Chapter 4
Discipline

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Without discipline, there’s no life at all.
Katharine Hepburn
With self-discipline most anything is possible.
Theodore Roosevelt

I. What is Self-Discipline?
Simply put, self-discipline is the ability to do what one has to do to succeed regardless of your emotional state. In life it is one of the core virtues that enables a person to excel, or as Joseph Addison has said that “self-discipline is that which, next to virtue, truly and essentially raises one man above another.” For instance, a student who lacks self-discipline will perform poorly. Talent alone cannot make a champion athlete; it requires a rigorous discipline of training to excel over everyone else. In short the virtues that a person actively cultivates within themselves are the root causes of all their success. As it has been said that “we first make our habits, then our habits make us” (Cited in Franklin R. Covey). William Feacher has said that “if we don’t discipline ourselves, the world will do it for us” which means that if a person does not discipline himself, he/she will certainly fail in life. A student should always bear in mind that self-discipline is not inborn. It is ‘a virtue or acquired asset’ (Duke Ellington). In other words, self-discipline is a habit. A habit in itself what the sages say ‘we make our habits, then our habits make us’ (Anonymous (Cited in Franklin R. Covey). This means that it is what a particular person has to obtain by regular training and whenever a person masters it, it can be most invaluable because it paves way to all successes. Samuel Smiles gave a nice remark that:

Sow a thought, reap an action;
Sow an action, reap a habit;
Sow a habit, reap a character;
Sow a character, reap a destiny.
(Cited in Franklin R. Covey)

Creating self-discipline is a process of self-conquering which is one of the most difficult tasks of all. Aristotle said that “I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is over self.” Before we start the mission of life building through forming self-discipline we should understand its nature. A person who wishes to develop their self-discipline in general has to master the following characteristics. They are: a) Self-Control, b) Motivation, C) Persistence, D) Goals, E) Will Power, and F) Hard Work.

II. Factors of Self-Discipline
1. Self-Control
Self-Control is defined as ‘internal resources with capacity to control/restrain emotions, desires, actions, thoughts, words and personal direction and alter self’s own states and responses—cognitive, emotional, or behavioral to the desirable direction that one wishes’. (Baumeister, 2002; Baumeister & Exline, 2000; Logue, 1995). Self-control is usually established early in childhood. Once developed, this trait remains fairly constant over one’s lifetime and is not affected by increased age (Baumeister, 2002; Grasmick, Tittle, Bursick, & Arneklev, 1993; Strayhom, 2002). However it can be depleted over time (Baumeister & Exline, 2000; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). It is analogous to a muscle, fatigued in the short run, but strengthened with use over time (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Muraven et al., 1999; Strayhorn, 2002).

A person who is able to control her behavior is the one who can delay immediate gratification and pursue higher goals such as in the completion of a college degree (Mischel, 1974; Strayhom, 2002). The concept of self-control is at the heart of almost all respects in the life of young people and adults. It is at the heart of alcohol and substance abuse issues. If a person has consistently exercised self-control, he/she will be able to resist temptation to drink in excess even though they are pressured by their friends. When one has mastered self-control one is ‘in control’ of one’s mind and will only engage in the activities of one’s choice and then only to the extent that one desires. If a person lacks self-control to the extent that they have become powerlessness over their desires, they will eventually become slaves of their desires. Terri Moffit is a professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Duke University who has conducted a long-term research with a group of 1,000 young people since birth. She has found that there are three factors which lead to success in life: I.Q., family socio-economic status, and self-control. Only one is easy to change, and that is self-control. A child who has self-control at age four is more likely to be happy and healthy as an adult. She concluded that children who had the greatest self-control in primary school and preschool ages were most likely to have fewer health problems and least likely to be addicted to any kind of a substance when they reached their 30s.

Self-control as a personality trait, although it is within a person, it is observable through their behavior. Self-control is measured in terms of the ability to delay gratification that has been considered as an outcome of one’s level of self-control (Strayhom, 2002). The factors contributing to development of self-control occur very early in childhood through the socialization process (Brannigan, Gemmell, Pevalin, & Wade, 2002; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Grasmick et al., 1993). Family social factors including the family structure, parental levels of hostility (Brannigan et al., 2002), parenting style (Arneklev, Grasmick, Tuttle, & Bursick, 1993), and methods of childhood socialization (Brannigan et al., 2002; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) are among the factors contributing to the development of self-control. Low levels of self-control were found to result in families in which parents did not closely monitor their children’s behavior, did not recognize deviant behavior when it occurred, and did not punish the behavior if recognized (Arneklev et al., 1993; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). These socialization antecedents have been studied primarily in the context of criminal behavior, where the concept and measurement of self-control was developed (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990), two pioneers of the field, have indicated six components of the self-control. These six indicators of the lack of self-control are as follows:
1. Impulsivity,
2. Simple tasks,
3. Risk-seeking,
4. Physical activity,
5. Self-centered, and

The first dimension of self-control – impulsivity – is a “tendency to respond to tangible stimuli in the immediate environment, to have a concrete ‘here and now’ orientation” (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 89). Higher levels of impulsivity suggest a tendency to succumb to immediate pleasure fulfillment (Arneklev et al., 1993), an inability to delay gratification (Grasmick et al., 1993) and, therefore, a lower level of self-control. The factors critical to academic success are the individual’s level of persistence in performing tasks or studying (impulsivity, simple tasks) and the individual’s interpersonal skills (self-centeredness, temper).

The second dimension is called simple tasks (Barlow, 1991; Grasmick et al., 1993). It is the tendency to “lack diligence, tenacity, or persistence in the course of action . . . preferring easy or simple gratifications of desires” (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 89).

The third dimension of self-control is risk-seeking. It refers to the tendency to be “adventurous . . . preferring exciting, risky or thrilling” activities (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 89). The individuals consistently seeking risk and pursuing excitement have lower levels of self-control (Barlow, 1991).

The fourth dimension of self-control refers to Individuals preferring physical activities to “cognitive” or “mental” activities (a preference for physical activity according to Grasmick et al. (1993) tend to have low self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

The fifth dimension of self-control is self-centered, which refers to the individual’s tendency “to be self-centered, indifferent, or insensitive to the suffering and needs of others” (Barlow, 1991; Grasmick et al., 1993).

The final dimension of the self-control scale is temper (Barlow, 1991; Grasmick et al., 1993). Individuals with low self-control “tend to have minimal tolerance for frustration and little ability to respond to conflict through verbal rather than physical means” (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 89).

**Self-Control and Academic Performances**

Self-control is closely tied with students’ academic performances and successes in colleges and universities. Nevitt Sanford (1962), a pioneer of the field observed how students faced challenges. Some challenges were instrumental at inspiring them in the pursuit of their goal. Others caused students to drop out of school. Both types of challenges are facts of college life. A student raised with too much support from their parents can cause them to remain complacent and not have the drive to overcome challenges and reach their potential. Inability to deal with challenges in the right manner can lead students off the track. The college experience will hopefully encourage students to seek “a commitment to the power of self-knowledge and personal responsibility” (Freedman, 1987, p. 9).
Other recent studies have found that among several variables, self-control is a robust predictor of a student’s level of academic success, measured by their GPA (Cantwell & Moore, 1996; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995; Cattell & Butcher, 1968). Researchers have also linked self-control to goal achievement in higher education (Logue, 1995; Cheung, 1998; Sandler, 2000; Strayhorn, 2002) where it is seen as an internal mechanism that pushes students forward in their academic pursuits. Individuals with high levels of self-control will often delay gratification in order to achieve a college degree (Logue, 1995), have greater problem-solving skills (Fraser & Tucker, 1997), and are more successful, both socially and academically (Muraven et al., 1999). In a research conducted by Phylis M. Mansfield, Mary Beth Pinto, Diane H. Parente and Thomas L. Wortman on the topic “College Students and Academic Performance: A Case of Taking Control”. They found out that the reason why more than 30% of first-year students did not return for their second year of college (Smith), and only 40% are reported to actually complete their degree and graduate (Newby, 2002) because of the lack of discipline. Additional research was conducted by Angela L. Duckworth and Martin E.P. Seligman and published in the journal Psychological Science entitled “Self-Discipline is a Better Predictor of Academic Success Than even IQ.” They studied a two sample groups of 140 eighth-graders and another group of 164 eighth-graders in a socio-economically and ethnically diverse magnet school in a Northeast city, USA. In their research they found that high self-discipline with lower IQ group consistently improve their achievement and excel higher IQ group in the long run.

Wolfe and Johnson (1995) even suggest that the construct of self-control should be used by college admissions offices in their selection process to better predict a student’s likelihood of success in the academy. The study of self-control in academic settings provides insight into some of the personal and social challenges of college students (Muraven et al., 1999). For example, imprudent and indulgent behaviors such as irresponsible sexual activity (Arneklev et al., 1993), excessive spending, drunkenness and drunk driving, theft (Baumeister & Exline, 2000; Burton, Cullen, Evans, Alarid, & Dunaway, 1998), and cheating on exams (Tibbets & Meyers, 1999) have been shown to result from failures in self-control.

2. Will Power for Self-Discipline

Will-power is the ‘inner strength that enables a person to control unnecessary and harmful impulses and to overcome the desires to indulge in unnecessary and useless habits leading to failure’. We need Will-Power because human life is full of subconscious, impulses such as laziness, permissiveness, hatred and jealousy. We make mistakes though we know that it is wrong just because we just allow these impulses to guide us. For example, students quarrel out of moments of anger which they later regret. Some drink to intoxication without thinking of the serious consequences. Some students procrastinate in their studies leading to poor grades. Looking from positive perspective, Will-Power enables a person to arrive at a decision to pursue a goal with perseverance by taking constructive actions leading to success and accomplishment in spite of inner emotional and mental resistance. It is a foundation for success, both spiritual and material.

Many people admire the individuals who have achieved great success. They believe that others are more successful because they are capable persons. But this is a
misconception. The truth is that everyone can be successful if they develop high levels of will power and self-discipline through a practical method of training. This inner power is not reserved for a few special people. The Dalai Lama, Head of the Dge-lugs-pa order of Tibetan Buddhists, and 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner, said that –

“Human potential is the same for all. Your feeling, “I am of no value”, is wrong. Absolutely wrong. You are deceiving yourself. We all have the power of thought - so what are you lacking? If you have willpower, then you can change anything. It is usually said that you are your own master.”

There is another misconception concerning will power. Some people erroneously think that will power is something strenuous and difficult. So they avoid practicing will power, even though they are conscious of its benefits. They believe that a person with self-discipline and self-control is living a limiting or a restrictive lifestyle, being narrow minded. Yet these people are the ones who end up leading a dull and limited life. Self-discipline, self-control and will power are pillars of success and power. They equip a person with strength to lead a rich desirable life instead of becoming the slaves of useless, harmful and destructive habits. This is the pre-requisites for any good endeavor such as studying, building a business, losing weight, bodybuilding and physical exercise, maintaining good relationships, changing habits, self improvement, meditation, spiritual growth, keeping promises and for almost everything else. In the end these people will feel more powerful and freedom to choose and pursue the style of life he/ she desires and even affect or change the surrounding the way he/ she wishes, and consequently be much happier and satisfied.

Everyone is constantly confronted and tempted by an endless stream of desires and temptations. It is easy to follow these temptations. In other words, it is easy to live in a comfortable zone.1 ‘Stepping out of one’s Comfort Zone’ is the process of overcoming habits and defeating the fear of the unfamiliar and growing to the point that one can make change for the betterment of life. If a person chooses to remain in his/her ‘comfort zone’, they cannot be anything more than they are at the moment.

3. Persistence and Will-Power

Persistence is the ability to continue through adversity, to brush off failure and ‘press on’ for our goals. Abraham Lincoln, an early president of the United States referred to persistence as “the Ability to Maintain Action Regardless of your feelings. Press on even when you feel like quitting”. Persistence is a state of mind. When a person pursues any big goal, their motivation will vary from one day to the next. Sometimes they will feel motivated; sometimes not. But it’s not motivation that produces results — it’s actions.

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1 ‘Comfort Zone’ is the state of your life to which you are accustomed and which most are unwilling to change.
Persistence allows a person to act even when they do not feel motivated to do so. If a person simply presses on taking action in spite of difficulties, failure or resistance to keep on working, they will eventually get results, and results will ultimately provide its own motivation. For example, a lady attempting to lose weight becomes a lot more enthusiastic about dieting and exercising once she lost those first 10 pounds and feel her clothes fitting more loosely.

Two classical examples of the power of persistence are Thomas Edison and Abraham Lincoln. Edison succeeded in inventing the first electric bulb after spending $40,000, and performing 1200 experiments. What if he quit at 1199? We would all be sitting in the dark! Life is always full of setbacks and successes are always preceded by failures. Any successful person has to go through these obstacles and failures. Abraham, President of the United States failed again and again before he could win an election and became one of the greatest U.S Presidents. Edison has said that

"Just because something doesn't do what you planned it to do doesn’t mean it’s useless.... Reverses should be an incentive to great accomplishment. Results? Why, man, I have gotten lots of results! If I find 10,000 ways something won’t work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is just one more step forward.... There are no rules here, we’re just trying to accomplish something."

Obstacles and failures are not merely negative, but they can be learning experiences or opportunities that push a person hard to try harder. The overcoming of obstacles can strengthen a person and offer progressive measurement of their growing strength. Discouragement creeps in when encountering difficult obstacles and repeated failure can cause a person to question their goals and faith in themselves. This leads to self doubt and the loss of self-confidence. In this situation a person has to refocus on their ideas and dreams. Persistence is a process of re-decision making. One can train himself/herself to be a persistent person.

Napoleon Hill gives eight factors that persistence is based upon:

- Definite purpose – know what you want.
- Desire
- Self-reliance - the belief to carry out your plan
- Definite plans - written organized plan.
- Accurate knowledge - knowing your plan is sound.
- Cooperation - being with others who will help you develop persistence.
- Will power - concentrate your thoughts on obtaining your goals.
- Habit - persistence is a habit that can be consciously developed.

How to Develop Persistence:

1. Have a definite purpose backed up with a strong desire to obtain it. Write it down.
2. Have a plan of action. How are you going to make it happen. What do you need to do.
3. Close your mind to negativity and discouraging influences. Self talk can be the most damaging.
4. Watch which were saying to yourself. Develop a group of people who will encourage you but also hold you accountable to follow through on your actions.

When to Give Up

Should you always persist and never give up? Certainly not. Sometimes giving up is clearly the best option. Have you ever heard of a company called Traf-O-Data? What about Microsoft? Both companies were started by Bill Gates and Paul Allen. Traf-O-Data was the first company they started, back in 1972. Gates and Allen ran it for several years before throwing in the towel. They gave up. Of course they did a little better with Microsoft. If they hadn’t given up on Traf-O-Data, then they might not have achieved their success with Microsoft. So how do you know when to press on or when to give up? One of the best ways is to ask yourself these questions: Is your plan still correct? If not, update the plan. Is your goal still correct? If not, update or abandon your goal. There’s no honor in clinging to a goal that no longer inspires you. Persistence is not stubbornness.

4. Persistence for Goals

Goals are tangible achievements that drive one’s motivation and form one’s definitions of achievements and successes. Eleanor Roosevelt reminds us that “the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams”. Setting goals is often spoken of as dreaming a dream. Goal pursuit is venturing on a trip across a foggy sea towards an island. It requires a great deal of faith.

Goal Setting Technique

- Put a goal on paper in as great a detail as possible will allow you to see the individual steps you need to take.
- Take the larger plan and chunk it down into smaller interim goals.
- Work on reaching your goal by tackling a smaller goal each day or each week. This creates your map to your individual destination with all the points of interest along the way.

Attributes of Goals

All goals, whether short-term or long-term, should incorporate these common attributes:

- Be realistic. Goals should be based on your abilities and circumstances.
- Be possible. Don't establish constraints that make the realistic, unrealistic.
- Be flexible. Anticipate bumps in the road and expect to work around them.
• Be measurable. Have a target in mind so you know when you have reached your goal.
• Be under your control. Set your own goals based on your values, interests, and desires. Target things where you can control the outcome.

Winston Churchill gave a speech exactly 60 years ago on October 29, 1946. These words are still applicable today.

“Never give in--never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yielded to force; never yielded to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

The ‘Coat of Arms’ of our university might enable you to understand this better. Our life is like “A Ship in the Sea.” This symbolizes that we have to keep on struggling and facing different difficulties in the sea of life, just like a ship or a boat that braves heavy storms, winds, and sun. This should always remind us that "Life is a Struggle" or "To Live is to Struggle" against the problems and difficulties and not to give up.

Stay focused. Never change your goal – just your strategy. Persistence must become a way of life if you want to succeed. By learning to overcome problems and obstacles, you can become an admirable person. There is a song sung by Mariah Carey. Part of the song says that—

“There can be miracles, When you believe, Though hope is frail It's hard to kill Who knows what miracles You can achieve When you believe Somehow you will, …You will when you believe.”

However difficult life is, be firm in your dreams and your goals, and believe in yourself. Strive on. What seems hard to achieve, will be achieved.

5. Hard Work

Hard work is the last component but it is not the least because if a person is not committed to working hard for goal, he/she cannot be successful. This is consistent to AU Motto "LABOR OMNIA VINCIT". This Latin motto means “Industrious effort conquers all things”. We can overcome all difficulties through hard work. We work not only to earn money for a living only, but also for creating a meaningful life. We believe that one justifies oneself and one’s own existence by the nobility of one’s work which includes industrious effort, commitment, determination, and courage to face adversity.

III. Summary

Some people might believe that success in life is due to luck, in-born abilities or some other factors such as social connections and support from parents, relatives and friends. Though it is difficult to disagree with such assertion, it is the truth that Mozart had
innate musical talent. However, if he did not practice and work hard, he would never become a great musician. The most vital component of success is labor or hard work or personal effort that you put in. No matter how talented a person is, how much support they are given from the outside a person can hardly ever achieve anything in life without hard work. Hard work is what drives us to the goal. It is the fuel that we need to keep the engine running. Any talent is like a precious stone unearthed. It looks dull and seems of little value. Such precious stone will remain dull and of little value if it is left uncut and unpolished. Hard work allows a talented person to polish that jewel.

The path to self-conquest is usually accompanied by failures. Failure reminds us that we have to work more and where to put an extra effort. When there is a failure, we learn from it and adjust our strategies. On one hand, it is no secret that most people perceive failure as something negative, something bad. On the other hand, we cannot avoid failure before achieving success. Moreover, it is only by experiencing failure that a person can begin to understand one’s true, inner self.

Questions for Further Reflection:
1. What is self-discipline and self-control?
2. What is social discipline?
3. What are key indicators high self-discipline?
4. What are key indicators of low self-discipline?
5. Explain the consequences of the lack of discipline?
6. How could you apply it to your life?

Recommendations for further reading


References:


