

Be Like Diogenes

On Desire, Success, and Ambition

“No person has the power to have everything they want, but it is in their power not to want what they don’t have, and to cheerfully put to good use what they do have.”

– **Seneca**

Today I’m covering desire, success, and ambition. Many misunderstand this topic. At first glance, it might seem like the Stoics tell you to avoid ambition or material possessions. That’s not the case.

Stoicism teaches that it is important to manage your connection to these things, how much you rely on them, and keeping your good character intact while pursuing them. The Stoics used the term **“preferred indifferent”** for things like wealth, rank, title, and material success. They are all things that we would rather have than not, but they are not absolutely required for a good life.

“Yes, I would prefer to have a million dollars than be broke, but either way I’m going to be a good person and enjoy life.”

THE TALE OF TWO CONQUERORS

Alexander the Great conquered the known world by age 30 and was undefeated in battle. He had all the power, success and wealth that you can imagine. Some people at the time even worshiped him as a god.

One day Alexander heard about Diogenes, a wise philosopher who lived simply in rags and he wanted to meet him. But, Diogenes ignored all his royal invitations. Finally fed up with being ignored, Alexander went to meet him.

He found Diogenes lying in the sun, perfectly content. Alexander stood over him and said, “Diogenes, I am Alexander the Great. Tell me what you want, and it is yours.”

Diogenes smiled and replied, **“I want you to stop blocking my sunlight.”**

One of Alexander’s men was angered by Diogenes’ remark and shouted, “This man has conquered the world. What have you done?”

Diogenes calmly answered, **“I have conquered my need to conquer.”**

Later Alexander was quoted as saying, “If I were not Alexander, I would wish to be Diogenes.” On the other hand, it was clear Diogenes would never wish to be Alexander...or anyone else.

Well-being and resilience often come from simply getting your mind right. Diogenes wanted nothing more than what he already had. He was self-contained and happy because of his ability to manage his wants.

There’s nothing wrong with ambition, possessions, or improving your financial position. Leadership, promotion, and financial success are not negatives. The danger comes when you allow your self-worth and happiness to depend on those things.

All things fade with time. We shouldn’t allow our character or joy fade with them.

One of the best ways to control desire and build contentment is by practicing gratitude. The practice of gratitude simply helps you want less because you are more appreciative of what you already have.

- ✓ Start the day with a gratitude journal.
- ✓ Send notes of appreciation to loved ones and friends.
- ✓ Practice negative visualization (imagine losing what you already have) .

The less you want and the less you need to be happy the more you will be happy.