



SUCCESS
for **TEENS**TM

Real **Teens**
Talk about
the **Slight** Using
Edge[®]

By the **Editors** of the
SUCCESS FoundationTM

SUCCESS | BOOKS

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Contents

Preface	vii
Foreword	xi
Introduction	xv
Chapter 1: Little Things Matter	1
Point #1: Little Things Matter	2
Point #2: Knowing What to Do Isn't the Same As Doing It	6
Point #3: The Ripple Effect.....	10
Point #4: Make the Right Choice at the Right Moment	12
Think About It: What Does Success Mean to You?	16
Chapter 2: Attitude Is Everything	19
Point #1: Your Philosophy Is the Key	20
Point #2: How You View Yourself Creates Your Life	21
Point #3: Change Yourself by Changing Your Philosophy	22
Point #4: What You Think Matters, Too	26
Think About It: What's Your Philosophy?.....	32
Chapter 3: Use the Moment	37
Point #1: Your Circumstances Aren't You	37
Point #2: You Can't Control What Happens to You, Only Your Reactions	39
Point #3: When You Stop Blaming, You Take Back Your Power	43
Point #4: Someday Never Comes	45
Think About It: Past or Future?.....	48
Chapter 4: Everything Starts with Small Steps	53
Point #1: The First Step Looks Harder Than It Is	53
Point #2: There's No Such Thing As a Lucky Break.....	55
Point #3: Make the Steps as Small As You Can	57
Point #4: The Second Step Is Just As Important.....	59
Think About It: The Power of Small Steps	64

Chapter 5: There’s No Such Thing As Failure	67
Point #1: Success Is Built on Failure	67
Point #2: It’s All in Our Heads	69
Point #3: Failure Creates Unexpected Opportunities	72
Point #4: Another Word for Learning	76
Think About It: The Key to Success Is Failure	79
Chapter 6: Habits Are Powerful	81
Point #1: Habits Run Your Life	81
Point #2: Make Your Habits Serve You	85
Point #3: Take Small Steps to Develop Good Habits	86
Point #4: Don’t Give Up a Habit—Start a New One	90
Think About It: What Are Your Habits?	94
Chapter 7: You’re Always Learning	97
Point #1: The Earlier You Invest, the Greater the Reward	98
Point #2: Take Advantage of All Opportunities	105
Point #3: You Need a Team on Your Side	108
Point #4: Adjust Your Course Continually	111
Think About It: Take Advantage of Opportunities	114
Chapter 8: Make Your Dreams Come True	117
Step One: Picture It Vividly	118
Step Two: Look at It Every Day	124
Step Three: Start with a Plan	125
Step Four: Don’t Quit on Yourself	129
Afterword	133
The Slight Edge Principles	135
Resources for Teens	137
Bibliography	143
Acknowledgments	147

Preface

A MESSAGE TO TEENS

Dear Teen,

Sometimes one book can make all the difference in your life.

Stuart Johnson learned this at age 15 when he was given David Schwartz's *The Magic of Thinking Big*, which began his own personal-development journey. That book led him to read other classics, including *Think & Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill, *Success through a Positive Mental Attitude* by W. Clement Stone, and many others. Through these books, he discovered that working on himself first best prepared him to take on the challenges of business and life. Today, he is a highly successful businessman, the owner of VideoPlus, L.P., SUCCESS Media, *SUCCESS* magazine, and founder of the SUCCESS Foundation.

Perhaps you have received this book from a parent, coach, teacher, or friend who wants to give you a resource for making the transition from passively waiting for life to happen to actively pursuing your dreams. It is our hope that *SUCCESS for Teens* will provide you with similar "magic" for thinking big in your life.

The Slight Edge

For the past few years, I have made it my mission to help youth receive the fundamental life-skills and personal-development philosophies necessary for success in school and in life. One of the best tools I have found for achieving this is the slight edge philosophy, which was first articulated in Jeff Olson's best-selling book, *The Slight Edge*. Jeff, through his wonderful book and from more than 20 years of teaching its philosophy, has positively influenced hundreds of thousands

of lives, encouraging people to do those simple, little disciplines that can change their life for the better forever.

You have in your hands what is NOT taught in high school or college. What you are now holding is the secret to a successful life. These pages provide you with the time-tested principles that will allow you to excel in all areas of your life—your health, your finances, your career, your personal relationships, and your family life. You’ll learn essential skills such as goal-setting, time management, and self-motivation to help you reach new levels of achievement. And, best of all, you have the benefit of youth to get the most from these life-changing principles.

The foundation for the slight edge philosophy comes down to this: You can create any life you want, no matter how difficult it may seem, by understanding how small, positive steps make a difference over time. It’s the things you do every day that don’t even seem to matter... that *do* matter most. In this book, you’ll learn that through the eight slight edge principles that teach you:

- ▶ Little Things Matter
- ▶ Attitude Is Everything
- ▶ You Must Use the Moment
- ▶ Everything Starts with Small Steps
- ▶ There’s No Such Thing As Failure
- ▶ Habits Are Powerful
- ▶ You’re Always Learning
- ▶ You Can Make Your Dreams Come True

I know that once you read these pages, you will come to understand that little things do matter, the choices you make are important, and you can make dreams come true.

Regards,



John Fleming
Executive Director
The SUCCESS Foundation
www.SUCCESSFoundation.org

A MESSAGE TO PARENTS

Dear Parent,

A startling number of young people say they aren't motivated to achieve, don't know how to plan or make decisions, and don't feel a sense of purpose.

That's why Stuart Johnson created the SUCCESS Foundation. He believes that young men and women thrive best when they first understand themselves and then apply that knowledge to the world around them. He wanted a way to illustrate the importance of clarifying goals, practicing the small efforts necessary for success, and accepting responsibility for one's own destiny.

We believe that every teen needs to be directed toward a path that enables them to achieve their goals, pursue careers, and become productive citizens. The tools for enhancing skills such as goal setting, dream-building, self-motivation, time management, and creating high self-esteem and a sense of purpose are so very important but often not taught in school. The SUCCESS Foundation believes that providing today's youth with personal development resources such as *SUCCESS for Teens* will help them reach their full potential.

I encourage you to share the fundamental life-skills and personal-development philosophies found in these pages and at www.SUCCESSFoundation.org with your teen. Together, we can help make a difference in the lives of our children.

Regards,



John Fleming
Executive Director
The SUCCESS Foundation
www.SUCCESSFoundation.org

Foreword

FROM THE DAUGHTER: Small Steps Win the Race

The slight edge has made a huge and positive impact on my life, and it can do the same for you.

When I was a senior in high school, I felt overwhelmed about applying to college. Applications, essays, recommendations, financial aid—there are tons of things I had to get together, and I felt the pressure to do it better than anyone else. I didn't think I would ever get everything done, but I ended up putting together a strong application and getting into colleges that I wanted. How did that happen? Because I disciplined myself in getting everything ready and didn't leave anything for the last minute. I didn't let my feelings of being overwhelmed keep me from accomplishing tasks. I applied the slight edge—I took one small step after another until I reached my goals.

My most vivid memory of how I used the slight edge was during my freshman year at the University of Florida. There were about 8,000 students in the freshman class, and everyone was incredibly smart and had done great things in high school. Once again I felt overwhelmed, up against people who were obviously very bright. I wasn't sure I belonged among them.

I remember asking my dad, Jeff Olson, “How am I going to do well in college? How am I going to stand out?”

And he gave me some fantastic advice: “If you apply the slight edge principles, simply show up at your classes every day, and do the things your professors tell you to do, you're going to beat 50 percent of the people by just doing that.”

What my father meant was that many people just don't put in the effort—they let the small things go by the wayside. So starting out freshman year, I went to classes every day and studied every night. It was amazing to me how many students didn't do those small things—instead, they crammed for tests and tried to take shortcuts at the last minute.

I did very well in college and graduated in the top 15 percent of my class. It wasn't because I was smarter than the other 85 percent of my classmates—it was because I was disciplined and did the small things every day, the little things that didn't look like such a big deal at the time.

Life is always a struggle, and you can get in the mindset that skipping the small things and taking shortcuts isn't going to harm you, especially when you get to college, because the professors aren't checking up on you, making sure you read the books, and showing up to class. You're on your own, and you can end up thinking, "If I don't go to class one day, it isn't going to hurt me." But the little things you do every day are more important than you can imagine.

Whether you want to play a new sport, do better in math, lose five pounds, or write your own book, the slight edge philosophy will help you. Success *will* come your way, if you do the things that are simple and small, and do them every day. You don't need to take huge leaps in life. When you tackle problems and challenges step by step, you'll be amazed at how much progress you can make.

Remember the tortoise and the hare—slow and steady wins the race. I wish you the best of luck on your journey.

Amber Olson

Dallas, Texas

FROM THE DAD: When I Was 19, I Was Headed Nowhere

I wish someone had given me this book when I was a teen. I sure could have used it.

For the first 20 years of my life, *success* was the last word anyone would have used to describe me. Throughout my childhood and teen years, it seemed like I was destined for nothing but failure and trouble.

In the third grade my teachers told me I had a low I.Q. My dad died when I was 10, and I became a troublemaker. My mom did her best to hold everything together, but as a fatherless, blond-haired kid growing up in a Hispanic neighborhood in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I just didn't fit in. I struggled my way through school, and by the time I was 19, I was headed nowhere.

But somewhere along the way I stumbled upon the ideas in this book—and everything shifted.

I went to college, got straight A's, and graduated at the top of my class. I went to work for a company and did well, then left and started my own company, which became one of the largest in its field. Then I built another company. Since then, I've created several multimillion-dollar sales organizations, produced nearly 1,000 television programs with *New York Times* best-selling authors, and presented seminars in every major city in the United States. I've even written a best-selling book, called *The Slight Edge*, upon which this book is based.

I don't want you to get the wrong idea here: This book is not just about financial and career achievements. Success is not defined by money. It's about what you achieve in *all* areas of your life. Beyond the business successes and bank accounts, I've been blessed with the joys of family and friends. I have relationships in my life that are more fulfilling than I ever thought possible. I've discovered new ways of learning and taken many paths to adventure.

When I was 19, it looked like I was getting ready to flunk out of life. But today I have an amazing life, one I never could have imagined when I was a teen. None of this was luck, and it sure wasn't coincidence. I owe it all to the ideas contained in the pages you're about to read.

“The slight edge philosophy comes down to this: you can create any life you want—but *not all at once, and only by utilizing your philosophy and the secret of time*. To understand that little steps, compounded over time, *do* make a difference. That the things you do every single day—the things that don’t look dramatic, that don’t even look like they matter—*do* matter.”

I learned this in my 20s, but now you have the opportunity to learn in just a few hours the valuable principles that took me years to learn. I’ve seen it work wonders for my daughter Amber, for her friends, and for other teens. You can put these principles to work no matter how old you are, and the earlier you start, the better.

I am honored that The SUCCESS Foundation, which made it possible for you to be holding this book in your hands, has built its first initiative around the slight edge principles that have changed so many lives. It is a most important endeavor, and I applaud and support my good friend Stuart Johnson for his commitment to providing teens with the personal development tools and resources needed to achieve new levels of success.

As I said before, I wish someone had given me this book when I was a teen. Fortunately, you won’t have that same regret, because someone who cares about you has put it in your hands *now*. My deepest wish is that you read it, take it to heart and put it into practice.

Here’s to your amazing life!

Jeff Olson

Author, *The Slight Edge*

Introduction

LITTLE THINGS MATTER

This book is about becoming the best possible person you can be. It's about making the most of your talents and opportunities, dealing with problems in positive ways, no matter what life brings, and achieving success—however you define it.

We've talked to teens from around the country to find out how they define success and what they're doing to make their dreams come true. And the answers they gave seem to boil down to the same answer (or set of answers).

Teens have said that success in life is not a question of how smart you are, how talented you are, or how lucky you are. It's not about the family you come from, the neighborhood you grew up in, or the school you go to. It's not about good looks or good luck.

There's only one difference between teens who are on the path to success, and those who aren't yet on the path.

That difference is called the slight edge and it boils down to three words: *Little things matter.*

Or, to put it another way, you can create any life you want—but not all at once, and only by taking small, positive actions every day. These small steps may not look like a big deal, but the teens in this book show how important they really are. By understanding your attitudes and the secret of time, you can achieve success in life, no matter how difficult that might seem right now. The slight edge is having faith that miracles do happen, if you know how to trust yourself and keep trying.

To understand the heart of the slight edge, let's look at an example from nature.

THE LESSON OF THE WATER HYACINTH

The water hyacinth is one of the most beautiful and unusual plants on earth. A delicate flower with six petals, it ranges in color from blue to lavender to pink and floats on the surface of ponds in warm areas around the world.

What makes the water hyacinth really special is that it is one of the fastest-growing plants in the world. A single water hyacinth can produce as many as 5,000 seeds and sends out short stems that become new plants. Over time, a single water hyacinth continuously doubles itself—one plant becomes two plants, two plants become four plants, four plants become eight plants, and so on.

One day there was a very beautiful (and very small) water hyacinth growing near the edge of a big pond. Nobody noticed it. Nobody noticed the second day either, when it had doubled and there were now two plants. Nobody noticed the water hyacinths on the third day or the fourth day. Even though they kept doubling in numbers, the water hyacinths were so small on the big pond that you'd have to look very hard to see them.

For two weeks the water hyacinths continued to double, but still covered only one square foot of the pond, just a tiny part of its huge surface. On Day 20, a person passing by the pond noticed something floating along the shore, but mistook it for a lost towel or a discarded trash bag. But by Day 30, it was impossible to ignore the hyacinths, because a blanket of beautiful flowers now covered the pond's entire surface.

The lesson of the water hyacinth is this: Small actions may not seem like much at first, but over time they have a compounding effect. All that means is that actions add up or intensify over time—you can get big results from small, daily steps. This is perhaps the most important lesson of the slight edge and it applies directly to your life.

As you read this book, keep the image of the water hyacinth in your mind. You are making choices every day, every hour of your life, and the impact of those choices spreads throughout your life like a blanket of water hyacinths covering a pond. You may not see the results of your choices today, tomorrow, or even next year. But, over time, you *will* see the results of your actions.

The question is this: What kinds of actions will you choose?

As you read on, remember two more important points.

- Only you can define what success means, and no one can do it for you. It's what you most want to do, not what others tell you to do.
- Everyone has the ability to be successful. Maybe you think success comes only from doing incredibly difficult things—things you don't think you'll ever be able to do. But that's simply not true.

The teens in this book talk about the many ways they've used the slight edge:

- They describe how they discovered what matters most in life, and how that's influenced their decisions and choices.
- They will teach you new ways of thinking and acting that will help you to make wise choices, whether at home, with friends, in school, in choosing a career, or in using your talents to their fullest potential.
- They will show you how to deal with difficult obstacles and challenges and keep going until you reach your goals.
- They will explain how you can be successful, however you define it.

Listen to what these teens have to say. Think about your own life as they tell their stories. After each story, ask yourself some questions. How are their experiences similar to yours? How are they different? How can you use what they've learned to improve your life? What new ideas or insights do you have? (If you want, there are places in the book where you can write down your thoughts and reactions.)

But most of all, use the advice these teens have to share—because, if you do, your life will start to change. Maybe not tomorrow or even the next day, but soon enough. Because when you understand the slight edge, time is on your side.

Little Things Matter

When Ferentz Lafargue was 16, he thought back to the fun he had with his friends when he was younger. They hung out in a parking lot, playing baseball, football, manhunt, and anything else they could think of. Like most kids, they made up their own games.

One day we noticed a piece of wood in the corner of the lot. We found a rock to prop it up and made ourselves a bicycle ramp. We practiced jumping for a week or two until the wood broke.

Every winter when it snowed, there would be huge piles of snow in the corners of the lot. We would start out by doing some light skiing to get warmed up. (The skis were made of the finest cardboard we could find.) But we all know what happens when you put a bunch of guys somewhere with snow... SNOWFIGHT!! When that happened, it was every man for himself. We would go home looking like we had just climbed Mt. Everest, and sometimes I think that would have been easier.

But Ferentz and his friends drifted apart:

These days the parking lot is just used for parking cars. We don't even keep in touch like we used to. Rarely will you see two of us together. Some have moved away, the rest just feel like they're miles away. The only thing we all have in common is that we grew up.

Devon was the superstar of the parking lot. He could throw, run, catch—the whole nine. We thought he would play high school baseball or football, and go on to become a major leaguer. But instead he ended up hanging out and doing things like robbing people, stealing chains, or getting caught up in stupid gang battles. Devon's only 18

and has been sent to jail two times already. The sad thing is he has no fear of going back.

Devon's younger brother John was a pretty good ballplayer, too, but more importantly he was a B+ student and a born leader. Now John is 17 and has a kid, and he's not even close to a high school diploma. He was hardly ever in school last year. The word is that John is dealing guns.

Then there's Angel, who used to be my best friend and in a way he always will be. One summer he lost his glove and, being that he was the only lefty in the parking lot, he taught himself to pitch right-handed. He could trick an opposing batter with a wicked right-handed curve ball.

Angel hasn't dropped out yet, but I doubt he goes to school more than five full days a year. He's dealing drugs. He used to have determination, but these days the only thing he seems determined to do is mess up his life.

I looked up to Devon and John and Angel. But I was smart enough to learn from their mistakes. I intend to go to college and study communications and advertising. One day, hopefully, I'll be writing for a big-time newspaper or working for an advertising company. Then I'd like to do whatever I can to help out some of my old friends.

Devon, John, and Angel still keep an eye out for me. Every time one of them sees an article I've written or hears about me doing anything else good, he's always ready to congratulate me and tell me to keep it up. It's almost like I'm their last hope of success: If I come out OK, then they'll honestly be able to say they had a hand in raising me.

Perhaps you've known people as talented as Devon, John, and Angel. Any of them could have turned their skills in a better direction. Why didn't they? Because of three words: *Little things matter.*

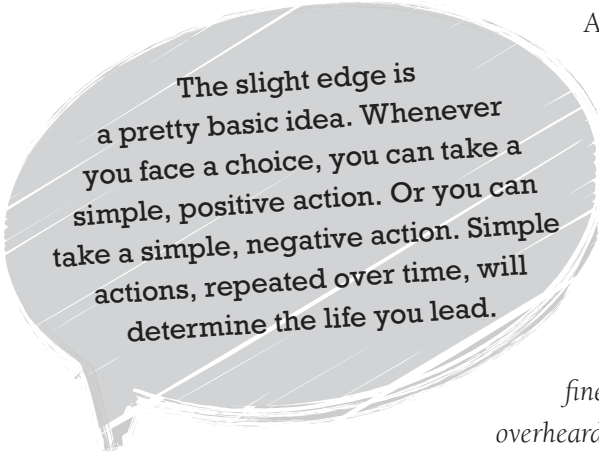
POINT #1: LITTLE THINGS MATTER

Those three words are the heart of this book. The slight edge is a pretty basic idea and you can sum it up this way: every day, every hour, every moment of your life, you face a choice. You can take a simple, positive action. Or you can take a simple, negative action. The difference between teens who

feel successful and those who don't feel that way comes from the little choices they make about what they think, say, and do.

Simple actions, repeated over time, will determine the life you lead. Devon, John, and Angel didn't become dropouts involved in crime and drugs overnight. They made small choices, day after day, week after week, until they lost their way. That's the bad news. The good news is that everyone—even people who seem as lost as Devon, John, and Angel—can start making different choices today and turn their lives around. It's never too late to change.

The little things that lead to success are easy to do. They can be as simple as getting up on time in the morning, showing up at school, and doing homework. The steps can be very small—as small as choosing a different response in the moment.



The slight edge is a pretty basic idea. Whenever you face a choice, you can take a simple, positive action. Or you can take a simple, negative action. Simple actions, repeated over time, will determine the life you lead.

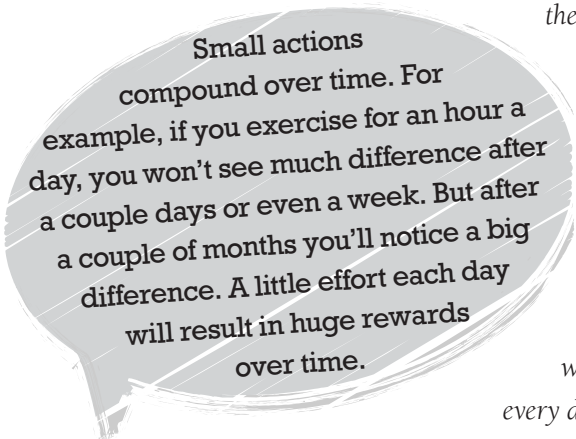
Mikaela Suarez, 13, from Rogers, Arkansas, likes to stay in the back of the class during dance class. She doesn't like the attention up front.

One day my friend asked me if I wanted to stand up closer to the teacher and I said, "No, I'm fine where I am." But my teacher overheard and asked me to stand up front. During that whole class I was really mad at my friend. But I didn't say anything and instead focused on dancing. And that was a positive decision on my part, to not get mad or worry about what anyone was thinking.

Octavia Fugerson, 17, from Atlanta, Georgia, went into foster care when she was 15 and was very depressed, to the point where she sometimes thought of suicide. But she now plans to become a psychologist and someday have her own foster care agency staffed by former foster kids. What enabled her to deal with her pain and stick to her goals?

I always looked for positive distractions. I knew if I got involved in drugs it wouldn't help me, only bring me down more. I tried to distract myself through reading and writing. If I was having a real rough day, I would just read a book to distract me away from everything and take me to another world.

Writing poetry also helps me. I can't honestly say that it takes the load off, but it helps me understand it, which takes the load off indirectly.



Small actions compound over time. For example, if you exercise for an hour a day, you won't see much difference after a couple days or even a week. But after a couple of months you'll notice a big difference. A little effort each day will result in huge rewards over time.

Kyle Freas, 19, from Plano, Texas, found himself with too much time on his hands.

I used to play basketball every day after school. I was on the school team. When the season was over, I had like three extra hours every day, because I was still in the habit of using that time to play basketball. I always wanted that extra time, but then when I had it I didn't know what to do with it.

So Kyle began spending an hour a day looking for ways to help other kids. In the last seven years he's raised thousands of dollars to help abused, homeless, and sick children. And Kyle considers himself just an average kid.

People get the idea that I'm not a normal teenager, that I don't have friends, that my project is all I do. I'm a normal kid with normal friends. I play video games and sports. I'm nothing special. It doesn't take anything spectacular to have an influence like I've had. I just put in a little effort every day.

Mikaela, Octavia, and Kyle, each in their own way, used the slight edge:

- ▶ Mikaela chose to remain silent when she was angry instead of lashing out at her friend.
- ▶ Octavia turned to reading or writing when she was depressed.
- ▶ Kyle spent an hour a day on a new project.

The little things they did weren't so little after all.

Think about how this applies to your own life. For example, if you exercise for an hour a day, you won't see much difference after a couple days or even a week. But after a couple of months you'll notice a big difference. If you read 10 pages of a good book every day, it might not seem like a lot. But after one year, you'll have read more than two-dozen 150-page books. It's the same with learning to play a new instrument or improving at a sport. A little practice each day will result in huge rewards over time.

Taylor, 18, discovered how small actions compound over time as she played soccer. She has a passion for the sport and has played it since she was 5 years old. But the older she got, the more competitive the sport got. Although Taylor loves soccer, she's never liked running. And soccer is a sport that demands a lot of running. When she was 15, her trainer made Taylor's soccer team practice extra running drills.

We had practice three times a week, and the first hour of it was conditioning. And then on the days when we didn't have practice our coach told us to go out and run three miles. And we had to be able to run those three miles in 30 minutes.

For the entire first month, I couldn't even finish the three miles. I would stop at two and a half because the pain was so great. It made me sick to my stomach to run that far. It was blazing hot outside, because I'm in South Texas. And there would be days when I wouldn't run because I didn't feel like it.

I thought maybe I could get away with not doing it. But when I would show up at practice the next day, you could tell who ran and who didn't. When I started to look like someone who was slacking, I realized that it was bigger than just me. I needed to help the team. I needed to do my part in order to make a difference.

I had friends encouraging me. They told me, "We want to do well at the end of the season. If you love this sport, then you need to do what it takes to honor your commitment to it."

So on the days I didn't feel like running, I would make myself put on my tennis shoes and go outside and do it. Even if I had to start slow, I realized I was at least trying instead of sitting at home.

At the start I knew I couldn't run three miles in 30 minutes, so I told myself I'll do what I can and see how that goes. The first day I could do only two miles in 30 minutes. It was slow and painful because I hadn't been running. But once I kept going I could see myself getting faster, and once you see yourself getting faster the easier it gets. It took me two months to run the three miles in 30 minutes.

During the soccer season, coaches who were looking for college players scouted Taylor's high school team.

Coaches would send me e-mails, saying, "I noticed you played the entire game, and it's really impressive to see girls who can last that long on the field and not show any wear and tear, to be able to play 100 percent the entire time." It was an eye opener to get these e-mails from college coaches who noticed how I could run so much, when a few months before I couldn't even run three miles.

Taylor is now attending college on a scholarship and playing for the school team.

Small actions compound over time. That means they grow in size and impact and lead to much bigger things. This is one of the most important lessons of the slight edge.

ACTION STEPS

- 🗨️ **What small steps could you take to reach your goals?**
- 🗨️ **What steps could you start taking today?**

POINT #2: KNOWING WHAT TO DO ISN'T THE SAME AS DOING IT

Teens we spoke to said that knowing how to do something and actually doing it are two different things. For example, Angel, Devon, and John had the talent and intelligence to know the right things to do, but still ended up making the wrong choices.

Knowing how to do something isn't actually doing the thing. Having the answer to a problem isn't the same thing as using the answer to solve the problem. That's because the little things that are important to do are also easy *not* to do, so a lot of people don't do them.

You know this from your own life. What's easier—trying something you're afraid of, or not even trying in the first place? Going along with what others think, or being who you really are, even if it means feeling alone? Avoiding your feelings because they're too hard or painful to face, or facing them square on? Getting up and running in the morning, or sleeping late?

The answer is pretty clear—it's often a *whole lot* easier not to do the simple things.

Some teens told us they didn't do the little, positive things because of what other people thought. Jesselin Rodriguez, 16, faced this problem when she got into junior high. It wasn't cool to be a success in school. If you did well, you got teased. Failure was cool—not in the sense that everyone fails at one time or another and can learn from it, but in the sense that it was cool to not do your best and be stuck in failure forever.

When I was in elementary school, doing well in school was the only thing that mattered to me. But when I got to junior high that all changed.

The atmosphere in junior high was totally different. When I walked in there for the first time, it seemed like everyone was just chillin'. I saw kids hanging out in the auditorium when they didn't belong there and even screaming at teachers. There was a fight almost every day. No one seemed to care about classes.

In that school you looked crazy if you were doing any work. The important thing was to have friends. If you didn't have friends, you were nothing. You'd get picked on, cursed out, and if people fought you it was never one-on-one.

I decided schoolwork wasn't going to be my top priority anymore. I thought my classmates would like me better if I acted more like them—lazy and not caring about anything except going home to watch TV.

So I made it a point to have friends and started thinking of school as a playground. I could do anything there—cut classes, write on the walls,

hide in the bathrooms—and nobody knew about it because there were too many kids.

When I did go to class, I'd walk in 20 minutes late, sit with a friend, and talk the rest of the period away. When the teachers asked me why I was late, I told them that I was in the bathroom or that I was talking to another teacher about something. They wouldn't bother me after that.

I did just enough work to pass, but I made it a point to never let my friends find that out. On the days when I did my homework, I used to give it to the teacher after class so my friends wouldn't see. If they knew, I was sure they would give me a hard time. They would be like, "What are you doing the work for? You think you're better than us?"

Then my class was divided up. The kids with the worst behavior and grades, including most of my friends, were sent to a different class. Since I didn't have my crew to do things with anymore, I had two choices—I could either not go to school at all, or I could start doing my work.

I knew my mother would kill me if I didn't go to school, so I started to go to class every day and began to do my homework on a more regular basis. My teachers were happy, and so was I.

By the time I was in eighth grade, I had worked my way up to a B average. I still felt that I could do better, but I didn't want to get higher grades than most of the people in my class. I thought they would get mad at me and be like, "Oh, now she thinks that she's smarter than me."

Soon Jesselin started high school.

Then came ninth grade and a big reality check. I thought that high school was going to be a bigger playground than junior high. I was wrong. Even though most of the kids were the same, the atmosphere was very different.

It was a brand-new alternative school and there were only about 50 students in the whole place. Every teacher knew who you were and where you were supposed to be every minute of the day. I had to do my work because there was no place to hide.

My teachers knew that I was smart and saw right through my front of acting like I didn't care. Still, I thought that as long as I handed in a couple

of pieces of work they would be satisfied and not bother me. For my whole freshman year, I was constantly told that I could do better. But it just went in one ear and came out the other.

Over the summer after ninth grade, I was talking to a friend who was in college. He asked me how I was doing in school. I told him that I was doing OK.

“How OK?” he asked. I told him I was doing just enough to pass. He asked me why, because he knew I could be at the top of my class if I wanted to be. I told him that I had gotten very lazy.

Then he asked me if I wanted to go to college. I told him that what I really wanted was to get a scholarship so I could go to a college out of state.

My friend told me there was no way I was going to get a scholarship. He even told me to forget about college at all, because I probably wouldn't finish high school the way I was going.

He put so much fear in me that I spent the rest of that summer thinking about what he said. It was the same thing my teachers had been telling me for years. It finally started to sink in. For a long time, it had been my dream to be the first one in my family to graduate from high school and go to college. Now I realized that I was going to have to work to make that dream come true.

Jesselin began to change.

For all of 10th grade, I did nothing but work. Breaking my lazy habits was the hardest thing I have ever done. I had to get used to doing my homework every night, not just when I felt like it. And I had to make a lot of sacrifices. I couldn't sit home and watch TV all day. I hardly listened to music. And I didn't see a lot of my friends outside of school. They would say, “Jesse, let's go downtown so I can go buy this shirt” or, “Let's go downtown and just chill.” And I was always saying, “No, I can't, I have to stay after school and finish my work.”

So, here I am, a junior almost ready for college—not at all ashamed of how bright I am, and not caring who knows it. It feels like the good girl I once had inside me has come back.

Jesselin learned that success can mean going against what's popular and sacrificing for what you really want. She started doing the little, positive

things even when she didn't feel like it. She started to believe in herself and in what she knew was most important. And she started using that knowledge, even if other people were telling her something different. Instead of just knowing the right things to do, Jesselin actually did them. And she grew as a person and made herself a better life.

ACTION STEPS

- 🗨️ **Is there something you know you should be doing that you're not doing?**
- 🗨️ **What's stopping you from taking that small, positive step?**

POINT #3: THE RIPPLE EFFECT

You've heard the expressions "timing is everything" or "he was in the right place at the right time." What that means is that by doing the small, positive things, you increase the chances that other positive things will happen to you. It's like tossing a rock into a pond—you'll see a splash and the ripples spreading out, but those ripples can go far beyond what you see. They can go all the way to the opposite shore.

It's the same thing in life, although you often don't see the ripples until something good happens (or something not so good). For better or for worse, even your smallest actions create a ripple effect that has a huge impact on you and the people around you, even when you don't see it or aren't aware of it.

Jordan Schwartz, 14, of Marietta, Georgia, knows from experience that when you do a simple, positive thing, you never know where it will lead. A few years ago she was traveling with her family and passing through an airport.

There was a woman there who had lost all her travel papers and she didn't speak one word of English. She was Spanish-speaking. My mother, who speaks Spanish, noticed something was going on and went over and offered her services. And she helped the woman get her forms filled out

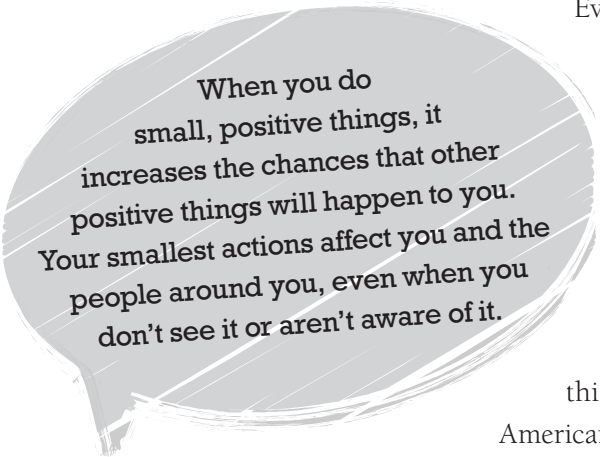
and on her way. It was all done in about a half-hour, with my mom stepping up to the plate, when it would have taken an hour with a translator.

That incident made a big impact on Jordan, because it made her think about helping others.

Some people think that community is just your town or your city. It's bigger than that—a sense of community means a sense of right and wrong, a sense of what to do in certain situations.

Jordan kept thinking about what happened in the airport when she got home. At the time she was raising money for a local police canine unit. She just wanted to donate the money, but the police commissioner invited her to make a speech about her project.

After it was over, the commissioner thanked me, said I did a great job, and said if I ever needed anything in the future to please let him know. So I took him up on his word.



When you do small, positive things, it increases the chances that other positive things will happen to you. Your smallest actions affect you and the people around you, even when you don't see it or aren't aware of it.

Ever since her mother helped the Spanish-speaking woman, Jordan had been thinking about people's attitudes about bilingualism, or speaking more than one language. Some people in her community think it's great that people speak Spanish in this country, while others think Americans should only speak English.

Like her mother, Jordan speaks both English and Spanish, and she decided to start a bilingual theater for children to teach tolerance and acceptance of everyone, no matter what language they speak. When the police commissioner asked if she needed anything, she told him about her idea and asked for his help.

The commissioner helped Jordan get permission to use school auditoriums to stage her productions. And that started her theater project on its way.

I was sending e-mails and putting flyers in the windows of local shops and businesses. After about a week or two of that, I started getting calls from people who wanted to help.

Today, Jordan's project—called the Children's Bilingual Theater—puts on several theater productions each year, in both English and Spanish, involving more than 100 young people.

And it happened because of the ripple effect:

- ▶ Jordan's mother helps a stranger in an airport.
- ▶ Jordan thinks about the meaning of community and starting a theater project.
- ▶ She's already working on another community project and an adult offers to help Jordan with anything she needs.
- ▶ With his help, Jordan starts her theater project.
- ▶ Soon the word spreads and other people are pitching in to help.

When you take a small, positive step, you never know where it will lead. But if you take that first step, the chances are great that more positive things will happen to you.

ACTION STEPS

- 🗨 **Have you seen the ripple effect in your own life?**
- 🗨 **Have you ever taken a positive step that led to another positive thing for you?**

POINT #4: MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

Only you can define what success means. But however you define it, the slight edge basically means doing the right thing at the right moment. That's where it all starts, and that often takes a lot of courage.

Chantel Clark understands this. When she was a senior in high school, Chantel hated a girl named Kim.

Kim was dark-skinned, with short hair she often wore in braided extensions. She was loud for no good reason and would get nasty with you in a heartbeat! She didn't care what people thought or said, dressing how she wanted regardless of trends.

Kim and I had different styles, but we were also a lot alike, and we found each other threatening because of that. In freshman year we got into a fight. She started it, over some "he-said, she-said." I won and gained my peers' respect.

After that, I had to live up to my reputation. So when I walked past her, I had nothing to say. If we saw each other in the mall, we would roll our eyes at each other. If we saw each other at a party, we made it our business to walk past each other with disgust.

But when I came back to school from summer vacation senior year, I saw my archenemy and she was no longer the same. Kim didn't do her hair or dress nice anymore. She didn't even hang out with her group of friends. I began to see people picking on her for no reason, calling her names, throwing things at her, and starting fights.

I heard through people that Kim was homeless because her mom kicked her out. She was getting skinny, her face looked like death and, honestly, I was worried. For the first time I did not want to pick an argument with her.

Chantel's attitude toward Kim began to change:

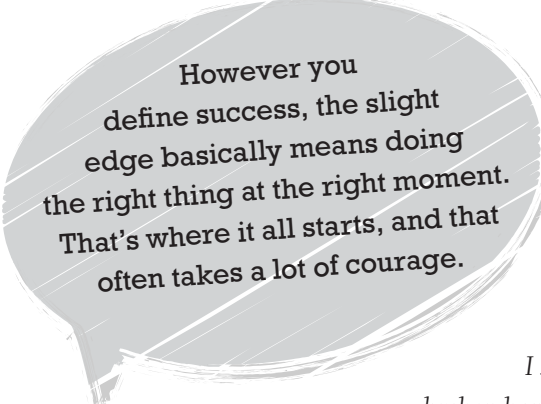
I know pain firsthand, and it's weird—once you've been hurt or gone through some trials, it's like you know when someone else is hurting inside. You can sense it, you can feel it. I had a yearning inside to talk to Kim, because I was sure I could speak to her like no one else could.

One day I went to the office of the school social worker, Ms. Bee, and saw Kim crying. I felt a heaviness in my chest. I wanted to reach out to her, but I couldn't.

I was scared about talking to her. What would people think? I also thought to myself, "What if I try to be nice and this chick gets smart? I might curse her out." So my pride, my temper, and my attitude kept me still.

I left Ms. Bee's office wondering what I could do. How could I speak to Kim? What would she say?

I returned to Ms. Bee's office later that day and asked her what was wrong with Kim, but she knew our rivalry and said it was confidential. So I asked Ms. Bee if she could set up a meeting between Kim and me. I explained that I saw how much pain she was in and wanted to help in any way I could.



However you define success, the slight edge basically means doing the right thing at the right moment. That's where it all starts, and that often takes a lot of courage.

Ms. Bee knew my life story and that I would be able to say things that only the two of us could have understood.

About a week or so later, Ms. Bee called me into her office, and Kim was there. I suddenly felt out of place and weird, but I went in anyway.

I said to Kim, "I came from a broken home, my life was never a bowl of cherries. My mother, a drug abuser. My father, missing in action. No one knew when he would pop up. But I was strong enough to overcome. You're beautiful and strong, and if you ever need a shoulder to cry on, I'm here."

Kim was shocked. She looked at me with this face that said, "No way." I guess she never saw me as the type to have a hard life, because I hide it so well.

I told her how this fairy princess in a glass castle is my image, but it's only a lie. We told each other things that almost nobody knew, and we laughed about it, too. After that conversation we became true friends, because we trusted each other. People often stared at us and talked behind our backs, because we were once enemies but are now friends. They could never understand the relationship we had.

I gave her clothes, lent her money, and snuck her into my house to eat and to hang out. We became like sisters.

We realized we could both change and be our real selves. She didn't need to be loud to be respected. I found out that I didn't have to pretend all the time. I could be me without worrying about what anyone else would think. I helped Kim to find herself again and in return I found me.

Success is more than finding the right job someday or making a lot of money. It's about doing the right thing at the right time.

That takes faith and courage. Chantel had faith in knowing the right thing to do and the courage to do it. Once you start using the slight edge, you will have both faith and courage to make the right choices.

Think About It

What Does Success Mean to You?

What does success mean to you? To find out, start with these questions:

- ✍ What's important to you?
- ✍ What do you like to do?
- ✍ What do you care about?
- ✍ What things mean the most to you?

After you've thought a while, jot down your thoughts in the spaces below.

What are five things you're good at? List them here:

Now, what are five things you love to do, whether or not you're especially good at them? (You may end up listing some or all of the same things in your first list. That's OK.)

And now, let's take it a step further, too: What are five things you would

do if you could, no matter how outrageous they are, even if you think you're no good at them?

Is there something you would have included on that last list, but didn't because it seemed too far-fetched? Maybe even impossible? If so, write it down here.

This gives you a pretty good idea of how you define success. But how are you going to get there? By taking small steps. So let's take the next step.

Success Starts with Little Steps

Think of three little things you can do that could lead to success in six areas of your life. Then write them down below. (Remember—they can be small steps! And you can repeat what you've written above in the spaces below.)

For Myself:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For My Friendships:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For My Health (physical, mental, and spiritual):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For My Wealth:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For My Education and Career:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For My Footprint on the World (what I want to accomplish or how I want to be remembered):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Hold onto your answers—we'll come back to them. But in the meantime, which of these steps can you take today?