

There is Nothing You Have to Do but Die

□ I believe in order to achieve greatness in this world, you must have an empowering set of beliefs. Greatness can take many forms, and for everyone, it can look different. If you look at truly successful people, they empowered themselves with some form of belief that motivated them to achieve success and greatness.

The first time I was exposed to an empowering set of beliefs was in 1983, when I was in retail management. I was an operations manager for a small clothing chain with seven stores. We were having a problem with the employees at one store, so our company president and I went to the store to have a meeting with all of the employees. The president had all the employees sit on the floor in a semi-circle, and then he comfortably seated himself in a chair in front of the employees and spoke in a calm and eloquent manner.

He said, "Do you realize that there is nothing you have to do but die?" He challenged the employees to come up with anything they felt they "had to do," and they responded with a list of things such as:

- You have to pay your taxes
- You have to eat
- You have to breathe
- You have to go to school

And one of the employees said, "We had to come to this meeting."

He responded, "You didn't have to come to this meeting; that was a choice that you made freely."

Of course the employee responded back with, "I had to come, because the manager said it was mandatory and I had to be here."

The president calmly told the employee that he certainly had a choice to either come to the meeting and participate with the other employees, or not come to the meeting and risk possible disciplinary action. He told the employee, "Either way, it was a choice that was available to you, and congratulations, you made a great choice to show up."

He went through their list one at a time and had them respond as to whether they had the freedom of choice in each circumstance. They did not have to pay their taxes, but if they "chose" not to, they may end up going to jail. They did not have to eat, but if they "chose" not to, they might die from starvation. They did not have to breathe, but if they "chose" not to, then they would certainly die. They never had to go to school, but if they "chose" not to, they would not get an education, and more than likely find it hard to find a job; they may end up broke and with no way to feed themselves it could eventually lead to death.

They acknowledged that even though there were potential consequences for making a bad choice, they truly did have choices in every circumstance. It made me and all of the other employees in that room, realize that we had always been totally empowered to make choices freely. We were certainly aware that there could be consequences for our choices, but the fact that no one could "make us" come to work, serve customers, and do as we are told, was powerful and freeing. When we came to work the next day, it was because we "chose" to do it. When we worked hard, it was because we "chose" to do so. When we happily served our customers, it was because we "chose" to do so.

I have never forgotten the lesson or the message, and it has guided me through many emotionally challenging times. Reflecting back, it removed the victim mentality that so many of the employees possessed. Before the talk, they were caught up in the "I have to" mode of their job responsibilities, which was emotionally debilitating and kept them from greatness. That mode rendered them emotional victims and kept them small in this large world of opportunity. If you hear an employee, co-worker, friend or family member use those words, tell them the story above and challenge them to think of things they "have to do." If you hear yourself think or say those words, then slap yourself silly, because now you know better: Awareness will create change!