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Choose Your Friends Wisely

BY BUD BILANICH

ACCORDING TO AMBROSE BIERCE, AN AMERICAN EDITORIALIST AND writer, optimism is, “The doctrine that everything is beautiful, including what is ugly, everything good, especially the bad, and everything right that is wrong... It is hereditary, but fortunately not contagious.” He has also said, “Calamities are of two kinds: misfortunes to ourselves, and good fortune to others.” I found these statements to be intriguing, so I decided to learn a little more about him.

As it turns out, Bierce was called “Bitter Bierce” by his contemporaries. He was an interesting character. He was born in 1842, and served in the Union Army during the Civil War. In 1913, he traveled to Mexico to observe firsthand the revolution going on there. He joined up with Pancho Villa’s army in Juarez. On December 26, 1913, he posted a letter to a friend from the city of Chihuahua. That was his last correspondence, and it is believed that he died in 1914.

He got the nickname Bitter Bierce from a book he published in 1906. First called *The Cynic’s Word Book*, it later became known as *The Devil’s Dictionary*, since it is a book of satirical definitions of English words.

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Bierce was clever, I’ll give him that, and I often see quotes from this book online. In *The Devil’s Dictionary*, he defines politeness as, “The most acceptable hypocrisy;” perseverance as, “A lowly virtue whereby mediocrity achieves an inglorious success;” and a year as, “A period of 365 disappointments.”

And that brings me to this month’s common sense advice. If you know any people like Ambrose Bierce, hold them at arm’s length. While they may be witty and entertaining at first, they will drag you down in the long run.

Self confidence is one of the keys to success. Self-confident people surround themselves with positive people. Positive people look for, and usually find, the best in others. They are genuinely happy about others’ success. They are polite because it is the best way to build strong relationships. They are willing to extend themselves to help others, even when they can see no immediate return to them for so doing.

Optimist is the first key to self confidence. You may have heard of something called “The Optimist Creed,” which is a listing of 10

statements that will help you achieve and maintain a positive outlook on life. This is definitely something you should hang in your workspace (feel free to contact me for a copy that’s suitable for framing).

I want to focus on point six of the Creed, which says, “Promise yourself to be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are of your own.” This is the complete opposite of Bierce’s life view. Positive people aren’t jealous or upset by the success of others. They are genuinely pleased when they see others succeed. They see the success of others as an inspiration and use it to motivate themselves to achieve bigger and better successes.

To sum up, successful people are self confident. Self-confident people surround themselves with positive people. If you want to succeed, look at the people around you. Are they positive, upbeat, and helpful? Or are they like Ambrose Bierce, quick witted, but negative and a drain on your energy? If most of the people around you are the latter, I suggest that you find a group of more positive friends. Your confidence, not to mention your success, will grow and develop. ○



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