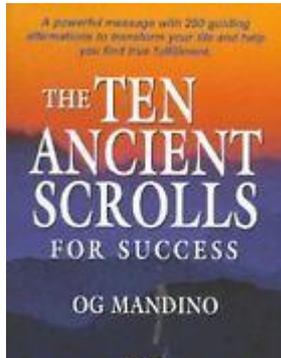


Perseverance: 'I will persist until I succeed'

Kate Ross - October 2016



This morning I would like to talk to you about perseverance. You are probably all familiar with the quote from the American inventor Thomas Edison “Genius is 1% inspiration, 99% perspiration”. It is noteworthy here that even brilliant inventors emphasise the importance of hard work and perseverance when discussing success - the idea that great accomplishments depend not so much on ingenuity as on hard work. As a teacher, I am aware that not everyone recognises this, and I have always been keen for my students to fully appreciate the importance of perseverance – to recognise that effort leads to achievement.

When looking at people who we believe are successful – whether it be our classmates, celebrities or Olympic champions - it is easy for us, when looking from the ‘outside’ to believe that their success is due to some innate ability or even to luck – they are simply gifted mathematicians or sportsmen or women, or public figures who happened to be in the right place at the right time. What we fail to see is the underlying effort involved in their achievement and we often don’t recognise that this achievement: an A in an exam, a first place in a competition or a reward for eloquence, is a product of far more – hard work, focus and a consistent determination to succeed.

Last year, when I was thinking about how I could build the idea of perseverance into the work habits of the Sixth Form I came across an American author Og Mandino and in particular a text he had written on the keys to success entitled ‘The Ten Scrolls’. One of the scrolls was entitled ‘I will persist until I succeed’ and I would like to read some excerpts from that to you today.

Mandino points out that– and I quote:

“The prizes of life are at the end of every journey, not near the beginning; and it is not given to me to know how many steps are necessary in order to reach my goal. Failure I may still encounter at the thousandth step, yet success hides behind the next bend in the road. Never will I know how close it lies unless I turn the corner.

Always will I take another step. If that is to no avail I will take another, and yet another. In truth, one step at a time is not too difficult.

I will persist until I succeed.”

If we think about what he is saying here, we see an important point – set backs can happen at any time in a venture, maybe at the beginning, maybe towards the end . . . the important thing is not to let a setback be a determining drawback. We all experience unexpected setbacks in our various activities, and it is easy to be thrown off course – to be upset and disappointed. At such times it can be tempting to decide not to bother – to decide either our goal isn’t achievable or we didn’t want it anyway. To do this is to misunderstand the

nature of success – to forget about the 99% perspiration which Edison refers to – perspiration only comes through effort.

It can be easy to start any enterprise with enthusiasm and to work at it as long as things go well – the real test is to persevere when enthusiasm isn't quite as strong and the way isn't as smooth as expected. And consistent effort in the face of setbacks is a true test of character – to persevere without being able to see the outcome. As Mandino says:

“I will consider each day's effort as but one blow of my blade against a mighty oak. The first blow may not cause a tremor in the wood, nor the second, nor the third. Each blow, of itself, may be trifling and seem of no consequence. Yet from these swipes the oak will eventually tumble. ... I will persist until I succeed.”

When discussing the need for persistence, he also refers to the need to 'keep your eyes on the prize' - not get bogged down in difficulties and lose sight of your longer goal.

A positive attitude is fundamental to persistence – we need to believe that we are gaining and learning – even from our mistakes. Edison provides an example of this is his claim that, although his efforts to invent the light bulb took a long time to bear fruit, he learned a lot – in fact 99 ways of how not to do it!

We can all use our experiences positively, and we can keep trying – we can be like Mandino who stated:

“I will try, and try, and try again. Each obstacle I will consider as a mere detour on my goal. I will persist and develop my skills, just as the mariner develops his, by learning to ride out the wrath of each storm.

I will persist until I succeed.

So long as there is breath in me, that long I shall persist. For now I know one of the greatest principles of success; if I persist long enough I will win.

I will persist. I will win.”

We at school are here to support you in your efforts, and to encourage you in your persistence. I hope you spend time thinking about the importance of perseverance and the role it plays in achieving success, whatever shape that success may take.

Finally, I would like you to remind you of the key ideas from my assembly – the points I would really like you to remember:

- Small yet frequent steps are manageable and lead to real progress – focus on the incremental steps you need to take to achieve your goal.
- Try to keep a positive attitude; do not focus on the times you may have failed or ON what you have not been able to do yet, rather focus on what you have learned and how this can

help you - Remember everyone fails at some point it is simply part of the process of learning.

- And always keep going, if at first you don't succeed, try again – perseverance is crucial to success. Do not give up. Remember if you persist, you will achieve.