

# KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

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# TAKING CONTROL

*The key to solving your problems is usually in your mind.*

By GLENN CAMPBELL

Everyone has problems. Sometimes they are severe: war, divorce, illness, unemployment. At times, we seem to be the victims of forces beyond our control. Even if our own misjudgment got us into this mess, that doesn't mean our own actions can get us out.

But still we have to try. As long as you live, you have to struggle for the best possible outcome regardless of your situation. If you learn you have untreatable cancer and only six months to live, you still have a responsibility to make the best of it. You have to see cancer not as a curse but an opportunity. An opportunity for what? That's for you to figure out.

Most of us face more mundane, non-life-threatening problems, but the challenge is the same: how to make the most of what we have. At this moment, you have both burdens and gifts and only a limited time left on Earth to work with them. What will you become?

In that struggle, your only enemy is yourself. All that stands between you and the "success" of making the most of yourself are blocks within you that you yourself enforce and maintain.

A block is a potential approach to a problem that you refuse to consider due to your artificial expectations about what life owes you. Blocks come in many guises, but they are usually expressed in the form: "I can't do X because of Y."

For example: "I can't fly overseas because I can't stand sitting in an airplane that long." Result: You never go. Or: "I can't quit drinking because I don't have the willpower." Result: You don't even try. Or: "I can't travel without my personal physician because of my delicate constitution." X and Y can be an

endless number of things, leading to all sorts of artificial requirements in health, diet, lifestyle, fashion and entertainment.

If you collect enough of these "I can't" restrictions, soon all avenues for solving your problems are cut off. You feel trapped, but it's not your problems themselves that are trapping you as much as your refusal to consider some potential solutions.

You can argue that some things are non-negotiable. You wouldn't seriously endanger yourself or the people you care about, but nearly everything else is negotiable: your home, your possessions, your public image and all the silly restrictions you have placed on your own behavior.

The key to dealing successfully with your problems is replacing your "I can't's" with "I cans". You *can* live without most of the things you thought were necessities. You *can* do many things you thought yourself incapable of. You *can* endure more pain than you imagined and still come out okay.

You know your self-restrictions are dubious when other people are functioning perfectly fine without them. Others are flying overseas and living without addiction, so why can't you?

That's where the excuses come in. You insist your situation is special, that different rules apply to you. You have sensitive skin, fragile self-esteem, an inadequate upbringing and a special lack of willpower. That's why you can't do what others can.

"I can't do X because of Y," is almost always based on flawed reasoning and distorted data. In most cases, you haven't experimented much or pushed yourself very far. You may have had one or two bad experiences with Y and simply given

up, probably because you could afford to. It was the lazy way. Instead of facing your fears and using your creativity to overcome the challenge, you wrote an imaginary rule for yourself and started blocking yourself in with it.

This may work okay until a crisis comes along, like running out of money, and your elaborate structure of "I can't's" becomes unsustainable. Something has to give! Either you'll give up some of your cherished restrictions or the crisis will break you. If you fail to change, real events may force change upon you, but it is always better to be pro-active and do it on your own.

It is amazing how many people die clutching their old dysfunctional habits until the bitter end. If someone has only six months to live, you'd think they'd give up some of their preconditions and actually *live* those six months. Instead, they cling in misery to every one of their original demands, as if they would be answered in the afterlife.

Dealing with problems and getting the most out of life is all about overcoming your own inertia. Are you going to control your problems or let them control you? Taking control of what happens to you really means taking control of yourself. It means recognizing that some barriers you thought were real were only in your mind and thus can be stepped right through.

You can't make cancer go away through force of will, but you can change the lens through which you are seeing it. At will, you can change what you expect from life and the very definition of what misfortune is.

Not a curse but an opportunity.

—G.C.