

What would you consider your motto?

Douglas Goodfellow
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Motto.

Motto?

I don't got no stinkin' motto!

Well, wait. Maybe I do. But not just one; my motto depends on my situation!

To wit:

With Mom, well, even there, I have several! When things are going swimmingly, "What a lucky guy I am!" When I get a little frustrated (inevitable, and I'm sure the same holds true for her), "How would I feel if I met her for the first time?" And of course the answer is that she'd overwhelm me with her kindness and I'd want to know her better. That's how it started.

With my kids at school? "They are what they are. Accept that. When eruptions occur, recognize them as a part of a new reality and figure out what the best way forward is."

When I'm on a long bike ride, mostly training for climbing? "Just this mile. Just this hill. Just this rise." I try to focus on that, because otherwise I have thoughts like, "I've gone twenty-seven miles. I've climbed five-thousand feet. And I'm not even one-third done yet."

Daunting.

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Those mottos fit particular situations. Overarching, organizing mottos? I like Christ's "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." But while that governs my interactions with others, maybe it doesn't do much to fulfill me.

Well, years ago (think mid-80's), I listened to a pop-psychology, motivational, cassette series done by a guy named Dennis Waitley. The title? I believe The Psychology of Winning. Unlike other speakers to whom I'd been exposed, Waitley used a coactive approach. Respect. Care. Still pop-psychology, but not of the "go other there and conquer!" ilk. He's still around; I just checked! Anyway, he introduced me to Viktor Frankl.

Particularly, this quote, attributed by many to Frankl but one which in fact he borrowed from Nietzsche: "If you know the why, you can live any how." I'd batted that quote around for thirty-seven years, through lots of ups. And lots of downs. So I finally picked up Frankl's book, Man's Search for Meaning. While I'd banded around those words for years, reading the book helped me understand them better. I don't pretend to expertise, but I'm at least up on the third or fourth rung.

And it makes perfect sense. I think back to high school, when all I wanted to be was out of the house. No solid "why" there, and my struggles with high school show that. I think back to previous relationships, how I didn't think they'd really work out, didn't work hard on my why, and ended up with exactly what I'd predicted--and I now know things could have been different. (I am not complaining--I am very happy with where I ended up!) I think about jobs I had in which I could not see value. No why. So no wonder I didn't find satisfaction in those jobs.

But finding a why in home, marriage, career, relationships, activities, then applying that why as motivation to push through the inevitable barriers of "what" (maintenance and yard work, inevitable personality clashes, everyday frustrations, shortcomings, grueling training) makes the struggle worthwhile, even central, to life.

Maybe the best example is cycling. My "why" for the past number of months? Being able to successfully complete the Triple Bypass. Not just a run-of-the-mill century ride. But a biggy. A worthy adversary. My first ride back in December showed no indication of being anywhere near in shape to do that ride, and that at 62 years old. 63 at the scheduled actual event.

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So, on a typical summer Saturday morning when I'd just as soon have slept in, I drove my bike to Central and Tramway. Got on it. Headed up the Crest, Oak Flats, the 217 rollers, Heartbreak Hill, Edgewood--all trying to get better at long, sustained, climbs.

Without the "why" of Triple Bypass, I'd have not ever done the "whats" of those very challenging training rides.

And that "motto" has made the rest of my life easier, more productive, too. At home. With Annie. With friends. At school.

So, this is the first prompt you gave me, and looking at the others I've received since (which I haven't started because this thing hangs over my head with this being about the seventeenth version), this is the hardest. So far. I've started it, obliterated it, redone it, I don't know how many times. An English professor in a class I took at UMKC said, "How do I know what I think until I see what I write?" She hit the nail on the head. Being confronted with the question "what would you consider your motto," I searched and searched until I could pick one. "If you know the why, you can live any how."

Pretty good!