PERSISTING

By

Arthur L. Costa, Ed.D. and Bena Kallick Ph.D.

> *"If I had to select one quality, one personal characteristic that I regard as being most highly correlated with success whatever the field, I would pick the trait of persistence. Determination. The will to endure to the end, to get knocked down 70 times and get up off the floor saying,*
>
> *'Here comes number 71!'"*
>
> *Richard M. Devos, businessman*

Do you ever give up in despair when the answer to a problem is not immediately found? Do you or your fellow students ever hear yourself say, "I can't do this," "It's too hard." Or, do you sometimes write down any answer just to get the task over with as quickly as possible? Do you get distracted from a task easily rather than sticking with it?

These are typical problems that we all have from time to time. What we often don't realize is that we can be in control of those behaviors—-if we want to!

People who are successful recognize when they are getting stuck and have strategies for getting themselves back on task. Rather than giving up, they stop and analyze the problem. They might pull out the calendar and set a goal for when they want to complete the task. They don't give up easily. They are able to develop a system, structure, or strategy to attack their problem. They have a variety of problem solving strategies and they choose the one that might work in this situation. They pay attention and look to see if their problem-solving strategy is working. If the strategy doesn't work, they know how to back up and try another. They recognize when a theory

or idea must be rejected and another employed. They have systematic methods that help them to persist which include knowing how to begin, knowing what steps must be performed, and what data need to be generated or collected. Some strategies for persisting include:

- **Envisioning and keeping in mind the end product**. What will it look like and feel like when you are successful?

- **Seeking assistance and input from others.** Sometimes others may have had experience with similar problems or can see a different array of solutions.

- **Breaking the problem apart** into steps and accomplishing each step that leads to the final outcome.

- **Setting deadlines and target dates** by which each step should be completed.

- **Reviewing the ground rules, directions or criteria for success**. You may have missed something along the way or assumed that you understood the task but find didn't.

- **Keep telling yourself to hang in there** and stick to it. (Remember the *Little Engine that Could*: "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can….")

You no doubt have many other strategies that you've used when you were intent on achieving an important goal. Add them to this list.

In some cases it may be prudent to abandon a goal. For example, when the risks are too great or there may be harm to yourself or others, when you determine that the goal is not worth the efforts or the investment of time and energy that it would take to achieve the goal is too great. These are all thoughtful reactions. However, if you are passionate about achieving a goal to which you are committed, then you must make every effort and employ a range of strategies to stay focused and work toward that goal over time. Remember what author Og Mandino says:

"I will persist until I succeed. Always will I take another step.

If that is of no avail I will take another, and yet another.

In truth, one step at a time is not too difficult...

I know that small attempts, repeated, will complete any undertaking."