



## **Dare to be Average** by Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

What a strange subject, you might be thinking. What do I mean by dare to be average? And why would anyone want to do that? Shouldn't we all strive to be excellent? I have chosen this topic for this newsletter as I think so many of us struggle with a sense of inadequacy because we will not dare to be average.

Allow me to first explain what I mean by daring to be average. We live in a society that is obsessed with results. We are all concerned about our next promotion, the next house we will buy, how wealthy we are, where our children will attend college, etc. While having goals is important to being happy, becoming obsessed with results is a sure road to misery. What happens too often is that our egos become inseparable from our goals. When we succeed we make the mistake of deciding we are a success. When we fail we make the mistake of deciding we are failures. This can be deadly to our self-esteem, especially when we hit a period of several successive defeats. I believe that all of us, including myself, struggle with this malady. I now believe that a person's happiness has much to do with how well they are able to strive for excellence, but dare to achieve average results.

Allow me to give you an example of what I mean. I once worked with a swimmer who only felt good about herself when she won her race that day. She was very depressed because she had not been swimming as fast as she thought she ought to. She felt worthless. I tried to help her see that she was getting a great education at a wonderful university and was a successful member of one of the nation's best swimming teams, but it didn't matter. After more discussion on this matter she acknowledged that she would only feel good about herself if she eventually won the Olympic gold medal in her event! Talk about pressure! Ask yourself this, as you get to the starting block of your day: do you have to win? What happens if you do not? And what is your definition of success?

In my opinion there are only two things a person has to do to be successful. One is to look deep within yourself to find a direction that you are passionate about. I'll talk more about how to do this in subsequent newsletters. Second is to fully give oneself to the process of achieving that dream. The key word here is process. It is imperative to understand that it does not matter one iota whether or not you accomplish your goal. All that matters is that you are doing what is most deeply yourself and you are doing it with all of your might. When you lose yourself in that journey you have already succeeded. External success becomes an afterthought and you are truly free because you have given your best, but dared to be average. In answer to an earlier question, yes, strive for excellence; just accept the results whatever they may be. Dare to receive average results after you have given your best offering. That is true humility. I believe it is also the only road to inner peace.

I can tell you from personal experience that learning to accept average results was critical in my own struggle for happiness. Ten years ago, I was working as a manager in my family's business. I had just graduated with my MBA and had been invited to look at a promotion to headquarters by our CEO. My life was going just as I had planned it. The only problem was, I wasn't happy. Over the course of two years of listening to my soul I finally came to the conclusion that I wanted to become a psychologist and do the work that I am now doing. I can assure you that the decision to change was excruciating. I was terrified to leave the security of my family's business. In fact, the first day of school I broke out in hives and almost called my boss back to ask for my job back! Thank goodness I stayed in school. I am now living my dream. Every day is a joy because I am doing exactly what my soul has dictated to me. I still have not succeeded like I would like to, but it doesn't really matter to me. In a much deeper sense I feel complete and deeply centered in my journey. I am making a small contribution to society in a way that is unique to me. It is deeply satisfying. When I step up to the starting block every day I never ask myself whether I will succeed. That has already been decided. The rest is just details.