

Living with Gusto

By Louis P. Solomon

I have observed that many people live their lives in fear. They are afraid to try new things. They fear the potential consequences of their actions. They are worried about what their family, friends, neighbors, and “they” will think. People are hemmed in and constrained by shackles that they place on themselves.



When young, I had the good fortune to read some remarks made by Oliver Wendell Holmes on a radio program where people around the country paid tribute to him on 90th birthday. At the end of the program, he spoke extemporaneously. He said that “...the work is never done while the power to work remains... For to live is to function.” He went on to quote the great Latin poet Virgil: “Death plucks my ear and says: Live – I am coming.” For some reason his remarks struck a sympathetic chord, and I have always lived life with gusto. Sometimes I have acted not too wisely, but always with enthusiasm.

One of the reasons people generally give for their relatively timid behavior is that they fear the consequences of their actions. I want to address that concern. What types of consequences are possible for a given action? Physical efforts can have physical consequences. One must take on a physical challenge with some respect for the consequences. You can break your leg, or worse. But, what are the possible consequences from non-physical actions? I can see that you can get a bruised ego, and maybe more. What else?

I taught my children to always try to achieve whatever they desired. I couldn’t help them run faster or jump higher. But I could try to help them look at life opportunities as they came along and to always consider making the attempt. I always posed the following question: What are the possible outcomes? In the attempt to accomplish a goal they will be successful or they won’t. People generally don’t focus on success; but they frequently focus on failure. If they win the lottery, they will travel. If they get a new job, they will buy a new car. If they start a new successful business, they will buy a new house. But, what if they fail? There must be consequences if they try to do something and fail. Are all the consequences bad?

Let me use the concept of a new business as an example. Imagine all of the potential actions to take and their possible consequences. The business will prosper or it won’t. If it prospers, then the daring entrepreneur is happy. But, what if it fails? What are the consequences of failure? As far as I can see the only possible bad consequence of starting a new business, which eventually fails, is losing money. Now there have to be some limits on the losses, but if the risk takers are young, they can afford to lose money and still recover. As you get older you are inclined to take fewer risks since you have less time to recover.

The advantages to trying something and failing are generally not addressed. If you try to start a new business and eventually fail, you will have learned many lessons that will make you valuable as an employee of an existing business. Your friends, who will be sympathetic, will look upon you as a daring person who had the nerve to try something. They frequently will secretly envy your nerve and wish they could do something too. No one will look at you and derisively sneer, “You failed!” So you

will be successful in every way associated with the daring endeavor except perhaps you will lose money. Not such a terrible thing. Your ego will suffer some damage, but that will not be permanent. If you consider your experience as a whole, you will decide that you have grown as a human being, learned new things, become more valuable on the job market, and won more respect from your friends, colleagues, and family. Doesn't sound so bad to me!

In essence, Death awaits all of us and we should try to live with as much gusto, interest, and action as we can during our stay here on Earth. I subscribe to the concept and encourage others to do the same. It has allowed me to have a very interesting life. I quote from the *Notebooks of Lazarus Long*, the creation of Robert Heinlein, who offers the following advice: "Everything in excess! To enjoy the flavor of life, take big bites. Moderation is for monks."