

# My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

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Simply because part of something is good, does not mean that other parts are also good; and the fact that some is good does not mean that more is better. I am convinced that extensive reading devoted to a wide variety of subjects is perhaps the second most valuable part of education, but it does not follow that you should believe everything that you read. The most valuable part of education, of course, is experience; without which, no amount of reading will advance your education very much. All that reading can really do is make you aware of other people's opinions; at best, make you aware of things that might otherwise be overlooked; or, at times, explain something that you have previously observed but failed to understand.

Theory and practice, however, seldom have much in common: the reality is that most people read into things that they hear or read ideas that have little or nothing in common with the thoughts that the speaker or writer was trying to communicate. Or, even worse, reject an idea because it flies in the face of their established opinions; which is why even attempting to discuss religion or politics is usually the kiss of death.

The facts mentioned above are largely responsible for my hesitation about publishing some of my observations and opinions; being aware of something does not always mean that you can communicate your opinions in a manner that many, if any, other people will understand, or even believe; in practice it is usually a good idea to keep many of your opinions to yourself, since any attempt to express them is usually an exercise in futility at best. Nevertheless, what follows needs to be expressed . . . and let the chips fall where they may.

While nobody has ever been able to prove that such things happen, it is nevertheless widely believed that your mind has a great deal of influence on the rest of your body; in effect, believing that you are sick can make you sick. But please do not misunderstand me to the degree that you assume that I am in favor of psychiatry; far from it, I have yet to meet a psychiatrist who was on the right side of the bars, have wondered for years whether it is cause or effect: that is . . . Does the study of psychiatry attract lunatics or produce them?

But, the babblings of psychiatrists and other lunatics aside, it is undeniably true that your moods influence the chemical functioning of your body; hormones are secreted, or withheld, largely in response to your moods. But, even here, the question of cause and effect must be considered; that is, does depression produce physical weakness or does such weakness cause depression? Asthma, ulcers, hemorrhoids, shingles and several other medical problems are largely produced, or at least influenced, by mood swings. But the physical results of your moods work in both directions, they can help you as well as hurt you; simply becoming convinced that your physical condition will improve is an important step in the direction of producing such improvement.

Starting nearly fifty years ago, and continuing for the next twenty years, I had one of the worst cases of piles in recorded medical history; but the problem was not continuous, bothered me very badly at times but would then give me no trouble at all for relatively long periods. Eventually I started to recognize a cause and effect relationship: my piles bothered me only when I was undergoing emotional stress, but immediately stopped hurting when the cause of the stress was removed. A good friend of mine who also suffered from the piles told me, after I mentioned the relationship between emotional stress and problems with the piles, that his piles also responded to stress.

In the early 1960s, at a time when I was flying back and forth to South America on a regular basis, and when I was involved in a very stressful business situation, I started suffering from pain in my throat; but a careful examination by several doctors could find nothing in my throat that might cause such pain. Then I noticed something: as soon as my airplane crossed the southern border of this country enroute to South America the pain immediately stopped, but would start again when I crossed the border enroute home. Once recognized, the cause of the pain was obvious: when I was in this country I was under stress and suffered the pain, but once outside the country I was away from the phone, away from people, and away from the stress, so the pain quit. Once I clearly understood the relationship between the stress and the pain, the pain was gone for good.

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A young man named Herbert who first worked for me in 1959, and who was probably the most intelligent person I ever met, as well as one of the nicest in every sense of the word, suffered stress from an emotional shock that changed him literally overnight; within a week he was vomiting blood from bleeding ulcers, and his personality altered to such an extent that he was literally a totally different type of person. He was driven insane by emotional stress and still suffers both physiological and psychological damage nearly forty years later.

I could quote a long list of similar examples but believe the ones listed above will establish my point: the mind exerts great influence on the body. Most of the cases of this that I have observed involved physical damage of some sort that was largely, or perhaps entirely, a result of mental stress; but I have seen several examples with opposite results, cases where the mind produced physical benefits rather than problems.

As related in earlier chapters, I trained in an “on again, off again” fashion for nearly fifty years; either training very hard or not at all, on or off like a light switch, and this intermittent training made me aware of several very surprising results. I learned, for example, that all I had to do to produce growth was to decide to start training after a prolonged layoff; that is, if I decided on a Friday to start training again three days later, on the following Monday, then my upper arms would grow at least a full half of an inch in circumference before I did any training at all. The mental decision to start training again triggered the growth. This occurred so many times that I eventually reached a point where I expected it, and it never failed to happen; on one occasion my arm size increased by a full inch within a couple of days after I decided to resume training, but before any training was done.

Such experiences have caused me to believe that the difference between success and failure may be largely, or entirely, your mental attitude: if you are convinced that you are going to grow, then you will, but if afraid that you will not grow, then you won't. I am sure it is not quite that simple, but am also convinced that your mental attitude has a great deal to do with your results.