



Classic Stories On Conquering Worry

One of the original American thought leaders on overcoming worry was Dale Carnegie. In addition to his other works, he published the very successful “How to Stop Worrying and Start Living” in 1944. There are two classic stories from this book that may help people who are struggling today. Experience has taught me that studying the struggles of people who are willing to share them can provide very useful insights into solutions for our own plan. The story of Galen Litchfield and Earl Haney have been read by millions of people over the past 60 plus years. If you are not familiar with their stories, here is Dale Carnegie’s version of their struggle.

The story of Galen Litchfield¹:

“Let’s take the case of Galen Litchfield—a man I have known for several years; one of the most successful American business men in the Far East. Mr. Litchfield was in China in 1942, when the Japanese invaded Shanghai. And here is his story as he told it to me while a guest in my home:

“Shortly after the Japs took Pearl Harbour,” Galen Litchfield began, “they came swarming into Shanghai. I was the manager of the Asia Life Insurance Company in Shanghai. They sent us an ‘army liquidator’—he was really an admiral— and gave me orders to assist this man in liquidating our assets. I didn’t have any choice in the matter. I could co-operate—or else. And the ‘or else’ was certain death.

“I went through the motions of doing what I was told, because I had no alternative. But there was one block of securities, worth \$750,000, which I left off the list I gave to the admiral. I left that block of securities off the list because they belonged to our Hong Kong organisation and had nothing to do with the Shanghai assets. All the same, I feared I might be in hot water if the Japs found out what I had done. And they soon found out.

“I wasn’t in the office when the discovery was made, but my head accountant was there. He told me that the Jap admiral flew into a rage, and stamped and swore, and called me a thief and a traitor! I had defied the Japanese Army! I knew what that meant. I would be thrown into the Bridge house!

¹ Dale Carnegie, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 42

"The Bridge house 1 The torture chamber of the Japanese Gestapo! I had had personal friends who had killed themselves rather than be taken to that prison. I had had other friends who had died in that place after ten days of questioning and torture. Now I was slated for the Bridge house myself!

"What did I do? I heard the news on Sunday afternoon. I suppose I should have been terrified. And I would have been terrified if I hadn't had a definite technique for solving my problems. For years, whenever I was worried I had always gone to my typewriter and written down two questions-and the answers to these questions:

1. What am I worrying about?
2. What can I do about it?

"I used to try to answer those questions without writing them down. But I stopped that years ago. I found that writing down both the questions and the answers clarifies my thinking.

So, that Sunday afternoon, I went directly to my room at the Shanghai Y.M.C.A. and got out my typewriter. I wrote:

1. What am I worrying about? I am afraid I will be thrown into the Bridge house tomorrow morning.

Then I typed out the second question:

2. What can I do about it?

"I spent hours thinking out and writing down the four courses of action I could take-and what the probable consequence of each action would be.

1. I can try to explain to the Japanese admiral. But he "no speak English". If I try to explain to him through an interpreter, I may stir him up again. That might mean death, for he is cruel, would rather dump me in the Bridge house than bother talking about it.

2. I can try to escape. Impossible. They keep track of me all the time. I have to check in

and out of my room at the Y.M.C.A. If I try to escape, I'll probably be captured and shot.

3. I can stay here in my room and not go near the office again. If I do, the Japanese admiral will be suspicious, will probably send soldiers to get me and throw me into the Bridge-house without giving me a chance to say a word.

4. I can go down to the office as usual on Monday morning. If I do, there is a chance that the Japanese admiral may be so busy that he will not think of

what I did. Even if he does think of it, he may have cooled off and may not bother me. If this happens, I am all right. Even if he does bother me, I'll still have a chance to try to explain to him. So, going down to the office as usual on Monday morning, and acting as if nothing had gone wrong gives me two chances to escape the Bridge-house.

"As soon as I thought it all out and decided to accept the fourth plan-to go down to the office as usual on Monday morning-I felt immensely relieved.

"When I entered the office the next morning, the Japanese admiral sat there with a cigarette dangling from his mouth. He glared at me as he always did; and said nothing. Six weeks later-thank God-he went back to Tokyo and my worries were ended.

"As I have already said, I probably saved my life by sitting down that Sunday afternoon and writing out all the various steps I could take and then writing down the probable consequences of each step and calmly coming to a decision. If I hadn't done that, I might have floundered and hesitated and done the wrong thing on the spur of the moment. If I hadn't thought out my problem and come to a decision, I would have been frantic with worry all Sunday afternoon. I wouldn't have slept that night. I would have gone down to the office Monday morning with a harassed and worried look; and that alone might have aroused the suspicion of the Japanese admiral and spurred him to act.

"Experience has proved to me, time after time, the enormous value of arriving at a decision. It is the failure to arrive at a fixed purpose, the inability to stop going round and round in maddening circles, that drives men to nervous breakdowns and living hells. I find that fifty per cent of my worries vanishes once I arrive at a clear, definite decision; and another forty per cent usually vanishes once I start to carry out that decision.

"So I banish about ninety per cent of my worries by taking these four steps:

1. Writing down precisely what I am worrying about.
2. Writing down what I can do about it.
3. Deciding what to do.
4. Starting immediately to carry out that decision."

Story of Earl P. Haney²

"A chap from Broken Bow, Nebraska, was making out his will. His name was Earl P. Haney, and he had duodenal ulcers. Three doctors, including a celebrated ulcer specialist, had pronounced Mr. Haney an "incurable case". They had told him not to eat this or that, and not to worry or fret-to keep perfectly calm. They also told him to make out his will!

These ulcers had already forced Earl P. Haney to give up a fine and highly paid position. So now he had nothing to do, nothing to look forward to except a lingering death.

Then he made a decision: a rare and superb decision. "Since I have only a little while to live," he said, "I may as well make the most of it. I have always wanted to travel around the world before I die. If I am ever going to do it, I'll have to do it now." So he bought his ticket.

The doctors were appalled. "We must warn you," they said to Mr. Haney, "that if you do take this trip, you will be buried at sea."

"No, I won't," he replied. "I have promised my relatives that I will be buried in the family plot at Broken Bow, Nebraska. So I am going to buy a casket and take it with me."

He purchased a casket, put it aboard ship, and then made arrangements with the steamship company-in the event of his death-to put his corpse in a freezing compartment and keep it there till the liner returned home. He set out on his trip, imbued with the spirit of old Omar:

*Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and-sans End!*

However, he didn't make the trip "sans wine". "I drank highballs, and smoked long cigars on that trip," Mr. Haney says in a letter that I have before me now. "I ate all kinds of foods-even strange native foods which were guaranteed to kill me. I enjoyed myself more than I had in years! We ran into monsoons and typhoons which should have put me in my casket, if only from fright-but I got an enormous kick out of all this adventure.

"I played games aboard the ship, sang songs, made new friends, stayed up half the night. When we reached China and India, I realised that the business troubles and cares that I had faced back home were paradise compared to the poverty and hunger in the Orient. I stopped all my senseless worrying and felt fine. When I got back to America, I had gained ninety pounds. I had almost

² Dale Carnegie, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 21

forgotten I had ever had a stomach ulcer. I had never felt better in my life. I promptly sold the casket back to the undertaker, and went back to business. I haven't been ill a day since.”

In the first story, Mr. Carnegie lays out Galen Litchfield's dilemma, and his solution. Galen's simple four step process will make perfect sense for some people. It is quick, concise and results in immediate action. I feel that the best aspect of this process is that fact that it is easily repeatable. When someone is struggling with worry, anxiety, or depression it is usually difficult to make decisions. This methodology helps you drive to the decision and take action!

In contrast, Mr. Haney cured his ills by 'giving up.' While I do not in anyway recommend anyone give up on life, there is a valuable lesson in this story. Once he stopped obsessing about his problems, they seemed to disappear. The mind is incredibly powerful and can make a healthy person incredibly ill. This story reinforces the need to pay close attention to what you are thinking about!



About Conquer Worry

Conquer Worry is designed to be a resource for people who are struggling, or have struggled in the past with worry, anxiety or depression. Our mission is clear. We are bringing together the best research, tools and thought leadership to serve as a resource to those who want to conquer their worries and build successful lives. Please visit www.conquerworry.org or connect with us on social media.

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