

By Barry Farber

It's The Challenge That Builds Us

What stays at rest, rusts. So, to stay flexible, to stay alive, we must keep moving. This is true for every form of life from the very smallest amoeba—that dies if it remains stationary—to every form of life on our planet. We are, whether aware of it or not, in a constant battle to build up our defenses and stay healthy. And that is how we, and all species, have adapted and evolved.

Even so, something appears to be happening to our ability to take on challenges. We are fast becoming a society that tries to avoid all efforts, all fights, even when it comes to our inner warrior of health—the immune system.

A theory called the “hygiene hypothesis” (from the book, *Superhuman*, by Robert Winston and Lori Oliwenstein) states that, “Scientists are finding that children (who are) exposed

to more infections when they are young—such as children with older siblings, those who go to daycare at an early age, or those who live in less than hygienic conditions—have much lower rates of asthma, allergies, and autoimmune diseases.”

In fact, *Superhuman* makes the point that such illnesses actually seem to be the result of an immune system that is not being challenged—an immune system that has nothing better to do. By trying to keep the environment sanitized and homogenized, people have weakened their own immune systems. “We’ve taken away all the bacteria that may be necessary,” the book purports, “for us to maintain a balance of the immune system.”

Still, no matter the cost, society seems to go to great lengths to avoid getting dirty. It’s as if people don’t want to fight for what they need, or they look for the easy way out of problems. But when we are not challenged, when

we are not confronted with things that may be difficult but stimulate growth, that’s when we tend to get complacent and lazy. Then, like the immune system that causes illness instead of fighting it, we have nothing better to do.

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience for which you must stop and look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt



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It’s easy to see how that is simply not working. Keeping the environment sterile doesn’t give the body a chance to learn to fight the bacteria that do attack it, so people then become allergic to things that ordinarily wouldn’t bother them at all.

It doesn’t do us any good to avoid every potentially harmful situation—we need to get out and play in the mud, to get our hands dirty, to build calluses for the hard work ahead: living. That means learning to fall and then get right back up—even though you know that you’re going to fall again—understanding that each time you do, you get up stronger.

Any way you look at it, you are moving forward in life. Even standing still, you’re still aging and your life is still moving into the future. What we do with this short time on earth is up to each and every one of us. And anytime we try something new, challenging, difficult, or frightening, there is a chance of falling.

But there are two important things I’ve learned over the years that are helpful to think about. One: how you fall when moving forward makes all the difference; and two: it matters what you do when you get back up. ▲

Barry Farber is the best selling author of 11 books, translated into over 20 foreign languages. He was rated the “hottest speaker of the year” by *Successful Meetings Magazine* and is a frequent guest on QVC, marketing innovative products. Watch Barry’s new video *Breaking through Barriers* at www.barryfarber.com or email him at barry@barryfarber.com.