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Focus on your goal

By Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

I used to go mountain biking often. While I was doing it I noticed something interesting. When I had to maneuver between two trees I was only successful when I looked where I wanted to go. That is, when I looked ahead, somehow I always missed the trees. When I looked at what I was trying to avoid I usually crashed into it. I asked other riders and they had the same experience.

That is a lot like life. When we work to avoid something, a failed relationship, a health problem, financial difficulties, we usually crash right into them. When we focus on what we are trying to achieve we usually avoid those perils.

It is interesting how I continue to have to relearn this lesson. No matter how sure I am that I should look ahead at the path, I am almost always tempted to look at the tree that is trying its best to dump me off my bike. It's a very interesting phenomenon. My sense tells me to look ahead, but my fear tells me to pay attention to the threat. If I listen to my fear, I usually lose.

I have also noticed that although the tendency to look at trees on a mountain bike is really not serious, looking at problems as we try to avoid them can be quite serious. I also usually find that two things allow me to stay focused on what matters and helps me avoid disaster. One is the clarity of my vision. If I am very sure about what I am after, I usually can avoid thinking about all of the bad things that might happen to me. I get so wrapped up in chasing my dream that I just stop thinking about the pitfalls that stand in my way.

The other thing that really helps me stay focused on my goals is to become very aware of the threats long before they become a problem. I do this by noticing small indications of problems that are developing and start to form plans to deal with the threats long before they become unavoidable. This keeps my fear associated with these obstacles at a manageable level and helps me stay focused on my goal. This usually assures my eventual success.

So, if you find yourself “running into trees” on your way to success, try doing what I do. Get very focused on your overall goal and deal with the threats long before they become unavoidable. I think you will find that this process will help you achieve your goals in a more effective manner.