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# ***Your Bottom Line***

By Dr. Henry J. Oles, Cr.Photos.

## **Learned helplessness**

If you expect failure, your expectation will undoubtedly be satisfied.

Too many professional photographers experience business setbacks and become afraid to move forward and capitalize on new opportunities. They adopt a "nothing good ever happens to me" attitude.

"Learned helplessness" can wreak havoc with otherwise enterprising studio owners. A famous psychology experiment helps us better understand this phenomenon. Scientists locked dogs into separate pens and applied electric shocks to the cage floors. Initially, the animals attempted to escape, but after failing time after time, they simply crouched in the corners and accepted their fate.

The dogs continued to stay in the cages, however, even when the psychologists opened the doors. With an escape route clearly visible, the animals were convinced they could not leave their painful environments.

The relationship of this experiment to human behavior is obvious. Many business careers have been subjected to "painful shocks" with no apparent cause or method of escape. Sometimes it's easy to give up when it seems that every alternate route is a dead end.

For example, I have a friend who operates his business every day firmly believing that he is one of life's victims and nothing will ever "click". He talks about the "dark cloud" that follows him around. I've tried many encouragements to break his vicious cycle, but his negative disposition closes off the possibility of success. Such an attitude can develop at any time in life and is extremely difficult to reverse.

The feeling of impending doom strikes all business owners from time to time. Photographers must accept failures and frustrations as inevitable aspects of any profession and be optimistic about the future. Learned helplessness can cause studio owners to overlook profitable opportunities, until the business finds itself in a worsening position, confirming the self-fulfilling prophesy of failure.

Ask successful enterprisers in the photc

industry to describe how they made it. If they are honest, they will tell you of many problems and crises along the way—and possibly about their concerns for the future. No one can be sure what will happen next, but business "winners" continue to push forward.

If studio owners set their sights on realistic goals and approach their work each day with enthusiasm, zest, and willingness to adapt to change, success will follow. The key is knowing and accepting that, for the most part, you control your own destiny.

For example, if your photographs are not selling, realize that it is your fault. Investigating alternatives and changing your methods can produce profitable work. If others nearby can make it, then you too should be generating a healthy bottom line.

The next time you feel as though you are trapped in a painful cage, stop and take an objective look around. An open door to success may be in front of you. Reach out—grab your opportunities. ☐