

# FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

## If You Think You Can, You Just Might ...

I love mottos. I love the way a motto can grab a big life-lesson and shrink it to a few small words. Mottos, one-liners, sayings – call them what you like – can drive home a point, hit the nail on the head, and pack a punch more powerful than a two-hour lecture. Mottos make you stop, make you think, make you laugh. And mottos, sometimes, help you grow ...

**I**d never realised how much my life had been shaped by mottos until the day, several years ago, that I moved office. I'd packed away my books, emptied out my drawers, taken down my shelves, and tossed out piles of junk. The only thing left was a noticeboard ... looking lost and lonely in the emptied-out room.

That noticeboard, a small cork square, had hung on the wall beside my desk for almost 20 years. And on it, without ever meaning to, I had accumulated almost 20 years worth of mottos, one-liners and sayings. They'd been clipped from magazines, scribbled on scraps of paper, jotted down on backs of business cards, even scrawled on restaurant napkins!

There were dozens of the things, pinned-up all higgledy-piggledy and overlapping untidily. The oldest ones underneath were so faded and tatty they were barely readable, and I'd long forgotten how they had ended up in my motto-collection. But as I removed



the rusty drawing-pins and took them down layer-by-layer off the wall, I was humbled by how much I owed these bits of compacted wisdom.

Like what? Well, like these (to pick a few) ...

- *"If you think you can't, you won't – but if you think you can, you just might!"* – this morale-boost encouraged me, a lifetime ago, to keep dreaming big scary dreams.
- *"Better to try something and fail than try nothing and succeed!"* – these words were a timely reminder for a slow-learner that 'mistakes' are just another word for 'experience'.

- “What other people think of me is none of my business!” was a pick-me-up on more than one occasion when negative comments and critics got me doubting myself.
- “Short people don’t need shrinks!” helped this five-foot-five-and-a-half-inch editor stand tall.

I harvested other good mottos from my noticeboard that day:

- Some were witty: “Constant change is here to stay ...”
- Some were wild: “Don’t get your knickers in a knot – it’s bad for your knickers, and it makes you walk funny!”
- Some were pointed: “If you can’t be positive, be quiet!”
- Some were profound: “If you can’t do great things, do small things in a great way.”
- Some deserve a lot more thought: “The journey is more important than the destination ...”

And some are now getting passed down to my descendants and heirs ...

**I** have, in recent years, begun choosing an appropriate motto for my grandkids as they each hit the teenager years – in the hope that they might be challenged, too, and their lives might be shaped in some small way.

For one grandson – a warm, likeable, fun-loving boy, who finds study a chore

and prefers clowning around – I chose this motto: “BE A LEADER, NOT A FOLLOWER!” (And I remind him every chance I get ...)

And for his older brother – a generous, soft-hearted uni-student, who finds academic stuff a breeze and is tempted to cruise – I chose: “BE BETTER THAN YOU NEED TO BE!”

He texted us the other day: “Wanna come to my flat? I’ll cook you dinner?” And, much impressed, my wife replied, “We’d love to! What would you like us to bring?” A few minutes later, he texted us again: “Umm – hahahahaha – could you bring everything? I’ve just had a look at my account, and I’ve got no money!”

We laughed and laughed. And laughed again.

And then another meaningful motto came to mind: “You make a living by what you GET ... you make a life by what you GIVE!”

So we did what any good grandparents would do.

We shouted him dinner at a local restaurant. ❁

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JOHN (GRAPEVINE’S FOUNDER/EDITOR) IS STILL COLLECTING MOTTOES. ONE OF HIS CURRENT FAVOURITES IS: “WE’RE ALL BORN ORIGINALS. SOME OF US STAY THAT WAY.”

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THORT



Why do people believe  
 you when you say there  
 are four trillion stars ...  
 but check when you say  
 the paint’s wet?