

Pointers and references

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

We all want to be better people, shout at the kids less often, get some perspective at work and call our friends and family more. We have a picture of a better version of ourselves but we're still fallible, lazy, tired and busy. Best intentions fall away and we forget our better selves. To make our jobs a little easier we can listen to Marcus Aurelius who tells us that without a goal we can't live consistently (§3.28). Thinking about the sort of qualities we want to show is a great first step to focus the mind and make sure we know where we're going¹ but we need a little more help. Thinking about the sort of person we want to be and looking closely at the qualities they embody we can come up with a consistent goal, a set of high or even unattainable targets.

Even with our goal, we'll still fail. Badly. But to get us through the tough spots we're going to get help from philosophers, deities, sportsmen, fictional characters, artists and people who are far smarter than us.

The hope here is that we can turn to this set of *Pointers* at times when we're losing our way, forgetting what's important to us and the promises we've made about the sort of person we want to become.

The set of qualities we're looking to develop here are inspired in part by the Modern Virtues page from the School of Life², the majority of content is helpful quotes and aphorisms picked up from books and the internet. If you find one good idea in these pages it will be directly attributable to them (§5.2).

Good luck and, as Seneca would say, live well.

¹Arthur Scopenhauer, [7]

²<http://bit.ly/1XoP0tE>

CHAPTER 2

Action

The *Pointers* here are not things to be mulled over and analysed in great depth, they're included to give us the little nudges and course corrections for our actions.

Without action of some kind our plans for improvement simply won't get very far. We need to look at the mammoth task in front of us and take that scary first step (and then the next). Taking action isn't always easy and choosing the right move (§2.17) at the right time (§4.2) can be stupefyingly hard. The hope is though that we won't be paralysed and we will make a positive impact on the people and projects which are important to us.

We won't be successful all the time (there are sometimes periods weeks in which I'm not very successful on many fronts for much of the time) but by persevering (§2.14 and 6.1) we can chip away at the habits (and even relationships (§3.2)) that are slowing us down or even undoing good progress we've already made.

We need to remember what's important to us. Remember how much time we have and how we choose to spend it¹. Marcus often looks at how little life he's been allotted (and how much he thinks he has left). Although, as Seneca reminds us, it's not that we are allocated a short time, it's just that we are wasteful of the time we do have. It's a good reminder for people like us to just get on with things and not get too wrapped up in ourselves when things do go well.

We also need to keep in mind that people will see how we spend our time and the choices we made. We need to be honest with ourselves about what is important to us and what's not. No matter what we say they will believe what they see (and don't see).

¹<http://bit.ly/1OMUOuU>

Action may not always bring happiness, but without action there is none.

Benjamin Disraeli (2.1)

You may never know what results come from your action but if you do nothing there will be no result.

Mahatma Gandhi (2.2)

Action expresses priority

Mahatma Ghandi (2.3)

Fac aut tace

(2.4)

Do or be silent.

Code wins.

(2.5)

Demonstrate
don't explicate.

Robert Greene (2.6)

When you come to a fork in
the road, take it.

Yogi Bera (2.7)

Each of us lives only now in this brief instant.
The rest has been lived already or is impossible
to see

Marcus Aurelius (2.8)

Do what nature demands. Get a move on if
you have it in you and don't worry whether
anyone will give you any credit for it. And
don't go expecting Plato's "Republic" either,
just be satisfied with even the smallest progress

Marcus Aurelius (2.9)

When you confront a problem you begin to solve it

§11.13

Rudy Guillian (2.10)

It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit

Harry S Truman (2.11)

Stick to what's in front of
you;
Idea, action, utterance

Marcus Aurelius (2.12)

Life is what happens while
you are busy making other
plans

John Lennon (2.13)

Quality is not an act. It is
a habit.

Aristotle (2.14)

How you do anything is how
you do everything

Ryan Holiday (2.15)

If I cannot do great things
I can do small things in a
great way

Martin Luther King Jr. (2.16)

To think is easy.
To act is hard.
But the hardest thing of all
is to act in accordance with
your thinking.

John Von Goethe (2.17)

Although understanding
the theory behind the ac-
tion enables one to speak,
it is the practice which
enables one to act

Musonius Rufus (2.18)

CHAPTER 3

Focus

As hard as it can be to take action, it's even harder to maintain the level of focus we need to on the right things. To help us find the right things we should think about what impact our efforts can produce (§6.19) and what price we'll have to pay. The sun will still hide behind the clouds on our day at the beach, the white van will still drive too close no matter how much we hope otherwise. Better to work on things we can control.

When we do identify the right things, we still squander our time and energy. We're too polite, putting ourselves and our priorities to one side to avoid offending people (§3.7), we make great gains on Twitter and Facebook while we let our Amazing Book Idea gather dust (§3.19), we spend hours mindlessly scrolling around crappy sensationalist journalism when we could be reading an immersive novel (§5.2) or working on our beloved hobby (§11.1).

Epictetus reminds us that we need to gut things from our lives which take us away from the tricky but important business of improvement. We can be sure that nothing truly terrible will happen if we stop using social media. We can be confident that life will carry on if we leave "the mind numbing spirit crushing game shows¹" to someone else. There are so many ways to spend our time, we need to be careful not to waste it and that can require significant effort. Asking ourselves whether what we're doing right now is truly important to us (§3.18) is an incredibly useful habit to develop.

Maybe we should call someone who's important to us and focus solely on that for starters.

Let's take 15 minutes. The advice and guidance on the next few pages will still be here when we get back.

¹Renton, Trainspotting

Call your mom

(3.1)

You are whatever the company you keep is.

Lord Chesterfield (3.2)

Let your mind dwell on examples of honour.

Cicero (3.3)

Steer clear of lifers, the toxic and charlatans.
You become who you know.

Ryan Holiday (3.4)

Never wrestle with pigs, you both get dirty
and the pig likes it.

§3.29

George Bernard Shaw (3.5)

From good men you will
learn good things, if you
mix with bad men you will
destroy even your existing
sense.

Theognis (3.6)

Don't spend time with people you don't like.

Prue Leith (3.7)

They should try to subordinate things to themselves not themselves to things.

§11.22

Horace (3.8)

The things you used to own.
Now they own you

Jack, Fight Club (3.9)

Never look back unless
you're planning to go that
way.

Henry David Thoreau (3.10)

You can do anything.
but you can't do everything.

§3.19

David Allen (3.11)

Reaching your true potential involves choice.
How exactly you choose to excel is up to you.

Brian Colbert (3.12)

No random actions, none not based on under-
lying principles.

Marcus Aurelius (3.13)

If you're not doing what you love, you're wast-
ing your time.

§3.23

Billy Joel (3.14)

If you wish to improve, be content to appear clueless or stupid in extraneous matters

Epictetus (3.15)

NoMFuP

§6.19

Malcolm Tucker (3.16)

Handy to remind ourselves what we should be paying attention to.

Slow down and remember this; most things make no difference. Being busy is a form of laziness. Lazy thinking and indiscriminate action.

§3.18

Tim Ferriss (3.17)

See: efficacy hacks² and a not to do list³.

²<http://bit.ly/1EDPjUQ>

³<http://bit.ly/1EDPu2H>

If you seek tranquillity, do less or (more accurately) do what's essential because most of what we say and do is not essential.

Ask yourself at every moment "is this necessary?"

Marcus Aurelius (3.18)

You're better off not giving
the small things more time
than they deserve

Marcus Aurelius (3.19)

Photography is a subtractive process, you have the whole world and you select a small square of it.

Uta Birth (3.20)

There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.

Peter Drucker (3.21)

Parkinson's Law:

A task will swell in (perceived) importance and complexity in relation to the time allocated for its completion.

(3.22)

Hard work is simply the
refuge of people who have
nothing better to do

Oscar Wilde (3.23)

A man is successful if he
gets up in the morning,
goes to bed at night and
in between does what he
wants to.

§3.14

Bob Dylan (3.24)

It sounds a bit square, but I've found that the chances of getting a good result are just so much higher when you spend at least eight hours a day on your work.

Wolfgang Tillmans (3.25)

The cucumber is bitter?
Then throw it out.
There are brambles in the
path?
Then go around them.

§3.7

Marcus Aurelius (3.26)

Of each thought ask:

- is it necessary?
- is it harmful to others?
- is it true?
- is it self indulgent?

(3.27)

If you don't have a consistent goal in life, how can you live it in a consistent way?

Marcus Aurelius (3.28)

Never try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes time and annoys the pig.

§3.5

Robert Heinlein (3.29)

In six months you will have discarded most of what you claim is important right now.

Ryan Holiday (3.30)

Sometimes the hard stuff is
hard because you shouldn't
do it in the first place

Tim Ferriss (3.31)

CHAPTER 4

Patience

We know how important action is, but acting rashly, without care and attention can do serious harm to ourselves and can undo the good progress we've made towards our aims.

In many ways, for us at least, knowing where we're headed is more important than getting there quickly, especially when you consider that we may not even arrive. So we should consider that the manner in which we undertake the journey is at least as important as the destination.

To some patience can look like a lack of engagement or a lack of commitment but there's often more harm done through an emotional (over) reaction (§4.15) and certainly we're only likely to waste time and do everything badly if we act or speak angrily (§4.13).

We know that we are expected to play the game with limited (or even inaccurate) information but we should take time to reflect and consider what we do know before committing to a course of action. We also need to be open to changing our plans as more facts are revealed (§7.16). Acting in good faith after a consideration of the facts and taking counsel where we can will mean that even when the landscape changes and the actions we took weren't right in retrospect we can still stand by them in the light of what we knew at the time (§8.10). Dive in, on the other hand, and we can blunder from one poorly understood situation to the next and end up in an even weaker position than if we'd have spent some time before rushing off.

It's a lot of effort to be patient enough to maintain a level of control so that we can act correctly, we don't fly into a rage, we don't make snap judgements and we don't let ourselves be carried away by the crowd.

With a little help we can be sure we're up to it.

Ask yourself this question:
Am I in charge of this situation or is this situation in charge of me?

Anthony De Mello (4.1)

Do not make war unless victory may be gained;
If there is a prospect of victory move;
If there is no prospect of victory do not move.

Sun Tzu (4.2)

Never content with a man who has nothing to lose.

Baltazar Graçian (4.3)

Impatience: perhaps the single greatest pitfall.

Robert Greene (4.4)

If you are unsure of a course of action do not attempt it. Your doubts and hesitation will infect your execution.

Robert Greene (4.5)

There are always more
of them before they are
counted.

§??

Ulysses S Grant (4.6)

The senses don't decieve,
judgement deceives.

John Von Goethe (4.7)

Don't let the force of impressions knock you off your feet; just say to it "Just hold on a minute, let me see who you are and what you represent. Let me pit you to the test."

Epictetus (4.8)

It is more important to
know where you're going
than to get there quickly

§3.28

Isocrates (4.9)

Once the words are out,
you cannot take them back.
Keep them under control.

Robert Greene (4.10)

The best advice I ever got
was “shut up”

Ryan Holiday (4.11)

Always say less than necessary¹.

¹<http://tcat.tc/1lwHzGd>

Wise men speak because
they have something to say;
fools speak because they
have to say something.

Plato (4.12)

Never do anything when
you are in a temper, for you
will do everything wrong

Baltazar Graçian (4.13)

The best fighter is never an-
gry

Lao Tzu (4.14)

How much more damage
grief and anger do than the
things that caused them.

Marcus Aurelius (4.15)

Fear is a bad advisor.

Angela Merkel (4.16)

CHAPTER 5

Learning

We don't know enough. We'll likely never master our respective professions, hobbies and past-times, we'll never understand how others behave and what motivates them to any meaningful level but that shouldn't stop us from trying. Quite the opposite in fact. Maintaining an open mind¹ is a key trait for us to make sure we're in a position where we can grow and make progress towards our aims. Getting stuck into patterns of behaviour and allowing our comfort zones to shrink is a sure way to stop progress dead in its tracks.

There's an endless amount of knowledge our open minds can consume but learning in an undirected manner won't help us (§3.17 and 5.18). Deciding which topics (and even which authors) to consume is important enough to be given some serious thought. We can't just let anyone in so following recommendations from those few we trust (§6.47) becomes a key strategy for learning.

Spending some time reviewing what we would like to learn should involve not just a look at our careers and the skills needed for the Next Big Project but a broader look at things we've enjoyed doing in the past and what topics we can look at in that area. If it happens that the topics you've enjoyed are the ones you use every day in your career then you're very lucky and if not? In that case we need to have a more detailed look (§3.24).

No matter what we choose, one way we can certainly learn more is to simply read more² so that we make use of otherwise wasted time.

¹<http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/themindsets/index.html>

²<http://ryanholiday.net/how-to-read-more-a-lot-more/>

You must see your attempt at attaining mastery as something necessary and positive

Robert Greene (5.1)

If I read a book and get one good idea from that \$20, then I've gotten one of the greatest deals of all time

Tom Peters (5.2)

An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

Benjamin Franklin (5.3)

Learn as if you were going to live but live as if you were going to die tomorrow.

Edmund Rich (5.4)

To forgive and forget means
to have thrown away a
dearly bought experience.

Arthur Schopenhaur (5.5)

Every reaction is a learning process; every significant experience alters your perspective.

Hunter S. Thompson (5.6)

The art lies in concealing
the art

Horace (5.7)

If people knew how hard I
worked, it would not seem
so masterful

Michelangelo (5.8)

Successful people are not gifted; they just work hard, then succeed.

On purpose

G. K. Nielson (5.9)

To let one's mind go lax is, in effect, to lose it.

Musonius Rufus (5.10)

The greatest danger you face is your mind growing soft and your eyes growing dull.

Robert Greene (5.11)

I would never die for my
beliefs because I might be
wrong.

Bertand Russell (5.12)

More listening, more learning
Fewer interruptions, fewer conclusions.

§7.16

Ryan Holiday (5.13)

Does learning mean nothing to you unless you know that someone else knows that you know it?

§7.13

Michel de Montaigne (5.14)

If you didn't learn these things to put them into practice, what did you learn them for?

Epictetus (5.15)

I was not proud of what
I had learned, but I never
doubted that it was worth
knowing.

Hunter S. Thompson (5.16)

Never nitpick a heuristic

Nassim Taleb (5.17)

Isn't it the height of folly
to learn inessential things
when time is so desperately
short?

§3.18

Seneca (5.18)

It is a greater thing to make oneself impassable than to be impassable as a property of one's nature.

Michel De Monaigne (5.19)

CHAPTER 6

Resilience

We can't have full control and so things won't always turn out as we'd hoped. Having the courage to pursue our goal in the face of unexpected changes of plan (§6.32), times of poor judgement (§6.3), and even after outright failures (§8.10) will mean that we'll still make slow progress towards our aim of a better self.

The challenges, of course, won't just come from us and our lapses in judgement or the Fates¹ changing their mind, others will see our improvement and resent us or even try to derail us (§6.9). Our successes will make them uncomfortable after they feel as though they've been revealed as lazy, cruel or arrogant. When that happens we need to remember that we were there not so long ago ourselves (§10.10) but we need to keep focussed on what's truly important and what we're trying to achieve. Our route is hard enough without allowing other people to throw us off course (§3.7).

Picking ourselves up and dusting ourselves off needs to become second nature. We may be lucky enough to have support from others at times but we know we can't rely on that, we can only rely on what we control and that is nothing more than our response to what has happened.

To reach our goals we don't need to be the best (§8.14), and in our case it doesn't really make sense to "be the best" as we'll always be able to improve in some way, but we do need to keep at it and no matter what happens acting as though we were already the better person we want to be (§6.7).

No matter what's happened, no matter what they've said, no matter what they've done; it's up to us how we react, it's up to us what happens next.

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parcae>

Fall seven times, stand
eight

§6.31

Japanese Proverb (6.1)

Promise yourself to be so strong that nothing
can disturb your peace of mind.

Christian D'Larson (6.2)

When we are tired we are attacked by ideas
we conquered long ago.

Friedrich Nietzsche (6.3)

All the meat and all that it wants.

Case, Neuromancer (6.4)

It's just fat and muscle.

(6.5)

We control our own actions and are responsible for them. If we act wrongly we have done serious harm to ourselves.

Marcus Aurelius (6.6)

Does what happened stop you from acting with justice, generosity, self control, sanity, prudence, honesty and straight forwardness?

Marcus Aurelius (6.7)

Haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate.

§10.6

Taylor Swift (6.8)

The world loves to blacken the radiant and
drag the sublime through the dust.

Schiller (6.9)

Ambition: tying your well being to what other
people say and do.

Self-indulgence: tying it to the things that
happen to you.

Sanity: tying it to your own actions.

§6.19

Marcus Aurelius (6.10)

You don't need their approval.

Danielle La Porte (6.11)

Tranquility comes when you stop caring what they say.

Marcus Aurelius (6.12)

Choose not to be harmed and you won't feel harmed. Don't feel harmed and you haven't been.

Marcus Aurelius (6.13)

It can ruin your life only if it ruins your character. Otherwise it cannot harm you. Inside or out.

Marcus Aurelius (6.14)

Everyone gets one life. Your's is almost used up and instead of treating yourself with respect you have entrusted your happiness to others.

Marcus Aurelius (6.15)

Care about what other people think and you will always be their prisoner.

§6.19

Lao Tzu (6.16)

If you work hard to do what is right, do not be upset by roadblocks; think about how many of the things in your life haven't turned out as you wanted them to but as they should have done.

Musonius Rufus (6.17)

You control the effort not the results.

Ryan Holiday (6.18)

Ta eph'hemin
Ta ouk eph'hemin

Stoic phrase (6.19)

what is up to us, what is not up to us.

Straight not straightened

Marcus Aurelius (6.20)

What is outside my mind
means nothing to it

Marcus Aurelius (6.21)

The mind without passions
is like a fortress. No place
is more secure

Marcus Aurelius (6.22)

Nothing either good nor
bad but thinking makes it
so.

William Shakespeare (6.23)

Real difficulties can be over-
come.

It's only the imaginary ones
that are unconquerable.

§4.6

Theodore N Vail (6.24)

Problems are rarely as bad as we think they are, or rather, they are precisely as bad as we think they are.

§6.50

Ryan Holiday (6.25)

External things are not the problem. It's your assessment of them which you can erase right now.

Marcus Aurelius (6.26)

Not to give into adversity.
Not to trust prosperity.

And always take note of
Fortune's habit of behaving
exactly as she pleases.

Seneca (6.27)

Take a canvas. Put a mark on it. Put another
mark on it.

Jasper Johns (6.28)

Inspiration is for amateurs-
the rest of us just show up
and get to work

Chuck Close (6.29)

Courage doesn't always
roar. Sometimes courage is
the quiet voice at the end
of the day whispering:
"I will try again tomorrow."

§8.6

Mary Anne Radmach (6.30)

Disgraceful for the soul to
give up while the body is
still going strong

Marcus Aurelius (6.31)

Change is the only constant
in life.

Heraclitus (6.32)

You can suffer the pain of
change or suffer remaining
the way you are.

Joyce Meyer (6.33)

You can't stop the waves
but you can learn how to
surf

§6.32

Jon Kabat Zin (6.34)

All of our unhappiness comes from our inability to be alone.

Jean de la Brugere (6.35)

The more a man has in himself, the less others can be to him.

Arthur Schopenhauer (6.36)

He who conquers others is strong, he who conquers himself is mighty.

Lao Tzu (6.37)

It is reason and wisdom which take away cares not places affording views over the sea.

Horace (6.38)

Happiness depends on ourselves.

Aristotle (6.39)

Success depends on previous preparation, and without such preparation there can be no success

Confucius (6.40)

Proper planning prevents piss poor performance

(6.41)

Optimism is cowardice

Oswald Spengler (6.42)

Hope is a poor hedge

Erik R. Sirri (6.43)

2007, but likely earlier

This is the precept by which
I have lived:
Prepare for the worst,
expect the best
and take what comes.

Hannah Ardent (6.44)

Preparation not luck

(6.45)

Trust yourself more and others less.

Robert Greene (6.46)

Love all.

Trust a few.

Do wrong to none.

William Shakespeare (6.47)

I was once a fortunate man,
then fortune deserted me
but true good fortune is
what you make for yourself.
Good fortune:

- good character
- good intentions
- good actions

Objective judgment now, at
this very moment.

Unselfish action now, at
this very moment.

Willing acceptance of all ex-
ternal events now, at this
very moment.

That's all you need

Marcus Aurelius (6.49)

It is we who generate the
judgments inscribing them
on ourselves

Marcus Aurelius (6.50)

When you judge another
you do not define them, you
define yourself.

Wayne Dyer (6.51)

The burden is equal to the
strength of the horse.

The Talmud (6.52)

CHAPTER 7

Humility

We can't bear listening to empty claims and boasting, it's infuriating especially when people seem to be eating up the inflated claims. At times we fall foul of this behaviour ourselves, acting as though there's nothing we can learn from those around us, acting as though we have it all figured out, acting as though we know it all. No matter how masterful we are in a given area, we can be sure that there are those more accomplished than us and those who are less accomplished. In either case we should be ready to listen to them as they can both provide different and valuable view points to change our direction and improve our processes (§7.16).

We're not immune to needing help, we need to recognise that there are those who have skills that we sorely lack and that asking for help is not a cause for embarrassment it's a chance for us to learn something new, patch our deficiencies and maybe build a new relationship. If we allow ego to stop us from admitting to ourselves that we need help we're doing ourselves a major disservice, we need to put that to one side and let the experts show us the way. Sometimes we'll be out of our depth and alone, in which case we know we need to do what's required to the best of our ability.

We're not immune to luck either, it's incredibly important to remember that the current situation is not just down to how awesome we are, that there's an element of fate involved too. We know that it's only truly our behaviour which is under our control and to act as though that's not the case is incredibly short sighted.

If we can keep this in mind we'll be open to new ideas, we'll be more self aware and we'll chip away at our weaknesses.

You are not a beautiful and
unique snowflake.

Tyler Durden (7.1)

After the game the king and
the pawn go back into the
same box

Italian Proverb (7.2)

You could leave this life
right now. Let that deter-
mine how you act.

Marcus Aurelius (7.3)

He who does not employ
a guide cannot gain advantage
from the ground.

Sun Tzu (7.4)

Take the help.

Danielle La Porte (7.5)

Men of any worth soon come to see that they are in the hands of Fate and gratefully submit to be moulded by its teachings

Arthur Schopenhauer (7.6)

Foolish is the man who delights in his good fortune, supposing it will never leave him.

§6.27

Euripides (7.7)

If you're not humble life will visit humility upon you

Mike Tyson (7.8)

The moment you think you
are successful, failure will
be there for you

Maurizio Cattelan (7.9)

To accept it without arro-
gance, to let it go with in-
difference

Marcus Aurelius (7.10)

Everywhere, at each moment, you have the option:

- to accept this event with humility
- to treat each person as he should be treated
- to approach this thought with care, so that nothing irrational creeps in

§4.7

Marcus Aurelius (7.11)

Be willing to be a beginner every single morning

§3.15

Meister Eckhart (7.12)

Boasting is what a boy does, because he has no real effect on the world.

§7.14

Matthew Crawford (7.13)

A superior man is modest in his speech but exceeds in his actions.

Confucious (7.14)

Your opinion is either dependent on the facts or it's not;

When they change you should shift along with them

§6.34

Ryan Holiday (7.15)

The facts were always there, of course, just unclear or hidden. Think clearly about what you're looking at.
cf. 8.10

Remember that to change your mind and accept correction are mere acts too

Marcus Aurelius (7.16)

and so, under our control

The fool doth think he
is wise and the wise man
knows himself to be a fool

§4.12

William Shakespeare (7.17)

Never be so self absorbed as
to believe that the master is
interested in your criticisms
of him, now matter how ac-
curate they are

Robert Greene (7.18)

but always be ready to listen and use the criticism you
hear.

A great failing: to see yourself as more than you are and value yourself at less than your true worth

John Von Goethe (7.19)

It is the folly of many to
mistake the echo of a Lon-
don coffee shop for the
voice of a kingdom.

Jonathan Swift (7.20)

Diversity in counsel.
Unity in command.

§7.4

Cyrus the Great (7.21)

The unnamed should not
be mistaken for the non-
existent.

Jon de la Brugère (7.22)

CHAPTER 8

Confidence

It's a fine line between arrogance and confidence. We need to be sure about what we're about to do but we need to remember that we're only human and we will make errors in judgement, just as we have done in the past (§10.8).

We can't let our past (§8.18 and 8.19) define our self image and we can't let our past behaviour define how we behave now. Once we've learnt what we can from those events, we need to understand that we can't change what happened but using what we've learnt, we can have an impact on what happens next.

Unchecked, our negative self talk and fear of failure can be paralysing but if we structure our tasks and goals in the right way we can control it. Somewhat. If we aim for things which are under our control we can be more sure of success. In areas where we have some control (or none at all) we need to consider what would constitute a successful outcome and what behaviours might influence that. We're not looking to win the Thursday night poker game, we're looking to make fewer errors than last week. We're not looking to get a raise at work, we're looking to consistently be valuable to our boss. We're not looking to win The Turner Prize, we're looking to hone our craft and produce a vast portfolio of work. Incidentally if we manage to consistently do those things we stand a much better chance of hitting the original external targets but that's none of our concern because we're focussed on what we can control. . .

Ultimately we don't have control of how things will turn out as measured by external metrics and that can be a big hit on our confidence, but if we change our success criteria and focus on internal metrics we stand a better chance of avoiding failure. Not entirely, of course.

Being bold enough to act in the face of that uncertainty is what we're aiming for.

Let go and move with the chaos that presents itself to you. From within it you will find endless oppourtunities that elude other people

Robert Greene (8.1)

Life shrinks or expands
in proportion to one's
courage.

§6.34

Anais Nin (8.2)

So often self confidence is
dependent on the basic but
elusive premise
“I’m fine as I am”

School of Life (8.3)

On confidence¹

Don’t water your weeds

Harvey Mackay (8.4)

Any kind of resistance or obstacle that crosses
your path should be seen as yet another chance
to improve your work

Robert Greene (8.5)

¹<http://www.thebookoflife.org/on-confidence/>

You can adopt the attitude that there's nothing you can do, or you can see the challenge as a call to action

§9.6

Catherine Pulsifer (8.6)

You've already made it this far, might as well take one more step

§6.1

Ryan Holiday (8.7)

But to get back up when you fail, to celebrate behaving like a human (however imperfectly) and fully embrace the pursuit you've embarked on.

Marcus Aurelius (8.8)

You will fail eventually.
Whatever.

§6.7

Danielle La Porte (8.9)

A mistake is not something
to be determined after the
fact but in the light of infor-
mation up to that point

Nassim Taleb (8.10)

A failed attempt is just that and nothing more,
its not the end and its not fatal. Keep at it.

(8.11)

Failure cannot cope with persistence.

§6.30

Napoleon Hill (8.12)

Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we might oft win be fearing to attempt.

William Shakespeare (8.13)

You don't have to be the best you just have to be harder to destroy. You have to be relentless

§8.12

Ryan Holiday (8.14)

You cannot display yourself too brazenly, yet you must get noticed. Create a distinctive (a subtly distinctive) style and image.

Robert Greene (8.15)

Understand: you should be radiating confidence not arrogance and disdain

Robert Greene (8.16)

He who demands little gets it.

Ellen Glasgow (8.17)

You are not your genes

Danielle La Porte (8.18)

Don't let someone else's
opinion of you become your
reality

Les Brown (8.19)

Don't look for miracles you
yourself are the miracle

Henry Miller (8.20)

CHAPTER 9

Gratitude

Just looking at the massively improbable set of circumstances needed to get us here in one piece we should be able to grab handfuls of gratitude from the air. We don't though, we take things for granted after a while. We forget quickly that we're lucky enough to be literate and high enough up Maslow's hierarchy of needs¹ to have time to focus on our better selves having ticked off the basics a long time ago.

It's not just the things we have already that we take for granted, it's someone taking extra effort on our behalf or extending an unexpected generosity to us. We become so cynical that we expect others to be on the make or we sniffily say that they're "just doing their job".

If we can't rely on ourselves to be grateful, we need a little help to remind us and correct our course.

The stoics had a, seemingly, counter-intuitive routine to make sure we appreciated the things we have and the people around us. They suggested that we occasionally take the time to imagine our life without our loved ones and our most treasured possessions (§9.2). By routinely putting ourselves through the loss of a limb or a loved one, we'll feel truly grateful when they are with you (or still connected to the rest of your body).

We know that we should behave as though this is our final day (§5.4 and 7.3) so simply waking up provides us with a great source of gratitude for the day ahead. No matter what else happens (§10.5) not only will we be ready for it but we'll be thankful for the chances brought us for improving ourselves by focussing on the aims we have.

¹<http://bit.ly/1BYf2Nd>

Certainly, if a man of understanding still has himself, he has lost nothing.

Michel De Montaigne (9.1)

When you kiss your wife or child, repeat to yourself, “I am kissing a mortal”

Epictetus (9.2)

...and she may be gone tomorrow.

Treat what you don't have
as non-existent

Look at what you have,
the things you value most
and think how much you'd
crave them if you didn't
have them

§11.22

Marcus Aurelius (9.3)

If the stars were to appear
but one night every thou-
sand years how man would
marvel

Ralph Waldo Emerson (9.4)

The ability to express won-
der and amazement and
seem like you mean it, is a
rare a dying talent but one
that is still greatly valued.

§9.4

Robert Greene (9.5)

Get used to your circumstances, complain about them as little as possible. Grasp whatever advantages they have to offer

§3.26

Seneca (9.6)

It is so hard to forget pain but it is harder to remember sweetness. There is no scar for happiness

Chuck Palaniuk (9.7)

CHAPTER 10

Generosity

Materially speaking, we know that it is better to help many than to live in luxury ¹, we don't need a top of the range car more than the homeless man needs the next meal. Professionally we can be equally tight fisted, grabbing at praise from our superiors and doing our peers down so we are first in line for the bonus and promotion. We don't need to do either of those things of course. Allowing others to take the credit for work we've played a part in or setting others up for success can feel like career suicide but it's character traits like this that, with time, mean we'll be seen as the person who brings up strong talent and the person needed on the project to make sure it's a roaring success. Even when we behave like this, we know other people are selfish, they will upset us and they'll unravel our plans. It doesn't mean they're out to get us (§10.13 and 10.5) even though it may feel like that from time to time.

As hard as it is, if we want to make progress towards our aims, we need to give other people (and ourselves) a break. It's part of our duty to lead by example. We know that focussing on things that happened in the past is fruitless, it won't change the situation and only adds to our own stresses. There are few things more pointless than behaviour like this. We don't have to forget the events, that might mean we'd be surprised next time around but turning them over and over?

There's no need to harbour grudges (§10.3), we don't have that time to waste, but we do need to remember the times we've spoken sharply or hurtfully and we've been forgiven and pass that favour on (§10.10 and 11.12).

¹Musonius Rufus, [4]

You've given and they've received it. And yet, like an idiot, you keep holding out for more. To be credited with a good deed? To be repaid in kind? why?

§2.11

Marcus Aurelius (10.1)

Always give with remembering and receive without forgetting

§11.12

Brian Tracy (10.2)

Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die

§6.8

Malachi McCourt (10.3)

they are just what we would be in their situation

Abraham Lincoln (10.4)

Tell yourself this the people
I deal with today will be:

- meddling
- ungrateful
- arrogant
- dishonest
- jealous
- surly

§10.10

Marcus Aurelius (10.5)

People are going to be like that from time to time and so long as you remember that you've been like that too you can see the behaviour for what it is.

Someone hates me? Their problem.

Mine: to be patient and cheerful with everyone (including them)

Marcus Aurelius (10.6)

Show kindness whenever possible.

§11.12

Dalai Lama (10.7)

Hint: it's always possible.

That you've made enough mistakes yourself. You're just like them.

§10.10

Marcus Aurelius (10.8)

If talking to oneself did not look so mad no day would go by without my growling to myself "you silly shit!" Yet, I do not intend that to be the definition of me.

§8.4

Michel De Montaigne (10.9)

Forgiveness means a long memory of all the times when we wouldn't have gotten through life with someone cutting us some slack. It is recognising that living with others is not possible without excusing errors.

School of Life (10.10)

See the modern virtues ²

²<http://bit.ly/1XoP0tE>

Never say that people are evil. You just need to find the pin.

Émile-Auguste Chartier (10.11)

It seemed right to him.

Epictetus (10.12)

Hanlon's Razor:
Never attribute to malice
that which can be ade-
quately explained by incom-
petence.

§10.10

Robert J. Hanlon (10.13)

or weakness or fear or hunger or . . .

CHAPTER 11

Leadership

It doesn't matter whether we're leading an expedition, a household or just ourselves our behaviour is always influencing those around us and our actions speak volumes about the sort of people we are.

We're holding ourselves to an incredibly high set of standards; we need to recognise the efforts of others and be generous in our interpretation of their actions (§10.10), show gratitude when things go well, have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, be open to correction (from anyone) in the light of better information, let others know they're important to us by putting everything else to one side and focussing entirely on them when they need us (and making sure we're available when they do). Consistently measuring ourselves against these standards will be hard and humbling for us. We will slip up from time to time. What matters is how we deal with those bumps in the road, will we let our heads drop or will we use the situation to our benefit? (§8.6) With sustained practice the gaps between the failures will lengthen and we'll set a better example as a result.

When things go wrong we need to move with a level of determination and confidence demonstrating that we have thought about our options and made a conscious choice about the next steps (§11.13). That's when we can be the most helpful, that's when we can calm things and that's when we're needed most.

Acting as though we have already achieved the qualities we aspire to, acting as though we are already the better versions of ourselves that we imagined at the start of the journey means we can have an incredibly positive impact on those around us.

Of course, it doesn't matter whether anyone follows. Only

that we try to lead.

When you are not practicing remember that someone else is and when you meet him he will win.

Bill Bradley (11.1)

Races are won here not there. Where it is hardest to speed up not easiest

Ryan Holiday (11.2)

The more conflicts and difficult situations you put yourself through the more battle tested your mind will be.

§11.2

Robert Greene (11.3)

A physician who heals a few is no less a doctor
than one who heals many

Musonius Rufus (11.4)

Wise men make more opportunities than they find

Francis Bacon (11.5)

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you sow.

Robert Louis Stephenson (11.6)

As I grow older I pay less attention to what people say, I just watch what they do.

Andrew Carnegie (11.7)

Pay less attention to the words people use and greater attention to the tone of their voice, the look in their eyes and their body language

§11.10

Robert Greene (11.8)

Learning to listen is the most valuable thing you can do

§11.7

Robert Love (11.9)

Practice really hearing what people say. Do your best to get inside their minds.

§11.9

Marcus Aurelius (11.10)

People do not change, they
are merely revealed.

Anne Enright (11.11)

Kindness gives birth to
kindness

Seneca (11.12)

There is no use talking
about the problem unless
you talk about the solution

Betty Williams (11.13)

Under promise; over deliver

§7.14

Tom Peters (11.14)

You can't build a reputation
on what you're going to do.

Henry Ford (11.15)

Be careful not to boast of
any success.

§7.13

Robert Greene (11.16)

Be quiet, work hard, stay
healthy

(11.17)

use strict;
good servant, bad master.

Simon Cozens (11.18)

Kings soon perish who make a habit of justifying their actions to their subjects by saying “I have the power” rather than “it is my duty”

Musonius Rufus (11.19)

Be the chief but never the
lord

Lao Tzu (11.20)

One man practicing sports-
manship is better than 100
teaching it

§11.15

Knute Roche (11.21)

Life is defined by how much you do, how often you took the difficult path and were rewarded for it

Ryan Holiday (11.22)

(not by how much you own)

Super-human effort is not worth a damn unless it produces results.

Shackleton (11.23)

Recognise effort
Reward results

BAML (11.24)

Close captures no crowns

Ryan Holiday (11.25)

The ability to measure people and know who you're dealing with is the most important skill of all.

§11.11

Robert Greene (11.26)

Do not impose on others
what you yourself do not de-
sire.

Confucious (11.27)

Learn to ask of all actions,
“why are they doing that?”
Starting with your own.

§10.13

Marcus Aurelius (11.28)

If it's in your control why do it? If it's in someone else's then who are you blaming? Blame no one
Set people straight if you can. If not just repair the damage.

§10.10

Marcus Aurelius (11.29)

If they've done something wrong, correct them gently and show them how to improve.

If you can't do that the blame lies with you or no one.

§2.11

Marcus Aurelius (11.30)

To undertake nothing:

- without purpose or at random
- for any other reason than the common good

§3.17

Marcus Aurelius (11.31)

Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened but go on like a clock . . . in a thunderstorm

Robert Louis Stephenson (11.32)

In the end, if people mistrust you and resist your authority you have only yourself to blame.

Robert Greene (11.33)

Ability will never catch up with the demand for it.

Confucious (11.34)

It takes a great talent and skill to conceal a great talent and skill.

§5.8

Franois de La Rochefoucauld (11.35)

Everything is judged by its appearance; what is unseen counts for nothing. Do not get lost in the crowd or buried in oblivion

Robert Greene (11.36)

They may forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel.

Carl W. Buechner (11.37)

Disclosure is disinfectant

Tim Ferriss (11.38)

All defects are lighter in the open. They are most pernicious when concealed beneath a pretense of soundness

Seneca (11.39)

We don't need to post our defects on Facebook, but we can spend some time thinking about them¹

Patience Wounded too often becomes rage.

Publius Syrus (11.40)

¹<http://thephilosophersmail.com/PhilosophicalMeditation.pdf>

When you do things right,
people will wonder if you've
done anything at all

Remains of a computerised space probe, Futurama (11.41)

It's not up to us to make
this a better place

Kate Tempest (11.42)

It is. We can do it one person at a time.

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