

Choosing One Word for 2015: Lessons from a Lion Tamer

Over a century ago, a lion tamer named Clyde Beatty learned a lesson that is so important that it could impact almost every area of your life today.

The Lion Tamer Who Survived

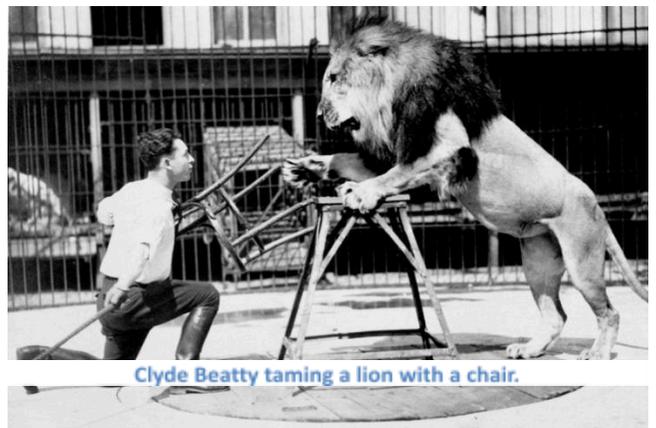
Clyde Beatty was born in Bainbridge, Ohio in 1903. When he was a teenager, he left home to join the circus and landed a job as a cage cleaner. In the years that followed, Beatty quickly progressed from a lowly cage boy to a popular entertainer. Beatty became famous for his “fighting act” in which he would tame fierce wild animals. At one point, Beatty’s act included a segment where he brought lions, tigers, cougars, and hyenas into the circus ring all at once and tamed the entire group.

But here’s the most impressive feat of all: In an era when the majority of lion tamers died in the ring, Beatty lived into his 60s, surviving every single instance being in the ring with lions. How did he manage to survive? Beatty was the first lion tamer to bring a chair into the circus ring.

The Whip and The Chair

The classic image of a lion tamer is one of an entertainer holding a whip and a chair. The whip gets all of the attention, but it’s mostly for show. In reality, it’s the chair that does the important work.

When a lion tamer holds a chair in front of the lion’s face, the lion tries to focus on all four legs of the chair at the same time. With its focus divided, the lion becomes confused and is unsure about what to do next. When faced with so many options, the lion chooses to freeze and wait instead of attacking the man holding the chair.



Avoid the Fate of the Lion

How often do you find yourself in the same position as the lion? How often do you have something you want to achieve (i.e. study harder, be on a sports team, be a musician, hang out with friends, get an A on a test), only to end up confused by all of the options in front of you and never make progress? The end result is that we feel like we are focused on too many things and maybe on the wrong things. We may start to be overwhelmed, take less action, and make less progress.

Commit to One Thing

Anytime you find the world waving a chair in your face, remember this: commit to one thing.

In the beginning, you don’t even have to succeed – just get started. Starting before you feel ready is one of the habits of successful people. Sometimes, you just need to commit, and start doing it. You have the ability to focus, you just need to choose where to direct it, instead of acting like the lion and dividing your attention among the four legs of the chair.

Stop Gazing at the Chair

Life isn’t a dress rehearsal. Whether you know it or not, you’re already in the ring. We all are. Most of the time, we sit quietly, gazing at the chair in front of us, silently debating about which leg is the most important. If you have somewhere you want to go, something you want to accomplish, someone you want to become... then make a decision. If you’re clear about where you want to go, the rest of the world will either help you get there. You don’t have to do it all at once, but there is *something* that you need to do now. Something that’s calling you, something that’s important to you, something that you’re destined to do. I don’t know what it is, but you do. Swipe the chair out of the way and choose it.

James Clear writes about science-based ideas for living a better life and building habits that stick.

Story adapted from article by James Clear. The original article can be found at: <http://jamesclear.com/how-to-focus>.

Image Credit: <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/deepLink?collection=oasis&uniqueId=h0u02153>.

What now?

Answer the following questions:

- How was 2014?

Objective: I will reflect upon my goals for 2015 and select one word on which I will focus.

Items Needed:

- Photocopy of story/graphic organizer (copies included)
- Students will need a writing utensil
- Markers and colored pencils (optional)
- Overhead projector/sound for short video clip, if time permits (optional)

Lesson:

1. Write the objective on the board.
2. Students may sit anywhere. They will need a writing utensil.
3. Explain the importance of reflecting about our past year, and looking to the future to think about where we can grow more in this coming year. If you need some guidance, consider this script:

Successful students and people regularly reflect about how live, school, family and priorities are going. It is important to review how we are doing, and consider how we can improve for the future. Adults do this all the time. Today, I am going to ask you to think about how this past year went, and where you want to focus in 2015. In fact, one area where I am going to focus is _____.

4. Distribute the story of Clyde Beatty, a lion tamer. The story's main idea is that when we spread our focus too many places, we struggle to sustain our goals. Please read it aloud however you want – ask for volunteers or you can read it aloud to students – your choice.
5. Ask students: why do you think we read this story? What does this have to do with 2015? (Answer: *setting one goal will allow us to be more successful and stay focused.*)
6. Have students brainstorm how 2014 was and where they want to focus in 2015. Ideas and phrases are ok.
7. Once students have brainstormed how they want to be their best in 2015, prompt students to think about to what **one word** they can commit for 2015. This word should help them be their best. Ask students:

What word do I need to help me be my best?

8. Have students select one word for 2015. Direct students to the word walls below the brainstorm. You may want to project this on your overhead projector. There is no right or wrong answer, and their word might not be listed. **But:** it must only be one word.
9. Create a list of the words that are selected in your group. Once students have selected their word, please have them write it on a piece of paper for your entire group. You will pass this piece of paper into Cathy Hunt at the end of the day – we'll be doing something with this information next.
10. Provide students with an index card. Direct them to write their one word in nice big, bold letters in the middle of their index card. Encourage students to decorate, color and include images that relate to the one word and what it will help them achieve in 2015.
11. As a team, consider what you want to do with the cards. If you have a device, please take some pictures of students with their one word card. You may want to hang the cards in the pod (which Steve is happy to help with if that's what you want to do) or in your classrooms. Any option is fine, as long as they are being shared.
12. If you have more time, you may want to show this short drawing animation video of setting and achieving goals (it is only 2:30): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cCiqbSJ9fg>