

Jack Canfield on *Living* A Spiritual Life Deb Sandella

Jack Canfield is an amazing example of someone who has gained great financial success while following his spiritual nature. He sat down with his friend and colleague Dr. Deb Sandella to talk about his journey, his work, and "Practice, Patience, and Perfection!"

Jack Canfield is a model of success. As the originator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul®* series, he fostered the emergence of inspirational anthologies as a genre and watched his company grow to gross sales of a billion dollars. As the force behind the development and delivery of more than 225 books with 125 million copies in print, he is uniquely qualified to talk about success.

Although Canfield doesn't advertise his work as such, it is deeply rooted in spirituality. He began practicing yoga and meditation as a graduate student and, inspired by his unbounded curiosity, has been a student of numerous spiritual practices. He admits his true purpose in life is to synthesize spiritual perspectives with productivity methods and strategies for success so he can bring together diverse groups of people and introduce them to far-reaching possibilities. He practices what he teaches and is a master at manifesting using spiritual principles. Recently, he shared his perspective on what he has learned

through his life and career about practice, patience, and perfection!

Practice, Practice, Practice

Canfield says of his work, "The Success Principles I teach always work...if you always work the principles." He acknowledges that although the movie *The Secret* successfully introduced spiritual concepts to a mass audience, it was deceptively simple. Fans frequently say to him, "I've watched *The Secret* sixty-five times, and I'm still not a millionaire."

"First of all, stop watching the movie," he tells them, "and go out and practice what you've learned. Take some action in the world." Canfield believes the Law of Attraction does work and, yes, there is "effort" involved; that's why we call an inspired project a "labor" of love. He recalls, "When I started speaking as a high school teacher, I can't tell you how many teacher workshops I delivered for three-hundred dollars a day in school cafeterias that smelled of sour milk, with chairs sized for five-year-olds. At the end of the workshop, I'd box up all the books I didn't sell, which was about two-thirds of them, and I'd go home. Now, when I speak, a pre-production crew prepares the space, I speak

to thousands of people at a time in countries all over the world, and a security team escorts me to and from the venue like I'm a United States senator. I didn't get that overnight. I had to be willing to do the preparation and do the work."

Effort includes taking action, according to Canfield. He identifies two kinds: required action and inspired action. Required actions are the factual requirements necessary to meet a goal. For example, to become a doctor, you must complete medical school, an internship, and residency. Inspired action, on the other hand, comes from inner spiritual urges that spark one's passion such that one wants to take immediate action on them. An inspired action might be the inspiration to apply to medical school in Mexico because you desire to work with Spanish-speaking patients. An inspired action is full of "juice," says Canfield. "At the moment of inspiration, you're infused with God energy. If you put your inspiration aside for three months, it loses the power of the original urge." Canfield recently heard his author friend Joe Vitale say, "Intentions are for sissies!" What he meant was, it takes more courage to follow your inspirations immediately than to work from a plan because you

have to totally trust that a higher power is looking out for you. As Canfield puts it, "If you truly surrender to your higher power, you'll automatically act quickly. The title of my first best-selling book was inspired during meditation. I asked for a title and before long, I saw words forming as if on a chalkboard. As I read them, they spelled *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and I immediately got goose-bumps."

"Practice makes perfect and perfect practice makes more perfect," he shares. "Otherwise you may be practicing imperfectly." For example, when he was a graduate student, he learned yoga from a book and practiced for several months. When he finally attended yoga class, he discovered he had been practicing many of the postures incorrectly. Since that time, Canfield makes a point to get instruction and coaching from the best teachers he can find so he creates good practice habits. He approaches being a good teacher by being a good student. He notes, "I can't see what I can't see," so it's helpful to have a coach. For example, a golfer can't really see what is going wrong with his stroke and benefits from a coach with an outside perspective. Having someone who knows the territory makes the journey easier. Canfield cites the



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example, “You’d want a guide with you if you were going into the rainforest, wouldn’t you? You’d want someone who knows where there’s quicksand, which indigenous tribes are friendly, and, more importantly, those that aren’t.” This thinking has inspired Canfield’s latest venture—an online social community where he offers new articles, videos, and expert webinars each month. His goal is to offer a cost-effective, ongoing coaching model for the masses.

Give Yourself the Gift of Patience

One of Canfield’s teachers was George Leonard, an Aikido sensei, who taught him a very important understanding of the value of practicing patiently. Leonard discovered that when you start a practice of any kind, there is an instant dramatic improvement in your results. But, after practicing for a while, you hit a plateau and suddenly the mind forgets the initial gain and you begin to feel as if there has been no value. This plateau causes most people to quit and give up. “I must have picked the wrong sport or the wrong meditation practice or the wrong kind of business,” they conclude. If you patiently stick with it, however, there comes another breakthrough point where you rise to a dramatic new

level of performance. Canfield remembers going through such a process when he took adult piano lessons. When he first started, he felt really good about playing even at a beginner level. He practiced and practiced and began to wonder if he’d ever get better. Then it happened. One day, out of the blue, his left hand actually played chords in rhythm as his right hand played melody; it was an exhilarating breakthrough. This pattern of alternating peaks and plateaus continues indefinitely and defines the road to mastery. Canfield points out that understanding this fluctuating course toward ever-greater success can help us sustain the practice during the plateaus.

When asked for suggestions about how readers can remain motivated during the plateaus, Canfield notes that making a minimum commitment to practice is better than no commitment. His Mormon friend Lee Brower was challenged by a friend to read the Bible cover to cover. Brower said, “That’s a lot of reading. I don’t know if I could do that.” He was questioned, “Would you be willing to commit to read for just one minute every day?” Brower contemplated the request and decided to commit. He’s found that some days he reads one

minute, some days he reads ten minutes, and other days he reads thirty minutes, because once he’s engaged for a minute, it almost always extends to a longer period of time. “Anyone can commit to anything for a minute,” says Canfield. Slowly, yet surely, Brower successfully made his way through the Bible.

Further, Canfield makes the point that you never know *how* your practice/efforts/actions will produce results. For example, Matt Damon, in January’s *Success* magazine, recounts how, early in his career, he starred in a movie he loved and really put his heart into it. Unfortunately, it never succeeded, and Damon’s acting failed to take off. However, a few years later, Damon heard from Stephen Spielberg that he liked Damon’s performance in this movie and, as a result, cast him in *Saving Private Ryan*, which became a blockbuster and launched Damon’s career. Canfield has learned, “Do whatever you’re doing 100 percent, regardless of how small or insignificant it may seem at the time. Give it your best. A commitment to excellence keeps you continuously stretching, and you never know how it fits into your ultimate journey.”

Mastering anything requires patience, reminds Canfield.

He encourages us to be patient with ourselves and let go of comparing our results to others and especially to our teachers/coaches/mentors, because they are already accomplished or else they wouldn’t be teaching; it’s more profitable to focus on patiently practicing. He cites authors Daniel Coyle in *The Talent Code: Greatness Isn’t Born. It’s Grown. Here’s How.* and Malcolm Gladwell in *Outliers: The Story of Success* for dissecting the patterns behind high achievers. They found that about ten-thousand hours of practice, usually over seven to ten years, creates performances that excel above others. Canfield recounts from his own experience, “I can remember when I would give seventeen five-day workshops in a row. I’d be away from home for three months at a time, and my wife would fly out to see me. After this kind of extended practice, I developed an intuitive ability to sense the needs of the people in the audience. A man would stand up to ask a question, and I’d already know this person had been sexually abused. I had done this work long enough to intuitively sense what was really going on, which of course helped me more quickly get to the issue and help him heal.”

Many people grow impatient and don’t sustain the effort

long enough; they give up too quickly, says Canfield. "If I can do it, anyone can," he emphasizes. "We don't have to struggle, just persevere." He points out that "impatience" or feeling frustrated about "not being there yet" focuses on what we don't have. "Acting and feeling as if we have what we want" is much more effective. Feeling the emotions of contentment and happiness attract more of the same while impatience pushes success away. Persevering, while in a feeling state of contentment, really works. Canfield knows because he waded through 144 rejections before the first *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book was accepted for publication.

Even when you persevere, you need breaks, shares Canfield. In *The Power of Full Engagement*, authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz suggest managing energy, not time, as the key to high performance and personal renewal. They observed hundreds of hours of high-performing tennis players and noticed that those players who performed best always paused just before serving and took a deep breath. They finally decided these deep breaths renewed the players and allowed them to return to the game with energy and focus.

Similarly, Canfield suggests we all take breaks to stay fully

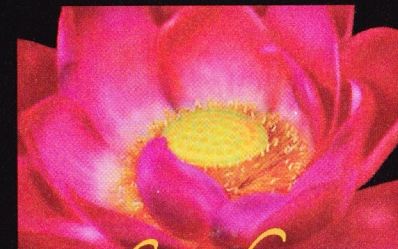
engaged in every moment. Meditation and yoga are examples. Creating rituals/practices allows us to re-center so we're ready to engage. What makes it a ritual is when it is done at the same time in a similar way consistently and thus becomes a habit. Meditating as soon as you wake up, walking the dog around the block when you get home from work, or having an Easter or a Seder dinner are examples of rituals. These constructive habits create a time of rest, renewal, and predictability, and keep us energized as we patiently practice.

Being Aware

What's Canfield's secret for perfectly maintaining a sustained effort and his spiritual center? He explains that when we get over-committed and busy "doing," we lose awareness of our spiritual nature. The goal is to sustain the tremendous sense of presence we gain during meditation while we are in action. He refers to the wisdom of the yogis and ashram teachers who practice experiencing a sense of joy in whatever their present activity, regardless how mundane. For example, we can notice the sensual experience of feeling the water on our hands as we wash dishes or the fresh smell of the clean sheets as we make the bed. By paying attention to the

colors, the textures, the sounds, the tastes, and the smells, awareness is brought to the present moment and a connectedness with everything, which is why residents, including celebrities, are assigned domestic chores in residential spiritual communities. These duties have a dual purpose of maintaining the physical environment of the community and heightening one's awareness of being present. Canfield uses a little timer in his office so that every fifteen minutes, he is reminded to come back to presence. When the beep starts, he takes a second to notice the temperature of the room, the color of the sky, the position of his body, the feeling of being part of everything. He says that this technique breaks the trance of unconscious doing and helps him come present and appreciate the moment. The core work of living a humanly successful and divinely spiritual life is to stay present no matter what you are doing. That's perfection! ■

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