

Purity of purpose is the unmitigated commitment to a cause. The commitment is sometimes taken to mean a kind of God like 'will' towards a goal or set of goals, but it is more than that. A wilful intent, even a very strong wilful intent often does not equate to accomplishing something that we desire. We only need to think of the many failed new Year's resolutions to understand this.

Another facet of purity of purpose which sometimes gets misconstrued is that it entails high levels of motivation throughout the whole process of accomplishing a goal. Motivation often is a great spark to initiate something, for instance, in the new year's resolution example, people's motivation tends to be on the high side. At least at the beginning. When the motivation levels wane then the behaviours or attempts at a goal tend to fall off as well. The natural assumption is to believe that it is poor levels of motivation or inability to sustain the motivation which is the problem. But that is just a spurious correlation.

One of the keys to purity of purpose is to be able to discipline oneself towards the attainment of a goal. Motivation may well be the spark, but discipline is the much-needed fuel. We do not see a lot of books on developing discipline, but we should as it's a sorely neglected aspect of many people's life. We tend to think of discipline as something people either have or they don't. But it functions more like a skill which can be developed and strengthened over time.

For example, when I first returned to study at university, I did not magically have good study practices. I had to develop them, nurture and strengthen them over time through repeated and consistent effort. The point being that discipline is malleable and as such we can utilize its malleability to our advantage. A really good way to encounter life is to think less of developing motivation and more along the lines of how to develop the discipline to accomplish something. A useful tip is to break down a goal you set for yourself into smaller and smaller components - investigating micro habits is a useful exercise in many areas of life.

Thus far two important facets of purity of intent have been identified - motivation and discipline. There is a third component which is just as integral namely the ability to focus on the task at hand. It is a kind of laser like focus often to the exclusion of all else. People are often surprised when I ask them to set themselves to have a good day. I ask them to investigate what that would entail and then put it into practice. When it boils down to it, having a good day often entail good mental and emotional hygiene. When outside influences disrupt that process, then it's a matter of returning to the task at hand which is to have a

good day. Sometimes some big life stuff gets in the way of this, but most of the time the saying 'don't sweat the small stuff' applies in life. The process is a continual return to the processes involved in obtaining a goal.

The exclusion of all else means that if my goal was to study, then I would set time and build an environment to support that. My study time then becomes exactly that - it would not entail family time or time with clients or time watching a movie. Additionally, it does not mean I have to devote every waking minute to studying. There just must be enough quality time devoted to studying in order to achieve that goal. In other words, its perfectly fine to have a family, devote time to friends and other interests while at the same time chasing some spiritual, psychological or business-like goal.

I think the mix involved in purity of purpose is something along the lines of 10% motivation, 20% laser like focus, 70% discipline. But that's just an estimate on my part and all each play very integral parts in purity of purpose. I do think its fair to say that if we look at the most successful people in the world - the ones which really place a premium on excellence, they seem to have purity of purpose.

One of the most astounding cases I know of purity of purpose and for that matter personal growth comes in the form of the famous psychiatrist Milton Erickson.

At age 17 Erickson contracted a severe case of polio and was told by his doctors that he was going to die. On the critical night when he was at his worst, he had his first encounter with purity of purpose and in particular the motivational aspects of it. I will let his words describe it:

"As I lay in bed that night, I overheard the three doctors tell my parents in the other room that their boy would be dead in the morning. I felt intense anger that anyone should tell a mother her boy would be dead by morning. My mother then came in with as serene a face as can be. I asked her to arrange the dresser, push it up against the side of the bed at an angle. She did not understand why, she thought I was delirious. My speech was difficult. But at that angle by virtue of the mirror on the dresser I could see through the doorway, through the west window of the other room. I was damned if I would die without seeing one more sunset. If I had any skill in drawing, I could still sketch that sunset."

He made it through the crisis stage but was almost completely paralysed. He could move his eyes, but that was the extent of his capacity to use his body. Literally, he was tied to a chair with the bottom removed and a pot underneath, so he could urinate and have bowel movements without making too much of a mess.

In terms of physical functioning it does not get much worse than this. Over to Milton again;

“I had polio, and I was totally paralysed, and the inflammation was so great that I had a sensory paralysis too. I could move my eyes and my hearing was undisturbed. I got very lonesome lying in bed, unable to move anything except my eyeballs. I was quarantined on the farm with seven sisters, one brother, two parents, and a practical nurse. And how could I entertain myself? I started watching people and my environment. I soon learned that my sisters could say “no” when they meant “yes.” And they could say “yes” and mean “no” at the same time. They could offer another sister an apple and hold it back. And I began studying nonverbal language and body language. I had a baby sister who had begun to learn to creep. I would have to learn to stand up and walk. And you can imagine the intensity with which I watched as my baby sister grew from creeping to learning how to stand up.”

Erickson then embarked on a campaign to teach himself to walk again. He began by visualizing his little finger moving, attempting to replicate the muscular patterns in his mind. After a slow and gruelling process that took months his finger moved. Erickson effectively taught himself to use his body again by employing an intense focus coupled with his observations of others.

I recall Erickson talking about this experience and the most glaring thing about it was how focussed and committed he was. His commitment to heal and be able to walk again entailed him building discipline to keep at the task at hand in the face of adversity. Yes he was motivated, but he also had this laser like focus to achieve his aims, which by necessity entailed training himself to be disciplined. This was Erickson’s thing, the thing he put above all else no matter the cost and he followed through on his inner talk by taking as much action as it needed. It also makes it sound like there were no setbacks and that once he set out on a path it would all fall into place in a nice linear fashion. But as I have pointed out previously, [change often involves setbacks](#).

Erickson then went on to become a psychiatrist, specializing in hypnosis. He was one of the greatest healers that the world has seen to date. Even though Erickson was not an Autistic Savant, I often use the term Autistic Savant when refereeing to his therapeutic work to indicate how advanced he had become in his use of hypnosis and therapeutic work.

He has influenced many fields of counselling psychology. Brief therapy is a by-product of an Ericksonian Technique. Solution based therapy stems from an Erickson technique. NLP has its genesis from Erickson and so on.

From being tied to a chair paralysed (he developed polio twice in his life, as if one ordeal

was not enough) to becoming one of the true master therapists that the world has seen. That is growth, the fulfilment of potential... From what everyone else said was the impossible, to the possible and to the inevitable. Inevitable because he had a [vision](#) and he held true to it, without letting getting things in the way.

Erickson was colour blind, he was dyslexic, he was tone deaf and for a while was so overcome with paralysis that he could not speak. His eyes and his mind were his only tools. Erickson had a lot of adversity in his life, but he accomplished a lot (By most peoples standards) which could not have been easy for him.

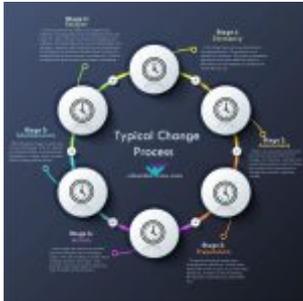
There is a part of Erickson's story that everyone misses. Erickson was largely self-taught. While he went to medical school and read books etc, his main method of learning was to observe - both others and how to best use his own mind.

The whole solution-based therapy, brief therapy, ordeal therapy, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) thing miss the point entirely. They try and pick apart his techniques as the answer. Erickson was less about technique as he was about really trying to understand what was occurring with a client. What was happening in their unconscious and how best to leverage that to the clients advantage.

We see the same sort of mentality occur in different aspects of life. Many people practice meditation because the Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree and closed his eyes with grim resolve. Solely focussing on the meditation aspect dismisses all the effort that went on before that. Buddha seems like a guy who had purity of purpose by the spade load and tried many different things in his life.

When used well, purity of purpose becomes a means to develop ourselves into a different order of creature than what we once were. And by that I am not talking about trying to raise our vibrational level. What I mean is that if we are mean spirited and often quick to anger, we can become a kinder gentler person. If we think we lack discipline in one area, then we can develop the discipline needed in exactly that area. We can use purity of purpose to change the course of our lives, just like Erickson changed the course of his. If you want to know more about how Milton Erickson worked with people, i highly recommend the book linked below:

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