

# 9 HABITS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE DON'T DO AND HOW TO BREAK THEM



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*A book by  
Cosmic Publications  
and it's contributors*



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*We hope you enjoy “9 Habits Highly Effective People don’t Do and How to Break Them”.*

*With great gratitude,*

*The Cosmic Publications Team*

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## Introduction

In 1980, tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were at an all-time high. The Lake Placid Winter Olympics were seen not only as a time for nations to come together, but also as a time of rivalry. Americans and Soviets alike rooted for their countries to beat the other and show dominance on a world stage.

One of the most unlikely events happened at the Winter Olympics that year. The Soviet Union were the undisputed champions of ice hockey worldwide. They'd won four straight Olympic gold medals and every World Championship in ten years. The Soviet team were professional winners, and the United States was forming a hodgepodge group of college kids to challenge them.

Nobody expected the American team to be able to compete with the Soviet team, except for one person: Herb Brooks. Herb Brooks believed that if he changed the way his team trained, they could be the best in the world. Brooks didn't focus on the talent of the group. In fact, he once told his team they didn't have enough talent to win on talent alone! Instead, he focused on their work ethic.

Brooks knew the Soviet team was talented, but he also knew they worked hard. Instead of trying to outplay them, Brooks focused on conditioning them. Brooks did not minimize the Soviet team's success, but he used it as inspiration to fuel his players to work harder. In fact, Brooks pushed his players so hard that they joked he wanted to kill them!

A few weeks before the gold medal match, the Americans and Soviets met in a friendly hockey game. The Soviets torched the Americans by double-digits. It would have been easy for the American team to quit then and embrace an almost certain failure, but they didn't. Instead of assuming the next game's outcome would be the same as this one, the team worked even harder. They placed the blame squarely on their own shoulders, and they used it to fuel their next moves.

Two weeks later, the Americans were ready to play. Brooks gave a rousing speech to the players in the room, showcasing his belief in their abilities, and the players bought in. Even with the pitiful showing a few weeks before, they believed they could beat the Soviet team—and they did. When the final buzzer rang, the American team had defeated the all-time great Soviet team by a score of 4-3.

Brooks's belief in his team, his ability to use others' success as motivation, and his never give up attitude enabled one of the greatest sports moments in American history.

## **How To Use This Book**

On the road to success, there are a lot of mistakes to be made! These mistakes can discourage you, rattle you, and strike a fear of failure in you so deep that you may give up altogether.

In order to be an effective person and meet your goals, you have to be able to recognize your own habits and learn to break them.

We've all had goals that we feel we just can't meet, no matter what we try. However, lurking behind these failures are the habits we can't break or maybe don't even know we have. There are nine habits that seem to radiate throughout our failures, and this book will give you a clear understanding of what they are and how they impact your effectiveness. Use each chapter as your personal barometer, and stop and consider times where those habits have kept you from reaching your goals.

In addition to understanding your bad habits, this book will give you tips and techniques to break them. Once you've broken these habits, you'll be on your way to success you've never seen before!

## Habit One: Idling, Going Nowhere Fast

*"The secret of getting ahead is getting started." - Mark Twain*

We have a tendency to look at others who have 'made it', and automatically assume they are smarter, richer, or somehow better equipped than we are. However, this isn't really the case. These people who are successful are so because they've made the decision to get started.

It seems like an easy decision to make, but it's the truth. As an ancient Chinese proverb states, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." If you think of this literally, you'll see the importance of simply getting started. One step toward your destination gets you closer than remaining stagnant. Even if you spend your time thinking through what you might need to succeed, if you never take the step, you are still further behind than someone who did.

A lot of people think it's important to wait until you feel ready before beginning. However, successful people mostly start before they feel ready. They take advantage of the time they have and embrace it.

The truth is that you will never feel completely ready to go for your dreams. There will always be some fear, and there will be times you fail or fall flat on your face. However, these moments are ones you can learn from to capitalize on your success.

Most people think their biggest fear is being a failure, however, when we really dig down deep, we find that failing isn't actually what we're afraid of. What we are most afraid of is looking like a failure. You worry you might be a laughingstock and that you'll have to grovel in front of others or hang your head in shame.

Of course, we all know that life is full of both failure and success. Failing at things is a part of life. Usually, success happens after a major failure anyway. Think of Thomas Edison, the famous inventor who created the lightbulb. It is said that he failed 1,000 times to create the lightbulb. However, Edison did not let this stop him. He kept working until he found the one lightbulb that worked. He took his first step before he had worked everything out, and he let the process inform his success.

Another thing worth remembering is that failing is not the worst thing that can happen. Success is simply a series of failures, so in that way, failure is actually a good thing. The only way to fail is to never start in the

first place. When you start, whether you fail or not, you are still making progress. Every failure informs your future success, but not starting acts as an informant to nothing. If you stand still, you learn nothing from the experience. Even if you take a step and then take three steps back, you've learned something from those three steps back that will help you progress past the starting line again.

Another reason why it's important to just get started is that it keeps you focused on your goal. When you haven't started working toward your dreams, you can let your mind wander and your enthusiasm wane. You may get distracted or begin focusing on other things. However, when you're on your journey and have started, it's much harder to become distracted or to not focus on it. Being on the path, in and of itself, focuses you and keeps you working on your dreams so you can realize them.

One of the major disadvantages of learning everything you can and preparing to be successful before taking the first step is that you don't know what you need to know. Think about what it's like to buy a house. First-time homeowners often report that they don't know much about buying a house. They'll research the process, and maybe even save money or try to pay off credit card debts before they meet with a loan officer. They think they're doing a great job, paying off their biggest debts first.

However, the homeowner might get to the first meeting with the loan officer and find that they should have paid a different debt first. Maybe the monthly amount on one card is so much larger that it would be better to carry a balance on a second card and pay the first card's balance down, rather than just paying off the second card. The money the first time homeowner had was now wasted on paying down a debt they didn't need to pay down. The prospective homeowner googled and learned that paying down debt is important, but they didn't know enough about the process to know what to ask or look for.

As a result, the prospective homeowner now has to take many steps back in the process. If the prospective homeowner had just taken the first step to meet with the loan officer from the beginning, they would have been able to better direct their path and might have been able to have greater success. Their timeline was actually elongated because they waited and didn't take the first step.

It's important to apply this same tactic when trying to achieve your dreams. As you take steps toward your dreams, you will learn what

information you need to know, and you will be able to inform yourself. Don't waste your time trying to find information before you've even begun your journey. Let your journey inform the information you need to learn.

## **Action Steps**

In order to take your first step, though, you need to know what your dream is. Take some time to think through your dream. Where do you want to be, and when? Remember that your dream may take longer, or shorter, to reach than you anticipate .

Next, figure out what your first step is. If your dream is to run a marathon, your first step might be to take a walk. If it's to own a restaurant, your first step might be to call a restaurant owner and get their input. What would be a good first step for you?

Third, take your first step. Be prepared to fall or fail, and accept it as part of your process. Go for it anyway. Once you take your first step, use that first step to inform your next step. Keep stepping toward your goal in everything you do.

## **Recap**

One of the biggest ways we can be held back from our dream is by not even starting! Take your first step before you're ready, and embrace that you will face failures along the way. Allow your failures to inform your success. Taking steps will keep you focused on your goal and allow you to take further steps. Don't let your fear of being seen as a failure; keep you from taking your first step.

## **Habit Two: The Blame Game**

*"Your life can only change to the degree you take responsibility for it." - Dr. Steve Maraboli*

If you've ever been around children, you know the tendency humans have to blame one another. It's common on the playground, and unfortunately, it doesn't get any less common as we grow older. The difference is that as we grow older, we tend to internalize our blame game, rather than shouting it out for everyone else to hear. As children, we make

our viewpoint on who's fault it was loud, but as we enter adulthood, we tend to keep it to ourselves, internalizing it and making it part of the story we tell ourselves, instead of the story we tell others.

It may seem odd, but the need to blame others comes from low self-esteem. It's a phenomenon known as the self-serving bias, a term first coined by Austrian psychologist Fritz Heider in 1971. The self-serving bias is the theory that we tend to perceive ourselves in a favorable manner, even when evidence points to unfavorable traits. It's a belief that we tend to attribute our successes to our strengths and achievements, but we overlook our failures by blaming them on outside factors, whether those are people or events. In doing so, we protect our ego from threat or injury, and we are able to maintain a high self-esteem.

In order to be successful, however, we need to do away with our self-serving bias and fight against it. While success is always welcomed and encouraged, our failures allow us to learn and grow. When we take responsibility for our failures, we allow them to teach us. However, when we put the responsibility for our failures on others, we do so out of self-preservation and cannot grow from the experience.

Human beings love to be in control. In everything we do, we seek to control a situation so that it's most favorable for us. When we succeed, we attribute our success to our control of the situation. We feel more relaxed when things are within our control, and more anxious when they are not. When things go wrong, our ego tries to protect ourselves by believing that the failure wasn't within our control at all.

However, this actually serves to hurt our self-esteem, not help it. When we succeed under our own control, our ego learns that we are strong and competent, and feels better about it. The hit our ego takes over a failure is only momentary. We can seek to put a band-aid over that hit by blaming it on someone or something else, or we can lean into the hit and find a way to overcome it. Overcoming previous failure is one of the greatest ways we can improve our ego, and we miss out on this opportunity when we don't allow ourselves to feel the sting of the failure and assign it its rightful responsibility.

There are two different ways we can avoid taking responsibility for our failures. The first is by blaming another person, and the second is by blaming circumstances. We've all had moments of each of these.



When we blame others, we think things like, if that black car hadn't slammed on its brakes, I wouldn't have hit it! while ignoring the role we had in the collision. We could have followed further behind, swerved to the side, or paid more attention to the road to anticipate the accident. When we place blame squarely on someone else, we act as if our actions did not play a role in the failure, and the simple removal of that person from interfering would have been enough to achieve a different outcome. However, in doing so, we fail to learn about how our behaviors could have changed the outcome without the need of external forces.

We also tend to blame our circumstances, rather than taking responsibility for our actions. Take, for example, a student who waits until the last minute to get started on a paper, only to find an emergency crop up in the hours before the paper is due. The emergency may be out of their control; however, the emergency is not to blame for the student's inability to turn their paper in on time. There are other factors that were within the student's control. If the student had started the paper earlier, they would have left room for an emergency to occur and for them to still complete the paper. As my college professor once said, "lack of preparation on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part."

When we blame our circumstances, rather than our role in them, we neglect to learn from the circumstances to make sure we succeed in the future. The student in the previous example may be partly right to blame their paper being late on circumstances, but they learned nothing about how to ensure the situation does not occur again. Emergencies pop up, and circumstances outside of our control often make their way into our lives and can affect things, however, your success should not be based on your circumstances. Your success should not be in anyone or anything's hands but yours.

In order to make this a reality, we must learn to take responsibility for our own failures and successes, regardless of circumstances or the involvement of others.

When we neglect to do so, we lose opportunities for empathy and personal growth. When we encounter experiences similar to others, we grow empathy. It is only by experiencing failure that we can empathize with others, and it is only by being accountable for our own failures that we can give grace to those who have failures, as well. We also lose opportunities for personal growth, as we have taken a learning opportunity away from

ourselves. Instead of letting our failures inform our future successes, we blame our failures away and don't learn anything from them at all.

## **Action Steps**

To learn to take responsibility for our own actions and stop playing the blame game, we must begin by working on our self-esteem. We can do this by remembering that failure is not the end of the world—it is a step on a journey to success. Try finding a few motivational quotes that inspire you to embrace failure, and commit them to memory. Repeat them to yourself when you start to blame others for your misfortune.

Second, think back in your life about times where you felt that circumstances or another person impeded your road to success. Examine the situation and think about how your actions contributed to the impediment. Rewrite the story in your mind, taking responsibility for your actions and how they contributed. Banish the old story that blamed others.

Third, examine what is in your control and what is not. Make a list of the things that are within your control, and focus on those. How can you use these things within your control to embrace success? One example may be your attitude. It can be so easy to let one bad event "ruin" your day, but realize that it is not the bad event that is ruining your day, but your attitude. Learn how to fix your attitude and let bad events roll off your shoulders so that your attitude does not become an impediment to success.

## **Recap**

Remember, your success is within your control. Your ego may try to convince you that it is not, that others are to blame for your failure, but you must take responsibility for your actions. When you accept responsibility for your own actions, you are able to learn from your mistakes, control yourself and your surroundings, and take hold of your own success.

## Habit Three: Stop Talking So Much

*"Most of the successful people I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking." - Bernard M. Baruch*

One of the biggest mistakes people make on the way to being unsuccessful is to spend more time talking than listening. Every successful person has learned the benefit of being quiet and listening to others.

One of the main disadvantages of talking too much is that it actively takes time you could be listening. There will always be people around you who know more than you, and there will often be people around you who know less. If you're talking, you're missing valuable opportunities to glean knowledge and expertise from those who know more and to understand more those that know less.

The advantages of listening, therefore, are two-fold. On the first hand, listening to smarter and more successful people than you provide insight into how they become that way. Listening is the easiest way to learn new lessons—without the pain of failing on your own first. Those who are successful have likely made many mistakes on their road to success, and failed countless times. As you take your path toward success, you may face some of the same situations they faced. You can use their failures to educate your successes—but only if you've stopped talking long enough to hear them.

On the other hand, listening to those around you who are at the same place or not as far along in their journey as you can also be enlightening. Think of a person who runs an ice cream shop, and finds himself surrounded by customers who know nothing about business—but maybe do know a little bit about ice cream consumption. He may be tempted to talk about what his business plan can offer, but these people likely aren't interested in that anyway. What he can do is listen to them, and he might find that they can help him inform his business plan, as well. If enough customers say that they prefer the Rocky Road flavor to Chocolate, or the chairs with backs to the chairs without, the manager can make choices that are influenced by these conversations. However, he would have missed this opportunity if he had spent more time talking than listening.

In addition to missing out on learning moments by talking, talking too much also has the negative effect of being ineffective. If you spend an

hour talking to a friend about your plans, that's an hour you are actively not pursuing your goals—you're only talking about them. In this way, you've lost an hour on your path to success, and probably not gained much from it at all.

Many people spend their time talking about their dreams thinking that it will increase their motivation, but in actuality, the opposite is true. When we talk about our plans, we actually lose motivation. How? Well, in order to find that out we need to focus on the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

### **Extrinsic v. Intrinsic Motivation**

Scientists and psychologists have studied the effects of motivation on the human psyche for centuries, but in the early 1970s, they first began to differentiate between extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Edward Deci and Richard Ryan published a book entitled, "Intrinsic Motivation" in 1971, where they argued that there were two different types of motivation that humans used.

The first type of motivation was extrinsic motivation, which is a motivation that is produced by external rewards. For instance, a child who has a sticker chart to do chores is motivated by the stickers that go on the chart. The reward, the stickers, are an external factor, happening outside of the child's body. The stickers are what motivates the child to continue doing chores.

The second type of motivation was intrinsic motivation, which is a motivation that is produced by internal rewards. For instance, a person who goes to a soup kitchen to help out and finds that they experience a level of gratefulness, as a result, is motivated by the internal reward of a grateful heart. Remembering this internal reward will motivate the person to help again.

Those who focus on intrinsic motivators seem to achieve more success than those who focus on external motivators. In fact, in a second study entitled "The effects of extrinsic incentive on some qualitative aspects of task performance," done by Kruglanski, Friedman, and Zeevi in 1971, psychologists found that extrinsic motivation and external rewards actually harmed the motivation and success rates of students. Originally, they studied college students to reach this conclusion, but eventually widened the participants' scope and found that even children as young as preschool

age were more likely to succeed with intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation. In addition, any positive effects that did come with extrinsic motivation decreased in value over time.

Talking about our plans with a friend is an example of trying to find extrinsic motivation. When we talk with our friends or colleagues about our plans, we throw all of our motivation and good feelings into the conversation. We hit our peak of excitement in relaying our success to our friends, and when they respond positively, that becomes a form of external reward we achieve. However, this reward is only for talking about our plans—not for actually doing them.

On the contrary, when we don't share our plans with others, we focus solely on our internal desires. Our motivation is entirely intrinsic, and we use it to fuel our success. Instead of our peak hitting when we're in the middle of a conversation, our peak hits when we're alone and can actually do something productive with it.

Have you ever had the experience of being out to coffee with a friend, and you begin talking about something exciting you're planning? In the moment, you feel like you could run through a wall to find this success, but by the time the conversation is over and you've gone home to accomplish it, you've lost much of the fire and motivation you had in the beginning.

Taylor Swift, arguably one of the most influential musicians of her generation, says in her documentary "Miss Americana" that many of her songs stem from ideas she's had mid-conversation. She's been known to dip out of a conversation, sometimes even mid-sentence, to capture a line or a thought that came to her while she was with friends or family. Many of her songs are recorded in voice memos on her cell phone, taken at the peak of her motivation. Those very ideas have become Grammy-winning songs, but imagine for a moment if she had chosen instead to stay in the conversation and continue talking. Likely, the conversation would derail and she would end up losing the motivation to write the song that entered her the accolades that have made her as successful as she is.

Instead of talking about your plans, take a note from Swift's playbook and begin doing. When you hit the peak of your motivation, wherever you are, step away and take advantage of it in order to capture your success.

In addition, practice only sharing with others about your path once you have seen results. Train your brain to understand that talking is not activity, and that any motivation that comes through talking should come due to the results—not the ideas.

## **Action Steps**

There are a few steps you can take to turn your talk into action so you can take advantage of the motivation you have.

First, let your excitement motivate you. Instead of focusing on external motivation and using others reactions as your reward, use your own feelings as your motivation. Bottle the peak of your excitement and spend it on yourself, instead of letting it flow away in conversation.

Second, share your successes with others once you achieve them, not before you've gotten started. Let the feeling of success and others' excitement when you succeed be your only form of extrinsic motivation. This feeling of success and the praise from others will feed your ego, which directly affects how much success you'll be able to achieve.

Third, when you are tempted to talk about your path, ask yourself: is there an action I can take instead of talking about it? Instead of entering a conversation, use your peak excitement to enter a moment of productivity.

Fourth, ACT! Now that you've identified an action you can take instead of talking, actually do it!

Fifth, write down your thoughts. You can bring yourself to the same peak excitement you get in talking with others by writing down your own thoughts and letting your mind fuel the excitement. Then, use that excitement to get to work!

## **Recap**

We often make the mistake of thinking that talking about our path to success will make it a reality, but this is actually the opposite of the truth. Not only does talking take up space where we could be listening or doing something productive, but it flips our motivation.

Talking about our plans takes motivation out of our hands and puts it in the hands of the person we're discussing with. In order to get our motivation back, we need to stop talking and start doing. Focus on your internal motivators, like pride in your success, and less on external



motivators, like your friends reactions. Learn to rely on your own pep-talks and not the pep-talks of others.

## Habit Four: Procrastination

*"Never do tomorrow what you can do today.  
Procrastination is the thief of time." - Charles Dickens*

Think about the last time you procrastinated. Perhaps it was a big project for school, a deadline for work, or even a family project that needed completing. Do you remember what you were doing while you were procrastinating? Do you remember how you felt when it was time to actually buckle down and do the work?

Nearly everyone has had the experience of procrastination coming back to hurt them. Most everyone remembers the panicked feeling of trying to hit the deadline, the self-loathing that comes with realizing you didn't have to feel this way or work this hard, and the worry that you won't get done what you set out to accomplish. Procrastination is an impediment to success.

Procrastination takes success right out of your hands, and instead, makes success a battle that must be won. With time comes the ability to move at your own pace, to think critically and tackle problems with expertise and assurance. Instead of racing against time and potentially making mistakes, you are able to thoughtfully consider your actions and make sure you're putting your best work out there. In this way, your success is yours to own. You've done the best work you can do, and put yourself in the best position to succeed. Procrastination eliminates these advantages and puts roadblocks on your path to success, thereby taking success out of your grasp and leaving it up to chance.

In addition, procrastination encourages slothfulness. Most of us don't procrastinate by being productive in other ways—we procrastinate by binge-watching television, by spending time with friends, or by doing other 'fun' activities that don't help us on our goals. We will go into much more detail on this in a later chapter. With that said, there is a time and place for these fun activities, and they are essential for good mental health; however, they should not be used as a way to avoid our responsibilities. The more we put off, the more likely we are to put more off. When you sit down to watch one episode of a show on Netflix, it is much easier to watch two or three than if you never started watching one at all.

When we get in the habit of procrastinating by embracing fun behaviors, we teach our minds and our bodies to get used to this slothfulness. Instead of showing our bodies the benefits of productivity, we discourage it. Our bodies learn to expect these slothful tendencies, and we embrace them over productivity.

Procrastination is a direct result of fear. Studies have shown time and time again that people procrastinate, primarily due to a fear of failure. The belief is that if they never get started on a project, they will not have to face their fears of failure. So instead, they find ways to coddle themselves and put off facing the fear that is overtaking them. Meanwhile, the brooding to-do list on their mind hovers over every move they make. The fear isn't actually pushed off—it now embraces and encapsulates every person's decision and behavior. It is continuously in the back of their mind, lurking. Where they could face this fear and banish it forever, the procrastinator has invited the fear into every nook and cranny of their mind and is now held captive to it.

In "The Relationship between Motivation, Fear of Failure and Procrastination among Working Women," Sanjeevini Dixit writes, "Procrastination is one way that individuals self-handicap and undermine their efforts to succeed in the workplace." Dixit cites nine different studies to reach this conclusion. Procrastination is "a tendency to put off or completely avoid an activity under one's control" (Tuckman, 1991). People procrastinate primarily to avoid the embarrassment of failure in the short-term but that protecting oneself from short-term shame and embarrassment often leads to lower levels of motivation, performance, and possible failure (Urban & Midgley, 2001).

Clearly, procrastination does not increase the likelihood of success, and in fact, diminishes it. Instead of procrastinating, we must learn to face our obstacles head-on and right away. Give yourself enough time and space to be able to focus on your task at hand fully. While fear of failure motivates procrastination, you can use a lack of procrastination to face your fear and decrease the likelihood of failure.

My father was a lawyer who was desperate to be a judge one day. When an opening came up for the court in our county, my father wanted to apply. The time period between the vacancy and when the application was due was only two weeks, and the application was a lengthy one. My father was so afraid of filling the application out incorrectly, that he put it off for

days. When it was finally time to sit down and do it, he was extremely frazzled. He worked until the last minute, hurriedly filling the spaces in an effort to get it to Fed-Ex in time to overnight it. He was able to overnight it and paid a hefty price—only to find out the next day that there had been a delay in the mail system, and his application hadn't arrived in time.

My father was furious with FedEx. His application should have arrived in time for the deadline, but the mail delay had kept it from doing so. However, my father's blame was misguided, as we talked about in Chapter 2. Instead of blaming FedEx for their mistake, my father should have taken responsibility and blamed his own procrastination. He had two weeks to complete the application. If he hadn't procrastinated, he could have completed the application earlier, and his application likely would have been more thoughtful and extensive than the one he rushed to complete. In addition, he could have given himself enough time to send the application in with time to spare—and the delay in FedEx wouldn't have made a difference. The truth is, while the delay in FedEx didn't help matters, it was not the reason that his application was late. His procrastination was to blame for the tardy application. He waited so long to get started that his success was no longer in his hands, but in the hands of a company that quite literally could not deliver.

Don't make the same mistake my father did. Keep your successes in your hand. Don't give your power over to time or anxiety. Use time to your advantage, and allow yourself the benefits that come from having ample time and resources to put your best foot forward. This is your best way to capture success. Leave yourself enough wiggle room in completing assignments that things can go dreadfully wrong, but success will still be within your control.

Instead of allowing yourself to give in to slothfulness and procrastination, train yourself to be a go-getter. Focus on what you can get done, not what you can put off. When you are successful at overcoming one obstacle, climb the next one as well. The more you accomplish, the more you will want to accomplish. Learn to face your fears head-on!

One of the best ways to combat procrastination is to make a to-do list. If your project is a big one with multiple parts, put each part on your to-do list, and check it off as you go. As you check things off your list, you'll find that they leave your mind and no longer keep your focus, so you can spend your focus on other things.

## **Action Steps**

In order to combat the habit of procrastination, you must start by not procrastinating. You must train yourself to repeat the action of not procrastinating in order to get the result you want—a habit of acceptance, rather than avoidance.

Practically speaking, begin first by downloading an app for keeping to-do lists, or if you're more of a kinesthetic learner, by keeping a pad of paper nearby with your to-do list. Take your action items out of your head and write them down, so you can see clearly what you need to accomplish. Set dates next to them that they are due—and make those dates with enough wiggle room to be able to comfortably rest easy knowing that even if FedEx doesn't deliver—you will.

Second, aim to accomplish the task even before the deadline you've set. Chip away at big projects if you need to, or schedule a time where you will sit and work on the project at hand. Treat your appointment to work on your project the same way you would a Dentist's appointment—put it in the calendar and stick to it.

Third, identify ways to help you focus. If your problem with procrastination is that you're easily distracted by your cell phone or email, set up a system that allows you to black those things out until you've finished a section of your project, or until you've reached a certain time limit. If your problem is that you end up letting a day go by without thinking about it, set a specific time that you'll work on it, and stick to it like it's a note in your calendar. If you need someone to keep you accountable, call a friend and ask them to check in to see how far you've advanced. Identify your distractions, and find ways to combat them.

## **Recap**

Procrastination is one of the biggest impediments to success, and one of the easiest ones to break. Procrastination stems out of a fear of failure, but actually increases the likelihood of failure in the activity. Face your failure head-on, create deadlines for yourself and find ways to stick to them. Don't put your success in the hands of circumstance, but keep it within your own grasp and control. You decide how successful you are.

## Habit five: The "I Can't" Motto

*"Whether you think you can or you can't, you're right."  
- Henry Ford*

How many times have you beaten yourself up over something that someone else gave no mind to? We are all our own worst critics, and there are many times when we speak more negatively about ourselves than others do about us. When we do this, we engage in negative self-talk that has the potential to destroy us.

Negative self-talk is inner dialogue we have with ourselves that limits our ability to believe in ourselves and reach our full potential. Any thought that diminishes your ability to motivate yourself and believe in your abilities is a form of negative self-talk, and we are prevalent to it. Negative self-talk can be disastrous for our health, as the study "Psychological Processes Mediate the Impact of Familial Risk, Social Circumstances, and Life Events on Mental Health" found. Negative self-talk leads to limited thinking, perfectionism, feelings of depression, relationship challenges, and a fractured ego. Yet, we engage in it all the time.

Your inner voice becomes the voice you listen to and rely on more than any other. It becomes your conscience, your gut, and your trusty advisor. In order to live the best and most successful life you can, you have to learn to train your inner voice to be positive, not negative.

Your behaviors stem from your thoughts, so when your inner voice takes on the motto of "I can't", then your actions follow suit. When you believe that you can't scale a mountain, you're less likely to improve your rock-climbing abilities or reach your goals. If you believe you can't get a certain job, you're less likely to submit your resume or prepare for your interview. No matter what the situation, if you go into it believing your inner critic that you cannot accomplish your goals, you will fail to accomplish what you want.

Of course, the problem comes in the space in between where you are and where you're headed. Of course, it is unreasonable to expect yourself to be able to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro when you've only been climbing a rock wall at the gym. At present, of course, you are not able to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, however, that does not mean that you will not be able to one day, if you put in the effort and have an "I can" mindset as you train. Your



abilities may preclude you from reaching your goal at this particular moment, however, they do not preclude you from reaching your goal in the future.

This is where the role of confidence comes in. Confidence is a belief in yourself that is unshaken by the circumstances of life around you. You must go forward on your goal, allowing yourself to 'fake it until you make it'—rather than destroying your confidence by telling yourself that you cannot possibly accomplish your goal. If you do not have confidence, or let your confidence wither through failure, you are falling into an "I can't" motto that will destroy your progress.

If you believe you can't accomplish something, what will happen to those around you? Will they be able to support you and encourage you? If you don't believe in your ability to meet your goals, why should anyone else?

In order to beat the "I can't" attitude and the negative associations that come with it, we must first look at how we can silence the negative self-talk coming from our inner critics, and instead, replace it with positive self-talk. There are numerous benefits that come from positive self-talk, and they include increased life span, lower rates of depression, lower levels of distress, greater resistance to the common cold, better psychological and physical well-being, better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, and better coping skills during hardships and times of stress according to the Mayo Clinic. It's been shown that those with positive thinking both cope with stress better and generally live healthier lives, with an increase in physical activity, a healthier diet, and moderate intake of alcohol and drugs.

In order to combat negative self-talk, we must begin to recognize where it begins. There are a few different types of negative self-talk to identify. The first is filtering, which is when you magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out the good. You focus only on what you cannot accomplish, not on what you did accomplish.

The second is personalizing, which is when you automatically blame yourself for something that happened, even if the fault didn't lie with you. If someone cancels plans because they aren't feeling well, you might immediately assume it's because they don't want to see you.

The third is catastrophizing, which is when you automatically assume and anticipate the worst, even when there's no reason to do so. You

assume the rest of your life will be a disaster because one thing went wrong in the morning.

The fourth is polarizing, when you see things as either only good or only bad, and you leave out the space between where the grey area lives. You feel you must be only perfect or a total failure, and there's no in-between.

Once you've identified these four types of negative self-talk, you can start to change your attitude. Identifying the negative self-talk enables you to replace it with positive self-talk.

You can begin by identifying areas to change. Think about the times during your day when you find the most negative self-talk, and work on combatting those with some more positivity. Focus on one area that you can do this. Stop yourself during your day and think about the negative things your brain is telling you, and if you need to correct ship and focus on the positives, do so. One way to stay positive is to be open to humor and seek it out.

Surround yourself with positive people, and make sure the people in your life are uplifting you, rather than pulling you down. Practice positive self-talk. The simplest rule with positive self-talk is that you promise not to say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to yourself. Capture the thoughts running through your head, and ask yourself if you would say that out loud to a friend. If you wouldn't, treat yourself kindly and refrain from saying it to yourself.

All of these are ways you can combat negative self-talk, and turn an "I can't" attitude into an "I can" attitude. You would never tell a friend that they can't climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, so why would you tell yourself that? Focus on what you can do, not what you can't do, and make an effort to allow positivity to rule the roost in your brain.

When you take on an "I can" attitude, not only do you inspire confidence in yourself, but you inspire the confidence of others. How many times have you watched someone accomplish something and suddenly, felt that you were able to accomplish things as well? Allow yourself to be that positive influence in someone else's life by being positive about your abilities and what you can accomplish.

Think about the children's book "The Little Engine that Could" by Watty Piper. The Little Engine that Could tells the story of a train that must

be pulled over a high mountain after its engine breaks down. Other trains are supposed to pull it, yet they all refuse, thinking they aren't able to. A small engine is finally asked if he will do the work, and he does so by repeating his motto, "I Think I Can". He ends up making it up the hill, and the moral of the story is that because he thought he could do it, he was able to do it. All the other trains thought they couldn't, and failed before they even tried.

## **Action Steps**

In order to conquer the "I Can't" motto, replace it with an "I Can" motto. Begin by identifying the places where you hear your negative self-talk the most, and work to turn that into positive self-talk. For every "I can't" that you hear yourself saying in your mind, replace it with an "I can" motto.

Next, think of examples in your life where "I can" became your story. Is there a time when you set your mind to something and you accomplished it? Tell yourself the story of your successes over and over again until they become the forefront of your mind. When you're reminded of times you've succeeded, you're more likely to see yourself succeeding in the future, as well. Let your stories of success serve as a rebuttal to your feelings of inadequacy.

Third, as you accomplish things, write down what you accomplished and turn them into positive "I Can" statements. If you were able to run a seven-minute mile for the first time, take advantage of your accomplishment and turn it into an "I can" statement. Do this with all of your accomplishments, and expand the number of success stories you can tell about yourself.

Lastly, tune-in to the way others speak about themselves. When they are engaging in negative self-talk, call them out on it. The more you pay attention to negative self-talk in others, the more you'll pay attention to it within yourself. Work with friends and family you trust to create positive-self talk in your lives, and by doing so, you'll create the positive circle that's needed to take control of your life.

## **Recap**

Negative self-talk impacts everyone. We all have an inner self-critic that seems to be harder on us than anyone else is. In order to be successful, we need to silence the negative self-talk from our inner critics and replace it with positive self-talk. When we do this, we go from an "I can't" attitude that maximizes failure and minimizes success into an "I can" attitude that minimizes failure and maximizes success. The start of any success is the belief that you can achieve it!

## Habit Six: Overconsumption

*"Lethargy comes from overconsumption of either food or thought." -  
Sadhguru*

When Apple released its IOS12 software, it came with a tracker for Screen Time. Some liked the idea, but overwhelmingly, people began to talk about how the new Screen Time tracker was calling them out on their bad habits. It seemed that most people thought they used their screens only a few hours a week, but the average person uses their phone over four hours a day, according to a study done by eMarketer.

The problem people had with Screen Time wasn't that it told them how much time they spent on their phones, but that it told them how much time they overspent on their phones. If users had been using their phones an appropriate amount of time, they wouldn't have thought much of the report. However, it was the overconsumption of screen time that made them antsy.

Most people are wary of overconsumption. It's why there are constant ads by companies that seek to help you prevent it in your own life. Whether it's weight loss companies that seek to prevent you from overconsumption of food, apps like Screen Time to prevent overconsumption of smartphone use, or tracking journals or applications that seek to help you keep track of how much time you spend in an activity, all of these entities work together to try and curb overconsumption and help the customer work in moderation.

So it's no wonder that overconsumption, as a whole, is antithetical to progress. Overconsumption naturally requires one to be focused on what they're consuming. How can you binge a show on Netflix if you aren't focused on what you're watching? In the same manner, overconsumption also requires the use of time. The more you consume, the more time you must devote to the task. It will always take you twice as long to eat two sandwiches as it does to eat one or watch two episodes of a show instead of one. Therefore, overconsumption takes both focus and time away from your goals and focuses them on the product you're consuming.

Overconsumption also encourages slothfulness. Generally, when someone is binge-watching Netflix, they're doing so in a reclined position. When someone is binge eating, they're doing so in the place of exercising.

No matter what you are consuming, doing so in a large quantity means that you are naturally missing chances in your day to get moving and to be productive.

Finally, overconsumption only feeds procrastination. If you stop to think about what you're consuming too much of and why, you will likely find that your overconsumption is either out of boredom or a sense of wanting to procrastinate. You don't want to actually weed the garden, so instead, you binge a show on Netflix. Perhaps you don't want to write a paper, so you go get a second lunch for the day instead of sitting down to do it. The more you over-consume, the less you are able to accomplish.

Overconsumption isn't just bad for you, either. Over a fifth of the world's food is lost due to over-eating and waste, and the world population consumes about 10% more food than it needs, according to a study done by the University of Edinburgh. Overconsumption by those with the means to do so means that there is food scarcity in other areas, as well.

Physicians, particularly those who work with pediatric groups, have found that digital media has an almost drug-like effect on young viewers, and can impact physical health in various ways. For one, too much screen time can cause "computer vision syndrome", which results in strained, dry eyes, blurred vision, and headaches, as well as neck and shoulder pain. Screen time also reduces both the quantity and quality of sleep, negatively impacts weight, and increases the risk of diabetes and heart disease in adults. In teenagers, prolonged screen time also leads to psychological difficulties, a lower sense of community and belonging, less creativity, and low self-confidence. In addition, a recent study published in *Psychology Today* found that 50% of teenagers and adults report being addicted to their devices.

With all of these negatives, it's imperative that we try to curb the effects of overconsumption instead of focusing on consuming media, food, and beverages in moderate amounts. When we are able to consume moderately, we open ourselves up for a world of possibility.

We need to consume moderately so we can focus on our goals. Think about the things you read in books, or what you see on Netflix. What percentage of those things are actively helping you meet your goals? For some, it may be much of it. If you're an avid runner seeking to run faster, and you're watching shows about running or reading a book about how to run faster, you may find that your consumption of other materials is helping



you. However, if you're watching a soap opera and reading a book about history, then your overconsumption is not getting you closer to your running goal. We should limit the time we spend consuming things that do not help us achieve our goals. It is okay to take a break and have some fun every now and then, but success requires focus on our goals above all else.

We must learn to spend our time where we spend our life. In other words, if you want your life to be about a specific set of values, you must spend your time cultivating those values. Think about a father who says his entire life is his family, yet spends the majority of his time at work and doesn't know anything about his children. Is his life really about his family? The way we spend our time shows our priorities. If your priority is to succeed and reach your goals, then you must spend your time in a way that prioritizes these goals, as well.

Our habits should encourage, not discourage, productivity. If you want to be productive in your day to day life, you must take steps of productivity. When you're focused on overconsuming goods, you miss out on times of productivity, and you set forth a habit of trading productivity for what's easy. You must learn to fuel your productivity, not your procrastination.

## **Action Steps**

The first thing you should do in order to curb overconsumption is to be honest about how much you're consuming in the first place. Track your calories, record your screen time, and make an effort to keep count of what your day really looks like. Without an honest look at how you're doing, you can never see how far you have to get where you're going.

Next, set a goal for what you want your consumption to look like. What is your end goal for how much you will eat or how much you will watch? What is your end goal for the kinds of things you will consume and how much of them. Write your goal down.

Third, cut your current consumption by 10%. Do this weekly, until you get down to the level of consumption you're happy with. A gradual decrease will do better than a total cut-down and help you feel less deprived over time. 10% is a manageable amount to decrease any overconsumption by.

Fourth, replace. Use that time you would have spent consuming your addiction before and replace it with something new. Perhaps instead of

eating the extra 200 calories, now you will go for a walk. Instead of watching the TV show, you might write a chapter of the book you have been wanting to finish. Focus on your goals, and use your newfound time and focus to be more productive in meeting them.

## **Recap**

We are all guilty of overconsuming in one area or another in our lives. However, overconsumption takes focus and time away from our goals, and encourages us to trade productivity for procrastination. In order to curb the effects of overconsumption, we must learn to consume moderately. We can replace the time and focus spent on our previous addictions with productive measures to reach our goals, and we will find that success happens much more quickly.

## Habit Seven: Minimizing Others Successes

*"People who can't stand to see the success of others will never experience their own." - Unknown*

Sometimes when we see others succeeding where we haven't, we're tempted to minimize the success. Often, this happens because we're envious. We recognize their success and we want it to be our own. Maybe we feel shame that we haven't reached that level of success, or we feel embarrassed that someone else exposed our weakness to do it. Perhaps we feel angry that someone accomplished what we have been so desperate to achieve. Our envy brings uncomfortable realizations about our own failures, so we seek to find comfort by making the envy disappear. We do this by minimizing the success of others, so that we can trick our psyche into thinking there's nothing to be envious of. If the success wasn't that great, then we have no reason to be embarrassed or angry for our lack of success. Envy does more than point out our places of failure, though. It can have disastrous effects on our ability to succeed.

Envy kills our joy and rots us from the inside. Have you ever had a moment where you were excited about something in your own life, only to have someone usurp it with their own? Suddenly, the joy you felt about your own life has been replaced with envy for someone else's. This causes you to resent them or harbor bitterness toward their lives, rather than embrace the joy in your own life.

The second thing envy does is kill your focus. Instead of focusing on your internal motivations and working toward your goals, envy turns your focus outward. You are now focused on what others have, instead of what you need to do to get what you want.

The third thing envy does is kill your ego. Your ego is delicate, and it's fueled by both moments of failure and moments of success. When you succeed, your ego grows and you become more confident. However, when you fail, your ego shrinks and you become less confident. Envy causes your ego to shrink since you are comparing your accomplishments to someone else's and coming up short.

According to IZA Institute of Labor Economics' 2018 study, "Is Envy Harmful to a Society's Psychological Health and Wellbeing? A Longitudinal Study of 18,000 Adults," Envy has a detrimental effect on our

mental health and our society at large. The study was longitudinal, following 18,000 individuals over ten years to examine their mental health in relation to social media and the envy it presents within users. They found a few major conclusions.

The study found that young people, particularly, are susceptible to envy, specifically envy that comes as a result of social media use. As people grow older, levels of envy tend to fall.

Second, the study found that envy is a powerful predictor of worse mental health and well-being in the future. In fact, someone's mental health can decrease by over 500% simply by increasing the amount of envy they possess.

Third, the study found that there's no evidence that envy acts as a motivator. Greater envy is associated with slower growth of psychological well-being, not higher.

## **Inspiration, not Envy**

If you're finding yourself envious of those who are further along in their journey than you, turn your envy into inspiration. Instead of minimizing the success of others, maximize it and praise it. Let those you are envious of be a teacher and inspiration, not a source of bitterness.

Let the success of others show you your gaps, but don't look at these gaps as negative. Look at them as part of the journey. When you can clearly see where you are and where you want to go, you can better create a path to get to where you want to be.

You can also let the success of others provide you a path. Every successful person began where you are now—wondering how to find success in their dreams. The difference is, they've accomplished it already, and you have yet to. Look at those who have accomplished the success you want as a guide. Let them show you the path to success.

Let the success be your motivation. Now that you've seen that success is possible, use that possibility to help spur you toward your own success. There is no reason success should be attainable for others and not for you—use this as your motivation!

After winning gold at the 2016 Olympics, Aly Raisman was asked what motivated her. She told the story of watching the 2004 Olympics with her mother, and seeing Carly Patterson win the gold medal. She was

instantly inspired, and motivated to overcome any obstacles in her way to reach the top of her sport. Raisman's inspiration fueled her success.

Imagine what would have happened if Raisman had minimized Patterson's success? If she had shrugged it off as being no big deal, Raisman would never have been as inspired or motivated to do better than she was. She would have fallen into mediocrity. Instead, Raisman recognized Patterson's success and elevated it. Her success wasn't something to be envious of, but to be inspired by.

The success of Patterson pushed Raisman forward and gave her a path to success. Instead of wondering how to get where Patterson was, Raisman could look at Patterson's path as an example to her own.

### **Action Steps**

Envy is a natural emotion, but it's one that we can use to inform. In order to help turn envy into inspiration, try these action steps:

Begin by identifying someone you are envious of. Why are you envious? What is it that you want that they have? Examine this deeply to get to the crux of where your envy originates.

Next, research the person. If they're known personally to you, ask them questions about how they got to where they are now. If they aren't, research them and the path they've taken to get to where they are. What can you learn from their path? How could you model your path after theirs? This will help you maximize their success so you can learn from it.

Third, identify your next step based on the path you've found about the person you're envious of. You may be at any point on the path, but there is still a step to take to move forward. Identify what your next step is.

Fourth, take that step! Whatever it is, take the first step on your path, and let the person you were previously envious of become your inspiration.

### **Recap**

We have a tendency to see someone who is successful and minimize their success. Others' success makes us envious and causes us to feel angry or embarrassed about our failures. Envy is an understandable emotion, but it comes with major drawbacks. It robs you of your joy, kills your focus, and harms your ego. However, when you can flip your envy and turn it into inspiration, you can let the success of others show you your gaps, where

you want to go, and how to get there. Your inspiration can give you the pathway you need to find the success you want, and act as a motivation for you to claim it for yourself. When you maximize others' success, you allow yourself to be inspired by their success, and you'll be more successful as a result.

## Habit Eight: Assuming Outcomes

*"Assuming is a form of giving away your power to another regarding an outcome that concerns you." - Molly Friedenfeld*

The type of attitude you have has a profound impact on your life. According to *The Happy Life*, an optimistic outlook on life creates more happiness, more positive emotions and better relationships, fewer negative emotions, better health, better coping skills, and better performance. The opposite, however, is true of negative attitudes. In short, your attitude affects your behavior, your health, and your well-being.

Optimistic and pessimistic attitudes don't occur in a binary, however, but on a spectrum. On the far left of the spectrum lies unrealistic pessimism, which is overblown negative thinking. This is the kind of thinking that causes anxiety spirals and leads to the imagination of catastrophes stemming from minor events. This attitude is irrationally pessimistic and entirely unhelpful.

On the other end of the spectrum is unrealistic optimism, which is unrestrained positivity. This is also unhelpful, as people who display this kind of optimism don't recognize natural limits and automatically assume that the world will conspire with them in order to help them succeed. In this mode, there's no room for growth or change.

In the middle of the spectrum are realistic optimism and realistic pessimism. Realistic pessimism takes a realistic approach to the problems and outcomes, but it pays special attention to negative outcomes. Realistic optimism takes a realistic approach to problems and outcomes, but pays special attention to positive outcomes. In nearly every situation, having a realistic optimistic approach is the most beneficial .

We all have a tendency to assume outcomes before they've happened. This is an evolutionary trait we've developed in order to stay safe and keep our ego in check. However, assuming outcomes, if done incorrectly, can have detrimental effects on the success we are able to achieve.

Assumption takes power out of your hands. When you assume an outcome will be one way or the other, you're less likely to put in the effort to get the outcome you desire—because you've already resigned yourself to the outcome you assume. Generally, when we assume outcomes, we fall on

the far end of the spectrum. We find that we are either assuming an overly positive outcome or an overly negative one. This works negatively, regardless of whether the outcome you assume is positive or negative. If you assume that the outcome will be positive, you're less likely to put in the additional effort to make it so. Likewise, if you assume the outcome will be negative, you're less likely to put in the effort to make it positive, since you've now deemed that the outcome will be a negative one no matter what you do.

Take, for example, a student who assumes he is awful at Math and will fail a Math test he has to take on Friday. This student may choose to study less, since he believes that no amount of effort will change the outcome of a failed grade. In this way, it becomes almost a self-fulfilling prophecy—one assumes the worst, doesn't put effort into making things better, and finds that the worst comes true.

Instead of assuming outcomes, we should focus on putting forth the effort it takes to get the desired outcome. We must learn to keep the possibilities of different outcomes open so that we can use these possibilities as a way to motivate ourselves. If we know that our success is within our control, we will be more motivated to do things to control it in a positive way.

However, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't think about the possible outcomes that could come from our behaviors and actions. Thinking about outcomes and preparing for them makes us more well-rounded and gives us a better opportunity for success. If you never think about how your behavior could influence your outcomes, you will never be able to achieve the success you want. However, preparing for your outcomes is not the same as assuming them.

For instance, when you prepare for an outcome, you think about the spectrum of what could happen. If you're studying for a Math test, you might think about the various outcomes you could get on the test. If, for instance, you're studying for a math test and ignoring a section on fractions, your outcomes could vary. If the entire test is based on fractions, you will do poorly. However, if the fractions make up a minimum amount of the test, your outcome would be markedly better. You can't predict this outcome or assume it, but you can use it to inform your preparation. You may decide that the possibility of the test having no fractions is low, and that in order to best prepare, you need to spend some time studying it.



This is using potential outcomes in a way that can inform your behavior, rather than using them as a finality that negatively influences your behavior.

Instead of focusing on what you can't control, focus on the things you can control. You can control how much preparation you put into your success, when you get started, how you focus your time, and what attitude you come to problems with.

## **Action Steps**

Learning to stop assuming outcomes is difficult, but important. Instead of assuming outcomes, we must learn to use the possibility and spectrum of them to inform our behavior. According to Harley Therapy , you can take a few steps to help right this behavior so you can live a less stressful life.

The first thing you must do is learn to recognize when you are making assumptions. Take a week and stop yourself and focus on moments when you are assuming things. Write them down so you can keep track of them, as this will often lead to extra clarity. Look for both small and big assumptions since both can be damaging.

The second thing you can do is ask questions about your assumptions. Break down your assumptions by searching for facts. If you had to prove your assumption true, which facts would you be able to use? If you are unable to find facts, then you know your assumption is baseless, and you can work to change it. Look for the most realistic answer to your questions. Ask yourself if the opposite of your assumption could also be true. All of these questions will help you examine the veracity of your assumption. Write these down, as well.

Third, learn to embrace the unknown. Most of the time, we make assumptions because we want answers, and we want to control things or make sense of them. Learn to be okay with the uncertainty and let the stress of needing to know a final answer go.

Fourth, look at the places where you consistently feel stuck or have a hard time. For instance, if you have a hard time making friendships, start there. What assumptions are you making about yourself or others? Learn to stop these and look for facts instead.

Last, be mindful. Draw your attention to the present instead of the future or the past. Let yourself live in the moment you are in, and you'll find yourself making assumptions about the past or future less and less.

## **Recap**

We all make assumptions about outcomes every now and then, but we must learn to do so only in a positive way. When we make assumptions about our successes or failures, we take the control out of our own hands. Our motivation dwindles, as we've already decided what the outcome will be. Stress increases, and our physical well-being decreases. We must learn to stop assuming outcomes and start working within a framework of possibilities instead. When we allow ourselves to view outcomes on an open spectrum, our motivation increases and we are better able to reach our goals.

## Habit Nine: Quitting When Things Get Hard

*"The struggle is temporary, but quitting lasts forever."*

*- Lance Armstrong*

Most of us can remember a time in childhood when we wanted to quit an extracurricular activity. As a child, my sister was convinced she wanted to be a professional ballerina. My mother put her in ballet classes after weeks of her begging. Three lessons in, my sister was ready to quit. The shoes were too loud, the leotard too itchy, and she found she didn't like dancing after all. My mother made her stick it out through the next recital, but my sister hasn't picked up dance shoes since.

Unfortunately, wanting to quit isn't a desire that's limited to children. Adults are plagued by this same desire, and it is one of the main reasons many don't reach the success they aim for.

Quitting pulls you off the road to success and places you back at the beginning of the journey. When we quit on our goals, we inevitably find ourselves having to start almost completely over—we may even take steps backwards.

There are many different reasons why we may quit on our road to success. The first is that the learning curve to create a new habit, pick up a new hobby, or improve a character flaw is always steep. It is hard to start new, and it's hard to reach your goals. These hardships are often exacerbated by high expectations that are unable to be matched, and a frustration over lack of knowledge, experience, and expertise.

Consider, for instance, someone who has the goal of losing weight. This person is used to eating whatever they want, but they have to restrict calories and exercise on their new weight loss regimen. The first week or two of this is going to be exceptionally difficult. Every meal will feel like deprivation, and exercise will feel like torture. In addition the difficulty present in simply starting something new, the dieter will also experience frustration at their lack of knowledge. They may not know how many calories are in a slice of pizza or an orange, and thus, it will cause them more time to tabulate their calories than someone with more knowledge. This lack of knowledge is frustrating, and the hardship that comes with the newness of the experience couples with it to create a recipe for failure.

This frustration will likely lead to a few beliefs that the dieter in question will begin to associate with themselves. The first belief is that the dieter will experience the same frustration and hardship for the duration of the journey. This belief is not only wrong, but it leads the dieter to begin to lose motivation on the journey. The second belief is that they'll begin to believe that what they're trying to achieve doesn't really matter. Once they start to believe their effort is in vain, it's incredibly hard to stay on track, and incredibly easy to quit. The third belief they may start to experience is the belief that others are able to do it, but they are unable. They'll begin to compare themselves to others and see the quick success someone else may have had, and they'll be discouraged they didn't achieve that success as well.

This is a typical pattern that leads to a quitting mentality, but there are also other key factors. For one, there is the factor of a lack of discipline. A lot of people quit because they aren't willing to be disciplined about staying on track. They get bored, they start to believe it's not worth it, and they start to get complacent. They begin to see the sacrifices they're making as not being worth it, and as a result, they lack the discipline it takes to stay the course. In addition, these same people may feel that once they've messed up once on their journey, it's all for naught. These kinds of people are success streakers—they believe in success only within streaks, and once the streak is broken, they find themselves wanting to throw in the towel. However, this approach makes no sense and certainly doesn't help matters. If you have a flat tire, do you throw out the other three? Or do you fix the flat you have, maybe replace it, and get on your way?

It all comes down to one thing: fear. The majority of people quit on their way to success because they're afraid of failure. They don't believe what they're doing will have the outcome they want, and they're afraid of working so hard and finding nothing in return. They don't believe that success lies within their own hands, so they give up before they fail. With a fear of failure that overshadows all growth, they end up shooting themselves in the foot by letting excuses run rampant and positive behaviors slide.

You've probably heard the myth that it takes 21 days to fix a habit. However, this isn't accurate. This myth is attributed to a plastic surgeon who believed it would take around three weeks for someone to get used to their new body. This idea is entirely different from getting used to a hobby

or learning to break one. Realistically, how long it takes for you to break a bad habit depends on how long you've had the habit, whether the behavior is fully integrated into your life, what rewards you get from it, the other behaviors that reinforce the habit, and your motivation.

The British Journal of General Practice found in 2012 that it can take anywhere from 18 days to 254 days to break a habit, with most people finding habits formed at around 10 weeks. This is a far cry from the 21 days myth that many flaunt, and leads directly to why people quit in the first place: high expectations. When someone routinely believes it will only take three weeks for a new habit to take form, and then it takes longer, it only serves to make the person feel like a failure, which in turn, increases the chance of abandoning goals .

Sticking to your goals is difficult. There are a lot of hoops to crawl through and hurdles to jump over. It's much easier to walk away from your goals than it is to persevere through the hardships, but that's exactly why it's essential to stick to your goals and your path to success.

When you set a challenging goal and give yourself the time and effort needed to meet it, you prove to yourself that you can handle challenging outcomes. If you do this enough times, you'll start to believe you are capable of meeting any challenge. Your "I can't" attitude will be transformed into an "I can" attitude because experience has shown that when faced with difficulties, you overcome them, not cower to them.

You'll also find that results come with hard work. If it were easy to meet your goal, you would have already met it. However, all goals take time and effort to meet. When you put the work in, you will find that the results match. There's no greater form of motivation to keep working on your goals than to see how hard work paid off before.

In addition, learning to adapt is a vital skill. For many people, motivation weans when it gets monotonous. After eating bland food for four weeks straight, a dieter's motivation to continue doing so to lose weight will plummet. Someone who is successful on the road to success is someone who learns to adapt. Whether it's adapting how you reach your goals, or when you reach your goals, you must learn to adapt to what's around you. Think of a pro athlete who suffers a leg injury and can no longer run on the treadmill. The athlete doesn't just sit on the couch and wait for the leg to heal—they find other ways to strengthen the rest of their body. They adapt.

The fear of failure is strong and powerful, but the only way to beat it is to run straight through it. Cowering behind it, or turning around and walking the other way doesn't work. The fear of failure keeps lurking behind us, trying to catch up with us. In order to take down our fear of failure, we must meet it head-on. When there are difficulties, run into them and let yourself overcome them instead of letting them become an excuse as to why you didn't meet the goal you wanted to meet.

## **The Five Ws**

Instead of quitting, focus on the 5 W's.

First, identify your why. Your why is your most essential and elementary motivation. Why do you want to reach this goal? If the goal is weight loss, for instance, what is it that is fueling your desire to lose weight? It could be the desire to look thin, the desire to be able to do more activities, or a concern about your longevity of life. For a lot of mothers, the why is their children and wanting to be around longer to be with them. Find out what your why is, and keep it at the forefront of your mind.

Second, make a plan for the how. How will you meet your goal? What are the steps you will need to hit in order to get to your final destination. Saying "I want to lose 100 pounds" is too big of a goal for one time, even if it is your final destination. Planning how you will get there informs your smaller goals and helps you set realistic markers that will get you to your destination without losing steam.

Third, be patient with the when. Humans have a tendency to map out when we will accomplish something, often giving ourselves a tighter time budget than we need. In some ways, this can be motivating when we reach our goals, but it can also be disappointing when we do not. Set time goals, but be patient with yourself on the when. If you don't meet your goals, use what you learned to inform your next goal—don't give up!

Fourth, track the progress of what. There is no greater motivation than when you see your own progress. Keep track of the progress you made, write it down, and look over it from time to time. This will help you see how your hard work is paying off, even when you're contemplating quitting.

Fifth, don't be distracted by the other who's. When we compare our successes to the successes of others, we only ever come out behind. Everyone reaches success in their own way, on their own timetable. If you

compare your success to someone else's, you may become discouraged that it's not happening as quickly for you as it did for someone else. This often leads to walking away—don't let someone else's success deter you from your own.

## **Action Steps**

Every person who has succeeded had a moment of self-doubt, and many even had a moment of wanting to walk away. The common denominator between successful people, however, is that even when they wanted to walk away, they didn't. In order to set yourself up for success, follow these steps:

First, specify your goals and why you want to achieve them. A goal of "I want to lose weight" isn't as effective as "I want to lose 20 pounds so I can run a marathon in three months." Make your goals specific.

Second, adjust your priorities, your perspective, and your purpose. Remind yourself of what your purpose is, and realign your priorities so they focus on that purpose as well. Set your perspective so that you are looking at your purpose ahead of you, and your priorities are helping you meet your goal.

Third, track your progress. Write down where you started, and periodically, self-check yourself to see how you've grown and progressed over time. Let your progress fuel your motivation and inform your next steps .

Fourth, find your inspiration. Look around you for inspiring stories of people who have succeeded at what you're trying to do, and use them as inspiration!

Fifth, manage your expectations. Don't let faulty expectations be the reason you quit. Manage your expectations. Tweak them as needed, and set them to be challenging, but able to be accomplished.

## **Recap**

Everyone, even successful people, have had moments where they wanted to quit. However, successful people have learned to overcome those moments with hard work and keep their eyes on the prize. Most people who quit do so because of mismanaged expectations and a fear of failure. Their goals start too high, and they become disillusioned and frustrated with the

process it takes to get there. They believe they will fail, so they quit before the fear takes over them.

However, you can prevent this by setting reasonable expectations. This helps you to stay motivated and keeps you from getting to frustrated. You can adapt your expectations to fit your needs, and adapt how you meet those expectations, too. When you do this, you learn to overcome your fear of failure. Do this enough times, and overcoming fear will become muscle memory, instead of cowering to it.



## Conclusion

*"Congratulations! Today is your day! You're off to great places! You're off and away!" - Dr. Seuss*

In the first chapter, we talked about the importance of just getting started. You can read all the self-help books you want and formulate the best game plan available, but if you don't take those first steps toward success, you will never cross the finish line. Of course, planning never hurts, but if it gets in the way of your success, leave it in the dust! Begin your journey of success now.

Success is reached when we take our first steps and allow ourselves to stumble. Remember that the stumbling blocks are what allow us to overcome, and they teach us perseverance. Instead of blaming the rock for why we fell, take responsibility for what we could have done to prevent the fall instead.

Focus on doing, not on talking. When we talk about our plans too much, we lose motivation and we aren't able to capitalize on our raw energy and excitement. Use that energy and excitement to propel yourself forward!

Learn to keep yourself from procrastinating or over-consuming. When we procrastinate, we put our goals off to a day that may never come, instead of reaching them. We do so by letting our focus and energy drift to other things, often things that don't further our goals at all, like TV or binge-eating. Eliminate these distractions over time, and learn to spend the time you would spend consuming on reaching your goals and inching closer to where you want to be.

Your attitude says everything about you. Remember The Little Engine That Could? When everyone else was saying, "I can't," he was saying, "I can!" His attitude made all the difference, and yours will be too. Don't assume a negative or positive outcome to your hard work, as that can decrease motivation. Assume a neutral outcome, and be pleasantly surprised when your hard work carries you past your wildest dreams.

Use the successes of others to propel you forward, not to hold you back. Replace envy with inspiration, and maximize others successes. This will increase the value of success in your mind and give you a path forward to reach your own.

As important as it is to take your first step, it's equally important to keep stepping! Don't let the fear of failure keep you from your goals, and don't quit when you reach a hardship. Remember that every hardship is a chance for growth and an opportunity to succeed.

Within yourself, you have all the power you need to accomplish your goals. It takes firm determination and a mindset of never giving up to succeed.

In the words of legendary coach Herb Brooks, "This is your time, now go out there and take it!"

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