

Thrive despite the odds

I don't know if you feel the same way, but I'm getting sick and tired of all the bad news.

Oh, I guess I could just stop reading the stuff, or watching it, or listening to it -- but that doesn't really matter. There's always going to be someone, somewhere, with bad news -- there are always going to be those people who persist in screaming "the sky is falling" every time an acorn drops from a nearby tree.

There are legitimate downturns -- heaven knows, in the financial markets, at least, now is one of them -- but that doesn't mean you can't still thrive, despite it all.

Much of it boils down to attitude -- the attitude that you're going to survive and thrive, no matter what may come your way. As famous Notre Dame coach Knute Rockne said, "The team that won't be beat can't be beat."

But along with attitude, there's also skill.

It's strange to realize it, but for every downturn, no matter how severe, there are people who profit by it. Every "up" has a "down," and there are those who bet against conventional wisdom. In downturns, they tend to do well.

For each person who panics and rushes to the store to buy wheat, there's someone who makes money selling it to them. Nine years ago, in the middle of the "Y2K" panic, a good friend of mine went out and purchased plywood to put over the windows in case of riots. No riots came, but the plywood people made money on it. That same year, I remember a group who was selling "emergency survival kits." They sold thousands of them -- and I'm sure the kits are still sitting in a storeroom somewhere, unopened and unused.

Even now, with the financial markets troubled and foreclosures looming for some people, others are buying those foreclosed homes and properties, and waiting for a better day. Still others are buying distressed properties for pennies on the dollar, from homeowners who sell the properties just to get out from under the loans. You can argue on the morality of what they're doing -- but the old adage of "Buy when there's blood running in the streets" still has some investors buying stocks and bonds.

Just yesterday, as I write this, the stock market prices of a number of incredible

companies were driven down, by a panicky market -- and yet, those people who bought the stocks at a lower level -- and for each "sell," there's going to be a "buy" -- were able to resell the stocks the next day, for a profit of 10%.

It reminds me of the old Rudyard Kipling poem, "If:"

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;*

*If you can dream — and not make dreams your master;
If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same:.
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools;*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss:
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings — nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And which is more; you'll be a Man, my son!*

I periodically drive a highway through a desert canyon. There, far above the highway, far removed from the river below, a tree juts out of the rock wall at what seems to be an impossible angle. That tree has found a little bit of dirt, and a source of water. A seed blown there by the wind, or carried there by a bird, took

root, and thrived, against all odds.

I am inspired by that silly tree. Nobody would have ever expected it to live, let alone thrive, in its rocky desert perch. Nobody would have expected it to grow at all, let alone grow for years and years. Even though the odds were against it, it kept on growing, through drought and wind, sun and rain.

Simply put, the tree found a place to grow, and never gave up, despite the odds.

That's the way we need to be.

We must thrive, no matter what the odds against us. We must continue to grow and progress, no matter how bleak other people may paint our plight.

We must continue to excel, despite what challenges may come our way.

As the old adage, goes, it really doesn't matter how many times you are knocked down in life -- what matters is how many times you get up.

No matter what problems may come our way, we can thrive in our environment.

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