

I Can't

"I can't." This is an expression that is vilified in our minds beginning at a young age. Every time a young child announces this decision they are corrected. The first adult that hears it asks them whether or not they have even tried. Generally, this confrontation will result in the child giving their task another attempt, until their attention span moves on to something else. The adult will see this, and chuckle to themselves with the knowledge that this is just a child who has yet to learn the art and virtue of perseverance. By the time this child comes of age, however, they will have been told by adults more times than they can count that there is no such thing as "can't."

It is interesting, then, to think about how many adults seem to proclaim this expression in their lives. Is it because, like many things that adults tell children, they are simply telling the child a general rule that children must follow, but can be broken once one is grown? Or is it because these adults are simply repeating what they were told as children without thoroughly examining what the phrase, "I can't," truly suggests?

If you confronted an adult that claims they can't do something with the same question about whether or not they have tried, the answer will almost always be yes. Adults have learned enough to know that it is unreasonable to say they can't until they have at least tried once. Therefore, the real question that we should be asking in response is, "have you tried EVERYTHING?" Have you exhausted every possible option, scenario, combination, tool, and approach? I do not simply refer to the ones that you knew of at the time you decided to undertake your task. I mean, have you also researched possibilities that you hadn't known about? Have you determined whether or not there is another person out there that has performed the exact same task you are attempting, or at least something similar? Have you exhausted this research? Have you read every book, blog, journal, magazine, bathroom stall, and website? If the answer to any one of these questions is "no," then go back and try again. Because you don't truly know if you can do something until you have tried absolutely everything.

The fact of the matter is, that rarely, if ever, is the answer to all of these questions "yes." Therefore, what is it that people actually mean when they say, "I can't?" A more accurate, but more verbose, way of saying it would be, "I don't care about or want enough this task or the resultant benefits of it in order to do all that is necessary to achieve it." I was told a countless number of times by people during my Month of Marathons that they couldn't run one marathon, let alone 31 straight. Every now and then, when I had time, I would discuss what they said. We would jointly conclude that if something they cared about depended on them doing so, it would be possible. The

most common example I used was, "if someone had a gun to your child's head, do you think you could do it then?" Therefore, the phrase, "I can't," denotes a lack of investment as opposed to a lack of potential or ability. I do not mean to say that every person I had this conversation with should have had the motivation to run marathons. It was something that I had decided to do, not them. I merely wanted to express to them what I am expressing here: given the right purpose, and enough time, you can.

What happens if someone has said they can't, we have asked them if they've done everything, and the rare case happens, and they honestly say, "yes?" Do we then concede that they can't? Nope. If everything in existence has been attempted enough to determine that it won't work, then congratulations, you have been awarded the honor of being the person who must invent the method. Or the tool. Or determine the right combination. Whether or not you will, once again, boils down to how much you care, and time. It may end up being that a person ends up trying for their entire life. But, I suggest removing the phrase, "I can't," from your lexicon and replacing it with, "I can't YET." Do this, so that you don't risk being on your death bed saying, "I didn't."