

It's Not How Far You Fall, It's How High You Bounce That Counts! by Mark Matteson

When I was in my teens, my father would play some great jazz at dinner time. One of his absolute favorites was “Take Five” by Dave Brubeck. According to jazz historian and famous documentarian Ken Burns, the album’s most memorable number is still one of the most played jazz tunes of all time. The YouTube link below has been watched 3,152,209 times! It’s cool, daddy!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwNrmYRiX_o

In the liner notes of the CD, *The Best of Ken Burns Jazz*, Burns writes:

In the wake of bebop, jazz branched out in many different directions. Among the most popular schools was West Coast jazz or cool jazz, and its best known group was the quartet led by pianist Dave Brubeck. His career had very nearly ended in 1951 when he seriously injured his neck in a swimming accident. From then on he was forced to CHANGE his keyboard style, using driving block chords instead of single-note passages. That style would be perfectly complemented by the playing of his alto saxophonist, Paul Desmond. Together the two made each other better, and in 1959 they released an album called *Time Out*. It was hugely popular, as was much of cool jazz, on college campuses, and the record sold more than a million copies—something no other jazz record had ever done!

Dave’s story demands the question, how do you know its bad? In the aftermath of his accident, he must have asked himself difficult questions: “What can I learn from this?” or “What can I change to make what I do better?”

A quote from General George Patton sums up an attitude, a mindset, of every successful person I have ever read about, interviewed, or observed: “It’s not how far you fall that counts. It’s how high you bounce!”

Have you been hit with some overwhelming adversity? Are you in the midst of some real challenges right now—physical, emotional, interpersonal, financial, spiritual? Can you overcome it?

You can, if you make a **decision**—a choice—to change your attitude, your perspective about what has happened to you. In short, you go from Victim to Victor. My book, *A Simple Choice*, is an extreme example of this principle in a well-told little story.

Here are some questions that might assist you in your transformation because, in the final analysis, it is A SIMPLE CHOICE, although not an easy one. Grab your journal, go off by yourself, and ask yourself on paper:

1. How do I know it's bad?
2. What is great about this?
3. There is a silver lining of opportunity in every dark cloud; what is it in my case?
4. Who else has bounced back that I might talk to or read about?
5. What do I need to do that will get me back on track?

Brooke Ellison is a shining example of this principle in action. On her first day of seventh grade in 1990, she was struck by a hit-and-run driver and almost died. Over the next few months, Brooke and her devoted family came to a realization: like her future mentor, Christopher Reeves, she would never regain the use of her arms and legs. Then Brooke decided to tackle her challenge. With the help of her mother and the support of her community, she graduated from high school, enrolled at Harvard, graduated, delivered the commencement address, and became an inspiration to millions. Upon graduation, she wrote a book, *Miracles Happen*, that was eventually made into a movie.

She is now a famous speaker and best-selling author. Her story is in a category all by itself. Most of us could not imagine having to type by breathing through a tube or being 100 percent dependent upon others for the simple things like eating or going to the kitchen for a cup of tea. Her life is the ultimate example of love, dedication, and determination. She is a person who bounced high with what was given her.

Things happen. Life will sometimes put us in a situation where we are the victim. We are minding our own business one day and, the next thing we know, we are in the hospital getting rotator cuff surgery. The next 12 weeks of recovery and rehab are painful, frustrating, and costly. You guessed it; I went down hard in a basketball mishap while playing hoops with the old guys. It forced me through a narrow passage of learning. I have gathered up precious insights that I never would have any other way. In a short period of time, I evolved from Victim to Victor. I reframed what happened to me and changed the way I described it. Here is what I did:

1. I stopped playing the victim and blaming the cheap shot. Accidents happen. Basketball is a contact sport and highly unpredictable. I chose to play. If I can't stand the heat, I ought not go in the kitchen.
2. I forgave some guy named Bruce for the FOUL and truly let it go.
3. I sought sound medical advice, had an MRI, and scheduled the surgery. I did my homework. I networked and found a great surgeon. I bit the bullet and carved out the time and money.
4. I read books by or about others who experienced ten times the pain and trials I have: Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* and Dale Carnegie's *The Unknown Lincoln*. I found the inspiration and courage to move on and up.
5. I asked others for help, learned to delegate simple tasks, and realized that I had people in my life who WANTED to help me.
6. I realized that I am blessed and have so much to grateful for. My rehabilitation taught me patience, humility and forgiveness on a new level.
7. Finally, I gained perspective and a large measure of compassion for people who have it way worse than me.

In 1978, Simon Weston joined the Welsh Guards in Great Britain. As part of the Falklands Task Force, he was aboard the RFA *Sir Galahad* when it was bombed by Argentine planes. He suffered burns over 49 percent of his body and his face was badly disfigured. He has undergone 70 operations since that fateful day and will still have to endure more. It would be easy—and no one would blame him—if he spent the rest of his life being resentful.

Instead, he says, "If you spend your life full of recriminations and bitterness, then you've failed yourself, failed the surgeons and nurses and everyone else because you aren't giving anything back. Hatred can consume you and it's wasted emotion." Simon is now an author, speaker, and cofounder of Weston Spirit, a non-profit organization that has worked with tens of thousands of young people whose lifestyles reflect a poverty of aspiration in the United Kingdom.

It's not what happens, but how I respond. When life hands me lemons, I start looking for world-class lemonade recipes. Remember, in the midst of adversity, sometimes it helps to ask simple questions: "How do I know it's bad?" and "What is the greater benefit in this event?" Keep asking and looking. We get what we ask for!

I think I'll go online and download "Take Five" from iTunes. I could use some cool jazz—and some musical inspiration. I have some bouncing to do!

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*Every negative event contains within it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.*

—Napoleon Hill, author of *Think and Grow Rich*

*When life hands you a lemon, squeeze it and make lemonade*

—W. Clement Stone, self-made millionaire, former publisher of *Success* magazine

*I've always been the opposite of a paranoid. I operate as if everyone is part of a plot to enhance my well-being and success.*

—Stan Dale, founder of the Human Awareness Institute

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Book of the Month

Man's Search For Meaning by Viktor E. Frankl

This incredible story of redemption and perseverance has changed my point of view on two separate occasions. Frankl was captured and imprisoned by the Nazi's during World War II. He lost his wife, mother, father, and sister. Frankl describes in extraordinary detail exactly how he survived Auschwitz and the atrocities all around him. While a prisoner, he set about serving others and came to the simple realization that his captors could take everything away from except for one simple thing. He writes:

The last of the great human freedoms is our ability to choose our response in any given set of circumstances. It was the one thing my captors could not take away from me.

In short, it came down to how he responded to what was happening to him and around him! He found strength, courage, and meaning in all the suffering. His experiences and insights formed the basis of a process he called logotherapy after the war.

It is a tough book to put down once you begin reading it. If you are frustrated, down and out, feeling like a victim, or feeling sorry for yourself, read this book! When you put it down, you will be a different person—I promise.