

KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

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Bottom Up!

Our patented personal success system will bring you love, wealth and happiness in 30 years or less – GUARANTEED!

By GLENN CAMPBELL

There are two ways to approach life: top-down and bottom-up.

Top-down is when you decide what your goals should be then do whatever is necessary to achieve them. You may decide to build a castle: You design it first, then start putting the pieces together to make it happen. If you encounter an obstacle, you plow right through it, because nothing's going to stand between you and your goals.

Bottom-up is when you don't have specific goals. Instead, you examine the tools and resources at your disposal and ask yourself, "What can I do with these?" You might build a castle, or you might end up with something you never expected or planned on. It all depends on what opportunities arise.

What do you want to be when you grow up?... Carpenter? Doctor? Football player? Movie star? Most people decide this question early on, then they lock themselves into a path they think is going to get them there. That's the top-down approach.

The problem is, the path doesn't always work. A lot of things can change after you make your plan, rendering it obsolete or much more costly than you anticipated. For high-risk goals like football player and movie star, there can be some formidable obstacles along the way, and chances are high that one of them is going to stop you.

Another risk is that you achieve your goal but then find it doesn't make you as happy as you thought it would. If you've never been a movie star, you don't know what it is really like until you get there, in which case it may be too late to change course.

The bottom-up approach reduces these risks by eliminating the fixed goals. It's okay to have general desires and dreams but unwise to get too committed to any one. Instead, you should analyze the actual tools and resources in your possession. What am I good at? What is someone willing to pay me for right now? What window of opportunity has just opened up? What special privilege can I get away with in my current circumstances?

When someone starts out as an office boy with no plans but ends up as the chief executive of the company, that's a bottom-up success story, but more often bottom-up involves rapid shifts in direction and strategy. Instead of slowly rising in an organizational pyramid, the bottom-up navigator is likely to jump pyramids and change course whenever a better opportunity appears. In time, he may be far ahead of anyone who took the straight-line path.

The thing about opportunities is they are rarely predictable, so the bottom-up approach requires you to be flexible. If you're working as a carpenter, and a realistic opportunity arises to become a movie star, you want to have the freedom to pursue it. The more

committed you are to a certain path, the more opportunities you have to let pass. If you are really trapped, you may not even see the opportunities anymore, because you know you can't follow them.

Another word for bottom-up is "opportunism." Opportunists have had a bad rap because some of them prey on people's weaknesses, but opportunism doesn't have to be so mercenary. It's merely a matter of letting serendipity be your guide rather than following an immutable plan.

You may think that opportunists have no focus, but that's not necessarily true. Even if you're willing to go with the flow, you still have to make decisions from time to time. You have to have a moral sense of where to go and where not. Having the opportunity to make pornography doesn't mean you should do it. You still have to evaluate whether an avenue is healthy for you.

The risk of top-down is that you end up making pornography as a way to get to your fixed goal—because every obstacle has to be overcome at any price. People with fixed goals can do a lot of treacherous and unclean things to try to get ahead of their competitors.

Opportunists would simply turn away from an obstacle. If one avenue is blocked, you shift seamlessly to another, to a place where there are no competitors because you're the only one who saw the opening.