

Lifting the Calf

William James, psychologist and author, believed in "moral muscles." He encouraged his patients to do at least one good deed every day, just to stay "morally fit." He believed that a person becomes strong psychologically by resisting life's small temptations and by doing deeds that an average person might otherwise find tedious, inconsequential, or even distasteful.

To James, staying strong on the inside was related more to what one does than to what one thinks or says.

James' approach is a little like that of the mythological farm boy -- a weakling who was ridiculed by all the other boys in the area. One day, the youth rescued a newborn calf by picking it up and carrying it to the barn. The next day, the boy went out and held the calf in his arms, to comfort and befriend it.

The boy continued the practice day after day. Since the calf's weight increased only a little each day, the youth didn't notice that he was lifting ever-greater weight. As the calf grew larger, he got stronger. Eventually, the farm boy was lifting a full-sized bull, and was hailed as the strongest boy in five counties.

There is much to be said for daily plodding. You travel farther in life by quietly moving forward than by just talking about your destination. Put another way, as we say it in the South, success is the result of working hard, playing hard and keeping your mouth shut.

--Beecher Hunter