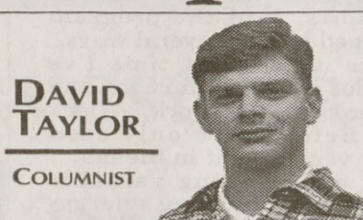


OPINION

Success requires belief and self-determination

Back when I was still a confused adolescent – just prior to being a confused adult – I constantly wondered why I couldn't be more athletic, more popular, better looking ... stop me when this list starts to sound familiar.



DAVID TAYLOR
COLUMNIST

It never made sense to me that some people had "it" (whatever "it" was at any particular time) and I didn't.

Somewhere along the line, I made one of those discoveries that I always knew, but never quite realized.

Apparently, "live" is an active verb. I live, you live, he lives, she lives, ya'll live (I love Texas), we live, they live. Yep, an active verb.

Ok, what did my rudimentary English skills have to do with my ability to get a date? Well, not much. I still haven't spent many nights diagramming sentences by candlelight.

But I did make the startling discovery that my life is up to me.

I guess the rest of the world already knew that, but it was news to me. I realized no one was going to make me a better basketball player, more confident or anything else for that matter.

The point remains that what we are and what

we will be are two things that are completely up to us.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson gave King George III of Great Britain the reasons for an independent United States of America.

Of the ideals found in the Declaration of Independence, a God-given right for the "pursuit of happiness" was by far the most revolutionary.

Since then, this "pursuit of happiness" has been interpreted by many to mean, "Cool, I get to do whatever I want."

What Jefferson really meant is that we have an innate ability to choose what we can become.

In the words of P. J. O'Rourke, "Freedom is not empowerment. Empowerment is what the Serbs have in Bosnia. Anybody can grab a gun and be empowered. An entitlement is what people on welfare get, and how free are they? It's not an endlessly expanding list of rights – the 'right' to education, the 'right' to health care, the 'right' to food and housing. That's not freedom, that's dependency. Those aren't rights, those are the rations of slavery – hay and a barn for human cattle."

Unfortunately, we usually are our own biggest obstacles.

After my freshman year, I spent a couple years playing missionary in the Philippines. The Filip-

inos had an explanation for everything that went wrong in their country. They would almost always say, "Mahirap ang buhay dito."

I know that doesn't mean much to you, so I will go ahead and translate. It means, "Life is hard here."

And it was. I spent half my time in the Philippines trying to understand why God found it necessary to create cockroaches the size of the state I left.

To make things more interesting, there were only two seasons: hot n' rainy and hot n' dry – those are the technical terms. And the overwhelming and omnipresent poverty was something I had never even imagined.

Too many people spend their lives making excuses as to why they "just can't do it right now."

However, of all the obstacles for the Filipinos, "Mahirap ang buhay dito" was by far the most insidious. No matter how hard you work, you can't help people who don't believe in themselves.

Many of the Filipinos simply wouldn't try because they had already decided they couldn't do a thing about their situations.

I'm not saying you can jump off a bridge if you just believe you will survive. But too many people spend their whole lives making excuses as to why they "just can't do it right now."

Or even worse, "I'm just not good at it." Someone once told me, "It doesn't matter whether you think you can or you think you can't ... because you're right."

In other words, believing in your own failure is halfway to ensuring it.

There always will be a reason to not try something, and there will always be someone better at what you may want to try. But if we use these as excuses, we will never do a darn thing.

The Chinese have an ancient curse: may all your wishes come true.

In simpler terms, be careful what you wish for because it might just happen.

We can make ourselves into whatever we want, but when all is said and done, we may not like ourselves any more than we did in the first place.

There is always a price to pay for our decisions.

O'Rourke also observed, "There is only one basic human right, the right to do as you damn well please. And with it comes the only basic human duty, the duty to take the consequences."

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THE BATTALION

Established in 1893

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EDITORIAL POLITICAL PLAY

Gingrich should focus on solving the drug problem, not his image.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich recently declared at a meeting of the Republican National Committee that the United States should "stop playing games" with the issue of illegal drugs.

The fact is that Gingrich should stop playing games with the American voting public.

Gingrich said at the annual Republican meeting that Congress should either pass legislation that would legalize drugs or adopt penalties severe enough to solve the problem entirely.

The statement is an obvious example of political rhetoric aimed at landing Gingrich's name in the paper.

Perhaps if Gingrich truly felt strongly about winning the war on drugs, he would have fervently supported the legislation passed last year by the Democratic Congress, which attempted to do exactly what the House speaker proposes – solve the drug problem.

The 1994 crime law increased penalties for drug traffickers and offenders, strengthened the nation's police forces and established new programs aimed at getting "at risk" children off the

street and involved in positive activities.

And Gingrich was at the forefront of Republicans whose goal was to defeat the Democrat's bill.

But since then, times have changed.

The Republicans now are in power, and the time is right – election time – to say all the right things.

Newt Gingrich now seems to be taking advantage of his position in the media spotlight to project a sparkling image of himself.

Drug legalization is not really an issue.

Regardless of whether it is a good idea, the idea that drugs should be illegal is ingrained in an American public and Congress would never pass such legislation.

Interestingly, Gingrich's statement did not come from the floor of the House where new legislation could be introduced, but at a Republican party function with a heavy media contingent in attendance.

The issue boils down to politicians wasting the time and money of the voters by concentrating on their image rather than concentrating on getting things done.



Gingrich



'Beaten' path eludes modern day Kerouacs

Poor Jack Kerouac. The embodiment of the term "adventurer." The man whose 1957 novel *On the Road* defined the "beat" generation and proclaimed its existence to the bulk of mainstream America.

What would this veritable wanderer be doing if he were alive today? If he were able to quest for the meaning of life as he and his friends hurtled back and forth across the great expanses of the American interstate?

I have the feeling he might not do much more than occasionally leave the couch to go to the refrigerator to get another beer.

In *On the Road*, Kerouac wrote that he "could hear a new call and see a new horizon," and that "somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything."

He was motivated to travel by his desire to see something never before seen. He felt that some meaning could be captured if only he could dig feverishly enough through the unknown and ever-expanding horizons of the world around him.

But today, those horizons apparently have become about as broad as they are going to get.

CHRIS STIDVENT
COLUMNIST



Kerouac might soon discover that there would be no place he could go to see anything new. And that he would not have any reasons to ever leave his house in the first place. Newness is fast becoming passe, as well as obsolete.

Our shrinking world is being brought closer together by the growth of the two big T's. Technology and tourism.

With the era of the Internet and CNN upon us, society is evolving into a mass of anonymous spectators who can interact with each other while conveniently never having to leave their houses.

We can learn about major world news events while and after they happen.

The tragedies and heroics of the world are brought right into our living room, and played out for us in 3-D, digitalized color and surround-sound.

We can then turn to our computers, and, once again without having to get up from the La-Z Boy, hold conversations with dozens of people from all over the world.

It's almost like we were alive.

And if technology did not provide us with so many incentives

to stay home, where would we go if we were to leave the house and set out adventuring?

What place left still has the mystique of being undiscovered with the promise of adventure laying in wait?

America, and the rest of the world, is becoming more and more the same, no matter where one is. Drive into any town – there's the McDonald's right next to the Taco Bell and across the street from the Wendy's and the Long John Silvers.

With the advent of franchising and larger corporations, standardized quality and convenience are replacing the variety that small businesses possess.

Mom and Pop shut down their hardware store five years ago. See, it used to be there where Ultra-Mega Wal-Mart is now. And the town's five movie theaters all gave way to the 1000-screened Cineplex last year.

Towns have become an assortment of the same 50 franchises with their locations simply shuffled geographically. Perhaps Kerouac could find relief from the monotony of the mundane by retreating to the wild.

He could travel to the Grand Canyon, to Yellowstone National Park, and there he would find ... other people. People with Big Macs in one hand and their camera in the other, snapping away

at the sunset while their three whining children frolic in the endangered plant life.

The national parks in our country are once again suffering from an overload of tourists this summer. The understaffed, underfunded park services have their hands full simply dealing with those tourists who become injured. Guaranteeing the tranquility of what were once considered vacation spots has become almost impossible.

People have reproduced to the point where you really can't go that far before bumping into another one. There can be no escape into the solitude of the self, for there is very little solitude left these days.

In a society where inter-global communication is instantaneous, and docile herds of tourists descend by busload to every formerly-remote spot on the planet, not much is left for the Jack Kerouacs of the world.

They can either contribute to the earth's encroaching blandness, or they can travel further out there, to whatever places are left where people don't all wear Mickey Mouse ears and eat Whoppers three times a day.

I like to think Kerouac would hitch a ride and choose the latter.

Chris Stidvent is a senior philosophy major



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NEWSROOM HOURS:

Sunday, 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.
Monday – Thursday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Newsroom phone: 845-3313; Fax: 845-2647

THE BATTALION ONLINE: The Battalion offers photos and the day's headlines on the worldwide web. Web Site: http://128.194.30.84

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The Battalion (USPS 045-360) is published daily, Monday through Friday during the fall and spring semesters and Monday through Thursday during the summer sessions (except University holidays and exam periods), at Texas A&M University. Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77840.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 230 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.