

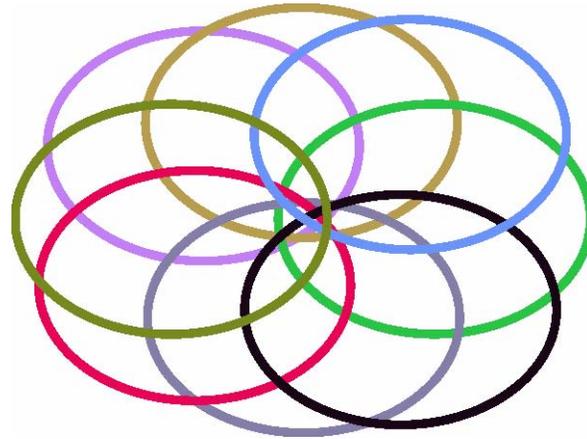
# I CAN DO THIS

## PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT WORKSHOP

Helping Offenders Have The Strength To Not Re-Offend

Seven week course

Helping you learn how to be all that you can be,  
by applying principles that are incredibly simple!



Each of the parts of life are inter related. You cannot separate this interaction. Everything we do in one part of our life has a far-reaching effect on all the other parts of our life. Therefore, learning to do one thing well will help us do everything well.

**Presented by Cordell Vail**  
Editing and Updating by Kenneth Teglia

These seven lessons are based on the “*My Turn To Win: The Secret Of Excellence*” Personal Achievement Workshops.

# Lesson 2

## The power of Conditioning: How it shapes our life

### ***THE PLACE OF CONDITIONING IN OUR LIFE***

Conditioning drives almost every part of our lives. We often say that "bad habits are so easy to form and so hard to break." In this lesson we will talk about good habits and bad habits and how they influence our ability to improve our lives. Habits and goal achieving are like two peas in a pod. You cannot talk about one without talking about the other.

I have had many participate in this seminar. Sadly, there are many who, even after they hear the ideas behind these lessons, and see the possibilities it offers for changing their lives for the better, fall back into the same lifestyle they were in before. Why is that? Conditioning! Conditioning is a really powerful tool in our lives. Often, it turns out that our husbands, wives, children, parents, brothers, sisters, co-workers, fellow offenders and friends actually hold us in a certain lifestyle even when we don't like it. It will be very hard, when you are released from prison, and go back home, to be different. We have a tendency to just go on doing what we did before. Our objective here is to help you learn how to be different and how to use the principles in this lesson to help you change your life so you will never again do the things you did before that caused you to break the law and wind up here as an offender.

### ***THE TRAP***

When I started studying goal setting, I was very surprised to learn that 85% of all the people who make New Year's Resolutions never achieve them. So I set out on a lifetime quest to find a way, and how, to make goal achieving something more than just setting New Year's Resolutions. In other words, to find a way to help people not just engage in wishful thinking, but to actually *get their*...to that better place in their lives. Over the past many years, I have read everything I could get my hands on about this subject and found many keys to successful goal achieving. I like to call one of those keys "THE FAMILY TRAP". What this key is about is one of the big reasons, I have found, that keeps people from achieving goals. Let me explain by sharing a life experience with you.

When I met my wife, we were students at the Brigham Young University. We got married and within weeks I was drafted into the U.S. Army. We spent 4 years in the Army. She never knew my family or me at home. She only knew me briefly as a college student away from home, and then for the four years in the military. I went to Vietnam as an infantry platoon leader for a year. While I was gone, she lived with my parents for that year and finally was able to get to know my family. However, she had never seen the way I acted around my family.

I was a Captain when I got out of the Army. My mind set was Captain Vail, Commander and Chief of my life. The military has a tendency to do that to you. I acted that way at church. I was that way with my friends. When something needed to be done, I just jumped up, volunteered and did it. I was a get-it-done kind of person. That was the only side of me my wife had ever seen.

After four years of Army life, I decided I wanted to go back to school and get my PhD as a counselor. We made plans to get out of the Army and moved back home to Utah where I could get my degree at BYU. However, school did not start for one month, so we stayed with my parents for that month before we were able to get into our rental house. It was wonderful to be home again. Or so I thought.

After a few days at home, my wife took me aside one evening and said, "Cordell, what is the matter with you?" I didn't know what she meant. I didn't *feel* sick. Everything was cool. We were out of the Army and on our way to school. I had no clue what she meant. So I asked her to explain. She said, "I have never seen you act this way". I still did not understand. I said, "What way?" Then she laid upon me one of the great lessons of my life. She taught me the lesson of a person being caught in "THE FAMILY TRAP".

I had grown up as a younger brother. My older brother was one of those who could take care of himself and was his own person. My parents taught him how to do everything. I was 10 years younger. When I was 5 he was 15. When I was 10 he was 20. My sister was 5 years older than me. They were both very well schooled by my parents in how to work. It seemed that they knew how to do everything. I was never old enough to do anything. Have you ever experienced that or seen that with younger children in a family? I suspect some of you might be laughing right now as you read this. Often times, older children in a family, when they refer to their younger brothers or sisters, are always saying, "When I was that age I had to ....." It seemed that because I was so much younger than my older brother and sister, when I was 28 years old I still was not old enough to know how to do anything in the minds of my family because my 38 year old brother was still the "OLDEST SON" who knew everything and could do everything. I was just his helper holding the board while he pounded the nails at everything we did. I was caught in "The Family Trap".

My wife was just shocked. Here was "THE SELF CONFIDENT - CAPTAIN VAIL" going around the house acting like a little 10 year old child. She said, "What is the matter with you?" All of a sudden, this person, this leader of men in combat, no less, that she knew, who could fix anything, was a 28 year old 10 year old, being treated like he was useless and not only that, he was playing the part! She had never seen me like that. She had only seen and known the Captain Vail side of me.

How could that happen? How could I have been two totally different people at once? That is why I call it "The Family Trap". It does not just happen with your family. I assure you that it can happen to anyone who has associated with family, friends, co-workers or associates for a long time, then you went away and changed. When you come back they don't know the new you. So they put you back in the "old you" mold. They expect you to act like you used to. They expect you to do what you used to do. So you do! It may seem surprising, but, normally,

we act like we are treated. We rise to the expectations of those we respect. This is especially true of family members. Many of us get caught in “The Family Trap” or “The Friend Trap” or “The Fellow Offender Trap”.

Here’s another example to further illustrate this point. As I said, I can fix almost anything mechanical. It is just a talent I have. If it is broken I can fix it. My older brother did not like to fix things. He made things, but he did not like to fix things. If it didn’t work, he just threw it away and bought a new one. Because of the way he was, my whole young life was spent taking things out of the garbage that he threw away, fixing them and using them for years. It thrilled me to do it just to try to show him I was better than him at something. The whole driving force behind me developing that talent was to make me feel like I could do something better than my older brother. I hardly ever had to buy anything I wanted. I just waited until he threw it away and then I fixed it and used it. I had cameras, skis, tennis rackets, fishing equipment, bow and arrows, hunting equipment, camping equipment, shop tools. My, how lucky I was that so many of his things either wore out, broke, or he just got tired of them and threw them away. I fixed them up like new and kept them.

With that background, now you can understand the rest of the story. Fast-forward to when I’m 50 years old and visiting my parent's house. Now you have to understand that after all these years, there was hardly a chair, table, lamp, or appliance in my parent’s house that I had not fixed over the years. In fact, we were sitting at a dining room table I had repaired so it could be used again with chairs that mostly had been broken, but which I had also fixed up as good as new. So there we were, sitting at this table, visiting with my parents and my 60 year old brother. As we sat there, my mother started to put a new battery in her hearing aid, but the battery compartment jammed, and she could not get the battery to go in or out of the device. With the broken hearing aid in her hand, she turned to my brother and said, "Could you fix this for me?" That was the height of "The Parent Trap" in my life. I was 50 years old. I had fixed almost everything that had ever broken in my parent's house, and my brother had hardly ever fixed anything, and still she turned to my 60 year old brother and said, "Could you fix this for me". There I was being treated like a 50-year-old 10 year old again!

The Helen Keller’s story is another perfect example of this "FAMILY TRAP". Have you ever heard her story? Helen’s parents were very rich. Because Helen was deaf and blind, her parents did not know how to communicate with her, so they just gave her anything she wanted any time she wanted it. They justified her bratty behavior by saying it was showing compassion and pity for her deaf and blind condition. A lady by the name of Ann Sullivan was hired as her teacher. She decided the only way to change Helen was to get her out of the family environment. She took Helen away from her family where she could control her and teach her manners and how to mind. Then she brought her back to her family. She told Helen's father her greatest fear was that Helen would go right back to being as she was before she took her because the family would go on treating her the way they had before. Helen was a different person when she was alone with Ann Sullivan. But Ann was right. As soon as they came back home, Helen started acting just like she had before. The point of this story is that Ann had to change the parents before she could change Helen. The rest is history. Once the family realized that and started to treat Helen the way Ann treated her, making her mind her manners, then, and only then, did Helen change.

You may be wondering: what this has to do with making changes in your life or goal setting? Well, it has everything to do with it. If you live in a bad environment and set out to achieve good, healthy goals while continuing to live in that same, bad, or negative environment, I'm sorry to report that your chances of succeeding are very low. I'll bet the farm on it, that this is a big reason why 85% of all people who make New Year's Resolutions fail to achieve them. They get caught in "The Parent Trap" or the "The Spouse Trap" or "The Friend Trap" or "The Children Trap" or the "Fellow Offender Trap" or worse yet you get caught in the "SELF TRAP" of low self-esteem.

You can go to schools, attend seminars and read books about changing your life. You can get all fired up and determined to change. Then you tell your spouse or parents or friends about what you are going to try to do and they laugh at you. What does that do to you? It destroys it all. You give up and go back to the mold they have set for you. You continue as you were, to avoid the conflict.

Have you ever experienced that? You are determined to lose weight and you get all your plans made and then some fellow offender or family member finds out you are going to do it and makes fun of you or tells you that you can't do it. Then, too often, that is it, the end. They destroy your ability to do it. They destroy your spirit. They become toxic. They cause you to believe that all you really are, *and ever shall be*, is what you were before to your parents, or your family or your friends, who keep seeing you in that way. What do you do in that situation? Too many times we just go ahead and fulfill those expectations that others have, good or bad. You become a 50-year-old, 10 year old.

Now the \$64,000 question is this, "How do you break out of that trap?" Well, sadly, some people just cannot do it themselves without help. It may mean that you would have to give up your family or friends and move away from them to live like Helen Keller did, and most people are not willing to do that. You may have to quit your job. You may have to live in a different part of the country. For some people, that would be too painful. The rewards of having the new self-image are not worth the pain of giving up what it would cost to separate yourself from the **toxic** environment that you live in. You are caught in "THE TRAP".

What did I do to break out of my "TRAP"? I moved away. I was away for 5 years, then I moved back and tried it again. After we had been back a few weeks, I knew that I could not live with or near my parents at that time in my life. I could only be a 50-year-old 50 year old if I lived around people who did not know what I used to be and did not hold me in "THE TRAP". I love my parents. I love my brother and sisters and family, but at that time in my life I knew that I could not live around them and reach my full potential in life. To them I was forever frozen as being a 10 year-old and not able to do anything as well as my older brother or sister. That probably wouldn't have changed even if I had invented a time-machine and was all over television explaining my incredible breakthrough! That was the "box" they had "stored" me in, and try as I did, I couldn't bust out of it. I therefore chose to live far away and just write to them, call them and visit them; but not allow them to keep me in "THE TRAP".

I think you can now see how "THE TRAP" could be one of the main reasons why it is so hard for most of us to even set goals, let alone have the ability to achieve them. It is a well

established fact that setting goals will change your life. Experts tell us setting goals will help us reach our dreams. Yet most of us cannot do it. Why? Why do we dream about the wants in our life but for some reason are not able to change our lives in a way that would fulfill those wants? It is a very common thing that a few years after we graduate from school we sort of max out in our lives. We take life as it has been dealt to us. We stop trying to find new and better ways of doing things. We sometimes seem to be stuck in life, trapped there by others, and are not able to get out of the rut. It is like our habits are set in cement and we give up trying to change.

## ***WANTS VS DO'S***

We all want more for ourselves, don't we? When we get out of prison, we want to be able to find a good place to live and find a good job. We might want to go back to school. We may want to get into physical shape. We may want to quit smoking. We may want to learn to play the piano or ride a motorcycle. We may want to stop being so cranky with our families and friends. But they are only wants, not things we are actually able to accomplish or change. Why? What is the obstacle in our life that stops us from making these changes? Why can't we seem to make that transition in our minds? Why can't we start? What is it that prevents us from realizing these dreams and putting them into action?

## ***OBSTACLES TO CHANGE***

There are many reasons why we are unable to change. One of the big reasons is despair. Despair causes discouragement, and discouragement sometimes makes us just not want to try. Another obstacle is lack of ambition. It just seems like too much work. Maybe we have tried in the past and failed, and think: why should I try again? If that continues, we can find ourselves no longer having *any* dreams. We will have lost our hope for better things.

But all of these obstacles can be overcome. The first step in overcoming these obstacles is to want to badly enough. We have to get a *fire in our bellies* for good, positive, life enriching change. The second step is to develop the ability to take action. To Start! Take that first step. We simply have to start taking action. Thoughts of change for the better that aren't followed by actions are never anything more than wishful thinking. But thought put into motion, creates results. That is what most of us fail to do during all those years of trying to change. We heard what was being taught to us about changing! We understood that we needed to change and be different if we wanted to truly be happy in life. We had a desire to do those things, but the desire was not a burning desire hot enough to compel us to action. We simply never took action. We never followed our new plan to change with honest effort! We listened intently when someone was encouraging us to change and always resolved in our heart to try it. But days later those principles always seemed to get put on the back burner of our life. Does that sound familiar in your life too? In this lesson, we will teach you how to create that desire, know what it will take to achieve that desire in your life, and then learn how to take action to achieve it.

Step three is that you have to have a central purpose in life. Something you are working towards that gives purpose to your life. You need to find a reason why. Bunker Hunt, the famous Cotton Farmer Billionaire said, to achieve any goal you have to do three things. First

you have to know what you want, second you have to know what it will take to get it, and third and most importantly you have to be willing to pay the price to get it. Most of us don't make it to step number one, because we honestly don't know what we want. You cannot get what you want if you don't know you want it. Discouragement can cause us to give up and just settle.

Successful businesses normally have a mission statement. Shouldn't we have one too? We need to have one main thing that we are reaching for or trying to achieve. That is the main reason people do not set goals or try to achieve. They don't have anything they are trying to reach for. There is no one central purpose in their life. This lesson will help you discover that you really do have a dream. It will help you find that one central purpose for your life and help you learn how to reach for it. We need to be like little children, who dream about what they are going to be when they grow up. They dream about what they want to become. Why have we stopped dreaming? We have to keep reaching for it even if we are already grown up. Reaching for it will give new meaning to your life and help you so that you will never come back here to be an offender again.

Many people perceive achieving a goal as something that is very hard to do, so they only make a half-hearted attempt at it. That is what most "New Year's Resolutions" are. They are a half-hearted effort, or, as I said earlier, just wishful thinking, and that is simply not enough. Setting and achieving goals takes a lot of hard work, but it is not complicated. In fact it is very simple. If it is simple they why don't we all do it? Is it because we don't believe it will work? Is it because change is hard? Yes, both of those things! It will work if you will just try it. If you have the persistence to stick with the change in your life that setting a goal will bring, you will be successful.

In these lessons, we will show you the ground rules of repetition, visualization and careful execution of goals in such a way as to create change in your life that will bring you joy and happiness. We often are prone to take the easy road or the path of least resistance. We are going to do some exercises that will help you learn how to start doing things that are hard for you to do. These are not physical exercises; they are mental exercises. Have you noticed that as most of us we grow older, both our minds and bodies have a tendency to fall out of shape? If something is a little bit hard to think about, or figure out, most of us avoid it. This lesson will help you learn how to exercise mentally.

## ***WHAT IS REQUIRED?***

Take the steps in these lessons, determine that you will devote a small amount of time each day, and it will change your life. Life is a generous pay master. You can have any reasonable thing you ask for. If you can dream of having or doing it, you can. Life has shown over and over that you will get out of it exactly what you put into it. Ask for a penny, you will get a penny! Ask for a million dollars and you will get a million dollars!

***If you keep right on doing what you have been doing, you  
will keep right on getting what you have been getting.***

Zig Ziglar

You must make a decision now. If you are like most, it is likely you have tried this before and have not been very successful. Decide right now that this time will be different for you. Are you willing to give 10 or 15 minutes a day to this and actually do what is required in these lessons? If so, you can be successful in those goals you set out to achieve.

Action - just going ahead and doing it! Taking action is one of the critical skills these lessons are going to help you learn! You CAN become better at everything you do. You can be more successful in your life. You can find better health and true happiness in the fulfillment of your dreams! But to achieve those accomplishments, you have to take action. You have to decide to change and then “GO AHEAD AND DO IT”. Every time you see a Federal Express package you are going to look at that logo and think to yourself: “JUST GO AHEAD AND DO IT!”

## ***TESTING YOUR ABILITY TO CHANGE***

OK! If you are willing to try this, and I assume you are because you kept reading, here is your first assignment. This is the starting place for change your life.

~~~~~  
**Please stop reading, close your eyes and say out loud three times “I can do this”.**  
~~~~~

Now here is the test. Did you stop reading and say that out loud three times or did you keep on reading?

I asked you to stop reading, close your eyes and say something out loud three times. If you did not actually do that, then we already have a problem. People often fail when they set goals because they never get past setting those goals. They do not continue on to take the necessary action to achieve those goals. If you did not say the sentence above out loud three times, please stop and do it now. This simple exercise will actually help condition you to start taking action!

## ***BEING THE BEST THAT YOU CAN BE***

I have observed many common people doing extraordinary things! There had to be an explanation as to how seemingly average people were able to accomplish those things. I wanted to discover what the reason was. Therefore I have made a lifetime study of them and the lives of those “average” people. I have read about, and in many cases even interviewed, many highly successful people, seeking to understand what things about them were the same, and what made them different from other people. I wanted to learn what it is that makes it so hard for other individuals to change so they could learn how to be achievers in their lives. From all this research, I have discovered what many of those keys are that highly successful people have learned in their lives to become achievers. This lesson has shown you some of those keys. The rest of these seven lessons will reveal more of those keys to you and help you turn those keys in

the locks of your life! But above all, these six lessons will teach you how to turn the key of success in your life by putting your dreams into action so you can and will achieve your goals! Taking action is the starting place and the primary key that has to be learned to be successful in achieving goals.

## Discussion Items:

1. Have you ever felt you were in this kind of trap?
2. What can you do to get out of the trap?
3. How can you keep that trap from starting again when you get out?
4. Are you holding someone else in that trap yourself?
5. What are you going to do to change your life now?
6. When are you going to start?

~~~~~

[Return to VCAA.com main page](#)  
[Return to Cordellvail.com main page](#)