

Create a Masterpiece Garden

“... the mind is a master weaver of both the inner garment of character and the outer garment of circumstance...”

-James Allen, “As a Man Thinketh”

You are a Masterpiece

Anytime I read a story of someone who accomplished something great, like Gladys Alward, or Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Ester or the other stories in this book. I get inspired to believe that I was made to do something important. Even if it is only the space of a few minutes of greatness, all of life is a story leading up to the crucial moment our purpose is revealed to us and to the world.

You are created to do something important too. If life is worth living it must be embraced and truly lived. We let the things we have talked about rob us of a life well lived. By establishing a few practices we can live. I say, live your life, love your life, create a great life!

I used to believe I had no control over my story. -I was a fatalist. I believed that each of us was destined to do things that

Leslie A. Gunterson *Propelling Practices: Momentum and Lift for Personal Lift*
<http://www.ExcellenceArt.org>

were outside of our control. Until I started putting some practices into place and realized that I can change the story, by changing the main character in it. When I first started this, I wasn't sure it would work, yet I plugged away at making choices.

Believing the Best

I knew that I could not change people; I knew that I could only change myself. Even people bent on control realize this. What I did not realize is the magnitude of the changes in others when I make the shifts in my thinking. I began to realize that people change immediately when I change my perspective of them.

For an example, I had a boyfriend in college who was in medical school who used to correct my grammar. When he first started doing it, I thought he was being a bit of a snob and was rather annoying. Then I began to realize, he cared about me and just wanted to help me sound intelligent. He immediately changed from being a snob to being a caring friend. Not because he changed, yet because I changed my perspective. It does not matter what the motive was. I can make up that it was whatever I want. Yet, what I

believe his motive is does affect our relationship. Why not believe the best?

I also learned that people change quickly when they are inspired to a larger purpose or vision. If I can earn your trust, and step into your world view, chances are you may see something in my vision and want to be involved with it. If you see me as a threat and you don't trust me, nothing I do will likely entice you to get involved in what I am doing. It is all about our thoughts. I am the same person with the same vision. It is just how others see me from their perspective.

Take George, everyone who knew him knew him to be kind, honest, intelligent and one you could trust to help you. Yet many people didn't trust him. You see George was African-American and in those days, in some of the places George lived, he could get hung or shot just for the color of his skin. George understood that and did not fight for his rights, he did not resist what was, he just earned the trust of everyone who knew him with his actions.

He worked hard to make the world a better place and ran a college for the study of helping his people grow more prosperous crops. He was known and loved by all of them too. When George

Washington Carver died he had friends of all races and honors poured out on him. He did not fight the world's perspective. He just naturally changed it by living his purpose.

We can believe anything we want. We are gullible beings. We believe whatever was planted in our brains. A little weed of doubt is sown in our brains by some meaningless comment at a fertile time and wha-la, we now have a tree of doubt that grows and grows, and chokes out a bunch of good fruit. In this way we create beliefs about people and create evidence to back up our beliefs so that we can be right about our beliefs.

It is when we take accountability for creating our masterpiece that we can make positive changes. It is when we take on our beliefs in a big way, that we start changing the main character of our story. It is when we take captive each belief, one at a time and challenge it, we get change. Once this occurs the whole story changes as all of the secondary characters in the story change.

Instantly, I can change people by changing my thinking about other people. I can go from thinking that someone is abrasive to seeing them as bold and brave. I can see them as ineffective or I can see them as compassionate and caring. I change the characters in my

song by changing and challenging myself.

I teach self defense. So it is logical that I, in my normal state, react defensively in my approach to life. After all, I have practiced this daily. I have been challenged to drop my defenses and to become more open and authentic. This is not an easy thing to do after spending all this time learning to defend myself. It sure changes my relationships though. All of the characters in my story became less threatening. In fact, I started to realize none of them can hurt me unless I give them my permission. I have nothing to defend and nothing to defend against. -It's all imaginary.

All of my fear is imaginary and all of my defensiveness is motivated by fear. When I drop the fear, all the imaginary threats disappear and people become safe and supportive. Who did I change to make the people around me supportive instead of adversarial? Only me.

I am open and more authentic with people. This is how I've learned to inspire and enroll people into my vision of excellence. I've created a whole new life for myself. The great thing is that if I can do it, so can you. The more we try to tell people how to change or use leverage to try to make them change, the more they stay the

Propelling Practices

Create a Masterpiece Garden

same, because we are the same. The more we are real with ourselves and others, the more we all change together.

Planting a Magnificent Garden

All change starts somewhere and I believe it should start with our thoughts. James Allen wrote a little classic book entitled, “As a Man Thinketh.” He talks about the power of our thoughts to mold our beliefs and our circumstances. In it he uses the analogy of a garden. As a gardener, I can imagine exactly how the garden is a great analogy to our minds. Our thoughts are the plants in our garden. They are healthy or they are not. They bear the fruit we want in the garden or they bear weeds.

The fruit of our garden is the result in both our character and in the outside circumstances that we call our lives. We either have good edible fruit that all enjoy in a beautiful garden or we have fruit that is bitter and inedible. All of this starts in the garden that we call our mind.

Surrounding our garden we have a fence. This is our boundary system and it is either strong, or weak. It can be either broken down or an impenetrable fortress keeping everyone out.

Leslie A. Gunterson *Propelling Practices: Momentum and Lift for Personal Lift*
<http://www.ExcellenceArt.org>

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he. -Proverbs 23:7a

“Improving my thinking improves and impacts my beliefs, which change my expectations, which affects my attitude, which changes my behavior, which improves my performance and that will change my life.”

-John Maxwell, “Thinking for a Change”

These quotes capture the importance of our thoughts. Our thoughts really make up our beliefs, attitudes and our degree of happiness, as well as our character and circumstances. If that is the case then I can choose to change my thoughts. Abraham Lincoln then said it well when he said, “People are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” He understood the power of choosing our thoughts and thus our feelings.

To be responsible for my thoughts I think of my mind like a garden and I care for it as importantly as I would a garden that grows all of the food I need to sustain me. Without healthy food, we eventually die. So it is without healthy thoughts.

When we want a good garden we plant good seed, it is the same if we want a good life we must start with our thoughts. Good thoughts start with good purposeful planting. What is it that I really want to be like? What kind of life do I want? What kind of character do I want? A gardener will plan out what fruit she wants to harvest. You have to decide what you want and plant that seed.

Just as if you were laying out the plot of your garden. You would decide what plants you want, and how many. The laws of sowing and reaping are pretty clear. The first law is, you always get a harvest. Even if it is dandelions, you will get a harvest of some kind. The second law is you get the harvest that you plant. You don't get beets from tomato seeds, so plant the seed you want.

The third law of the harvest is that if you tend your crop you always get a harvest that is more than the seed you planted. This is important. A little effort into cultivating good thoughts will reward you with a hundredfold result!

You begin with what you want. You intend it, you plan for it, you think about it regularly. You declare it to your friends and

family. You might enroll them in where you want to plant the carrots and the beans. That is how you plan a garden. Why not plan a life that can sustain you in the same way.

We all believe we can have a garden and do what is necessary to grow one. We need to believe that we can change our lives and grow in character the way we want to also. We can choose to believe that we can create what we want.

After a gardener has decided what to plant and has planted his seed, he maintains the plot. He may begin with some fertilizer. What I have found successful for fertilizing my purpose and vision is to be grateful. I have found this eliminates many weed thoughts that I'll talk about later. I was coached to keep a gratitude journal and in it I started to daily acknowledge myself, my family members and to write 5 new things that I am grateful for each day.

What I have found by keeping this journal is that the more I find to be grateful for, the more I keep an attitude of thanks and find more to be grateful for. The attitude just keeps growing. I find I have more things to acknowledge my family members for as well. And the relationships are improving, even though I am only acknowledging them in my journal.

One concept I also found helpful is to act ‘as if,’ what I wanted had already happened. To practice the gratitude of acting as if, that I wrote of earlier. The seed of gratitude I planted and tended from that fateful time has continued to bear fruit. It has continued to produce healing by the power of declaring in faith a positive result in alignment with not only what I wanted, but also what was best for all concerned. If I had declared that I was thankful for a sports car in my driveway, that would not be in alignment with who I am and what was best for me at the time. The result of healed relationships is always in alignment with my purpose, my values and my internal beliefs. Faith works!

Weeding the Garden

Weeds are a nuisance in any garden. The first way to prevent weeds is to not sow weed seeds. Now most of us don’t have weed seeds in our garden shed. However, they just sort of blow in from somewhere. That is also how they get into the garden of our minds, they just sort of blow in on the wind. Some ways I have found to prevent most casual windblown seed is to avoid places I may find

Leslie A. Gunterson *Propelling Practices: Momentum and Lift for Personal Lift*
<http://www.ExcellenceArt.org>

I do not watch much news. I don't read the news either. If it is important, I do find out about it. I do not miss many important happenings. What I do miss is many weeds of discontent: weeds of gossip, weeds of negative opinions of other people that might sprout seeds of these things in my mind. I know me, I am easily SNIOPED. That means, Susceptible to the Negative Influence of Other People. Since I know that about myself, I don't go there.

I am not the only one to recommend this as I have heard it from many people including Gavin De Becker in "The Gift of Fear." If you are going to watch the news, do not do it right before going to sleep. By the time you awake the seed has sprouted into a full grown weed! If you are going to watch the news, do something else just before bed. I recommend reading something positive, writing in a gratitude journal or a victory journal or some other kind of positive reflective process.

A victory journal is where you keep track of all of your victories and positives. It can be a list, or a journal or whatever form you want. Be creative and keep track of and celebrate those victories. I find that it is easy for me to forget all of the good things

I have done, the positive choices I have made and the victories that I have won. I barely noticed the victory and then I am off to the next goal. I am learning to take the time to celebrate the victory and to keep it in a journal to remind me when I am not feeling victorious.

Another thing I like to do before bed is visualize how my day would have looked if everything went the way I had planned and hoped. In this way I can re-write my day and visualize it better for tomorrow. Meditation, prayer, and relaxation exercises all prepare us for sleep with positive seed implanted to sprout instead of negative. Also these practices help us sleep better.

When we notice weeds that are tiny sprouts and we can tell these thoughts are not going to be in alignment with what we are creating and what we are about, it is easier to pull them right away before they develop long tap roots. If you have ever weeded a garden you will notice that the tap root is the thickest root and it grows straight down. If you catch it late, you may not pull the whole root when you pull up the plant. It is the same with a weed thought. We have to get it all, all the negative beliefs that start rooting that plant into our belief system.

Some weeds to eliminate from our garden that negatively

impact the garden fruit are the three C's, complaining, condemning and Criticizing. These weeds not only don't bear good fruit on their own, they tend to spread, and attract more weeds as well as causing our other fruit to become bitter.

Complaining is never positive for the people around us and is quite contagious. It tends to breed discontent and attract more complaints both from us and from those around us. It is not attractive in a good sense and depletes energy that could be spent changing our discontents instead of whining about them. What I notice about myself when I complain is that I do not feel better afterward. I feel worse. In the end, the fruit is bitter and this is one plant I do not want around my garden.

Condemning is also known as blaming, it is a prolific plant. I have to tattle on myself. I love to find someone to blame for stuff that bugs me. I certainly don't want to admit that I am a little sensitive and get my feathers in a ruffle over little stuff. Yet, the more aware I am of what is really bugging me, the more I find the people I look around to blame are not there. There is nobody to blame for the stuff that ruffles me, but me. The more I look the more I see that it is all my stuff.

It's like coming into a messy room and getting flustered about the mess and as you are cleaning it up you realize that it is all your mess. Oops! No one to blame but me! All of life is that way. Our stuff is our stuff. Blaming may feel better for the short run, but it keeps us from learning anything different. It keeps us stuck in our messy stuff. This stuff is toxic, I would not even use it as fertilizer in my garden, let alone let it propagate. It is a weed.

Criticizing is a great pastime. After all if I am looking at you, I do not have to look in the mirror and see me. This is why so many school children tattle and criticize each other. The payoff is that their faults are being overlooked while others are scrutinized and they are rewarded for being helpful in their tattling.

I am great at criticizing. What I have learned though is that when I criticize, people pretty much dig in their heels and don't change much. It is true that what we resist, persists. If I give negative energy to something I do not like, in the way of criticism, I am just feeding what I do not want.

I like to think about what it is I am critical of and own the part of it that is in me. Then I can get the log out of my own eye.

Once I see clear I can make a choice to give loving feedback or let it

go. I find the speck in another's eye, is usually not the log I first saw in my own eye. The fruit of criticism is the bitter fruit of resentment. This is not a plant suited for the fruitful garden of my dreams.

Fear and doubt are little weeds that can quickly spread and take deep roots. It is best to root them up right away and to dig down into the soil of our lives and investigate where the beginning of that root goes. Perhaps through a deeper cultivation we can eliminate the entire root and find rich soil for new beliefs to grow healthy fruit in.

Tending our Good Thoughts

A good gardener tends to his plants as well as looks for weeds. The undersides of leaves can show signs of disease and or pests in the garden that are not clear until the plant is suffering. We have to check our thoughts and our fruit to make sure it is what we originally intended. The way we tend to our thoughts is to listen to our thoughts.

Listen to your own self-talk, thoughts, and the words you speak. Listen to your own beliefs about yourself, critical thoughts toward yourself and others and listen to your words, as well as

listening to those around you. This is taking those thoughts captive; listen and catch them. Evaluate them against what is really true. We are each worthy. We are each created to be a contribution. We each have talents, gifts and skills to share with others. Counter beliefs with positive thoughts such as these.

Be aware of thoughts that come from outside yourself, and be prepared to counter random outlandish thoughts that are outside of your values, boundary system or beliefs. We all have thoughts of frustration and resignation. We all want to give up sometimes. Recognize this as being outside of what it is that we really want.

Recognize the feelings associated with your thoughts. Good emotions are aligned with what you want. This is a good reason for starting a journal of our thoughts. This helps us evaluate if what we are thinking about is what in fact we want. Or if we need to change what it is that we are thinking about.

Undesirable feelings such as depression, doubt, guilt are indications that the things we are thinking about are not going to take us toward what we want. These are thoughts we need to take captive. Recognize them as weeds and pull them up. We need to replace them with thoughts of faith and gratitude. Plant in the hole

Propelling Practices

Create a Masterpiece Garden

of the weed a flower seed that will blossom into something wonderful.

Evaluate what you hear

“An unexamined life is not worth living.” Socrates

Once we have captured our thoughts and listened to our words we can begin to evaluate them. As you evaluate remember that we are hung by the tongue. We get what we speak, as much as we reap what we sow. The tongue has the power of life and death.

Just listen, for one week, to what you are saying. Are your words life or death? What do those words sound like in the people around you such as your children or friends? Doing this will change your desires to change your thoughts. Check your tone also.

Do not get overwhelmed with what you hear. Just begin to be aware and willing to change these speaking habits for habits with better outcomes.

Fencing the Garden

Leslie A. Gunterson *Propelling Practices: Momentum and Lift for Personal Lift*
<http://www.ExcellenceArt.org>

Boundaries are like fences; they help us to know who we are and where our limits are. Good boundaries keep out poor, unsupportive relationships, and protect us. Good Boundaries also have gates to let in good supportive intimate relationships and healing. Our gates also let out hurting emotions like grief. Boundaries say, “No.” or “Yes”, “I will/ I will not”, “I like, don’t like.”

Take a look at your boundary system. Know and own what is and is not your personal responsibility. We are responsible to others, but not for others. We need to own: Our emotions, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behavior, choices, values, limits, thoughts, desires, and our ability to give and receive love, these are the things we are responsible for.

We cannot however control others and when we try to do this we disrespect others ability to create their own lives. If we recognize the happiness that we can own by being grateful we would never try to become happy by trying to change anyone else to make ourselves happier.

There are many general problems that occur with our fences.

Leslie A. Gunterson *Propelling Practices: Momentum and Lift for Personal Lift*
<http://www.ExcellenceArt.org>

Some fences are just broken down and not reliable to protect us. We say “yes” to bad things, people and/or choices and when we get tired of saying “yes” all of the time we say “no” to good things, people and choices.

Some of us have fortresses for fences. We don’t let anyone in to see our garden and mistake every passerby for an intruder. We lack a gate which is the ability to let in healing and take out the garbage. Because our fence is impenetrable our garbage gets full and we blame passersby for dumping extra in our yard.

Some gardener’s fences actually go out beyond their own boundaries and they start fencing off and controlling their neighbor’s gardens. They spray the roses and do other chores for their neighbors even when the neighbors don’t want the help. This is not a working choice in neighborhoods and creates conflict.

A good working fence says, “I know my boundaries, who I am and what I am responsible for. I am accountable for my choices and for my behavior. It has a functional gate that lets in good relationships and visitors to share in the garden and lets the gardener remove the rubbish from the garden and dispose of it. It protects the garden from damage by unwanted, unsafe visitors.

Practices:

Believe the best in people, in situations; don't resist what is.
Fertilize your garden by practicing gratitude: Gratitude Journal
Acknowledge the good things: Victory Journal
Journaling and challenging thoughts and beliefs
Plant what you want to grow: Start with good thoughts
Weed what you don't want to grow: 3C's and Fear
Prepare for sleep with a positive: visualize having a perfect day
Listen: to self-talk which reveals beliefs
Build a healthy fence with a gate and a view of the neighborhood

Challenge Questions

How can I change my perspective about this circumstance?
How can I change my perspective on this person?
What am I grateful for today?
How am I acknowledging what I am grateful for?
How can I acknowledge my victories?
What seed am I planting?
What crop do I want to harvest?
What seed do I need to plant?
Where are the weed seeds blowing into my mind from?
What assumptions am I making about my environment?
What assumptions am I making about people around me?
How can I release blame and take more responsibility for my life today?
How are my thoughts controlling my behaviors and ultimately my results?

Affirmations:

I am creating the life I want to create.

I can do all things.

I am grateful for all that happens in my life.

I am planting a good harvest.

What I think about I will eventually bring about.

Good is coming, I am about to get my socks blessed off!

He/she is (positive assumption) not (negative assumption)

I am the creator of the world I see.

Today I will resist nothing that occurs.

I am determined to see things differently.

I am determined to see positive possibilities.

I can transform the world I see by giving up resentment.

I can transform the world I see by giving up assumptions.

I can change my assumptions to serve me.