

Following Through ... from a different angle

More And More Grist For the Intention Mill

"And in the economic news today, we have this report:

The annual production of good intentions is rising. So is the price of poor follow through."

In this fast-paced, information-rich, high tech world, success increasingly depends on being able to actually do what we intend to do.

With more information available every day about what we can do, for example, to stay healthy or get wealthy, to raise happy drug-free kids, or to protect the environment, we know more all the time about how to get what we want out of life. With so much grist for the intention mill, it's no wonder we produce so many intentions.

The more we know, the more potential we have for improving our lives. But useful new information doesn't automatically change what we do. The only way we humans can actually benefit from much of the useful information we keep accumulating is by adopting intentions and following through on them. So, the more we know about what we could do to make our lives better, the more potential we're wasting by doing a lousy job of following through.

For example, if researchers discover that eating at an unnaturally slow pace can add ten years or more to your life, you wouldn't *automatically* start eating slowly. You'd have to *decide* to do that. What's more, you'd have to *keep on* deciding. Your ability to actually benefit from the potentially life-extending new information would hinge entirely on your ability to follow through.

It's ironic that the more technological, social and economic progress we humans make, the more demands we place on our decidedly unimpressive follow through equipment.

For example, because advances in technology have made life so much less physically demanding than it once was, we now have to *decide* to get regular exercise in order to stay healthy. The problem is, a group of one hundred people *today* who only *intend* to get enough exercise will

probably produce less exercise than did a group of ten people *yesterday* who *had to* be physically active just to survive.

And what about the affluence we enjoy? Just think about the burden that "having plenty" places on our ability to follow through.

For example, many of yesterday's parents criticize today's parents for making life much too easy for their kids. "Stop giving your children everything they want!" insist the parents of yesterday. "Don't you see that you're depriving your children of the character-building effects of having to work hard and be patient? You just have to say, 'No.'"

What the critics of today's parents don't take into account is that it was a whole lot easier to say "No" to kids in less affluent times. It's one thing to say "No" when, economically, you're in no position to say "Yes." It's something else entirely to *decide* to say "No" when you know darned well that you have the means to make your child happy right now by saying "Yes." In today's more affluent times, when saying "No" stems from a philosophical decision rather than an economic necessity, "building character" in our children depends far more than it used to on the ability of parents to follow through on their intentions.

We humans keep putting more and more of our eggs in our follow through basket. And until we plug the hole in the basket, we can look forward to a whole lot more scrambled eggs.