

The First Victory

The Power of Self-Discipline

TY MUSHAMBI

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This book is dedicated to

Erasmus Gapara:
who shared his life's testimony with me, and in so doing introduced me to the
practical aspects of self-discipline and the positive transformation it brings into one's
life.

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INTRODUCTION

“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough: we must do.”

- Bruce Lee

Without discipline, all the motivational teachings and *time management* strategies in the world will never be effective. You can keep playing around with words like ‘change’, ‘strive’, ‘courage’, ‘no excuses’, ‘desire to improve’, ‘be persistent’ and ‘goal setting’ all you want. It is *easy to* utter these words, but it is an arduous task to get yourself to do it.

In short, it is easier said than done. Don’t get me wrong; motivation is a wonderful thing. It is what gets us going in the first place, but self-discipline is the only thing that will keep us going once the excitement dries up. In my search for knowledge, I’ve attended seminars, sermons and workshops about anything and everything more times than I’d like to count. At some point, I began to realize that the ones who benefited the most from these meetings were not those who clapped the most, shouted the loudest “Amen” or grinned from ear to ear when the speaker made a joke, but those who continued to do what they were taught long after the fact.

The hard truth is — half of the time — all of us know or have an idea of what we should do to improve the areas of our lives that we are not satisfied with. Having financial problems? Increase your sources of income, save more, spend less and invest the rest. Weight issues? Go on a diet, exercise and drink lots of water. Loneliness? Become a friend in order to have friends.

I don’t mean to underrate what are in fact serious problems that people struggle with on a regular basis, but even the tallest of mountains can be climbed over time. Of course, the time it takes to overcome that mountain differs from person to person, but it can be done nonetheless. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. That’s not just a Shakespeare quote, but a truth about

the way the world works. There's also no reason why you cannot be any of the three.

Let's not be naïve, though. Genetics, family\educational background and relationships do give some people a distinct advantage over others, but it is your choice to use that as a crutch for the rest of your life or not. Countless books, articles and videos have provided solutions (some even supported by science) to our biggest problems and more. I'm sure a lot of us have even come across some 'helpful' quotes on the internet and social platforms. My favorites so far are, "If you don't like where you are then you should move; you're not a tree." and "When life gives you lemons, make grape juice. Then sit back and watch as the world wonders how you did it."

It doesn't matter if you're ready to charge Hell with a water pistol after a riveting presentation; what matters is the energy you put into making it a reality, even when you don't feel like it. Most people, if motivated enough, go as far as BEGINNING to do what needs to be done. They get a gym membership, open a savings account, or enroll in a class, but the real change lies in CONTINUING to do what is necessary.

We live in a lightning-fast information age, and there is no doubt the knowledge that empowers us to succeed in various spheres of our lives is readily available. However, it's not the truth that we know that sets us free, but the truth that we know and *apply*. Positive change is intentional, and self-discipline allows us to take our lives off auto-pilot and steer towards continuous improvement.

Most of the troubles that plague modern individuals in our society — addiction, abuse, crime, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, prejudice, financial debt, failure at school and work, obesity — have some degree of self-control failure as a central aspect. We are too busy *letting* ourselves go, *falling* for the wrong people or getting *hooked* on something bad or counterproductive to take responsibility and grow as individuals. This is (mostly) a free world, but the word "freedom" has shifted its meaning from "liberty" to "casting off restraint".

However, contrary to popular belief, self-discipline does not mean being hard on yourself, or having a restrictive lifestyle. It means self-control, which is a result of inner strength, and it is vital for success in today's world. Delayed gratification, focus, work ethic, perseverance, commitment and a standard of excellence are the staples of a successful person.

Theodore Bryant, a Human Behavior Specialist, says that there is a part of each and every one of us that resists change. He called this part 'Mr. Hyde'. To avoid self-discipline, Hyde uses tactics such as:

- cynicism;
- negativism;
- defeatism;
- escapism and
- delay-ism

Fear of failure, success (that's right), risks, rejection and mediocrity keeps a lot of us from stepping out of our comfort zones to embrace discipline. Self-discipline is a skill that can be learned, and I invite you to come on this journey with me. *Discover your true potential and awaken the giant inside of you (this time, for real).*

Enjoy your reading. This will be the first of many victories for your life.

CHAPTER ONE: YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY

“The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself; to be conquered by yourself is of all things most shameful and vile.”

-Plato

It's early in the morning. You are fast asleep, dreaming, but a familiar noise keeps playing at the back of your mind. Finally, you slowly open your eyes, feeling groggy. There it is again. Beep, beep, beep, beep. It doesn't take much sleuthing for you to realize it's the alarm you set for 5.00 am. Last night, after watching a particularly inspiring training montage, you decided you'd get up early and go for a run before heading to work.

However, it is cold outside and your bed feels so warm and comfy.

“Come on. This is it. Change starts today.” you say to yourself, as you close your eyes again to think. “But it's cold outside. Maybe I can start jogging tomorrow.” You know you have to make a choice. You can either take the easy way out, hit the ‘snooze’ button and go back to sleep in your cozy cocoon... Or take the high road, put on your running shoes, and bolt out the door.

Every single day, we're faced with numerous tiny decisions like this one. In these moments, we have to decide between what is good for us... and what is easy, comfortable, enjoyable and safe. On their own, most of these choices seem fairly insignificant, but together, they add up. They compound, and it is the summation of all these micro-decisions that determines our destiny. Like dominoes, bad choices set us back one piece at a time, until we realize that the damage has been done when it is too late.

“Self-discipline is an act of cultivation. It requires you to connect today's actions to tomorrow's results.” - Gary Ryan Blair

Consistently taking the higher road will help you achieve your biggest goals, unleash your full potential, and maybe even change lives around the world.

Taking the easy way out too often results in a life of mediocrity and constant disappointment in yourself... Until one day, you look back in regret, wondering... "What if?"

I want you to humor me for a moment... Imagine a day in your future (say, ten years from now) as a 'multiverse'. There are an infinite amount of ways your life can turn out at that point, depending on the choices you make from today onwards (and hence multiple versions of yourself coexisting). Somewhere out there, there is a richer version of you, a poorer one, a healthier you, a more intelligent you, one who can play the piano, one who can speak nine different languages, and so on. Which one do you want to be?

The present you is not who you are, it's who you WERE - the result of your past decisions accumulated over time. That means that whoever you WILL BE depends on the choices you make from now on. There are plenty of important qualities that can contribute to a person's achievements and happiness, but there is only one that produces sustainable, long term success in all aspects of life, and that is self-discipline.

Be it in terms of work ethic, fitness, dieting, or relationships, self-discipline is the number one attribute needed to accomplish goals, lead a healthy lifestyle, and ultimately, to be happy. A 2013 study by Wilhelm Hoffman showed that people with high self-control are happier than those without. This is true because the self-disciplined subjects were more capable of dealing with goal conflicts.

Disciplined people spend less time contemplating whether to indulge in behaviors detrimental to their success, and are able to make positive decisions more easily. The self-disciplined do not allow their choices to be dictated by impulses or feelings. Instead, they make informed, rational decisions on a daily basis without feeling overly stressed or upset.

These people are not disciplined because they lack disruptive urges; they are disciplined because they have learned to ignore them. Theodore Bryant, a Human Behavior Specialist, personifies our resistance to change as 'Mr. Hyde'. Our inner Mr. Hyde is our self-defeating traits that keep us from transforming our desires into ideas, plans and actions.

Mr. Hyde's methods of sabotaging our discipline operate on a subconscious level, where we are unaware of them. The following is a list of Mr. Hyde's tactics:

Cynicism

As your inner skeptic, Mr. Hyde's goal is to instill doubt and discourage you. Realism is good – it saves you from a lot of disappointment and helps you plan accordingly – but pessimism isn't. Realism helps you take practical steps towards achieving big goals, but doubt paralyzes you in fear of failure.

Negativism

"Why bother?" says Mr. Hyde. "The economy is bad." "You'll never finish it in time." This is what you hear as you begin to devise goals and plans during harsh times. Once Hyde's negativism triumphs over you, your brain will search for reasons to support negative attitudes. Hyde will remind you of your present circumstances and sympathize with you, making you a victim, instead of a victor. Whatever you tell yourself, negative or positive, your subconscious believes.

Our attitude has everything to do with our success. We create our own attitude, and our attitude influences our behavior. Purposefully choose to have a positive attitude, no matter what happens around you. Be a victor, not a victim.

Defeatism

Nobody's perfect. We all have our shortcomings and we do not succeed at everything we attempt to do. The only thing we can do is pick ourselves up and try again, learning from our mistakes as we go along. Hyde will play the blame game, attempting to drown your enthusiasm by pointing out all your perceived faults, previous failures, and trick you into self-defeat.

Do not allow any perceived inadequacies to dredge up feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. This will lead to your giving up. Hyde will use anything relentlessly - a personality trait, a physical characteristic, or even any other irrelevant quality like our race, sex, or religion - to make us feel inferior.

Escapism

I am a firm believer of 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy', but we have to manage our distractions, instead of letting them manage us. Hard work is naturally uncomfortable, and Mr. Hyde always looks for the

easy way out. Think of the rewards; constantly remind yourself of the reason you decided to pursue that particular venture.

Continuously revisiting your source of inspiration gives you the strength to endure the temporary hardships you may come across along the way.

Delayism\Procrastination

Hyde's favorite excuse is "I'll do it later," Any one of the previously described tactics is usually used as a reason to "do it later." We all get 86,400 seconds in a day, and what we do with that precious time makes the difference between success and failure. A second seems inconsequential to us, but seconds add up into minutes, hours, days, weeks and months.

Hyde is good at placing hurdles between you and your goal. For example, you may say, "I can't begin a weight-loss program until I buy a proper exercise outfit." Then Hyde adds another obstacle by saying, "I can't afford to buy a new outfit right now." We sometimes heap ourselves with more and more excuses until we completely discard our original plan. There is a difference between prioritization and procrastination. Ask yourself whether a given delay is legitimate or not. Is it working for you or against you?

Despite everything that I've mentioned above, we should not treat Mr. Hyde as the bad guy. Instead, we must treat Mr. Hyde as the part of us that is creative, fun-loving, and pleasure-seeking; our inner child. Treat Hyde as an unruly child - one that has no self-discipline, no self-restraint, and no ability to delay gratification.

Like any spoilt little kid, Hyde will be manipulative to get what he wants. Don't try to fight this side of yourself. You'll end up being a walking mass of inner conflicts and lose mental energy that could be used in the drive toward accomplishing your goals.

We recruit Hyde as a partner who supports our self-discipline efforts instead. All it takes is positive self-talk and compromise. In his book *The Now Habit*, Dr. Neil Fiore suggests that making time for guaranteed fun can be an effective way to overcome things like procrastination.

Decide beforehand what blocks of time you'll allocate each week to family time, entertainment, exercise, prayer, social activities, and personal hobbies. Then schedule your work hours using whatever time is left. This ensures that your work will not encroach on your leisure time. It's a win-win for both you and Hyde.

Benjamin Franklin suggested that the best strategy for high productivity is to divide the day into one third work, one third play, and one third rest. I have found this particular strategy to be very effective, as it relieves my stress and makes me happier when I'm working. It is important to value both your work time and play time equally. Respect them, and they won't interfere with one another.

CHAPTER TWO: PROCRASTINATION – THE BANE OF PROGRESS

“The best way to get something done is to begin.”
-Unknown

In his book, *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth*, John C. Maxwell shares one of his father’s favorite riddles: *Five frogs are sitting on a log. Four decide to jump off. How many are left?*

The answer seems obvious: one. But this is incorrect. There are still five frogs on the log, because there is a difference between *deciding*, and *doing*. The Law of Diminishing Intent states that the longer you wait to do something that should be done now, the greater the odds that you will never actually do it.

Procrastination is the habit of putting off impending tasks in preference to more pleasurable experiences, usually to the “last minute.” It can cause missed opportunities, stress, overwhelm, resentment and personal guilt.

Just like everything else in life, procrastination comes in stages, and these are:

1. False Security - “This isn’t due for a while. I will relax for now.”

When I was in high school, the teachers were gracious enough to provide one week deadlines for handing in assignments, and sometimes awarded extensions upon request. However, I always found some of my classmates in a frenzy to write the assignment on the morning of the due date. I was also in no position to judge them, because I usually wrote it the night before.

I always got high scores, but I knew I could’ve done better if I had put more time into it. And if you asked me about half of what I wrote, I probably wouldn’t remember it or know what it meant.

I was so concerned with meeting deadlines that I missed the chance to grow as an academic. That’s what false security does; it stunts our growth as individuals, whether or not we meet our deadline. It doesn’t take a

rocket scientist to know that the longer you work on something, the better you become at it.

It may seem like we have all the time in the world, but the truth is, no one is promised tomorrow, and the problem with 'one day' is that it always arrives sooner than we expected. The experience of working on our goals consistently and practicing to become better helps us to develop character and perfect our craft. Whenever you sit back, relax, and watch the clock tick, you are robbing yourself of those experiences.

2. Laziness - "Perhaps I should get a head start... Nah!"

According to your estimations, there is still a lot of time to get the job done. It also doesn't *feel* like the *right* time to get started. When the task at hand appears to be difficult and tedious, it's easier to opt for conserving your energy. On the other hand, your favorite show is on TV, and the job can wait until after. Most of the time we procrastinate because we feel emotionally or physically drained. The more we continue this way and the longer we wait, the more our resolve will weaken (read: The Law of Diminishing Intent). We then lose passion for what we are doing and let time pass us by while we do nothing.

The solution to laziness is to continuously revisit the source of your inspiration. Something stirred you up to the point where you decided to pursue a certain goal. It could've been something you saw, read, heard or experienced that motivated you to chase a certain dream. Some people compile 'vision boards' - a collection of images and magazine cut-outs of the things they want most in life - and take time to look at them every day. I like to play certain songs when I'm reading, writing or exercising; the music inspires and energizes me to push through. Find out what works for you, and use it whenever you require a boost.

3. Excuses - "I can't do this right now because..."

Even when motivation is high, you may still encounter tasks that you don't want to do, and any reason to delay doing them is good enough. If you were hoping for a cutesy solution to this problem, I'm sorry to disappoint you, because this is where maturity and taking responsibility for your actions comes into play.

You have to decide what's more important to you, and stand by your decision. The pinnacle of discipline is when a conscious decision directly translates into guaranteed action. If you still remember, I mentioned earlier in the last chapter that Mister Hyde will try by all means to place a barricade between you and your goals. You need to really dig deep and question whether or not an excuse is valid, because any reason you give

yourself sounds like a good one to you, because you're the one who came up with it.

4. *Denial – “I still have time. I just have to work twice as hard.”*

The deadline looms closer and closer with each passing moment, and now it has dawned on you that you really need to move fast or you'll miss it. All you need to do is buckle down and work really hard, and you'll make it in time. You're probably right – you could pull it off with the time you have left – but at the cost of your energy, time, quality of work and peace of mind.

However, If you're wrong and the time you have left is not enough, then you will become frustrated, resentful and blame yourself when you do not meet your targets. It is always better to get the job done properly long before it's due, and then kick back for the remainder of the timeline, than to relax when you have time and then work in a frenzy when there's no time left.

5. *Crisis – “I can't believe I'm too late! I'll never do this again!”*

It's too late. You cannot possibly do it in time now, and the only person you have to blame for it is yourself. But you've learned your lesson; you now know that procrastination is bad for you. You would've been a lot better off if you had started early and saw it through to the end. Next time, you won't be so careless with your time. It's over now, right?

6. *Repeat*

Wrong. Most of the time, when we procrastinate, we are unaware that we are doing so. This makes us susceptible to repeating the same mistakes whenever something else comes along. We have to become more aware of our thoughts in order to nip procrastination in the bud.

Recognize when you are procrastinating, and you will ensure that you do not entertain the thought. Here are some useful indicators that will help you know when you're procrastinating:

- **Waiting for the “right mood” or the “right time” to tackle the important task at hand.** This is probably the most common type of reasoning behind procrastination. Some people feel like they do their best work when they are under pressure, some think that they have to acquire every single tool they'll need first, and others think that they need to be in the right frame of mind in order to begin. Now is the only time we have, which makes it the best time. No one is guaranteed tomorrow. Moods can be set, you can always

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