



LIVING ABOVE YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start. ~ Nido Qubein

Do you ever have difficult weeks where every walk seems uphill, every stroke of the paddle is upstream, and every ride is against the wind? For me it has been a week where my friendship wasn't accepted, my motives were misinterpreted, I didn't get all my reports written, my friends bickered among themselves, my goldfish died, and I got caught in the rain. I'm just kidding about my goldfish, but you get the point.

WORK TO BE BETTER NOT BITTER

Hardships, struggles, and difficulties are inevitable, yet may feel like they are grinding against you in a way that threatens to defeat you. I believe that this grinding, rather than wear us down into nothing, can shape us into something better. Here are some guiding principles to help you live above your circumstances.

- 1. What happens *in* me is more important than what happens *to* me.**

I focus on my character and not just successful performance. I try to get my eyes off the immediate situation and negative circumstances. My goal in any and every circumstance is to be kind, patient, and understanding. I don't want to focus on things that lie outside my control, but instead, on what I can control, like my attitude, disposition, and character.

- 2. The noise outside me is best managed through quietness within me.**

Sometimes I wish people would hand me situations where I would never be anxious, frustrated, sad, upset, insecure, or unsure. The truth is, I am unable to control the entire world, reduce the chaos, decrease the stream of constant disturbance, or eliminate the noise of the outside world. But I can choose to quiet myself. If my inner peace is only found when there are no storms, I would be in trouble. Peace needs to be found during problems. And in this case, living in peace is better than winning a war.

- 3. I choose to celebrate my successes and learn from my mistakes.**

Perhaps you think that because I'm positive, I never

make mistakes. That is, of course, not true. I choose to focus on what goes right, not what goes wrong. I focus on my abilities and not my limitations. My goal is not perfect performance. It is positive character and an optimistic attitude. Every mistake is an opportunity to learn and grow. This is not to say that I enjoy the process, but I have learned to appreciate growth in character and attitude. I have learned to enjoy life as it comes.

4. My strength is best demonstrated when I lift others up.

This helps me live above my circumstances because I am focused on others, not only myself. I want to help someone else overcome their struggles, rather than only concentrating on my own. If you compete against someone, especially if you are trying to tarnish them in some way, it only serves to demonstrate weakness, inferiority, and inadequacy. Instead, I can encourage, support, and build others up whether traffic is slow, the economy is down, or there is another storm on the horizon.

BEING PEACEFUL DESPITE THE STORM

Living above my circumstances allows me to live in peace and not be upset by every wave of negativity that spills on my shoes. For those who work or live with substance use disorders, this can be an essential trait and a skill to be honed. When things don't go right, I will be okay because I am the one who chooses how I will respond. Even during the darkest night, I'm going to be standing strong and confident, waiting for the sunrise I know is coming.

A TIME TO REFLECT

1 How can you focus on your character, not only your performance or circumstances?

2 What strategies or tactics could you use to quiet yourself, instead of trying to quiet the outside noise?

3 Reflect on “my story is not over.” What are some chapter titles of your story that you look forward to?
