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Self- Discipline

Self-discipline is the rejection of instant gratification in favor of something better. It is the giving up of instant pleasure and satisfaction for a good opportunity or reward that is far more important and valuable in the future. It is the ability to go through the rigor of repeating an activity again and again until your skill or competence increases.

Self-discipline was once the core characteristic of an American. It remained so for 300 years. But now it is becoming a bit of a rare commodity. Losing that one trait will change the fate of a person or a nation.

The reality is that most people do not master self-discipline. This is true even when faced with a need to create massive change or to follow a strict course of action with a consequence of dying if one does not become disciplined. This phenomenon has been studied over and over again with the same results. Even people who face death if they do not make substantial changes in their lifestyles

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often fail to make the necessary changes. For instance, Dr. Edward Miller, the dean of the medical school and CEO of the hospital at Johns Hopkins University, observed, “If you look at people after coronary artery bypass grafting two years later, 90 percent of them have not changed their lifestyle.” (Deutschman 2007). It is not an exaggeration to say that the quality of your life and health rely on self-discipline.

The achievement of your dreams and goals also relies on your ability to master this critical component of success. If you want to develop the ability to create long-term and replicable success you must develop discipline. That means that whatever you have to do in order to increase your skill or competence and achieve results needs to be repeated again and again. You must discipline yourself (or others) with intention and effort until the behaviors manifest and become self-perpetuating.

Did you go to the grocery store this week and get food?

In all likelihood someone in your home goes shopping every week. Let’s say it’s you. If you do it, you eat. If you don’t, then you pay a price. You go instead of watching TV or sleeping or reading the comics. Why? Well, you just do.

And that’s how it must be. If you want to eat you simply have little alternative but to go. You intentionally manifest the behavior of getting up, getting into the car, and going shopping until it becomes a habit and something you no longer think about. It’s now a normal part of your routine.

Self-discipline drives success. You must repeat the target behavior, whatever it is, every day until it becomes second nature. Until it becomes a habit. Automatic. It is about behaving your way to success.

What is the attitude of the person with self-discipline? “I am in charge of my behavior.” Self-discipline is the attitude of achievement. “I do it every day. I control my behavior. I decide what I want in my life. I run my life.” You become your behavior not

your intentions and by doing so become not only a better human being but a higher achiever.

Self-discipline is one of the most critical aspects of achievement that we will talk about. It is a building block that we will add to. It certainly is not the beginning and the end. You can have self-discipline and fail. You can make it harder to be disciplined because you lack emotion or a deeper understanding of why you do what you do. You can have self-discipline and never do anything that matters. Those are all possible results. But, without self-discipline there is no achievement. There is no success.

You can win a game without self-discipline. You can't win a Super Bowl, the World Series, or the World Cup without it.

Self-discipline is best wrapped up in one word: "Until." You simply do whatever it is *until* it is done.

Perseverance and renewing genesis are important components of self-discipline.

Perseverance is the driving factor of self-discipline. To persevere means to refuse to stop. It means to maintain a state of unbending and unyielding movement toward an outcome. If you don't give up at something you attempt, then you can't fail. If something doesn't work out as planned the first time, then you must try and try again using different methods to achieve the result that you are looking for.

Perseverance requires placing thought (objective analysis of what needs to be done) over feelings (I'm tired). You must learn to follow your thoughts instead of your feelings. You master your feelings and manifest your thoughts. You will achieve at a higher level if you develop a strong awareness of what your feelings are doing to your actions and if you can move when your body asks you to be inert.

Renewing genesis means beginning each day or each part of the day without having to think about pursuing your goal. You simply begin again where you left off. Yesterday you wrote pages

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248 to 254 in your new book. Today you write 255 to 261. It makes no difference what else is on your to-do list or what comes up during the day. You decide to do it and then you do it until it's done.

You never allow yourself to think, "I wonder if I should . . . today." That sentence leads to eternal failure. When do you find the time? You prioritize it. You get it done. Everything else comes next.

You *do*, because you decided you would. You trust yourself and you teach yourself that you are worthy of trust by doing what you decide to do.

This is so important to understand: If you can't rely on yourself to follow through on your own decisions . . . if you can't trust yourself to follow through, then you will fail. You can have all the positive attitude on the planet and never move. Without decisions and follow-through, you fail. Those who don't ever decide and discipline themselves to carry through on their decisions cannot achieve at a high level.

Decision followed by action creates self trust. When you create self trust, others begin to trust you and want to be around you because you make things happen. You begin to build momentum toward greater success.

Decide and do until.

Question: I'm an idea person and a great starter. I get big and promising ideas and start taking action toward implementing them. But then I usually get so excited by my next great idea that I'm off chasing that before I finish the one I was working on. What is the secret to finishing a job?

One common reason people don't stick with something until it is done is that they don't believe they actually can finish it. People

won't persevere or give their best effort if they don't believe that they are capable of achieving more. Does this describe you?

Do you think that if a task requires too much effort it won't be worth it?

Do you consistently avoid working any harder than you have to?

Do you believe that massive success is only for the truly talented and lucky, so there's no point in giving your best?

It sounds like you (in the company of most people) are capable of several times more than you have achieved so far. Do you have trouble believing that, or do you feel a twinge in your gut that confirms the truth of that statement? If you really don't believe you are capable of more, then you are already working at your current maximum level of excellence. However, if you are willing to just consider that you're capable of more, you are in the right mind-set to change your life.

Research shows that people perform better when they believe they can perform better and when they believe they are in control of their performance. The first step is a willingness to just consider that you're capable of more.

Take a moment to think about your accomplishments thus far, and be honest with yourself about the things you could have done better. You fail to finish things. What else is there? Perhaps you shied away from increased responsibility at your job and got passed over for a promotion or you gave up on making your dream a reality because it seemed too difficult.

In order to change your behavior, you need to first acknowledge that your current circumstances are generally due to the actions you've taken so far, and more importantly the quality and intensity of effort you've put forth. Imagine you're in a shopping mall, standing before one of those maps that state, "You are here." If you know where you are, you can easily map out a route to get somewhere else.

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It is important not to judge yourself too harshly for your lack of accomplishment up to this point. For some people, feelings of guilt can cause them to move more decisively and take measured and focused action. But for many, these negative feelings accomplish nothing.

The point is to gain a clear understanding of where you are and figure out where you want to go. Acknowledge that you did the best you could with the resources you had, but now you are ready to do better and be more.

This can be an uncomfortable exercise because in a sense it means acknowledging that you are the cause of your own stunted progress. However, only by knowing with certainty where you *are* can you move on to somewhere *better*.

Success Actions That Work: This chapter is the starting place for you. Self-discipline. You need to act your way to success. You need to overwrite some dominant bad habits.

You have formed a habit of starting and not finishing things. No matter how fired up you get about the latest project, your old, ingrained habits are as solid as concrete. The biggest mistakes people make are often in underestimating the amount of energy that will be required when they first start making changes.

Doing that which you are familiar with takes little new energy and is rarely overridden by anything else. We're used to doing things a certain way and if we try to change those comfortable old routines, we feel nervous and out of place.

In order to become comfortable with a new habit of finishing, you need to stick with it long enough so that it becomes second nature. That's a lot easier said than done. Remember, that's how you got comfortable where you are—even if it's not exactly where you want to be.

You will increase your chances for real and lasting change by seeking out a mentor or working with a coach. Most successful

people have coaches and mentors to help them along the way because some things in the equation of achievement simply meet with a lot of inertia. These support people can help make sure you stick with it until you get to the point where you don't need that extra boost each week.

A significant amount of action, focus, and will is needed in order to change old habits. The good news is that once changed, like cement, they become unconscious and semipermanent.

Question: For how long do you persist? I read that successful people never give up. I've also read that sometimes you shouldn't beat your head against the wall expecting a different result (a definition of insanity). If you're not succeeding, how do you know when to quit?

The advice does appear to be in conflict. One person says persist until you succeed. Another person says to give up the sinking ship. The point being that once you've tried something and it doesn't work, it's time to move on to something that does. Your confusion is completely understandable, especially coming from the point of frustration in which you find yourself after hitting the proverbial brick wall.

The short answer is that you quit when you stop believing in what you are doing.

The longer answer is that you have to carefully evaluate what you've done to succeed. Chances are high that you've done a lot of busy work and talking but not taken a lot of action. You have to carefully decide if you are not succeeding because something isn't possible for you or if you've not succeeded because you haven't put in the hard work it takes to succeed. If you really want to achieve something and you haven't tried every possible avenue to success, then don't give up. If you've exhausted every possibility available to you and you are still not getting a result and your belief is that you won't, it may be time to stop.

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The other time to quit is when the goal is rendered no longer valid or useful. As you progress through a series of goals you may realize that one of your goals that you've worked hard on was misguided. The time to stop is the moment you recognize your error. Don't give it any more time or effort. Put that energy toward another more meaningful goal.

Perhaps an example from one author's personal history would be helpful. Here is Kevin's experience when submitting one of his early books for publication:

I submitted the book *The Psychology of Persuasion* 247 times to 247 different publishers before it was accepted by Pelican Publishing. Even then, it was obvious that they barely believed the book (and the author promoting the book) would sell.

In retrospect, I couldn't blame any of the 247 publishers. They had no logical reason to believe the book would sell. None. I had written two books. Both were self-published with fewer than 1,000 sales each. That's not much of a track record.

One well-known publisher clearly told me the book was poorly written and the subject matter was marginal. Whew.

Today, next to Zig Ziglar's *See You at the Top*, I believe *The Psychology of Persuasion* is Pelican's best-selling book. Internationally, approximately one million copies have sold. There are a lot of books that sell better, but the point is that the book has done quite well.

So should I have quit and done something else?

The answer didn't exist within the track record. It was to be found in personal drive. I had predetermined that I would make the book successful. I wanted the book published, I wanted it to sell well, and that meant I would go above and beyond the call of any duty to sell the book. I would do radio shows in the middle of the night, speak to groups as small as five or six people, do book signings where only one or two or no one showed up.

Because I had predetermined that as my outcome, the book would sell. I didn't just know it or get a feeling about it. I was

going to make it happen every day. The work involved during the first few years was overwhelming. But I made it happen.

I persisted until I succeeded. All of that said, I probably would have suggested to 98 percent of people I've coached that they move along after about 100 rejections.

The book became symbolic of me as a person and I wasn't going to have me thrown aside. I and my book were going to succeed on some level.

Success Actions That Work: The answer to whether you continue to persist or choose to move on really is a question rooted in utility and decision making. If you are going to go with the flow and see how the world receives you, then you probably should quit when you feel you are not being successful and move on to something else.

On the other hand, if you have a strong desire for success and a personal passion for a project with a potentially big payoff, then stick to it. Make a sound plan, get the job done, and do not let anyone stop you. Persist until you succeed.

Question: What's more important for success: perspiration or inspiration? I think it's more important to have a positive attitude than to simply be a hard worker. Is there any research on this?

The conventional wisdom is that a positive mental attitude is the master key to success. Studies about optimism show that optimistic people live longer, get better grades, and are healthier.

The reality is that people confuse optimism as it is studied in science with a positive mental attitude.

Optimism means that you don't always believe it is your fault. Optimism means that the bad stuff doesn't have to last forever. Optimism means that problems in one part of life don't necessarily

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mean that everything has gone wrong or will. As scientists look at optimism and measure it, optimism is a useful outlook on life.

Attitude is important in all aspects of life. Attitudes are important in persuasion and influence. Attitudes matter. But if you were looking to measure the things that contribute to a successful life, a positive attitude might only be a small portion of those factors.

A positive attitude or a negative attitude is largely subjective and the impact of either of those attitudes on achievement will vary from person to person. A lot of people equate a good attitude with a big smile or a happy outlook on life. Others equate a good attitude with a visible face of determination. Others believe that a good attitude is really a focused attitude.

No matter what you think a positive attitude is, it often becomes an end in itself and that can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. When this happens, it tends to cause the extinction of the goals for which the person was cultivating a positive mental attitude.

Reality? You can have a lot of different kinds of attitudes and achieve or fail. Success is much more closely tied to behavior than it is to intention.

In my mind, I can still see the guy sitting down and playing the piano, his fingers moving over the keys like a bird flapping her wings. He just flew. The music was complex and beautiful. You never would have thought this guy a pianist. And he was truly amazing.

“How the heck do you do that?”

“My Mom used to make me practice an hour every day after school.”

“For how long?”

“From the time I was four until I graduated high school.”

“You really wanted to do that?”

“Not at first, not for a long time. But then I did, yes. I started to love it in junior high.”

Same with Lance Armstrong, Kristy Yamaguchi, Carl Lewis, Einstein, Edison, Curie, Bell, Mozart, The Beatles, Gates, Oprah, and Trump. Same with everyone who succeeds at anything. They lived and worked many, many days and years with no reward. The reward came later.

Success Actions That Work: Research shows that optimism is important for success (and health). In addition, a positive mental attitude can grease the wheels of achievement and help you get along with others who can help you along the way to success. You will be more successful when you are nice to others. Studies consistently show that people with pleasing personalities have an easier time reaching success. Not only are they more level-headed in taking care of business, but they also draw people to them who are eager and willing to help. Be polite and appreciative. Show true interest in others and keep a sense of humor.

But a positive attitude can't be an end in itself or you will not accomplish all that you are capable of. If we had to choose, we would pick perspiration over inspiration. But you need and can have both.

In most cases, behavior precedes attitude. Behavior (action) tends to generate passion for the behavior itself. If you want to be successful, *do* the things it takes to be successful. A positive or inspired attitude will follow shortly thereafter.

Question: How important is focus and concentration to high achievement? Some days I can be really scatterbrained. Will this affect the level of success I

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achieve in life? Are there things I can do to improve my focus?

Focus and concentration are central to achieving at a high level. It takes concentrated effort to play the game of life with optimal results. For 2,000 years, great achievers have mastered the ability to concentrate. In art and science, business and warfare, literature, politics and philosophy, the real achievements of humankind have been the result of this power.

Concentration arises chiefly from being deeply interested or vested in an activity. It is very closely related to persistence and what Napoleon Hill called “definiteness of purpose.” Concentration is the enemy of self-consciousness and vacillation. Timid people are erratic in their habits. They shift constantly from one thing to another, appearing to be busy but accomplishing nothing substantial. Concentration enables us to accomplish incredible things.

Concentration is the art of continuous and intense application to a task. To cultivate concentration you must have focus. At first, it’s a good thing to think and do only one thing at a time. There’s nothing wrong with writing a book and doing home improvements in the same 30-day period. There is everything wrong with starting projects and not finishing them. The creation of one bad habit after another destroys the most crystal clear dreams.

Developing concentration is a pillar of long-term success. It is fairly easy to tell if someone will succeed or not. The question: Do they get things done?

Do *you* get things done? Despite your “scatterbrained” moments, do you have the power of concentrated effort? If not, and you do not do something to change, you are destined to do the same thing everyday for the rest of your life.

Here is a secret that might improve your long-term focus: *No one can become deeply interested in work that they don’t like.*

Thousands of people struggle upstream all their lives because they are in a job that doesn't fit them. They do not experience doing their best—and the fulfillment that flows from this—because they do not like what they are doing and lose their own self-respect. Are you one of them?

It is easiest to improve focus and change behavior in general when you integrate an emotional component. This means that you can reduce the need to white knuckle your way to high achievement through sheer determination and hard work. You can go beyond a logical connection to your effort and feel the emotion of why you are doing what you do.

Unfortunately, we can't give you the emotional component that will keep you focused. You have to find that. What is the one thing that drives you, the one thing that matters more than anything else? It has to be real and it has to engage you. Stopping can't be an option because the emotional component of missing the goal is more engaging than the temporary pleasure of not doing whatever is required to enhance your skill or competence. Your ability to dig in, to stay focused, to get up one more time, to practice when you don't want to, to reach further than your peers, and to put temporary pleasures aside will allow you to more quickly achieve your goals.

Success Actions That Work: In order to cultivate focus, you must bring your will to bear strongly upon your work and your life. Begin to develop your focus skills today in little things. Cultivate intense focus in whatever you do. Say to yourself: "This is one thing I do and I will do it well until it is done." Period. Develop your ability to focus and complete projects by reading guides in this area such as *The Power of an Hour* (Lakhani 2006). Perhaps you need a mentor who will help you see how most every difficulty yields to the power of focus and how uninterrupted application to one thing will achieve the seemingly impossible.

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Without concentrated focus, you will be unable to persevere in the face of difficulty. By contrast, a person of strong will and concentration uses obstacles as stepping-stones to higher things. Don't be one of those people who complain that they don't like the idea that they lack focus, concentration, and memory, but then don't make the slightest effort to improve themselves. All the goals in the world are meaningless without focus, concentration, and effort.

One of the payoffs of increased concentration is an improved ability to make more money and better manage it. Yet, the need for concentrated effort goes beyond business. You want to increase your ability to concentrate in nonincome producing activities, too. Apply intense focus to everything you do. Why? Because the power of concentrated effort will help you cultivate many other valuable traits like organization, punctuality, thoroughness, an improved memory, self-respect, and self-reliance. Through concentrated effort you will not only aspire to but attain the highest achievements.