

# STEVE MOTENKO

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*"Somebody showed it to me, and I found it by myself"*  
- Lew Welch

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## Loving the Recession 2: Your 2,000 Bits (and the Power of Your Attention)



*You CAN make yourself more focused, more productive, happier, even in these challenging times, by the simple power of your attention. And the competitive advantage that offers is stunning. Here's how ...*

**D**o you know someone to whom everything is a problem? Always complaining? Eeyore in human form ... nothing good ever happens to them? (Or if it does, they conveniently ignore it?)

What quality of life does that individual have?

On the other hand, do you know anyone who, despite adversity, always seems to keep their emotional head above water? Always seeing possibility, opportunity, and hope?

Now, the difference between these approaches is hardwired, isn't it? It's just who they are, no?

NO! (Emphatically, I say.) Fact is, you get to choose. It's an exceedingly simple choice, but seldom easy. It takes diligence. And ... you can do it.

Look at the world one way (through the eyes of cable news, for example), and you find hatred, violence, injustice and misery. Look at it another way and you find love, compassion, joy and fulfillment. It's the same world; it's just the perspective that's changed. Is either view more "real" than the other?

In fact, I'd argue there's way more love in the world than hatred, way more compassion than persecution. The bad stuff makes up the news because the "news," by definition, reports things *different* from the norm. What does that say about the norm in human life?

In a bizarre movie a few years ago called "What the Bleep Do We Know?" a physicist said that over the span of any given second, our brains swim in 400 billion bits of information – a mind-boggling flood of sensory data. But over that same second, our conscious awareness can process only 2,000 bits. In other words, **what we're literally paying attention to, at any moment, is a drop in the ocean of what's possible** – 2,000 out of the 400 billion bits available! That explains a lot.

It explains why multiple witnesses at a crime scene report very different stories. It explains why “Nights in Rodanthe” makes some cry and others scorn. It explains why Christopher Reeve faced quadriplegia with grace, while others let it destroy them.

See, **your experience of life is quite simply a product of what you pay attention to** ... what you **direct your awareness** toward, in any given second ... the 2,000 bits you **choose** in every moment.

Now some of you are thinking, “I don’t have a choice what I pay attention to! The recession ...” (or fill in the blank with whatever negative situation is plaguing you) “... is in my face, day after day!”

Yes, the recession is part of the 400 billion bits. And to the extent that it’s necessary to pay attention to it, by all means do so. You have to pay enough attention to make decisions about how best to surf the economic waves to keep your head above water. But beyond what’s necessary for making sound decisions, you don’t have to dwell on the suffering.

But, you say, even if I’m not “dwelling” on it, the negative stuff is still going on! Yes, but as long as you’re not directing your awareness to it, it won’t control you or your experience of life. And studies show clearly that confidence, hope, and optimism breed success.

But maybe it feels impossible to stay out of despair. So, practically, how do you create that shift in awareness to focus on the positive and the possible? Here are some practical suggestions. If you do them, they’ll help. You can’t just read about them. You have to diligently engage in them. Schedule them. Get a good friend to support you in working them into your life, every day.

### **Paying attention to possibility:**

- Simply remind yourself daily of the profound, face-slapping fact that what you pay attention to powerfully affects your reality, and that you have the power to choose. For example:
  - **Read books** like Eckhart Tolle’s *The Power Of Now* or *A New Earth*, or Martin Seligman’s *Learned Optimism*, or Martha Beck’s *The Joy Diet* – all profound, accessible, and practical. Mark your favorite passages, and read them often.
  - Recite **affirmations** daily (no, not “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and doggone it, people like me.”) Affirmations get bad raps, but they can be immensely powerful – if you believe in them, and only if. An affirmation is simply a brief phrase that reminds you of what you know to be true about yourself, or about life – even if you don’t always act from it. One I’ve used when I’ve been frantic or frustrated: “What must get done will get done. Anxiety doesn’t help.”
  - Every minute that you spend **opening your awareness to *this* moment**, as each moment unfolds, is a minute you’re truly grounded in reality. Doesn’t matter whether it’s through meditation, playing basketball, having sex, walking in nature, gazing into a loved one’s eyes, listening to great music, or just sitting in silence ...

- Claim and focus on your **core values**. With those in hand, claim and focus on your **vision for yourself**. (Stephen Covey says simply that all peak performers are visualizers.) These are immensely powerful targets for your attention. And then, pay attention to the **steps necessary to achieve that vision**. And plan them.
- **Keep a gratitude journal**. Every day, if only for two minutes, write down what you're grateful for. It's every bit as real as what you fear. What you appreciate and what you fear both make up your life. Which do you pay attention to more? Which do you act from?
- Every day, **do something you love, something that makes you just plain happy**. Doesn't matter what (assuming it's ethical and moderately legal), or how long you do it. Dance. Play with a kid or a dog. Write an absurdist email. Read a slut novel. Watch 30 Rock. (Or Third Rock.) You know what makes you happy. Just do it. Every day.
- Every week, **spend time with people you truly enjoy**
- **Schedule the above items in your calendar**. Don't tell me how busy you are. I don't expect you to spend 6 hours a day on the practices above. A few minutes on each to start. The ROI from that time investment, in how you feel about yourself and your future, will be priceless.

A final word: I wouldn't blame you for objecting to my title – “Loving the Recession.” I don't mean to trivialize the suffering that's so real for so many. And still I want to suggest that you can choose to love anything, without denying the pain involved. This is a time of profound questioning. Love the questions.

“I beg you ...” writes Rainer Maria Rilke in the compilation *Letters To A Young Poet*, “have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.... The point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday ... you will gradually ... live your way into the answer.”

**Steve Motenko, PCC**, is a Harvard-educated leadership trainer and a certified personal development coach. He's facilitated management training experiences at Boeing, Microsoft, and in government agencies, nonprofits, community organizations, and educational institutions across the country. In his coaching practice, he supports leaders committed to living into their highest aspirations.

Steve is offering a “Loving the Recession” workshop in Seattle on April 29, 2009 ([www.stevemotenko.com/LovingTheRecession-workshop.html](http://www.stevemotenko.com/LovingTheRecession-workshop.html)), applying insights and practices from this article.

And if you're interested in coaching yourself -- or someone else -- to success, check out Steve's eight-week self-paced e-course: **Coaching to Success: The 7 Layers**. (<http://www.stevemotenko.com/e-course.html>).

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