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| **Are You Prepared for Success?**  Earl Nightingale once said that if a person does not prepare for his success, when his opportunity comes, it will only make him look foolish. You've probably heard it said repeatedly that luck is what happens when preparedness meets opportunity. Only when you've paid the price to be ready for your success are you in a position to take advantage of your opportunities when they arise. And the most remarkable thing is this: The very act of preparation attracts to you, like iron filings to a magnet, opportunities to use that preparation to advance in your life. You'll seldom learn anything of value without soon having a chance to use your new knowledge and your new skills to move ahead more rapidly.  There is a series of things that you can do to become ready for success. All of these activities require self-discipline and a good deal of faith. They require self-discipline because the most normal and natural thing for people to do is to try to get by without preparation. Instead of taking the time and making the effort to be ready for their chance when it comes, they fool around, listen to the radio, watch television, and then they try to wing it and dupe others into thinking that they are more prepared than they really are. And since just about everyone can see through just about everyone else, the unprepared person simply looks incompetent and foolish.  **The Golden Hour**  We live in a knowledge-based society, and knowledge in every field is doubling approximately every seven years. This means that you must double your knowledge in your field every seven years just to stay even. You're already "maxed out" at your current level of knowledge and skill. You've reached the ceiling in your career with your current talents and abilities. If you want to go faster and further, you must get back to work and begin to prepare yourself for greater heights. You must put aside the newspaper, turn off the television, politely excuse yourself from aimless socializing, and work on yourself.  Get in the habit of awaking earlier in the morning and spending the first 30 to 60 minutes reading something uplifting, informational, educational. Henry Ward Beecher once said, "The first hour is the rudder of the day." This is often called the "golden hour." It's the hour during which you program your mind and set your emotional tone for the rest of the day. If you get up in the morning at least two hours before you have to be at work, or before your first appointment, and spend the first hour investing in your mind, taking in "mental protein" rather than "mental candy," reading good books rather than the newspaper or magazines, your whole day will flow more smoothly. You'll be more positive and optimistic. You'll be calmer, more confident and relaxed. You'll gain a greater sense of control and well-being by the very act of reading healthy material for the first hour of each and everyday.  **Plan Your Day**  Another thing that highly successful people do is plan and prepare for the entire day. They review all of the tasks and responsibilities that they have for the coming hours. They carefully make a list of all their activities, and they set clear priorities on the activities. They decide which things are most important to do, which are secondary in importance, and which things should not be done at all unless all the other things are finished. They then discipline themselves to start working on their most important tasks and stay with them during the day until they're complete.  **The natural tendency of the low performer is to do what is fun and easy before he or she does what is hard and necessary.** Underachievers always like to do the little things first. They are drawn to the tasks that contribute little to their careers or future possibilities. But high achievers discipline themselves to start at the top of their list and to work on the activities in order of importance, without diversion or distraction.  In everything you do, preparation is the key. If you want to be ready for success, you have to plant the seeds well in advance of the harvest that you expect. Do what the winners do: Think on paper. Memorize the winner's creed: "Everything counts." Everything you do is either moving you toward your goals or away from them. Everything is either helping you or hurting you. Nothing is neutral. Everything counts. A young man once asked a successful businessman how he could be more successful faster. The businessman told him that the key to his own success had been to "get good" at his job.  The young man said, "I'm already good at what I do."  The businessman then said, "Well, get better!"  The young man, somewhat self-satisfied, said, "Well, I'm already better than most people."  To that, the businessman replied, "Then be the best."  Those are three of the best pieces of advice I've ever heard: Get good. Get better. Be the best!  A quotation by Abraham Lincoln had a great influence on my life when I was 15. It was a statement he made when he was a young lawyer in Springfield, Illinois. He said, "I will study and prepare myself, and someday my chance will come."  If you study and prepare yourself, your chance will come as well. There is nothing that you cannot accomplish if you'll invest the effort to get yourself ready for the success that you desire. And there is nothing that can stop you but your own lack of preparation.  Think about the message in this beautiful poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:  *"Those heights by great men won and kept  Were not achieved by sudden flight;  But they, while their companions slept,  Were toiling upward in the night."*  Remember that preparation requires self-discipline, because your natural tendency is to do more and more of the things that come most easily to you and avoid those areas that you don't enjoy because you're not particularly good at them yet. It requires character for you to admit your weaknesses in a particular area and then resolve to go to work to develop yourself so those weaknesses don't hold you back. In other words: Prepare yourself for success ... or when opportunity knocks, it will make you look a fool.  IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ... It's not what you don't know that can cause you to miss out on success; it's what you think you don't need to know. Perhaps you have never studied the intricacies of how to raise money to support a new venture ... you have never needed to. But, how many ideas have you had that get dispelled because they are "too big" or would "cost too much money"? Maybe they would seem smaller, more achievable — allowing you to entertain them — if you knew how to obtain venture capital. You don't need to learn every subject in depth. But, take the time to learn what you think you don't need to know — at least at a cursory level. If the occasion comes to dig deeper, then dig.  BRIAN TRACY is the author of *The Psychology of Achievement.* To read more articles by Brian Tracy, "Take Action" (Mar/Apr 2006), "Sell the 'Gap' " (Jan/Feb 2006), and "Think Like a Winner" (Jul/Aug 2005), visit [www.AdvantEdgeMag.com/Tracy](http://www.nightingale.com/a%7EAuthorID%7E123.asp) today. |

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