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# THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD



WHEN I WAS A KID growing up in a tenement section of the Bronx, my mother said something I will never forget. I was talking to her about what I wanted to be when I was an old guy of 25. She turned to me and in a serious, quiet voice said that only one thing mattered in any successful life: "You must realize that you are the most important thing in the world. You've got to believe this if you're ever going to get anywhere on this earth," she said. "You've also got to realize the vastness of the world. No matter how important you are, you're only one small person in a world where everybody believes he is just as important as you."

It was good advice, and I've tried to follow it. I remember two years back when I wanted to do an album of songs, some of them new arrangements of old-timers. This was during the period I was still known exclusively as a rock 'n' roll singer.

In trying to apply my mother's philosophy, I made the decision along with my record company to take the money earned from "Splish Splash" and "Queen of the Hop," and pour it back into myself through this album of pop material. Although the record-company executives weren't as crazy about the idea as they might have been, I believed it was the right thing to do. And that particular album just happened to be responsible for the sudden skyrocketing of my career.

One of the songs I included was Kurt Weill's "Mack the Knife." Between the album and singles of that song which came out later, I sold more than a million and took that first important step out of rock 'n' roll into really adult singing. "Mack the Knife" proved one thing: you've got to believe in yourself enough so that no one can force you to back down to where you get stuck in the crowd.

When it comes to planning, I've got a mind like an IBM machine. Nearly everything I do is part of a master plan to make me the most important entertainer in the world. I'm not a spontaneous human being. Show me any top entertainer or top business executive, and I'll show you a guy who has mapped out his life from the very start.



*Frankly, says this teen-age idol, it's me! Here's how he explains his startling philosophy of life*

By **BOBBY DARIN**  
 as told to  
 Marya Saunders  
 and Robert Gaines

Sometimes, though, I can go overboard by pushing too hard. I've got to watch that streak of fake in me. For example, I like to play up ordinary things with tricks, gags, stunts. When I walk into a strange room, I usually try to cover my nervousness by shouting and playing to the entire room.

This is a weakness. Maybe when I'm a bit more grown-up, I'll be able to cut out this "wingadingding" nonsense and just walk into a room straight.

Lord knows, I don't expect anybody to think the way I do. Nor do I figure that I'm the guy to tell people, especially teen-agers, what to do with their lives. But the trouble with the world, I think, is that there aren't enough egotists who really think they're important. There aren't enough individuals—tough-minded, independent thinkers who are self-centered enough to stick to their own ideas.

The rock 'n' roll craze is a perfect example of group thinking. It hit the country like a tidal wave in 1953. Suddenly, we were flooded to the eyeballs with rock 'n' roll. I was writing a few songs that year while trying to break in as a pop singer. I took a ballad I was excited about over to a friend who was a music publisher.

The publisher took one look at it, shrugged his shoulders, and said sourly, "Who needs it? All the kids are buying these days is rock 'n' roll."

I took the song home, changed it in about 15 minutes to a rock 'n' roll beat with a new name, and mailed it off to the same publisher. A day later, I got a call. "Great, kid," he said. "This is the kind of stuff we're looking for. Send us more!"

So how are you going to think independently in this rock 'n' roll world? First you've got to have something upstairs to think with. This means you've got to listen and learn. You've got to know as much as possible about the world.

I get frightened when I bump into things I don't know about, and this is what's wrong with kids today. They get scared, too, but instead of learning about the problem, they slip into conformity, where others think for them.

An awful lot of American parents aren't helping the problem, either. They're so busy giving their children the best



of everything that they're robbing them of the ability to do things on their own.

The way I see it, parents ought to be guideposts to a kid. They should direct the youngster and teach him, not force him into a set pattern.

For example, if my mother had seen me rolling on the floor when I was little, she wouldn't have worried: if that's what I wanted to do, I could do it. If, on the other hand, there was broken glass on the floor, she would have warned me and told me that I would get cut and it would hurt if I didn't stop.

She wouldn't just swat me on the head and say, "Stop that. It's stupid." If I stayed on the floor and cut myself, I had nobody to blame but me. My mother showed me the way but let me learn by myself. She didn't squeeze the individualism out of me that way.

In all fairness, I've got to say that many kids don't give their parents a fair shake. You hear a constant wail from teens that "my father doesn't talk to me." But how would the kids know? They're not even listening; they're too busy trying to get the car out of Dad for Saturday night.

Part of education is making flubs. The first song I sold was a flop called "My First Real Love." But that didn't stop me.

The real blunder with most kids I meet is not that they make these flubs, but that they don't make them often enough. Their theory is: why try for something hard? Why try to be tops when you can join the crowd of second-raters?

Learning, I find, is a continuous process, and a great way to learn is from people. I can sometimes learn more having dinner with friends in New York than I can from five volumes of philosophy. You don't have

to think like a guy to learn from him or to like him. But to be his friend, you've got to accept the fact that he can be different from you.

A famous entertainer, for example, is a good friend of mine, but we're as different as Fabian and Crosby. Once, in a night club in Los Angeles, I saw him wasting his time sitting at a table after the show with a small army of people. He didn't know half of them, and they were only there because he was famous and not just Joe Blow from Hohokus.

I walked over to him. "Waddya need all these characters for?" I said bluntly. He looked at me, surprised and hurt. I suddenly had the feeling that I had asked a painful question—and there was no reason for my doing it. That's the way he is; I'm the way I am.

I'm not like him or Sinatra or Como. I'm just Bobby Darin—an individual—but I can still be friends with all of them.

Sure, I've got my faults. I'm the ego-maniac you read about. I'm an honest guy, but I can sometimes be cruel. I try to be completely objective about myself. But in the meantime, I'm a guy with some very definite ideas about just how my life should be lived.

I think that I come first. But when I say "Jump," the fewer people that jump, the better I like it!

I'm not saying you should be like me. I'm only saying you should be exactly like you and not try to be like anybody else.

I know that I'm the most important guy in the world! It would be a better world if you felt the same way about you.



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