



**A 12-step program from a true King
Atlanta high school students are flanked by
a portrait of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King
Jr. as they participate in holiday tribute at
the Georgia Capitol.**

One of the most eloquent people of our time, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday we celebrate today, delivered inspiring advice for success.

In his honor, apply these 12 points of his wisdom to your life today.

1. In his all-time favorite "Street Sweeper" speech, King called for excellence in whatever you do.

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper
he should sweep streets
even as Michelangelo painted,
or Beethoven played music,
or Shakespeare wrote poetry.
He should sweep streets so well
that all the hosts of heaven and earth
will pause to say,
...Here lived a great street sweeper"

King elaborated this theme for students at a high school in Oct. 1967 when he said, "Set out to do such a good job that the living, the dead or the unborn couldn't do it any better. If you can't be a pine at the top of the hill, be a shrub in the valley - but be the best little shrub on the side of the hill. Be a bush if you can't be a tree. If you can't be a highway, just be a trail. If you can't be a sun, be a star. For it isn't by size that you win or fail. Be the best of whatever you are."

What does it mean for you to be a great street sweeper?

Whether listed at the top of the Census Bureau list of professions with Ph.D.s and M.D.s, or at the bottom with unskilled labor, put art and heart into your work. **Perform your best and take pride in whatever you do.** Surveys show that 85 percent of Americans dread going to work. They work just for the money, waiting to retire. What a waste of half of your life!

Turn this around. If you hate your job, find something about it you can appreciate. If you flip burgers, make the perfect patty. Instead of bemoaning poor pay, consider new ways to enjoy your earnings. If number-crunching bores you, study Roman numerals. When selling frustrates you, focus new fascination on communication skills or the power of silence.

King was about to address sanitation workers in a protest march on an evening in April 1963 when he was assassinated while standing on the balcony of his Memphis motel room. Honor that audience and follow his Buddhist-like philosophy to fully immerse in the moment: Put out the garbage consciously, with great respect and awareness.

Shave as if you are the shaver, being conscious of every hair removed. Get lost in the sounds and sensation.

The principle works in relationships, too. Touch your partner's skin as if painting with the finest brush on the clearest canvas. Whisper sweet nothings as if singing the finest aria, even if you are tone deaf.

2. Self-esteem is at the core of achieving excellence and happiness. Too many of us are victims of others' judgments or disapproval. Have deep belief in your own dignity, worth and "somebodiness," King implored. "Don't allow anybody to make you feel that you're nobody," he said. "Always feel that you count. Always feel that you have worth, and always feel that your life has ultimate significance."

3. Service to others is key to happiness and greatness, said King. "If you want to be great - that's wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's your new definition of greatness - it means that everybody

can be great because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verbs agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”

Take a moment, too, to honor all who serve. Thank the doorman, bus driver and messenger as if they were as talented and giving as much pleasure as Michaelangelo, Beethoven or Shakespeare, or whatever contemporary artists you admire.

4. Happiness comes from making others happy. King put this poignantly when he said, “Those who are not looking for happiness are the most likely to find it, because those who are searching forget that the surest way to be happy is to seek happiness for others.” What can you do today to bring joy to someone else's life? Do it from your heart without thought of what you get in return.

5. The civil rights leader echoes another Martin - existential philosopher Martin Buber – when King said, “‘I’ cannot reach fulfillment without ‘thou.’ The self cannot be self without other selves. Self-concern without other-concern is like a tributary that has no outward flow to the ocean. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

“I-thou” philosophy means that no man is an island, that you and I are one, dependent on each other for existence and happiness. We need each other and are responsible for one another. Born to a family of pastors, King echoes the Bible that you are your brother's keeper, defined by how you treat others. In what way are you looking out for others?

6. “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends,” said King.

In consumer research there are two kinds of people: objecters and accepters. Objecters voice their discontent, while accepters are more complacent, and less motivated to speak their satisfaction. Which are you?

How many times have you offered a compliment instead of a complaint? Everyone wants to be acknowledged, appreciated, and complimented.

Recently, I wrote a letter to the vice president of customer service of Air Canada to compliment a gate agent in India for helping me rearrange a missed flight. I received a return letter saying, “Thank you for your thoughtfulness in taking the time to let us know about your satisfaction. Your kind words mean a lot to us. It is rewarding to learn that you were left with a favorable impression of the courtesy extended to you. Our dedicated employees are always pleased to know that their efforts have been recognized and appreciated.” I read the letter several times. Expressing appreciation multiplies joy for everyone.

7. A devotee of Ghandi, King weighed in on the importance and power of forgiveness. Even if you don't forget, forgive. As King said, “Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship.”

8. In advice that applies to every aspiration in life, King said, “Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” How many times have you panicked at how overwhelming a task seemed? Whether it is cleaning the garage or working toward world peace, take one small step at a time, and the big picture will eventually appear.

9. King's famous “I Have A Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, as 250,000 people marched on Washington, can motivate you for your personal challenges. The Nobel Peace Prize winner had “a dream of a nation where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone, but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity; the dream of a country where every man will respect the dignity and worth of the human personality.”

Reflect on your dream. What do you want for your life, loved ones, and even the world? Say it aloud to someone, since putting words to a vision, and bearing witness, make intentions more real.

10. The 1963 Time Magazine Man of the Year eerily presaged his demise when he declared he had been to the mountaintop. But, King defied, “I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man.” What would you do in your own life, if you were free from fear and worry?

11. In the spirit of Ghandi, the Dalai Lama (who also wrote on happiness), and other proponents of peace, King declared, “Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it ... Darkness can not drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Refuse to let any negative energy in your life. Welcome those who upset you as your teacher. Send them love and defuse their hate.

12. Let hope spring eternal. It is hope that has been found by research to keep cancer patients alive despite the severity of illness. Hope keeps us waking up each day when we've lost a job, money, home or loved one. In King's inspirational words, “If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. Don't let tough times get you down.

“Stand up for freedom, stand up for justice, stand up for economic progress, and stand up for a world free from fear, free from terror, free from oppression. And when the storm clouds gather, when things get tough, persevere and don't give up.

“Dare to be great, dare to dream and dare to succeed.”