
January 17th
REBOOT THE REAL WORK

“I am your teacher and you are learning in my school. My aim is to bring you to completion, unhindered, free from compulsive behavior, unrestrained, without shame, free, flourishing, and happy, looking to God in things great and small—your aim is to learn and diligently practice all these things. Why then don’t you complete the work, if you have the right aim and I have both the right aim and right preparation? What is missing? . . . The work is quite feasible, and is the only thing in our power. . . . Let go of the past. We must only begin. Believe me and you will see.”

—EPICTETUS, *DISCOURSES*, 2.19.29–34

Do you remember, in school or early in your life, being afraid to try something because you feared you might fail at it? Most teenagers choose to fool around rather than exert themselves. Halfhearted, lazy effort gives them a ready-made excuse: “It doesn’t matter. I wasn’t even trying.”

As we get older, failure is not so inconsequential anymore. What’s at stake is not some arbitrary grade or intramural sports trophy, but the quality of your life and your ability to deal with the world around you.

Don’t let that intimidate you, though. You have the best teachers in the world: the wisest philosophers who ever lived. And not only are you capable, the professor is asking for something very simple: just begin the work. The rest follows.