One of my all-time favorite quotes is “If we always do what we have always done, we will always get what we always got.” I think I heard the quote back in the 90s at a sales manager’s conference back in the day when I was in the corporate world pursuing the dream of making lots of money and buying lots of expensive toys. The source of the quote is unknown, but the validity and truth that it holds is just as powerful today as it was the first time I heard it.

Woven into that brief quote are themes of dedication, purpose, direction, and goals. As we begin a new semester, maybe you are evaluating how last semester turned out. If you are less than happy with your results, perhaps the quote can give you a nudge to do a few things differently. If your fall 2015 was awesome, then perhaps the quote will affirm for you that you have good solid goals, you used your time wisely, and you merely need to continue on the current course.

So how did I find those specific themes in such a brief quote? “If we always do” seemingly indicates taking some course of action. To “do” means we pursue a direction, or choose to put some effort in a certain direction. If you didn’t make the grades that you want, then evaluating your direction of balance in class time, study time, extra-curricular time might be in order.

The quote includes “what we have always done” which leaves one to speculate that “what” represents some purpose, as in doing “x” on purpose. One could easily question if any of us do anything on purpose these days, if you walk around the campus and count the number of people using their “devices” and not really interacting with or aware of life outside their device. Do you know why you do what you do? Do you follow the crowd or live your life and make choices intentionally?

Making choices to live intentionally requires dedication to a cause, to something greater than oneself, to deciding that our lives matter. Inherent in accepting this requires that we set the direction of our lives and follow that vision, even when others try to influence us to veer off course. Sometimes this direction-setting business can be lonely, especially when our stated direction may seem to others as too lofty or too “big” for someone like “you.” You know, there will always be people ready to burst your dreams.

I also think the quote infers that we have specific goals: short-term, intermediate, and long-term. Goals have this amazing property to give us a sense of direction, purpose, and urgency. In effect, goals serve as markers to allow us to chart our progress. Without seeing some progress, it is easy to get discouraged and to simply take whatever comes our way.

So what will you do this semester? Will you do the same as last semester or will you challenge yourself to go beyond even your wildest expectations? I hope you choose the latter!