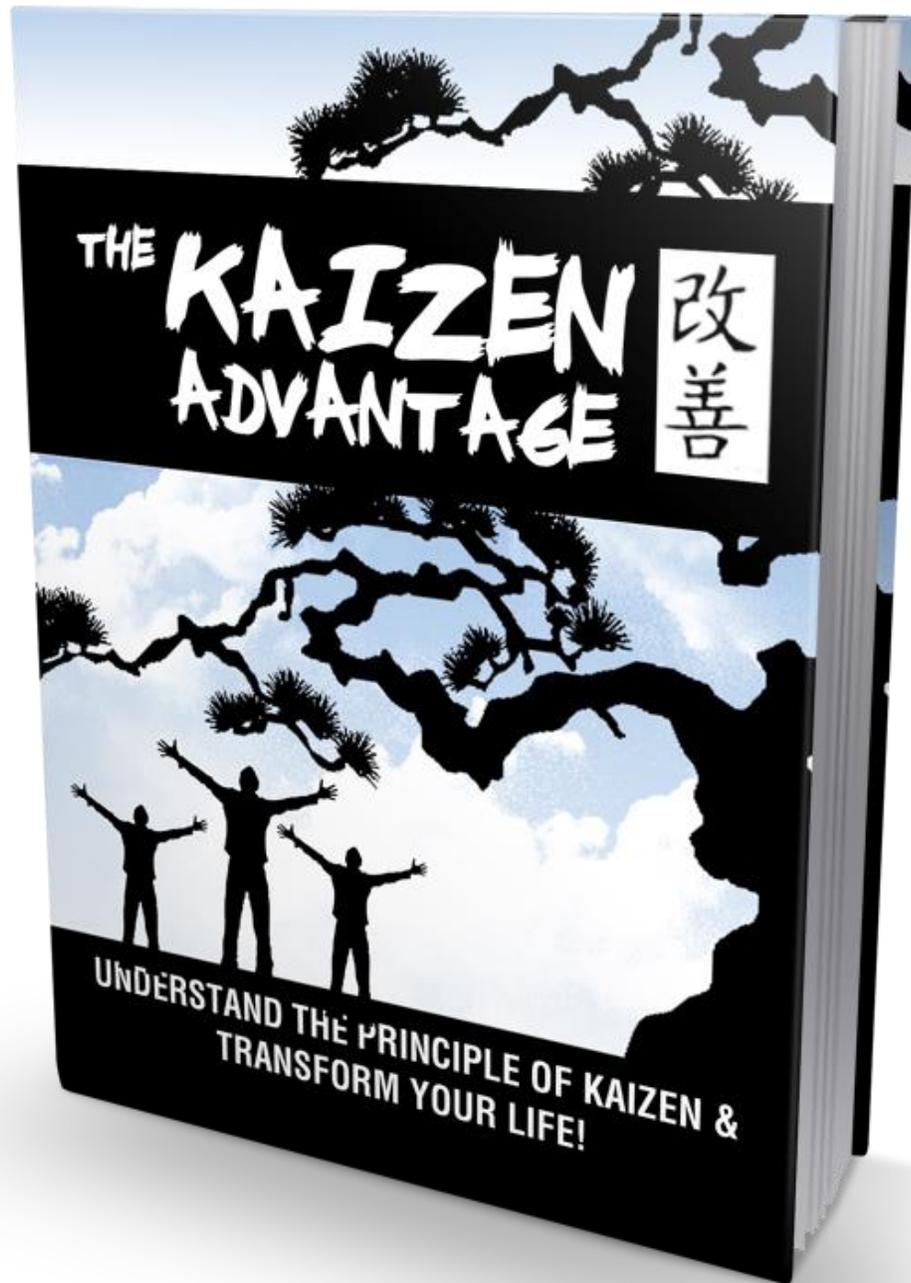


The Kaizen Advantage



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Introduction

To be happy, to make others around them happy, to live life to it's fullest ... These are the top three reasons we seek to continually improve in life. Without happiness, smiling faces around us and living life to the fullest, what type of life would we live?

Today, I would like to introduce you to a little something called *kaizen* – many of you may have heard of this before, but to some, this may be a foreign word.

Simply put, it is a Japanese management strategy that can be incorporated into all areas of your life, from work situations to personal life issues and the management thereof.

Roughly translated, it means; "Continuous slow improvement, or good change."

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Kaizen, is the philosophy of using small steps, or contributions, that work towards a big change, or 'big picture'. It focuses on you and me, the individuals that form part of a small business, corporation and even a country. It encompasses the little things that can be changed by each one of us, on the path to becoming better, healthier, fitter Human Beings.

This is achieved by concentrating and improving on the little things that with time, effort and consistency, add up to a way of life, creating success almost effortlessly. To get to this point, we have to conquer our bad eating habits, cogitating, lack of activity and stress.

We have to take small, but steady steps towards achieving our goals, no matter what they might be! We can use the power and effectiveness of Kaizen, to accomplish all of this.

Kaizen is a long term commitment. It takes a long term view and the most important principles are that it is a daily, continuous and steady exercise. It is not important that huge and sudden

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improvements are made. Small improvements are great and it is important that you continually look at ways of making things better, no matter how small. You know the saying, “if it works, why change it?” Well, the Kaizen philosophy suggests that there are always ways to improve things, no matter how small that these changes may be.

We all know that it is better to prevent a problem than to fix one. By incorporating the Kaizen principles into your life, any obstacle to your success can be removed, even if it is one step at a time. Just remember, a thousand mile walk begins with the first step.

How to start?

You have to start with your mind. What motivates you? What is your reason for wanting to do whatever it is you want to do, be it weight loss, planning a trip, or improving your financial well-being? How will reaching those goals make you feel and how it might change your life?

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We have to learn to be patient. This can only be measured by your commitment to your goals. You are committing to changes to improve your life and this will not change over- night. As they say, Rome was not built in a day!

When you have embraced the Kaizen philosophy, you will not be put off by setbacks, but will enhance your vision with objectives based on time lines and measuring your success on a daily basis, by sticking to your commitment.

Well now it's time to take a closer look into this subject of Kaizen, through this short journey we are going to uncover exactly what kaizen is, the history behind it, the different types of Kaizen, how to create a Kaizen environment in your home, and much more. Let's dive in

Chapter 1 – The History Of Kaizen And Its Effect In The Real World

After World War II was over, the American occupation forces were asked to help Japan recover from the harsh consequences of the war that the country suffered from. In coordination with the Japanese business executives, this team developed new measures to improve business processes, quality and productivity.

At the same time, the Civil Communications Section (CCS) worked on developing a management training program which sought to teach statistical control methods. Homer Sarasohn and Charles Protzman developed and taught this course during 1949-1950. Sarasohn recommended W. Edwards Deming for further training.

The Economic and Scientific Section (ESS) was also assigned with the task of improving Japanese managerial skills and Edgar McVoy brought Lowell Mellen to Japan to help in establishing the Training Within Industry (TWI) programs in 1951.

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Before the arrival of Mellen in 1951, the ESS group showed a training film about the TWI 3J principles- Job Instruction, Job Methods and Job Relations. This film was titled as 'Improvement in four steps'. Thus, this was the original introduction of Kaizen to Japan.

In 1960, the Emperor of Japan awarded the 2nd order Medal of the Sacred Treasure to Dr. Deming for introducing, pioneering and implementing Kaizen in Japan.

Kaizen was first adopted by Toyota when it implemented quality circles in its production process. A quality circle is a group of people who work on the same or similar project, who meet on a regular basis to identify, analyse and solve work-related issues, if any.

This led to the formation of the Toyota Production System, led by Taiichi Ohno, a former Executive Vice-President of Toyota Motor Company. This aimed to create a system of continuous improvement in quality, processes, productivity, management, and technology. This concept soon became popular across the

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country and contributed to the country's success on the global market.

In 1986, Masaaki Imai's introduced Kaizen to the rest of the world through his one of the bestselling books, named, Kaizen: The Key to Japan's Competitive Success.

Impact of Kaizen in the real world

Kaizen is a philosophy which can be applied in all spheres of our lives, be it our working life, social life or life at home.

Implementation of Kaizen assumes that there is always scope for improvement and one should not be completely satisfied with one's previous achievements and thus strive for better.

When companies start to apply the concept of Kaizen, it aims towards improvements in the people, products, and the processes followed in the company. Emphasis is placed upon the process- on the 'how' part of achieving the desired results. Employees who are best at their jobs suggest improvements that would help in resolving problems quickly and efficiently. These changes are

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then communicated to everyone in the team so that the rest of the team can also start applying Kaizen.

A study of 236 employees from three different facilities has shown that the adoption of Kaizen has led to job enrichment and a rise in motivation. Job satisfaction also leads to satisfaction in your personal life, thus enriching lives in personal and work spheres.

Kaizen has many benefits in the real world, some of which are listed below.

- The process of Kaizen helps in ensuring that any hindrances or threats to the project are identified in the initial stages of the project and solved immediately.
- It aims to reduce the waste of an organization by effective management. Since this method encourages the idea that there are always better ways of doing things, employees are asked to conduct brainstorming sessions to come up with new and innovative ideas to reduce waste. This also ensures people work in a team and reach a positive outcome.

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- Companies who implement Kaizen are adept at process-oriented thinking which means that the method of achieving a certain result is as important as the result itself.

Kaizen has proven to be immensely successful in Japanese business and is responsible in bringing Japan to the forefront in the global market. Because of such success in Japan, this philosophy is now being heavily implemented in organizations from other parts of the world. Since it focuses on improvement, it has great positive impacts to the businesses and also in other spheres of life.

Chapter 2 – Different Types Of Kaizen

Kaizen, If implemented in an organization, is the responsibility of all the employees and not just a few selected people.

There are different ways in which the Kaizen philosophy can be implemented in the workplace some of which are listed below.

Point Kaizen

It is one of the most commonly implemented types of Kaizen. It happens very quickly and usually without much planning. As soon as something is found broken or incorrect, quick and immediate measures are taken to correct the issues.

These measures are generally small, isolated and easy to implement, however they can have a huge impact.

In some cases, it is also possible that the positive effects of point kaizen in one area can reduce or eliminate benefits of point Kaizen in some other area. An example of Point Kaizen could be a

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shop inspection by a supervisor and he finds broken materials or other small issues, and then asks the owner of the shop to perform a quick Kaizen (5S) to rectify those issues.

System Kaizen

System Kaizen is accomplished in an organized manner and is devised to address system level problems in an organization.

It is an upper level strategic planning method which results in a number of planned Kaizen events over a long period of time. It is in contrast to point Kaizen which generally happens as a result of identification of a small issue which is resolved in a short period of time.

Line Kaizen

'Line' in this context refers to a structured spreading of Lean from point or discrete to the line. For example, Kaizen might be applied to a process (point), but also to the downstream process. Those two points constitute a Line Kaizen.

Another example might be in Lean implemented in procurement, but also being implemented in the planning department. Here in

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this case, planning is upstream from procurement and Kaizen is performed at those two points, which thus forms a line.

Plane Kaizen

It is the next upper level of Line Kaizen, in that several lines are connected together. In modern terminologies, this can also be described as value stream, where instead of traditional departments, the organization is structured into product lines or families and value streams. It can be visualized as changes or improvements made to one line being implemented to multiple other lines or processes.

Cube Kaizen

Cube Kaizen describes the situation where all the points of the planes are connected to each other and no point is disjointed from each other. This would resemble a situation where Lean has spread across the entire organization. Improvements are made up and down through the plane, or upstream or downstream, including the complete organization, suppliers and customers. This might require some changes in the standard business processes as well

Chapter 3 - 10 Steps to Success With Kaizen

Mr. Masaaki Imai is the first person to introduce Kaizen to the world outside of Japan. He used his book "Kaizen, the Key to Japan's Competitive Success" in order to help spread the word.

In this chapter we are going to look at 10 steps to success with the Kaizen art of continuous improvement.

Step One: Continue Learning

To start with, it is important that you realize that kaizen is unconventional. This means that it is not necessary to continue learning all our lives through.

Therefore, the basic idea is to realize that as you go along in life, you should always have to keep learning because new and

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innovational ideas are continuously popping up around every corner ... the world continues to grow, and so should your mind.

Step Two: Continue thinking about how YOU can do Something

People have a tendency to focus on the negative – are you a victim of “negative thinking?” Instead of focusing on the things you are not able to do, what you should be doing right now is focusing your mind on those things you can do. This is called being an optimistic forward thinker. Continue down this path and before you know it, you’ll be accomplishing something new that you never thought was possible.

Always keep your mind forward and focus on the outcome and instead of finding ways that the outcome cannot be accomplished, find ways that the outcome CAN be accomplished.

Step Three: Eliminate Those Excuses

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“I didn’t do this because ...” stop right there – stop making excuses. Making excuses is the biggest excuse in the book not to do something. Start by seeking answers to current practices by asking questions. Focus on the outcome and then start to take action. If you continue to try, you won’t get stuck – you will continuously go in a forward motion.

Step Four: Never give up and never strive for perfection

“Giving up” shouldn’t even be in your vocabulary. Giving up is failure and that is not acceptable. On the same level, you must never strive for perfection, because by doing so, you are only setting yourself up for failure. Once you have accomplished something up to a certain point, don’t just walk away, instead, keep at it until you have completed it all the way. Yes, of course, there may be problems along the way, but as you go along, you can make adjustments.

Step Five: Correct the mistakes

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As you're doing something, mistakes are probably going to pop up at unexpected times. If this happens, don't keep going.

Instead, find the solution to the mistake. Find out where you went wrong so that you can avoid that mistake the second time. It goes without saying "we learn from our own mistakes." If the mistake involves other people, then do everything you can do in order to correct it as quickly as possible.

Step Six: Don't forget about your intelligence

Don't just spend money for kaizen, you should also be using your intelligence. The key to this is action. Start off by learning everything you need to know, then take action based on what you have learned.

Step Seven: Challenges are learning opportunities

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Everyone has their own challenges they have to get through in life. When a challenge walks in your path, you should recognize it as a learning opportunity.

Honestly, if we didn't have these challenges, we probably wouldn't learn as much as we know today. Obstacles will pop up most everywhere when you least expect it. Just remember that everything you do will make you become a better person. Jump over those hurdles, learn to overcome them and be rewarded for those actions in the end. After one challenge goes away, another challenge may pop up in front of you, so be prepared to jump over that one as well.

Step Eight: Don't be afraid to ask "Why"

So many people are afraid of the question "why." Does that sound like you? Stop being afraid, there is nothing wrong with asking why.

By asking why, you will be able to discover what the base of the task is that you want to accomplish – it will help you understand

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it better. By understanding why something needs to be done, your chances of completing the task from start to finish will increase. Also, you should also consider the fact that by asking “why” and learning the reason behind it, you will be adding to your knowledge.

Step Nine: Group thinking is a good thing

Group thinking is something that you should think about. In our opinion, it is always better to seek the wisdom of ten people, than the knowledge of one person. You see, there is a tremendous amount of power in “group thinking.”

This could involve holding a meeting with a group of people and brainstorming together – this is how things get done. It is better to discuss a task with a group of people as this will increase the chances of the task getting done the right way – if you are getting the answers from one person that may not know how things are done, your chances of failing will increase.

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So, with those thoughts in mind, it is important that you remember to ask how something is done from people who have already gone through the process and completed – don't be afraid to ask a group of people for some help with a task that needs completing.

Step Ten: Kaizen is infinite

Here we are, at the final step – with this step, it is important that you realize that kaizen is infinite. This is a process of learning and growing gradually, steadily, and continually.

Often times, it will help to remember that life is a continuous journey, it isn't a destination – you must continue to move through it. If you practice the philosophy of continuous improvement, then you will be making the most of this journey we call life.

Basically, if you want to continue to improve your life, you can't sit there and the couch and expect "Mr. Improvement" to knock on your front door and automatically take place. Improvement in

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life, regardless of who you may be, is something that is going to take time and work – it takes a whole lot of action.

Chapter 4 - How to Create A Kaizen Culture In The Home

Just as much as kaizen or the philosophy of continuous improvement is used to have all employees at all company levels work together proactively in order to achieve regular, incremental improvements to the manufacturing process, so you can have all members of your household working together to strive for continual improvement of conditions in your home.

Don't have one person be the lord and master instead have all family members offer their suggestions in regular get together meetings and work with the suggestions that can be achieved. You will see that they atmosphere and the aura of your home improves and everyone will be much happier being part of a working process in a happy home.

Keep in mind that kaizen is part action plan and also part philosophy. As an action plan kaizen is all about organizing events that are focused on improving specific areas within the

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company. Your home is not a company but it too can constantly use improvement where the family can live together in harmony.

As a philosophy, kaizen is all about building a culture where all employees are actively engaged in suggesting and then implementing improvements to the company.

In your home once family member begin helping one another with the usual daily tasks you will see how much can be accomplished during the time it would take one family member to do a task. With children, who are of age to also help out, it can make a world of difference to teach them certain tasks and help them understand why they are necessary to accomplish. You will see that even children can be proud of what they have learned and glad that you taught them these tasks.

Kaizen works alongside standardized work since standardized work takes care of the best practices for a certain process and kaizen then find improvements for these processes.

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You can make use of a typical kaizen event even in your home. First of all you must set goals and see what needs improving in your home and then make sure everyone understand why these goals must be met.

Then you can also develop a plan for improvement and implement the improvements. Once a certain task has been accomplished have a family meeting so that you can get feedback from them as to how satisfied they are with what has been done and if they understand why it had to be done. This will give them the incentive to do other tasks and to always consider what improvements might be made.

It is interesting to note that kaizen as an action plan is just what actually develops kaizen as a philosophy. Then kaizen is applied as an action through continual and consistent successful kaizen events to also teach employees or as the case may be family members to think differently about their work or tasks.

Implement it just right and you can have a most harmonious home life.

Chapter 5 – Kaizen Methods & Benefits

As we have covered in the first part of this guide, The basic idea of Kaizen focuses on improving processes and products while at the same time making use of employee creativity to aid in defining the way procedures and systems can be improved.

Two of the overall advantages of this philosophy include increased productivity and the ability to maintain quality products and services. It is through teamwork that one benefits not through individualism. The kaizen idea is great for creating a work atmosphere that rewards everyone.

Another advantage of kaizen is the possibility of creating a tight-running business. Once you start practicing a method like this all of your employees will be thinking in a “conveyor belt” style and learning from one another as well as sharing ideas and suggestions for constant improvement.

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Kaizen helps to improve employee satisfaction by letting the workers look-over the processes and systems and make suggestions for further improvement.

Getting together for team meetings is a great way for employees to share their ideas and come up with more suggestions for improving quality.

Another great benefit of this kind of system is increased productivity because workers get more involved with the decision making process and they are eager to see that their suggestion work. It is also a great way to get new employees involved right from the start when they see that everyone works together as a team.

By implementing kaizen in your business you can also improve safety on the work floor.

This occurs when your implemented ideas help clean-up the areas where employees work and let them have better control of equipment and processes.

Once workers see how this all works once something goes wrong they will be ready to come together and brainstorm ideas on how to fix the situation instead of brooding about it individually. It is

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sort of like having a well-oiled machine in constant motion. It is good for employers because they can be sure that there will be less accident-related injuries that can result in decreased production and employees taking time off to handle medical emergencies.

Another thing you can be sure about is that if suddenly a new task emerges due to continued progress any employees who already know how to do these tasks will be ready to show others how they are done. In this way production doesn't have to stop for a learning process but can continue as workers learn as they go along and as they do.

You can be sure that kaizen will be of great benefit to you company, your employees and most important to your company's productivity.

Chapter 6 - Personal Kaizen

First of all what you want to do is to start your own personal kaizen and make a list of the areas you want to improve. You can make you day more efficient by timing your activities and you can make your day more productive by reaching the goals you want to achieve day in and day out.

Take a look at what you spend the most time on such as reading email, taking phone calls or writing reports. Let's say email takes the longest time to sort. This is another idea of kaizen – to start with the lowliest of tasks. You might consider introducing a folder flow or create an inbox and an urgent box. Set aside time for the urgent mail first and do it several times if there is a lot. Then leave the regular inbox to clear out when you have accomplished other tasks first.

What you want to do is to externalize thinking and “free” yourself for the tasks that must be accomplished in one working day. Even if you set aside other tasks for the following day you will have the satisfaction that what had to be done was done.

Sometimes as it happens when you are done with the important tasks you might look over the less important ones and perhaps

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some of them can be incorporated into one big task which makes it easier to take care of and requires less time.

Kaizen also focuses on eliminating waste. In a company situation it is important to have employees set up tool stations so that everything is easily within reach and no time is wasted looking for certain tools. By cutting out steps that waste time productivity can be greatly increased.

Another kaizen principle is standardization when you think about what the best practices are and do this before they are put into motion.

Once you are ready by already visualizing these practices you can have them implemented almost automatically. Once you see how these practices work then you can consider if any of them need any improvement and work on that next.

It can be a good idea to adopt one new practice each month. After a while you will see which of these practices become outdated and move on to another. Make sure you keep track of them and soon you will see that as amazing as it seems there might even be some time each day to sit back and reflect on the working process and catch your breath.

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You want to have everything running smoothly which greatly soothes the mind and then you can concentrate on the more difficult tasks which might be still causing some problems.

Keep in mind that kaizen is a system for introducing process improvements and the most important thing is to use these systems to make your life much easier.

You can get more work completed from happy and satisfied employees than from unhappy and stressed employees. Once employees are also helping one another to understand certain processes and everyone is learning as they go along you can be sure that production won't stop. This will also free you up to concentrate on the tasks that are of most importance to you.

Conclusion

Congratulations on making it to the end of this guide on the philosophy of Kaizen.

You may be surprised to know that the majority of people who start reading a book never complete it. If you've made it this far, you're definitely interested in Kaizen and all the benefits it has to offer.

Here are some ways in which you can use the Kaizen philosophy to achieve your ultimate goals.

Motivating yourself

There is a saying, "the mind is strong, but the flesh is weak!" Start by associating with people who are of a positive mindset, people who can give you good advice and good information.

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Use what you have learned from your mistakes. You can use visual stimuli, like a poster showing a place, or sporting event that you are planning to visit in the future. You can also use a calendar and mark the days off and show how you are progressing towards your goal.

I have used this particular method very successfully myself. If I had not used this method, I doubt very much that I would have achieved my life-long ambition of attending a major world sporting event and travelling the West Indies on a Cruise Ship.

Anticipating obstacles

We all know that is very difficult to get rid of old habits and at the same time, new habits are difficult to keep in place. It is all about keeping strong!

It is very important that we realize that we will slip now and then and that we have a plan in place to anticipate problems that may occur. That is life for you and we have to be prepared for some things not to go as planned. An example of life throwing the

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unexpected at you is that during the time of planning and saving for my dream holiday, I landed in hospital for two weeks without an income! I just had to make adjustments and work a little extra time in to make up for that loss of income.

Strengthen Any Potential Weaknesses In Your Plan

You need to learn to turn excuses into opportunities. This will make you stronger. There are many things in life that set us up for failure. Financial issues, social interactions, transport and a myriad of other things. These prevent us from reaching our goals, if we allow them to. Try and turn them into strengths and come up with alternatives rather than giving up completely.

Be YOUR best self

Kaizen's Philosophy, is to get each person to be the best that they can, one day at a time.

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Stop comparing yourself to others. Just be the best that you can at everything you do. Do things in your time, improving day by day. Have that mental strength to stick it out when you want to quit and know that at the end of the day, you have given your all to reach your goal.