

## Last Exit

I drove past a highway sign the other day that caught my eye. It read “Your road to success was one exit back!” It took me a moment to realize that it was a sign for a local college, and the challenge it put out was to turn around – fast – to get on the road to success! But in that moment of thinking about what the sign meant, it also occurred to me that the sign is a perfect example of a depressed-brain dilemma.

If you are depressed, and you believe you have passed up the (one and only) road to success, you do not see choices, like turning around. You are more likely to think, “There. I have done it again: I missed the last exit to my one and only chance to succeed. I am doomed to have no success.” And that thought process results in making fewer efforts to get what you want and deepening your depression.

A depressed mind is not only negative but rigid, which makes it a poor problem solver. Instead of grasping that you could turn around, you are more likely to keep doing what you have been doing, all the while bemoaning that you did not choose the right course of action. E.g., you picked the wrong company to work at, are involved with the wrong person, driving the wrong car, saving your money in the wrong investment, etc.

Why are you unlikely to correct your situation? Being stuck in your “if only I had...” direction of thinking, you have low expectations of making a better choice or having a better outcome. It is hard for you to broaden your perspective, seeing that even if you have passed up a chance for success, there are at least two available choices than continuing to do what you have been doing, traveling down one road without deviation.

Start by believing this: No matter what direction you are going, you *can* turn around! You do not have to pursue a failing enterprise, whether it is a job, a course at school or a relationship. I learned long ago that successful entrepreneurs are not people who made one lucky choice and succeeded on it. In general, entrepreneurs make MORE mistakes than most of us. What they tend to do better than most others is to CORRECT their mistakes. If they see something is not working as it should or they have chosen wrongly, they stop moving in the wrong direction, turn around, and try something else.

Thomas Edison – inventor of the light bulb and hundreds of other amazing inventions (like the film projector) – tried 1,200 different filaments for the bulb before he found the one that was right. Put up a picture of Thomas Edison to remind yourself to change directions and keep trying.

Next, believe this too, because it is true: There is NOT only one road to success, not only one choice you can make. You can look for opportunity as you continue to travel down the road of life. Start looking for new options to present themselves. Today’s college grad can expect to work in seven *careers* during the course of a work life. That is a clear message that you should NOT expect to stay on the same path but rather expect to travel down new roads

I have heard it said that luck is what happens at the intersection of preparation and opportunity. With that in mind, tell your depressed brain that you are opening up your narrow focus and looking around. Try these questions:

- What are you hoping for? Have you got a goal or some goals for your life? If not, start here by talking with others about your interests, ideas, wishes and dreams. Then pick something small (don't start with your biggest dream – yet!) to work toward.
- What are you preparing for? – Are you putting in effort to develop skills in work and relationships, rather than just hoping you will get something good to come your way?
- Are you ready to achieve your goal? Sometimes depression is complicated by your fears of succeeding.
- Who can help you keep an eye out for opportunity? When traveling we can benefit from having a navigator. Who can help you find the opportunity to turn off on one of the many roads of life that you cross?

I will write more about these questions, because I know that trying something new can be scary. But I really believe this: If something new does not work out, you can always turn around.