life), or even just a chair. The only real criterion is that the spot should be insulated from interruptions. For some people a spot outdoors may be ideal. For others, a spot in the middle of activity (e.g. a table in a coffee shop) might be perfect.

2) Set aside time to think every day

Again, the time of day is dependent on your personality. Maxwell does most of thinking early in the morning, except for reflective thinking, which he does last thing at night.

3) Find a process that works for you

Apparently, Rudyard Kipling had to have pure black ink before he could write. Some people need a particular view, a special smell, or drink, or music or a routine. Some people think best with pen and paper, others at a keyboard. Find out what works best for you and do it.

4) Capture your thoughts

If you don't write down your ideas you are likely to lose them. Keep a notebook, or set of index cards and a pen handy at all times to jot down ideas as they come to you. Maxwell even has a small pad with a tiny light attached beside his bed so that he can jot down thoughts that strike him in the middle of the night without disturbing his wife by turning a light on.

5) Put your thoughts into action quickly

Don't delay. Great ideas often cool if left unactioned.

6) Try to improve your thinking every day

Some tips for practising good thinking skills:

- a) Focus on the positive. Negativity and worry will hinder good thinking.
- b) Gather good input. Expose yourself to good thinking (e.g. through reading) and keep notes.
- c) Spend time with good thinkers. Find a mentor or a group of friends who are good thinkers and let that rub off on you.

"I believe that many people take thinking for granted. They see it as a natural function of life. But the truth is that intentional thinking isn't commonplace. What you do every day in the area of thinking really matters because it sets the stage for all your actions, and it will bring you either adversity or advantage".

Maxwell closes the chapter with the story of Antwone Fisher, about whom a real-life drama was filmed. Fisher was born in prison, shortly after his father died. He grew up in a foster home where he was abused sexually, physically, verbally and emotionally. His foster mother boasted that she had beaten him unconscious once. When a movie reviewer asked him if the film had been accurate in its portrayal, Fisher replied that he had been "kind to them in the movie and the book... They are worse". Luckily for him, he had a teacher who started to instill some self-esteem in him during fourth grade. Even more fortunate, the decision was made for this teacher to see her class through fifth and sixth grade. Even though he should have been held back in fourth grade she passed him and continued to help him. In the fifth grade, when he completed a reading assignment in front of the class without his usual stuttering in panic, she praised his effort and told him she was proud of him. That was his turning point, as he realised that he could improve his

life for himself. This fundamental change in his thinking changed his life. He avoided the life of drugs and criminal activity that his foster brother and friends drifted into, and became a successful Hollywood script writer, with a healthy family of his own.

"No matter what kind of goals you have or obstacles you need to overcome, thinking can give you an advantage. And that advantage has the potential to change your life for the better, just as it did for Antwone Fisher".

Some things to think about:

Of Maxwell's eleven types of thinking, which are you strong at, and which not? How can you maximise your strengths, and who could help you compensate for your weaknesses?

Do you have a good thinking spot and a routine that encourages good thinking?

8. **Today's COMMITMENT Gives Me Tenacity**

We now come to the sixth of Maxwell's "Daily Dozen": Commitment. The chapter is entitled "Today's COMMITMENT Gives Me Tenacity". This may be one of the most important factors in making each day a masterpiece.

Maxwell opens with the example of Mickey Mantle, a hugely successful baseball player in the 1950's and 1960's. He was incredibly strong (holding the Guinness record for the longest home run hit at 643 feet) and talented, winning numerous awards and holding baseball records that still stand today. Despite this incredibly successful career, many people believe he never achieved his maximum potential. This is partly due to the fact that he battled with injuries, particularly to his knees, but also to the fact that he was an alcoholic (a fact that only became public in 1994, long after his retirement). He had started drinking back in 1950 when his father died. Each year he would stop drinking during the pre-season training, then start drinking again once the season began. He later admitted that the drinking had shortened his professional career, and had exacerbated the effects of the knee injuries. Once he retired, he basically drank himself unconscious almost every day, except when he had professional engagements with sponsors, etc. When he turned 62 his life hit rock bottom, with his health, family and personal life in tatters. In 1994, he decided to sober up and went into the Betty Ford rehab clinic.

People had thought he could exceed the legendary baseball players Joe DiMaggio and Babe Ruth and set even greater records, but sadly he never fulfilled this potential. Once he sobered up, he demonstrated a great deal of commitment to reforming his life, but it was too late. He received a liver transplant, but shortly thereafter died of cancer in 1995.

"What were you born to do? What do you think your future holds? Do you believe you have a purpose or destiny? If so, will you fulfil it? To become the person you have the potential to be, you will need great tenacity. That quality comes from commitment".

1) Commitment can change your life

Most of us face certain key points in our lives when we are forced to make decisions that will affect our futures dramatically. Commitment to following through on the decisions we make is essential to their success. "If you want to change, you must embrace commitment".

2) Commitment helps you overcome many of life's obstacles

We all face problems - no one is exempt from difficulty. Any challenge that is worthwhile involves hard work. Persevering through difficulties and hard times requires commitment.

3) Your commitment will be tested every day

Commitment is not an event (e.g. a marriage is not the product of saying "I do" at the altar, a successful business venture is not guaranteed by signing a contract) - it requires ongoing effort and will be tested. The tests take many forms such as failures along the way, having to press on when no one will support you, or facing disappointments.

Maxwell then tells how he came to realise the importance of commitment when he was 29 and leading a church that was entering into a huge building programme. He was faced with difficult decisions, opposition to change, and huge financial challenges. He realised that if he wasn't totally committed to the project and determined to overcome the obstacles, the project would never succeed. He gives the following advice:

1) Count the cost

Maxwell recounts how Churchill faced the threat of invasion by Hitler after the French army fell in 1940. The Germans (and the French!) were sure the British would surrender. They hadn't reckoned on Churchill's commitment to uphold "the survival of Christian civilisation" (Churchill's words). He challenged the British people with the vision of restoring freedom to Europe, or else facing "the abyss of a new dark age". Knowing what was at stake, and facing the reality of a long and difficult war, Churchill and the British people committed themselves to the battle (literally).

2) Determine to pay the price

Having counted the cost, the next step is to decide whether you are prepared to pay it. Sam Nunn (a U.S. Senator) said, "everything in life exacts a price, and you will have to decide whether the price is worth the prize".

3) Always strive for excellence

Focusing on excellence can help with commitment (Maxwell gives the examples of Michelangelo completing the Sistine Chapel, and Edison persevering to invent a working light-bulb).

Succeeding in one's commitments can be a life-changing experience, lifting one's life to a new level of success. "When you accomplish something that you once believed was impossible, it makes you a new person". Maxwell tells how the eventual success of his major building project expanded his thinking and his leadership.

He then gives some practical tips:

1) Expect commitment to be a struggle

I'm currently reading an excellent book on leadership by Andy Stanley ("The Next Generation Leader"), where he states, "if the pathway into the future were well lit, it would be crowded". Maxwell tells how he and his wife once took their children on a touring holiday, which visited some of the major sites in America's history. As they travelled from Ellis Island, to Philadelphia, to Williamsburg and then to Washington, they were struck by the examples from the nation's history of people who had faced immense problems, but had pressed through, often at great cost, and succeeded. "The greatest honors were reserved for those who endured the greatest struggles. The stakes were high, but so were the rewards... Anything worth having is going to be a struggle".

2) Don't rely on talent alone

Mickey Mantle is a good example of someone with a lot of talent who relied on that to carry him through with minimal commitment. You've got to put in the hard work to make best use of your natural abilities.

3) Focus on choices, not conditions

People who focus on circumstances often find their commitment wavering with the prevailing conditions. Rather, one should focus on the choices that one faces. "Each choice is a crossroad, one that will either confirm or compromise their commitments".

4) Be single-minded

Churchill's dedication to the war effort is a good example of this. Lance Armstrong has been criticised for his total focus on the Tour de France, rather than including other major cycling events in his schedule. But there's no denying that his single-minded dedication brought about incredible results.

5) Do what's right even when you don't feel like it

Maxwell quotes Ken Blanchard: "When you're interested in something, you do it only when it's convenient. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results".

Maxwell ends with the story of Liz Murray, a young American girl brought up by alcoholic, drug-addicted parents. From the age of nine, she had been forced to do odd jobs to feed herself and her sister (her parents once sold her sister's only warm coat to buy drugs). Her mother died of AIDS when she was 15, and Liz became a street-child. Amazingly, that was a positive turning point for her. As she reflected on her mother's life and death, she realised that this was the result of the lifestyle that she had been brought up in, and determined that she would improve her lot in life. That meant returning to school, even though she was homeless.

She found a summer job that enabled her to get into a school, where she was determined to catch up with her peers. She crammed four year's of schooling into two years, while studying after hours in stairwells and on trains. She decided to apply for a place at Harvard and for a scholarship offered by the New York Times for "students who hope to build on their achievements in college and to make significant contributions to society... [who] have demonstrated academic achievement, community service and a commitment to learning especially in the face of financial and other obstacles". She won both the scholarship and a place at Harvard. She plans to become a documentary film-maker. She summed up her approach to life as hard work and determination - i.e. commitment!

A closing quote, from Abraham Lincoln:

Always bear in mind that your own resolution to success is more important than any other thing.

Some things to think about:

How do you think people who know you would describe you: as casual or as committed?

How would you rate your commitment to excellence?

9. Today's FINANCES Give Me Options

The seventh of Maxwell's "Daily Dozen" deals with an important aspect of all of our lives: Finances! It's entitled "Today's FINANCES Give Me Options".

Maxwell opens with a set of horrifying statistics concerning the average American's financial state. While national statistics in SA are no doubt different, I'm sure there are many similarities. In 2002, 1.5 million Americans went through personal bankruptcy proceedings. Nearly 44 million American families have less than \$1000 liquid assets, and over 16 million are technically bankrupt. Consumer debt in the USA is at \$1.7 trillion. In 2000 the debt:income ratio for individuals in the USA was 1.63, up from 1.14 in 1981. In a survey, over a quarter of Americans felt their personal finances were "shaky". 40% claimed to have difficulty meeting regular payments. Someone joked: "the average American is busy buying things he doesn't want with money he doesn't have to impress people he doesn't like"!

Against this depressing backdrop, Maxwell states three truths about money:

1) Money won't make you happy

A study showed that personal incomes had increased by 16% (adjusted for inflation) between 1970 and 1999 (i.e. Americans are quite a bit better off), but that the number of people who described themselves as "very happy" had fallen from 36% to 29% in the same period. "We are better paid, better fed, and better educated than ever. yet the divorce rate has doubled, the teen-suicide rate has tripled, and depression has soared".

2) Debt will make you unhappy

The out-of-control feeling that comes with debt and financial difficulties will cause most people discomfort.

3) Having a financial margin will give you options

"The bottom line is that money is nothing but a tool". Focusing on money for its own sake is pointless, but it can open up possibilities that would otherwise be out of the question. Money enables us to make choices that contribute to a meaningful lifestyle, such as spending time with family, or choosing to retire, rather than being forced to work on past the normal time of retirement.

Maxwell then gives a number of pointers that can help lay a foundation for a healthy financial position.

1) Put the value of things in perspective

People often value possessions and money more than they value other people. Maxwell makes the point that materialism is a mindset that is independent of financial status: poor people can be just as preoccupied with "stuff" as rich people.

2) Recognise your "season of life"

Maxwell breaks most people's life-cycles down into three phases (he also readily admits that they are generalisations):

Learning: studying and equipping yourself. For most people this takes place in their teens and 20's. Don't expect to be earning much at this stage, but rather try to ensure that you are ideally positioned for the next phase.

Earning: if you're well-prepared and work hard you should be able to make the most of your earning opportunities through your thirties and into your fifties. Providing for your family and preparing for your future are the usual priorities in this phase.

Returning: generosity should be something we practice all our lives, but it is often later in life when we are best positioned to give back to society. Children have usually left home and are self-sufficient, and proper retirement preparation earlier in life should mean that one can start to give back on a greater scale.

3) Reduce your debt

Going into debt for things that will appreciate in value (such as a home) or enable earning (transportation, education, etc.) or provide a return (investing in your own business) is sensible, as long as it is sensibly managed. However, many people get themselves into great financial difficulty by taking on far more debt than is necessary or wise.

4) Put a financial formula into place

Commit yourself to saving a certain percentage of your income. "The difference between the rich and the poor is that the rich invest their money and spend what's left, while the poor spend their money and invest what's left"!

In both the personal and business spheres of his life, John Maxwell has committed himself to the following discipline: "Every day I will focus on my financial game plan so that each day I will have more, not fewer options". He suggests the following practical steps:

1) Become a good earner

Maximise your earning potential (not at the expense of other, more important, aspects of your life) through working hard, and learning how to manage money.

2) Be grateful every day

Keep money in a proper perspective.

3) Don't compare yourself to others

Trying to keep up with other people's life-styles is a path to financial disaster! In particular, one usually doesn't know what alternative income sources other people might have (or how badly they have gone into debt to fund that apparently attractive life-style!).

4) Give as much as you can

Someone once said: "Money is like manure. If you let it pile up, it just smells. But if you spread it around, you can encourage things to grow"! Blaise Pascal said "I love wealth because it affords me the means of helping the needy". Maxwell makes the point that while having "options" can be interpreted somewhat selfishly, he sees more as enabling him to help others. His model is based on that of Andrew Carnegie who had the goal of accumulating wealth for the first half of his life and then giving it away in the second half.

Maxwell wraps up chapter with the story of Suze Orman, the well-known author and "financial guru". She was born into a poor family, and studied social work at college. After graduation, she worked as a waitress for seven years before someone lent her \$50,000 to help open her own restaurant. Since this was not enough capital she decided to invest it, but after four months the investment had disappeared (she claims the broker she dealt with cheated her). She then decided to become a broker herself, and rapidly became very successful. She opened her own company and was earning (and spending) a great deal of money. However, a court case and the attendant stress caused her to put her work aside for a while - but, she didn't stop spending. A small incident brought her to her senses: she was stopped for speeding and fined \$40, but realised she didn't have the money. She was going to have further extend her debt, while driving an expensive car, wearing an \$8,000 watch and a \$2,000 coat. She suddenly realised the financial hole that she had dug for herself and resolved to get out of it. as a result she has written several books with the aim of helping people who are in a similar financial position. While she has made a lot of money from the books, she is now careful to lead a modest lifestyle. "Orman has her critics... But one thing is for sure. She has settled the financial issue in her life. She earns and manages her finances daily. It doesn't really matter how much money she has. She lives modestly... But she has many options. And that's a good measure of success when it comes to finances".

A closing quote, from John Wesley:

Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

Some things to think about:

What is your debt:income ratio? Do you think it is healthy?

If you have a lot of debt, what practical step(s) can you take to help get you on a better financial footing?

Would you say you were preoccupied with possessions/money? Are these more valuable than people and your relationships with them?

10. Today's FAITH Gives Me Peace

The eighth of Maxwell's "Daily Dozen" turns to a very personal subject - that of Faith. It's entitled "Today's FAITH Gives Me Peace". I appreciate that this is a sensitive subject for some people, and you may wish to skip this week's article if you feel that a discussion of the Christian faith is not for you (Maxwell has a similar disclaimer at the start of this chapter in his book). Given the personal nature of the subject matter, I have quoted Maxwell directly a little more than usual, and have also given some of my own personal perspective.

As has been mentioned previously, Maxwell started out as the pastor of a church. During this time he became involved in training church leaders, and then found that more and more business leaders were coming to his seminars and buying his books to the extent that they now form the majority of his audience. He now deals mainly with "large corporations, entrepreneurial businesses and leadership-intensive institutions [such as the U.S. Military Academy at West Point]". While he does not hide his faith, he is also careful not to be pushy about it. While speaking to a large corporation he was asked where he had learned his leadership principles. He replied that the questioner probably didn't want to know the answer to the question! Needless to say that just made the executive more curious and he persisted. Maxwell's answer: "Everything I know about leadership I learned from the Bible". The questioner was "surprised but very respectful".

While acknowledging that this is a potentially controversial topic to be tackling in a general book about daily self-leadership, he includes it for two reasons: (1) integrity - he wouldn't be true to himself if he discounted the importance of his faith, and (2) whatever your personal faith may be, it is an important aspect of life and he hopes to "encourage you to explore this aspect of your own life".

Maxwell states that he has found that people usually have one of six responses to faith:

- 1) Ignore it: it seems irrelevant or "old fashioned".
- 2) Misunderstand it: it seems "too mystical and elusive", too hard to grasp.

- 3) Discount it: it's something that other people need/want in their lives.
- 4) Fight it: not appreciating the value of faith, people will try to attack other people's views.
- 5) Delay it: it's important, but can be put off until later in life (this was my own view as a teenager!).
- 6) Explore it: it's worth giving a chance.

Maxwell points out that faith is important because humans have a spiritual dimension. We seek meaning in life one way or another. He quotes the philosopher Teilhard de Chardin: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience"! Faith brings a number of daily benefits:

1) Faith gives me a divine perspective today

Life has its ups and downs - its problems and calamities. Faith can help bring meaning into the sometimes difficult chaos of daily life.

2) Faith gives me health today

Maxwell cites a number of medical studies (American and international) that have shown that people who "practice their religion regularly" have considerably fewer health problems (both physical and mental).

3) Faith gives me strength for today

A strong faith can help one to face and overcome adversity. "The opposite is also true. Faithlessness is de-energizing".

4) Faith gives me resilience today

When difficulties do befall us, faith can help us get up, dust ourselves off and get going again.

Maxwell then tells of his personal faith journey. His father was a pastor and so he grew up in a household of faith. But faith is not something we inherit from our parents - we need to claim it for ourselves, and Maxwell did so at the age of seventeen (coincidentally, the same age as I did): "I made my faith decision: I will accept God's gift of His Son, Jesus Christ as my Savior. That decision, more than any other, has shaped my life. It has forged my world view... has influenced how I view others... taught me how to treat people... given me great self-worth... taught me how to lead people". He expands on the last point: "True leadership starts with the heart - with character. The underlying message from God is not to act differently, but to become different. Not to act honestly, but to become an honest person. Then honesty will be at the core of your leadership style".

We Already Have Faith... The Important Choice Is Where We Place It

Everyone has faith in something. It might be in science, it might be one's own intellect, but even an atheist believes something (presumably that their existence is just some great meaningless cosmic accident). I sometimes jokingly say that I don't have enough faith to be an atheist! I cannot bring myself to believe that this wonderful world that we inhabit and my life in it are just accidents. Studying physics and the marvelous structure of our universe simply reinforced my faith that there has to be an intelligent, active designer at work. My recent forays into bioinformatics and what I have learned about the structure of DNA and genetic biology has had a similar effect.

Understand That Faith Is Often Birthed Out of Difficulties

Sometimes people are faced with problems that cannot be overcome by human effort - faith is a useful response to such circumstances. "Faith not only can help you through a crisis, it can help you to approach life after the hard times with a whole new perspective".

A Faith That Hasn't Been Tested Can't Be Trusted

A superficial faith is unlikely to bring much benefit. One needs to work at it - deepening one's faith daily. Maxwell quotes Victor Frankl, who was imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps for three years in the Second World War: "A weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them".

Maxwell then turns to the practicalities of deepening one's faith on a daily basis. As he points out, there have been thousands of books written on this topic. He gives four simple pointers:

1) Embrace the value of faith

While a number of benefits of a strong personal faith have already been mentioned, Maxwell adds the fact that faith can supply answers to questions that cannot be answered any other way. Science is remarkably changeable. What is accepted as "scientific fact" one day can be overturned by a new discovery the next. New findings radically change our beliefs about our universe. Less than a one hundred years ago it was accepted that the atom was indivisible! In stark contrast, the "core beliefs of Judaism and Christianity have not changed in thousands of years. There is a spiritual aspect to human life that cannot be denied. Spiritual needs must be met spiritually".

2) Put God in the picture

"If you want to embrace faith, you must let God into your life". If you will let him, God will help you.

3) Associate with people of faith

Faith is often best expressed and learned in community.

4) Explore and deepen your faith

Just as our bodies require physical exercise, so our spiritual life needs spiritual exercise (and the Bible is full of "athletic metaphors for spiritual growth").

In closing Maxwell tells the story of Rick Husband. He wanted to be an astronaut from a very young age. As a child he followed the early American space exploration closely. After studying mechanical engineering he became an air force pilot, and pressed on to become a test pilot. He obtained a masters degree in mechanical engineering. He also married, and had two children. "He was respected ... also for his faith and his devotion as a husband and father". In 1994 he was accepted into NASA's training program and in 1999 he piloted the space shuttle Discovery into space. He commented that "One of the most enjoyable things about flying in space is getting to see God's creation from a different perspective". In 2003 he was commanding a mission on the shuttle Columbia when it burned up on reentry. Two days later his wife was interviewed on TV - "She was remarkably composed". She explained how she was coping, referring to a Bible verse that Rick had often quoted: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6). In her words: "that verse has been a blessing to me and Rick, and now it's a tremendous blessing to me because I don't understand any of this, but I do trust the Lord, and so that's been a tremendous comfort". Only faith can give that kind of peace.

In closing, a quote from F.B. Meyer (a well-known theologian):

"Unbelief puts our circumstances between us and God. Faith puts God between us and our circumstances".

Something to think about:

What have you put your faith in?

11. Today's RELATIONSHIPS Give Me Fulfillment

The next installment of Maxwell's "Daily Dozen" is entitled "Today's RELATIONSHIPS Give Me

Fulfillment". In a previous chapter he dealt with family - probably the most important set of relationships we have. In this chapter he deals with the subject more generally.

As usual he opens with an anecdote. This time it is the story of Armand Hammer - the chairman of a major US petroleum company. He died in 1990 at age 92, and was "a legend": a successful businessman, well-known in influential circles and a generous supporter of charitable causes. Newspapers printed lavish eulogies, praising his achievements. In particular, he was remembered for his work on improving US-Soviet relations during the early days of communist rule in Russia. However, after his death a rather different picture started to emerge. It turned out that his public image was a very carefully crafted PR exercise. This was done to "disguise a greedy, deceptive man who used people like objects and then threw them away like trash when he was finished with them".

Much of the glamorous rags-to-riches story about his youth was total fiction. In fact, he had been bankrolled by the Soviets to support their Western spy network. He first married a Russian woman and they had a son, but he soon divorced her when he wanted a more glamorous wife. He managed to win over a wealthy, influential woman and used her money and connections to establish himself in business. After she had served her purpose, he divorced her and married a wealthy widow (while stringing his pregnant mistress along with promises of marriage!). He used his third wife's money to get his businesses out of debt and to buy shares in an oil company. Using his art for self-publicity he managed to get himself elected as president and chairman of this company, and then manipulated the directors to keep himself in control. It was the company's funds that financed his charitable giving, etc. and earned him his reputation as a generous man.

"Hammer appears to have burned every relational bridge he ever built". He treated his employees appallingly. He even let his father be imprisoned for a crime he had committed himself! He neglected his son and his illegitimate daughter, made a mess of all his marriages, and distanced himself from his own brothers. When he died his son and his brothers' families did not attend the funeral. After his death, there were over 100 claims against his estate (due to the extravagant promises he had made to many charities, etc.). Unfortunately for them there was no great fortune to inherit! The oil company he had controlled rapidly disowned him (their website carries no mention of him). And declassification of Russian revealed his support of Soviet spies in the 1920's. In short, he messed up every relationship he had.

Maxwell surmises that he had overlooked four key principles about relationships:

1) Life's greatest experiences involve other people

Team work is an essential ingredient of almost all successful endeavours. Even great soloists (sports-people, performers, etc.) owe much of their success to dedicated teams of coaches, support personnel, etc. From another perspective, great achievements that are not shared with people who are close to us are less fulfilling than when we can celebrate our successes with those we care for (and who care for us).

2) You'll enjoy life more if you like people

Antisocial "Scrooges" generally don't enjoy anything at all. "People who love people usually have a ball".

3) You'll get further in life if people like you

If people don't like you they are unlikely to want to help you (and may even actively try to sabotage your achievements). If you have a good network of strong relationships you will have a sound foundation for success.

4) People are any organization's most appreciable asset

"Any organization that succeeds does so because of its people". (I have always thought that this is particularly true of a university where every aspect of the organisation involves people: people are our inputs and our products, and the "process" depends totally on people).

Maxwell then relates how he understood the importance of this daily principle very early in his life. His father had given him Dale Carnegie's book "How to Win Friends and Influence People", and Maxwell had been struck by one of its principles: "In order to make friends, be friendly". This was emphasised for him when one of his college teachers stated that "If you have one true friend in life, you are very fortunate", and from that day on he has been intentional about his relationships. Some of the key principles he has based this

on are:

1) Place a high value on people

"Expect the best from everyone. Assume people's motives are good unless they prove them to be otherwise. Value them by their best moments. And give them your friendship rather than asking for theirs".

2) Learn to understand people

Many managers in business are out of touch with their employees and their customers. Some of this may be attributable to managers who do not value people (point 1 above), but in some cases they just don't understand people. In this regard, Maxwell gives the following insights about people and corrective actions:

- People are insecure... give them confidence
- People want to feel special... sincerely compliment them
- People desire a better tomorrow... show them hope
- People need to be understood... listen to them
- People are selfish... speak to their needs first
- People get emotionally low... encourage them
- People want to be associated with success... help them win

3) Give respect freely but expect to earn it from others

Maxwell tells the story of an airport porter who was being yelled at and abused by a self-important business traveller. The more the passenger ranted, the calmer the porter's reaction. After the businessman went off to catch his flight, a by-stander complimented the porter on his calm, professional handling of the man. The porter replied that it was easy: "[he's] going to Miami, but his bags - they're going to Kalamazoo"! The moral of the story is that a lack of respect can have serious consequences, over and above the basic right that we all have to be treated with respect. On the other hand, we should not expect, let alone demand, respect for ourselves - it must be earned to have any value.

4) Commit yourself to adding value to others

Charles Spurgeon (a famous 19th century theologian) said: "Carve your name on hearts and not on marble". We need to give ourselves, unselfishly to helping others improve themselves. Our relationships should not be "transactional", but selfless. Maxwell quotes Leo Buscaglia: "Always start a relationship by asking: Do I have any ulterior motives for wanting to relate to this person? Is my caring conditional? Am I trying to escape something? Am I planning to change the person? Do I need this person to make up for some deficiency in myself? If your answer to any of these questions is 'yes', leave the person alone. He or she is better off without you".

Maxwell then gives some practical pointers on how to manage the daily discipline of building strong, meaningful relationships.

1) Put others first

This comes down to the Golden Rule, or as Clifton and Rath put it "Do unto others as they

would have you do unto them" (How Full Is Your Bucket, see: <http://listserv.ru.ac.za/pipermail/cs-staffdev-1/2005-April/000071.html>). "Walk slowly through the crowd, remember people's names, smile at everyone, and be quick to offer help. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care".

2) Don't carry emotional baggage

Get over past offenses. If necessary, sit down with the person and resolve the issue, otherwise "forget about it and move on".

3) Give time to your most valuable relationships

Prioritise your relationships: family should come first and then close friendships and other important

relationships. Be careful not squander your time and energy on a "first-come, first-served basis".

4) Serve others gladly

While serving seems unnatural and/or difficult, it is very fulfilling. For maximum impact it needs to be done cheerfully.

5) Express love and affection often

Maxwell relates how the primary emotion he experienced when underwent his heart attack was love (rather than fear or uncertainty). In that moment, he wanted to be able to tell the people he cared about that he loved them. Leaving that until a life-or-death moment may be cutting it rather fine! Tell people you love them, care for them. Look for the best in people. Encourage them.

Maxwell closes with a personal story of one of his most meaningful relationships, with Bill Bright. Bill Bright had been a mentor and a close friend, and had given Maxwell some of his first opportunities to speak on the subject of leadership. Maxwell tells the story of how Bright invited him to speak at a conference in 1983 and how he found himself seated next to some legendary leaders as a co-speaker, feeling totally overwhelmed at the opportunity he was being given. Towards the end of his life, Bright invited Maxwell to take his place as leader of multinational organisation Bright had founded to provide leadership training for churches. Maxwell was deeply moved by the privilege of being entrusted with his mentor's position. When Bright died a few months later Maxwell's reaction was one of fulfillment, based on the deep joy that a real relationship had brought over several decades.

And a closing quote:

My greatest moments and memories are filled with the people who mean the most to me.

Some things to think about:

"If you have one true friend in life, you are very fortunate" (friendship is used here in the sense of a relationship based on unconditional love). How many true friends do you have?

What practical things can you do to add value to the people around you?

12. Today's *GENEROSITY* Gives Me Significance

The next chapter of Maxwell's book "Today Matters" deals with the subject of generosity. It is entitled "Today's *GENEROSITY* Gives Me Significance", and deals with far more than financial generosity.

He starts the chapter with a series of questions: "If your income doubled overnight, how much money would you give away? How about if your net worth were suddenly over \$100 million? What if you became the richest person in the world? How generous do you think you would be?". He then tells the story of J. Paul Getty, who was the richest man in the world at one time, but who was a total miser.

Getty went into the oil business in his teens, and made his first million by the age of 23. He built up his fortune, investing in other oil companies, property, and obtaining oil rights in Saudi Arabia. He hated the fame that his position as the richest man in the world brought, as he was irritated by the requests for money that followed. He dressed in worn-out clothes and was incredibly stingy (he even put a pay-phone into his massive mansion on an 700 acre estate outside London for guests to use!). When his grandson was kidnapped in 1973, he refused to pay the \$17 million ransom. When the kidnappers cut off part of the young man's ear he relented, but haggled for a ransom \$2.7 million, claiming this was all he could afford (his fortune was measured in billions). It was five months before his grandson was freed.

When he died in 1976, he was alienated from his children and they and his five ex-wives fought over the estate, most of which went to a museum.

Maxwell makes the point that Getty had the **RIGHT** to do what he liked with his money - he had earned it, and did not have to share it with anyone. But that misses the point of what is the **BEST** thing to do. One of Getty's sons was cast in a very different mould, and, despite not having inherited much of his father's fortune, he gave millions away. In his words, "[I am] privileged to be the heir to huge wealth and I regard myself as custodian

of that money for the benefit of people who need it more than I do".

Maxwell then gives three reasons for being generous:

1) Giving turns your focus outward

Miserly people are not nice to be around - they tend to be very self-centred. Thinking about others and how you can help them (financially or in other ways) produces an attractive selflessness. Maxwell quotes the Roman poet Seneca: "No man can live happily who regards himself alone, who turns everything to his own advantage. You must live for others if you wish to live for yourself".

2) Giving adds value to others

We are far more likely to be remembered for our service to others than for our wealth or position (Mother Theresa is probably better-known and more highly regarded than Getty, for example). Maxwell quotes President Woodrow Wilson: "You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of home and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand". The best part of giving is that it is not a zero-sum game: "When you add value to others, you do not take anything away from yourself".

3) Giving helps the giver

Giving feels good! Helping someone in need leaves us feeling rewarded and fulfilled. Maxwell quotes Solomon here:

The world of the generous gets larger and larger;

the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller.

The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed;

those who help others are helped.

[Proverbs 11:24-25]

Maxwell then tells the story of how he first learned of the importance generosity. When he was newly-wed and first starting work, he was earning a pittance and his wife, Margaret, was holding down several jobs to help them survive. However, Maxwell's brother Larry was doing very well and were very generous, paying for holidays, providing clothes, supporting John Maxwell's business studies, etc. Maxwell and his wife realised that this was not a burden for Larry and his wife, but a joy. This led Maxwell to the personal decision "I will live to give".

This involves two aspects:

1) Give others your money

We tend to focus on the things we spend our money on. People investing in the stock market usually pay a lot of attention to the financial news and JSE reporting. If you've given a lot to charity, you will probably be interested in how they use the money. Giving to people (directly or indirectly) is likely to result in a growing attitude of care for them. This usually requires a proactive approach: "If you wait until you feel like it to give, you may wait forever"! But once you start to give, you are likely to want to continue.

2) Give others yourself

This is probably even more important than money. Our time is usually worth far more than our money, and shows a greater level of commitment. (Perhaps this is most noticeable in our families, but it applies elsewhere too). Who has made the greatest impact in your life? Was it through giving you money? "When you invest in another person just for the sake of seeing them blossom, with no thought to any benefit you might receive, you will be the kind of generous person others want to be around". Many generous people have viewed this as an obligation, rather than an option. The doctor, Sir Wilfred Grenfell said, "The service we render to others is really the rent we pay for our room on this earth... the purpose of this world is... to give and to serve".

Maxwell makes the point that generosity is not something that comes naturally (at least not to most people). It takes effort and daily discipline. The key is to value other people, understand them and develop yourself in order to be able to give back. He gives some practical pointers:

1) Don't wait for prosperity to become generous

Anyone can give to others, no matter what their personal circumstances. Maxwell quotes some American statistics in this regard. The state of Mississippi has the second lowest level of personal income in the U.S.A., but ranks sixth out of the states in terms of giving. Conversely, New Hampshire is ranked sixth in terms of personal income, but 45'th in giving! American's gave more (as a percentage of income) during the Great Depression than they do today. And 80% of people earning more than a million dollars bequeath nothing to charity. "People do not give from the top of their purses, but from the bottom of their hearts".

2) Find a reason to give every day

Seek out causes and needs that you can support. Find organisations that are making a difference and give to them regularly.

3) Find people to receive every day

Look for opportunities to give financially, or of your time and effort, to individuals.

As a closing story, Maxwell tells of Dave Thomas, the founder of the "Wendy's" chain of fast-food restaurants. Thomas was adopted as a small child and had a difficult childhood, moving frequently from town to town. As a child he loved the time spent eating with his father in restaurants. From the age of 12 he started to work in restaurants. He joined the army and worked in the catering wing. When he left the army, he returned to a restaurant he had worked in previously, whose owner, Phil Clauss, had mentored him. In 1964, Clauss asked Thomas to revive four KFC franchises he held. Thomas turned them around and became a millionaire when Clauss sold them. In 1969, Thomas opened his own fast-food restaurant in Columbus, Ohio, and named it after his daughter, Wendy. He quickly expanded to four restaurants. He then perfected the drive-through window business and started some innovative franchising methods, and his company began to grow even more rapidly. After 100 months, there were 1000 Wendy's restaurants open. Today there are more than 6000.

Having been adopted himself, Dave Thomas was sympathetic to the problems of adoption and started to speak out on the subject. He was also generous with his time and money, describing a "Virtuous Circle of Generosity... giving of wealth, giving of self". In 1990, President Bush (the first one!) asked him to head up a White House Initiative on Adoption. From then, until his death in 2002, Dave Thomas dedicated himself to the cause of adoption. In 1992, he created a foundation for this purpose, promoting "adoption and [making] it easier for parents to adopt. It also partners with adoption organizations working to place the more than 125,000 children in foster care with permanent families". His motivation: "I just know everybody deserves a home and love". He worked within his company and in corporate America to offer adoption benefits. He lobbied Congress and even persuaded the postal service to produce a stamp series featuring adoption.

He also worked for many other causes, supporting business programmes and high-school mentoring programmes in universities, producing public service adverts, and giving to hospitals. When he died, television networks gave him the kind of eulogies normally reserved for great politicians and Hollywood stars, and the U.S. Senate passed a resolution of tribute. The CEO of Wendy's said: "He was the heart and soul of our company. He had a passion for great tasting hamburgers, and devoted his life to serving customers great food and helping those less fortunate in his community".

All along Thomas knew what was important: "The one thing people remember about you isn't how much money you made or the deals you swung. What they remember is if you were a nice guy". That generous attitude ensured that his life had great significance.

As a closing quote, I want to repeat Woodrow Wilson's words:

You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.

Some things to think about:

Do you support some worthy cause regularly? If not, how could you start?

Who has made the greatest impact in your life? How can you apply their example and enrich the lives of others?

13. Today's VALUES Give Me Direction

This week's installment deals with the importance of values or principles, and is entitled "Today's VALUES Give Me Direction".

As usual, Maxwell opens the chapter with a counter-point. In this case, he cites the numerous, well-known scandals that have rocked corporate America in recent years: ImClone, Martha Stewart, Enron, WorldCom, etc. The litany of "securities fraud, bank fraud, conspiracy to obstruct justice, and perjury" that these cases involve is truly depressing. In pointing to the underlying failure of the individuals' value systems, Maxwell quotes the prosecuting attorney in the Stewart trial who said, "It's a tragedy that could have been prevented if those two people had only done what parents have taught their children for eons, that if you are in a tight spot, lying is not the way out. Lying is an act with profound consequences".

Our values determine the way in which we lead our lives and can act as:

1) An Anchor

When difficulties arise, how we react is determined by our values. Do we run, hide, lie to avoid problems, or face them with integrity. "People without values are adrift on the ocean of life".

2) A Faithful Friend

Maxwell quotes Abraham Lincoln: "When I lay down the reins of [the U.S. Presidency], I want to have one friend left, and that friend is inside myself". In other words, if others were to desert him because of the principled stands he had taken, he would still be able to live with himself.

3) Your North Star

Our circumstances and many other aspects of our lives (habits, skills, etc.) change frequently, but our values act as a dependable guide. Maxwell quotes a saying:

Methods are many,

Values are few.

Methods always change,

Values never do.

Our values are the core of our being. We may add values as we grow wiser with age and experience.

This book and the twelve daily disciplines that Maxwell presents in it are really his core values, and are the basis for the way in which he approaches his family, his work and his personal life.

"If you want to be proactive in the way you live your life, if you want to influence your life's direction, if you want your life to exhibit the qualities you find desirable, and if you want to live with integrity, then you need to know what your values are, decide to embrace them, and practice them every day".

Maxwell tells how he was brought up to have a strong value system, but was 23 before he took the personal decision to base his life on values that he purposefully embraced. He gives some tips to help:

1) Create a list of good values

Maxwell suggests that you write down everything that comes to mind in terms of values that you find admirable, principles that are important to you, etc. You should consider all facets of your life: family, work, etc. He then suggests that you put the list aside, but keep it close at hand for about a fortnight, adding new ideas as they come to you. Reading on the subject of values may also stimulate some ideas. Following this, you should start to merge things that are similar, such as "truthfulness" and "integrity", or "commitment" and "hard work". This narrowing down process should result in a fairly short list of things that are really important to you - what would you be willing to die for?! If you are married, get your partner to generate a

list for himself/herself, and discuss your lists (any major discrepancies would need to be worked through).

2) Embrace those good values

Now you have your list, be purposeful in basing your life on them. James Dobson refers to the mid-life crises many people face between the ages of 35 and 50, which he ascribes to poor value systems: "All of a sudden you realize that the ladder you've been climbing is leaning against the wrong wall"! Holding to your values can help prevent this kind of crisis.

3) Make a decision to live those values daily

Apparently Roy Disney ascribed the Disney company's success to the fact that it was based on values, which simplified decision-making. Albert Einstein said: "Try not to become men of success. Rather, become men of value". Living by your values will bring quality of life (and often success).

Maxwell makes the point that living by our values is often difficult. Negative people and experiences will test our commitment to doing what we believe is right. People with differing priorities may try to persuade you to take their approach to a situation. Maxwell's solution is the discipline: "Every day I review and reflect on my values". He keeps a list of his twelve values in a notebook, and spends a minute at the end of every day reflecting on each of them. He gives the following guidelines:

1) Articulate and embrace your values daily

List your values, with a brief description of what each means for you (how you will apply it and the expected benefits of living by it). Reflect on the list daily to allow it to become a part of who you are. Evaluate your decisions against the list. Tell other people what they are. This last point helps strengthen your accountability.

2) Compare your values to your practices daily

Evaluate your behaviour against your values. Maxwell tells the cautionary tale of the CEO of a company reacted strongly when a mid-level employee was found to have embezzled almost one million dollars. The employee admitted his crime, offering to pay back three-quarters of the money immediately and to arrange to repay the remainder as soon as possible. The CEO wrote to the courts describing the crime in the strongest terms and demanding that the courts make an example of him. A few years later it came out that the CEO had embezzled \$600 million! "Discrepancies between values and practices create chaos in a person's life", undermining both the person's credibility and their integrity.

3) Live out your values regardless of your feelings

Living by our values is easy when things are going well. Living by our values when it will cause us pain or cost us something is not so easy! As an example, Maxwell points out that most people would have no problem returning a wallet they found on the street, but might be reluctant to report the fact that their boss was embezzling from the company if they knew they would lose their job as a result. "Successful people do what's right no matter how they feel about it". This ranges from big issues (like the example above) to small things, like following through on a value of health/fitness by exercising even when you don't feel like getting out of bed early to go to the gym or for a run.

4) Evaluate each day in light of your values

Some time spent daily reflecting on your values is essential for living them out. Apparently, Benjamin Franklin asked himself "What good will I do today?" each morning, and "What good did I do today?" last thing each night.

Maxwell closes with an anecdote about a time when he struggled with his own value system. He had been scheduled for months to speak at a conference in 2003. However, a few days before the conference he was phoned by the White House inviting him to a meeting with George W. Bush. He tried desperately to come up with a way to fulfil his long-standing speaking engagement and also meet with the President. The conference organisers were as accommodating as they could be, exploring options for rescheduling Maxwell's presentation. His assistant investigated travel options (including whether hiring a private jet would enable

Maxwell to get back to the conference in time for his presentation). However, none of these options solved the problem. Ultimately, they decided to videotape Maxwell ahead of time and show the recorded message, while he went to the meeting with Bush.

"But then I got to thinking. That was okay for me, but what about [the company whose convention he was speaking at]? Wasn't commitment one of my personal values? And didn't I teach people at my company... to display a 100 percent commitment to excellence in everything we do? [He phoned the company:] "I'll be there on Thursday as we promised". I hung up the phone and asked [my assistant] to send my regrets to the White House".

While this was a huge disappointment for him, he felt that he had done the right thing, based on his values. As it happened, the meeting with Bush was cancelled at the last moment due to some crisis in Iraq!

"By choosing to embrace and practice good values every day, you choose the higher course in life. And your life goes in a direction that you will always feel good about. You may not always get what you desire, but you will always be the person you desire to be".

Some things to think about:

Think about a person you would say had a high level of integrity. What is it about them that makes you think of them in this way?

If you haven't done so in the past, draw up a list of personal values (taking some weeks to refine it, as Maxwell suggests above). To what extent do you already live by these principles?

14. Today's GROWTH Gives Me Potential

This week is the final installment of "Today Matters". It deals with the subject of personal growth and development, and is entitled "Today's GROWTH Gives Me Potential". As with some of the other topics there is some common ground with Stephen Covey's "7 Habits": the seventh habit is "Sharpen the Saw", and deals with the need to grow and develop in the other six habits.

Maxwell has opened each chapter in this series with a negative anecdote. However, when he and his writing team started to brainstorm this chapter, they couldn't think of a counter-example! "We were looking for a story about someone who had fantastic potential but who clearly missed it and lived an unfulfilled life because he never dedicated himself to growth. There's a reason we couldn't find a really good story like that: You rarely hear about them. People who settle for mediocrity don't stand out. Their stories don't get told". However, you may know someone like that, perhaps from your school days, or a student who had great potential while at Rhodes, but went on to underachieve. You may even harbour some personal regrets about some area of your own life.

Maxwell quotes Robert Louis Stephenson: "To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life". Many people never achieve this, possibly due to some common misconceptions about personal growth:

1) They think growth is automatic

As children our bodies grow automatically, and our schooling and our parents teach us to grow mentally. The problem usually comes when we leave school or university and expect these processes to continue to be automatic. We have to take responsibility for our growth and be intentional about our physical and mental development.

2) They think growth comes from information

It is easy to attain knowledge about a subject without putting it into practice, but that is not growth. "Life change is the proper measure of whether information makes a difference".

3) They think growth comes with experience

Maxwell quotes a story about an archer who keeps missing the target. They are accumulating experience, but not allowing that experience to teach them. Missing in the same place is not growth! "Experience is good only if it is reflected on and one learns from both his mistakes and successes".

Maxwell then turns to the topic of why growth is important. He quotes the composer Menotti: "Hell begins on that day when God grants us a clear vision of all that we might have achieved, of all the gifts we wasted, of all that we might have done that we did not do". The only cure to these regrets is to grow and take advantage of the opportunities we get. He then gives four concrete reasons for considering growth important:

1) Gifting without growth leads to ineffectiveness

Our natural abilities alone will not enable us to achieve all our potential. In sports, in music and similar areas, this is very obvious, but it is just as true for less obvious talents. Whatever field our abilities are in, we need to grow them in order to be fully effective.

2) Growth prevents personal and professional stagnation

If you wish to advance in your career, improve your relationship with your wife/husband, or improve your health, you need to grow in that area. Many people try to make external changes (changing jobs, divorcing their partner, or giving up exercise), but one really needs to make internal changes: growing in that area. The excitement of a new job/relationship may bring temporary relief, but ultimately the same problems are likely to resurface, unless one has grown. Developing your work-skills can lead to more satisfaction at work (and is likely to lead to advancement in your organisation). Developing your relationship skills will improve your marriage. And working on your exercise routine or eating patterns can improve your health. In short, focussing our efforts on personal development can prevent stagnation.

3) Your personal growth impacts your organisation's growth

People in leadership positions need to keep growing if their organisations are not to be held back (this relates to Maxwell's "Law of the Lid" - the first of his "21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership"). "If you want to grow the organization, you must grow the leader". Maxwell quotes Jim Rohn: "In order to do more, I've got to be more".

4) Only through continuous improvement can you reach your potential

Apparently the Tartars cursed their enemies with "May you stay in one place forever"! Maxwell points out that this may be the fate of anyone who does not grow and develop.

Early in his career, Maxwell was faced with the decision to spend \$745 on some training materials (a large sum of money for him at the time), and was challenged by the salesman on what his "personal growth" plan was. He had to admit that he didn't have a plan for his development, which led him to make a commitment to himself to "develop and follow a personal growth plan for my life". He discussed the training programme that he had been offered with his wife and they made two important decisions. The first was that they would sacrifice in order to buy the training materials. The second was that they would grow together. "From that day on, we learned together, we travelled together, and we sacrificed together in order to grow".

He then gives some practical guidelines on how to go about formulating a personal growth plan.

1) Answer the question: What is my potential?

Maxwell tells the story of a teenager who had lost his right hand in an accident. Someone asked him about his handicap, and he replied "I don't have a handicap, sir. I just don't have a right hand". The young man was one of the top scorers for his football team! Stories like this, of people who have overcome an obvious problem in order to achieve are inspiring, but all of us have a goals and dreams which we can accomplish if we are prepared to build on our potential in order to achieve.

2) Make a commitment to change

"You need to be willing to change, for without change, there can be no growth". Change may be uncomfortable, but it is essential.

3) Set growth goals

Maxwell tells how he started out with quite a broad growth plan, which was perfect for a young man at the start of his career. Over time he started to focus his growth plan on the key areas of communication and

leadership. Your growth plan needs to be focused on your strengths. World-class pianists do not waste time practicing the flute! In the chapter on priorities (see "Today Matters 6", 2 December 2005), Maxwell suggested using the following criteria: "requirement, return and reward". The same criteria can be applied to your personal growth plan.

4) Learn to enjoy the journey

Maxwell quotes a statistic that it takes most chess grand masters 15 years before they win their first world title (about a fifth of the average lifespan!). Achieving your potential may take time, and you had better enjoy what you're doing on the way!

5) Put yourself in a growth environment

Maxwell tells how, right from the very beginning, he had the support and companionship of his wife as he developed and grew. Some aquarium fish will adapt their growth to suit the size of the tank in which they are placed. Put them in a small tank and they will never attain the size that they would in nature. "People are similar. If they live in a harsh and limiting environment, they stay small. But put them someplace that encourages growth, and they will expand to reach their potential".

Growth is now one of Maxwell's daily disciplines, and he gives some tips and techniques that help in this regard:

1) Make it your goal to grow in some way every day

He tells the story of John Nabor, an accomplished swimmer at his high school, who in 1972 was inspired to prepare for the 1976 Olympics. He realised that he would need to shave 4 seconds off his current times - an enormous goal in a sport where differences are measured in tenths of seconds. He broke this down: he would need to improve by one second a year, which meant aiming for one tenth of a second improvement every month - that was a plausible goal. In 1976, John Nabor won five medals at the Olympics, four of them gold! The moral of the story is that a little growth each day can add up to a big difference in the long run.

2) Have a time and plan to grow

Over 20 years ago, Maxwell read a statement by Earl Nightengale: "If a person will spend one hour a day on the same subject for five years, that person will be an expert on that subject". Maxwell was challenged to spend an hour a day studying leadership. He structures this time carefully:

- He listens to seven audio lessons (on CD or tape) each week. In general he finds that "Four are average, two are good to excellent, and only one may be outstanding" (if it's bad, it gets tossed out after five minutes!). For every lesson he listens to, he tries to pinpoint one thing that he can latch onto and put into practice immediately. The best lessons he has typed up, so that he can reread them and mark them up.

- He reads two books very month. He keeps two stacks of books, and reads one from each pile each month. The one contains books that he expects to be excellent and to have a strong impact in his life. These are read slowly and carefully, with a view to how they apply to him. The second pile is of books he expects to be average and which he skims through, simply grasping the main ideas.

- He sets an appointment each month. Every month he makes an appointment to see someone who can help him grow (John Wooden, who featured in Chapter 2, "Today Matters 4", 18 November 2005, was one of these interviewees). He prepares for the meetings by reading material the person may have written and preparing a list of questions. These questions focus on the person's strengths and Maxwell's growth areas.

3) File what you learn

Maxwell is a compulsive filer! He files good articles he has read, quotes, transcripts of tapes and CDs that have impacted him. The front covers of the books he is reading have lists of the main points written in them, and these are then transcribed by his assistant. While this gives a valuable resource for future reference, it also helps one to evaluate what one is studying and to focus on the lessons to be learned. (For me, that is one of the benefits of this series: summarising the best of the books I have read in this way, helps me enormously).

4) Apply what you learn

Learning without application is pointless, as we noted earlier. But the application is often difficult (Mike Abrashoff: "Up is not an easy direction. It defies gravity, both cultural and magnetic.").

Maxwell ends off with the remarkable story of Richard Carmona. He grew up in a poor family, with parents who abused alcohol. At one time they were evicted from their home and had to live in cramped conditions with his grandparents for a year. He dreamed of being a doctor, but was a poor student and eventually dropped out of school. His life started to change when he met a Green Beret (member of the US special forces), and enlisted in the army. In order to get into the Green Berets he had to complete his "matric", which he did. He served as a medic in Vietnam, with the special forces, earning a number of awards for bravery. His military service literally changed his life: "They taught me about responsibility, accountability, staying focused, accomplishing missions, and using resources effectively. They gave me the platform for my life."

On leaving the army, Carmona went to college and eventually earned a degree - the first member of his family to do so. He went on to get a BSc in 1976 and then enrolled in medical school. He finished at the top of his class, and specialised in surgery and then in trauma treatment. He moved to Arizona where he founded Tucson's first trauma centre, and in 1985 "he became director of the University of Arizona and Tucson Medical Center's trauma and emergency services".

Still he continued to improve himself, becoming a deputy sheriff, SWAT officer, and the medical director for the fire department. In 1998, he completed a masters degree in public health. "My wife says I'm overcompensating for not doing well the first half of my life... It's my sense of having to make up for lost time".

Ultimately, in 2002, he was appointed as the Surgeon General of the United States. His life is an outstanding example of someone who has grown and realised an amazing potential that might otherwise have been lost.

A final quote on growth (by Maxwell):

The greatest of all miracles is that we need not be tomorrow what we are today. The greatest of all insights is that we cannot be tomorrow what we do not do today. That is why today matters.

Maxwell then ends the book, by admitting that trying to implement all 12 of his "Daily Dozen" may seem daunting. He suggests that you rate yourself in each of the 12 areas, ranking them from 1 (what you do best) to 12 (considerable work needed!). Discuss your evaluation with someone who knows you well and can verify your ranking reasonably objectively. Adjust your rankings if necessary. Then pick two strengths from your top six and one weakness from the lower six. Start focusing on these three issues. After two months, reevaluate yourself in these three areas. If you have improved significantly in any of them then replace it with another from the same set of six. Then just keep going until you work through all 12 and have incorporated them all into daily life. They should become second nature in time.

Some things to think about:

Is there an area in your life which you feel is "stagnant". How can you grow in order to improve this?

Evaluate yourself on the twelve factors, as Maxwell suggests above, and implement an improvement plan for three of them (you may wish to refer back to the sessions dealing with the issues you select). As a reminder the Daily Dozen are:

- 1) Attitude: choose and display the right attitudes daily
- 2) Priorities: determine and act on important priorities daily
- 3) Health: know and follow healthy guidelines daily
- 4) Family: communicate with and care for your family daily
- 5) Thinking: practice and develop good thinking daily

- 6) Commitment: make and keep proper commitments daily
- 7) Finances: make and manage money properly daily
- 8) Faith: deepen and live out your faith daily
- 9) Relationships: initiate and invest in good relationships daily
- 10) Generosity: plan for and model generosity daily
- 11) Values: embrace and practice good values daily
- 12) Growth: seek and experience improvements daily