

Pointers and references

March 2014 - December 2016

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 (§2.31). 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 a diverse bunch of philosophers, sportsmen, fictional characters and artists. 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 to keep us on track.

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 (§4.3).

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

¹Arthur Scopenhauer, [?]

²<http://bit.ly/1XoP0tE>

Great achievement seems
unfinished but its use is
continuous.

Lao Tzu (0.1)

CHAPTER 1

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 (§1.14) at the right time (§3.3) 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 of weeks during which I'm not very successful on most fronts) but by persevering (§1.13 and 5.1) we can chip away at the habits (and even relationships (§2.2)) 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. That's a good reminder for us to just get on with things and not get wrapped up in ourselves too much.

We also need to remember that people will see how we spend our time and the choices we make. 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 us do (and what they see us avoid).

¹<http://bit.ly/1OMUOuU>

Action may not always
bring happiness, but with-
out action there is none.

Benjamin Disraeli (1.1)

Action expresses priority.

Mahatma Ghandi (1.2)

Code wins.

(1.3)

Fac aut tace.

(1.4)

Do or be silent.

Demonstrate
don't explicate.

Robert Greene (1.5)

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

Yogi Bera (1.6)

When you confront a prob-
lem you begin to solve it.

§10.12

Rudy Guillian (1.7)

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 (1.8)

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

Harry S Truman (1.9)

When no credit is taken,
acomplishment endures.

§1.9

Lao Tzu (1.10)

How you do anything is
how you do everything.

Ryan Holiday (1.11)

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

Martin Luther King Jr. (1.12)

Quality is not an act.
It is a habit.

Aristotle (1.13)

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 (1.14)

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

Musonius Rufus (1.15)

Life is what happens while
you are busy making other
plans.

John Lennon (1.16)

CHAPTER 2

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 (§5.17) and what price we'll have to pay. The sun will still hide behind the clouds on our day at the beach, the car behind will still drive too close no matter how much we hope otherwise. Better to work on things we can control instead.

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 (§2.7), we make great gains on Twitter and Facebook while we let our Amazing Book Idea gather dust (§2.21), we spend hours mindlessly scrolling around sensationalist journalism when we could be reading a beautiful immersive novel (§4.3) or working on our beloved hobby (§10.5).

Epictetus (§2.18) recommends 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 terrible will happen if we stop using social media. We can be confident that life will carry on if we ignore "the mind numbing spirit crushing game shows¹". There are so many ways to spend our time, we need to be careful to choose well and that takes effort. Asking ourselves whether what we're doing right now is truly important to us (§2.20) is a vital habit to develop.

Maybe we should call someone who's important to us and focus just 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.

(2.1)

You are whatever the company you keep is.

Lord Chesterfield (2.2)

Let your mind dwell on examples of honour.

Cicero (2.3)

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

Ryan Holiday (2.4)

Relentlessly prune bullshit, don't wait to do things that matter, and savor the time you have. That's what you do when life is short².

Paul Graham (2.5)

²<http://www.paulgraham.com/vb.html>

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

Theognis (2.6)

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

Prue Leith (2.7)

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

Horace (2.8)

The things you used to
own. Now they own you.

Jack, Fight Club (2.9)

It's a long road there's no
turning back.

Dr. Jeff Cameron (2.10)

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

Henry David Thoreau (2.11)

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

§2.21

David Allen (2.12)

If you're not doing what you love,
you're wasting your time.

§2.24

Billy Joel (2.13)

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

§2.32

George Bernard Shaw (2.14)

Photography is a subtractive process, you
start with the whole world and finish with a
small square of it.

§2.19

Uta Birth (2.15)

NoMFuP

§5.17

Malcolm Tucker (2.16)

No random actions, none
not based on underlying
principles.

Marcus Aurelius (2.17)

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

Epictetus (2.18)

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

§2.20

Tim Ferriss (2.19)

See: efficacy hacks³ and a not to do list⁴.

³<http://bit.ly/1EDPjUQ>

⁴<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 (2.20)

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

Marcus Aurelius (2.21)

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

Peter Drucker (2.22)

Choose one,
reject the other.

Lao Tzu (2.23)

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

Oscar Wilde (2.24)

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

§2.13

Bob Dylan (2.25)

Parkinson's Law:

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

§4.15

Cyril Northcote Parkinson (2.26)

<http://bit.ly/1Massqh>

The cucumber is bitter?
Then throw it out.

Brambles in the path?
Then go around them.

§2.7

Marcus Aurelius (2.27)

Test each thought; is it:

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

(2.28)

In six months you will have discarded most of what you say is important today.

Ryan Holiday (2.29)

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

§10.33

G. K. Nielson (2.30)

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

Marcus Aurelius (2.31)

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

§2.14

Robert Heinlein (2.32)

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

Tim Ferriss (2.33)

CHAPTER 3

Patience

We know how important action is, but acting rashly, without care and attention can do serious harm to ourselves and can undo the progress we've made towards our aims. On this journey knowing where we're headed is more important than getting there quickly, especially when you consider that we may not even arrive. We should understand that the way we make the journey is much more important than our 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 (§3.17) and we're only going to waste time and do everything badly if we act or speak when we're angry or hungry or ... (§3.15).

We know that we are expected to play the game with limited (or even inaccurate) information but we should take time to think over 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 (§6.17).

Acting in good faith after a consideration of the facts (as they appear) 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 with a clear conscience (§7.10). But quickly dive in and we can blunder from one poorly understood situation to the next and end up in an even weaker position than we started in.

It takes 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.

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

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

§2.31

Isocrates (3.1)

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

Anthony De Mello (3.2)

Do not make war unless
victory may be gained;
If there is a prospect of vic-
tory move;
Otherwise, do not.

Sun Tzu (3.3)

Never content with a man
who has nothing to lose.

Baltazar Graçian (3.4)

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

Robert Greene (3.5)

Impatience: perhaps the single greatest pitfall.

Robert Greene (3.6)

There are always more
of them before they are
counted.

§5.22

Ulysses S Grant (3.7)

The senses don't decieve,
judgement deceives.

John Von Goethe (3.8)

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 put you to the test."

Epictetus (3.9)

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

Robert Greene (3.10)

The best advice I ever got
was “shut up”

Ryan Holiday (3.11)

<http://tcat.tc/1lwHzGd>

Spare words: nature's way.
Violent winds do not blow
all morning.

Lao Tzu (3.12)

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

Plato (3.13)

The good soldier is not hot-tempered.

Lao Tzu (3.14)

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

Baltazar Graçian (3.15)

Anger and emotion are strategically counter-productive. You must always stay calm and objective

Robert Greene (3.16)

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

Marcus Aurelius (3.17)

Fear is a bad advisor.

Angela Merkel (3.18)

CHAPTER 4

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. Maintaining an open mind¹ is a key trait for us to make sure we're in a position where we can 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 (§2.19 and 4.20). 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 (§4.17) 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 or 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 (§2.25). But if not? In that case we need to take a wider search².

No matter what we choose, there will be a wealth of knowledge available³. Some of which will have been available for hundreds of years without being renewed every five minutes to match the latest opinions. We can learn an amazing amount by relying on these long gone experts.

¹<http://bit.ly/2cRRW34>

²<http://bit.ly/1lfBcZi>

³<http://bit.ly/1HIBFUq>

The taking of flash photos and the use of recording devices of any kind including; pens, pencils, eyes and ears, is strictly encouraged.

Bob Holman (4.1)

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

Robert Greene (4.2)

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 (4.3)

An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

Benjamin Franklin (4.4)

Study as if you were going to live forever but live as if you were going to die tomorrow.

Edmund Rich (4.5)

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

Arthur Schopenhaur (4.6)

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

Hunter S. Thompson (4.7)

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

Robert Greene (4.8)

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

Musonius Rufus (4.9)

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

Bertand Russell (4.10)

More listening,
more learning
Fewer interruptions,
fewer conclusions.

§6.17

Ryan Holiday (4.11)

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

§6.13

Michel de Montaigne (4.12)

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

Epictetus (4.13)

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

Hunter S. Thompson (4.14)

Ability will never catch up with the demand for it.

Confucious (4.15)

Trust yourself more and
others less.

Robert Greene (4.16)

Love all.
Trust few.
Do wrong to none.

William Shakespeare (4.17)

You'll only get three mentors you can trust. Just make sure you're paying attention so you don't miss them.

§1.9

Madalina G. Idomir (4.18)

Never nitpick a heuristic.

Nassim Taleb (4.19)

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

§2.20

Seneca (4.20)

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

Michel De Monaigne (4.21)

CHAPTER 5

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 (§5.30), times of poor judgement (§5.3), and even after outright failures (§7.10) will mean that we'll still make slow progress towards our aim of a better self.

The challenges 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 (§5.8). Our successes can make them uncomfortable when they feel lazy, cruel or arrogant. When that happens we need to remember that we were there not so long ago ourselves (§9.14) 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 (§2.7).

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 (§7.12), 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 (§5.7).

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.

§5.28

Japanese Proverb (5.1)

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

Christian D'Larson (5.2)

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

Friedrich Nietzsche (5.3)

All the meat and all that it wants.

Case, Neuromancer (5.4)

It's just fat and muscle.

(5.5)

We control our own actions and are responsible for them. If we act badly we have harmed ourselves.

Marcus Aurelius (5.6)

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

Marcus Aurelius (5.7)

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

Schiller (5.8)

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

§9.8

Taylor Swift (5.9)

You don't need their approval.

Danielle La Porte (5.10)

What is outside my mind means nothing to
it.

Marcus Aurelius (5.11)

Tranquility comes when
you stop caring what they
say.

Marcus Aurelius (5.12)

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

Marcus Aurelius (5.13)

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

§5.17

Lao Tzu (5.14)

You control the effort not
the results.

Ryan Holiday (5.15)

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 (5.16)

Ta eph'hemin
Ta ouk eph'hemin

Stoic phrase (5.17)

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

Nothing either good nor
bad but thinking makes it
so.

William Shakespeare (5.18)

Real difficulties can be
overcome.
It's only the imaginary ones
that are unconquerable.

§3.7

Theodore N Vail (5.19)

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

§5.23

Ryan Holiday (5.20)

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

Marcus Aurelius (5.21)

See things for what they
are, do what we can, en-
dure what we must.

Ryan Holiday (5.22)

It is we who generate the
judgments inscribing them
on ourselves.

Marcus Aurelius (5.23)

Not to give into adversity.
Not to trust prosperity.
And always take note of
Fortune's habit of behaving
exactly as she pleases.

Seneca (5.24)

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

Robert Louis Stephenson (5.25)

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

Chuck Close (5.26)

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

§7.8

Mary Anne Radmach (5.27)

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

Marcus Aurelius (5.28)

Don't cling to your body's
woes. Then you can learn
endurance.

Lao Tzu (5.29)

Change is the only constant
in life.

Heraclitus (5.30)

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

Joyce Meyer (5.31)

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

§5.30

Jon Kabat Zin (5.32)

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

Jean de la Brugere (5.33)

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

Arthur Schopenhauer (5.34)

Knowing others is intelligent.
Knowing yourself is enlightened.

Lao Tzu (5.35)

Happiness depends on ourselves.

Aristotle (5.36)

Optimism is cowardice.

Oswald Spengler (5.37)

Proper planning prevents piss poor performance.

(5.38)

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

Confucius (5.39)

Hope is a poor hedge.

Erik R. Sirri (5.40)

We need some hope to keep us going but without a look at what pitfalls are waiting for us we'll be lucky to get through in one piece².

²<http://woopmylife.org>

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

Hannah Ardent (5.41)

Preparation not luck.

(5.42)

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

The burden is equal to the
strength of the horse.

The Talmud (5.44)

CHAPTER 6

Humility

Even as reasonable as we are, 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 (§6.17). We're not immune to needing help, we need to recognise that there are others with skills 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 us, 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.

Be willing to be a beginner
every single morning.

§2.18

Meister Eckhart (6.1)

You could leave this life right now. Let that determine how you act.

Marcus Aurelius (6.2)

No one has had so much divine favour that they could guarantee themselves tomorrow.

§8.3

Seneca (6.3)

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

Italian Proverb (6.4)

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

Sun Tzu (6.5)

Take the help.

Danielle La Porte (6.6)

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 (6.7)

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

§3.8

Marcus Aurelius (6.8)

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

§5.24

Euripides (6.9)

If you're not humble in this
world, then the world will
throw humbleness at you.

Mike Tyson (6.10)

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

Maurizio Cattelan (6.11)

To accept it without arrogance, to let it go with indifference.

Marcus Aurelius (6.12)

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

§6.14

Matthew Crawford (6.13)

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

Confucious (6.14)

Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it.

George Bernard Shaw (6.15)

Your opinion is either dependent on the facts or not; When they change you should shift along with them.

§5.32

Ryan Holiday (6.16)

The facts were always there, of course, just unclear or hidden. Think clearly about what you're looking at. §7.10

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

§4.10

Marcus Aurelius (6.17)

and so, under our control

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

§3.13

William Shakespeare (6.18)

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

§7.15

John Von Goethe (6.19)

Never be so self absorbed
as to believe that the mas-
ter is interested in your crit-
icisms of him, now matter
how accurate they are.

Robert Greene (6.20)

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

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

Jonathan Swift (6.21)

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

Jon de la Brugère (6.22)

Diversity in counsel.
Unity in command.

§6.5

Cyrus the Great (6.23)

You are not a beautiful and
unique snowflake.

Tyler Durden (6.24)

CHAPTER 7

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 before (§9.12). Of course, we can't let our past (§7.18 and 7.19) define our self image and we can't let our past define how we behave now. Once we've learnt from those events, we need to understand that we can't change what happened but 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. 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 Nobel Prize in Literature, we're looking to hone our craft and produce a rich 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 not what we don't. We don't have control of how things will turn out measured by external metrics and that can be a big hit on our confidence, but if we change our success criteria focussing on internal metrics we can always win or learn.

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

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

William Shakespeare (7.1)

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 (7.2)

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

§5.32

Anais Nin (7.3)

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

School of Life (7.4)

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

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

§5.1

Ryan Holiday (7.5)

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

Robert Greene (7.6)

Not to feel exasperated, despondant and defeated because your days aren't packed with wise and moral actions. 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 (7.7)

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

§8.1

Catherine Pulsifer (7.8)

Failure cannot cope with persistence.

§5.27

Napoleon Hill (7.9)

A mistake is not something to be determined after the fact but in the light of information up to that point.

Nassim Taleb (7.10)

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

(7.11)

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

§7.9

Ryan Holiday (7.12)

You will fail eventually.
Whatever.

§5.7

Danielle La Porte (7.13)

All that matters is how you respond.

He who demands little gets it.

Ellen Glasgow (7.14)

Don't pretend you're not proud of your work.

§6.14

April Gornik (7.15)

Understand: you should be radiating confidence not arrogance and disdain.

Robert Greene (7.16)

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

Robert Greene (7.17)

You are not your genes.

Danielle La Porte (7.18)

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

Les Brown (7.19)

Don't water your weeds.

Harvey Mackay (7.20)

CHAPTER 8

Gratitude

Just looking at the massively improbable set of circumstances needed to get us here in one piece we should be dripping with gratitude, we should be able to grab handfulls of it 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 heirarchy 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 cynycal that we expect others are trying to con us or we sniffily say that they're "just doing their job".

We can't trust ourselves to be grateful at the right time, we need a little help to remind us and correct our course. The stoics offered a 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 (§8.3). By regularly 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 (§4.5 and 6.2) so simply waking up provides us with a great source of gratitude for the day ahead (there are many who won't of course). No matter what else happens (§9.7) 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>

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

§2.27

Seneca (8.1)

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

Michel De Montaigne (8.2)

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

Epictetus (8.3)

...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.

Marcus Aurelius (8.4)

Look at plain silk; hold
uncarved wood. The self
dwindles; desires fade.

Lao Tzu (8.5)

If the stars were to appear but one night every thousand years how man would marvel.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (8.6)

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

§8.6

Robert Greene (8.7)

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

Chuck Palaniuk (8.8)

CHAPTER 9

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 (§9.18 and 9.7) 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 (§9.3), 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 (§9.14 and 9.10).

¹Musonius Rufus, [?]

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?

§1.9

Marcus Aurelius (9.1)

Always give without remembering and receive without forgetting.

§9.10

Brian Tracy (9.2)

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

§5.9

Malachi McCourt (9.3)

They are just what we would be in their situation.

Abraham Lincoln (9.4)

No self interest? Self is fulfilled.

Lao Tzu (9.5)

Patience Wounded too often becomes rage.

Publius Syrus (9.6)

The people I deal with to-day will be:

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

§9.14

Marcus Aurelius (9.7)

People are going to be like that but remember that you've been like that too from time to time.

Someone hates me? Their problem.

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

Marcus Aurelius (9.8)

People who are good, I
treat well. People who are
not good, I also treat well.

Lao Tzu (9.9)

Kindness gives birth to
kindness.

Seneca (9.10)

Show kindness whenever possible.

§9.10

Dalai Lama (9.11)

Hint: it's always possible.

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

§9.14

Marcus Aurelius (9.12)

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.

§7.20

Michel De Montaigne (9.13)

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 (9.14)

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 (9.15)

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

§5.23

Wayne Dyer (9.16)

It seemed right to him.

Epictetus (9.17)

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

§9.14

Robert J. Hanlon (9.18)

or weakness or fear or hunger or . . .

CHAPTER 10

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 (§9.14), 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. 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? (§7.8) 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 (§10.12). 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.

Wise men make more opportunities than they find.

Francis Bacon (10.1)

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

Robert Louis Stephenson (10.2)

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

Musonius Rufus (10.3)

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

Ryan Holiday (10.4)

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

Bill Bradley (10.5)

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

§10.4

Robert Greene (10.6)

Learning to listen is the most valuable thing you can do

§10.11

Robert Love (10.7)

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

§10.11

Andrew Carnegie (10.8)

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

§10.11

Marcus Aurelius (10.9)

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.

§10.11

Robert Greene (10.10)

People do not change, they
are merely revealed.

Anne Enright (10.11)

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

Betty Williams (10.12)

Under promise; over deliver

§6.14

Tom Peters (10.13)

You can't build a reputa-
tion on what you're going
to do.

Henry Ford (10.14)

Be quiet, work hard, stay
healthy

(10.15)

use strict;
good servant, bad master.

Simon Cozens (10.16)

Be the chief but never the
lord.

Lao Tzu (10.17)

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

§10.14

Knut Roche (10.18)

Has self-knowledge without
self-display
Self-respect without pride.

Lao Tzu (10.19)

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

Musonius Rufus (10.20)

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

§9.18

Marcus Aurelius (10.21)

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.

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.

§1.9

Marcus Aurelius (10.23)

To undertake nothing:

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

§2.19

Marcus Aurelius (10.24)

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

Robert Greene (10.25)

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

Shackleton (10.26)

Recognise effort
Reward results

BAML (10.27)

Close captures no crowns

Ryan Holiday (10.28)

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

§10.11

Robert Greene (10.29)

Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.

Confucious (10.30)

Disclosure is disinfectant

Tim Ferriss (10.31)

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

Seneca (10.32)

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

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

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

§?? François de La Rochefoucauld (10.33)

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

Computerised space probe, Futurama (10.34)

Were not idiots. We know that time is desperately short, so taking the time to work on this project, to make this journey, must be important to us. Picking up this collection when were struggling for the right course of action or taking a step back to think about these qualities and how they relate to each other and our lives must have an important impact. That process must produce some important result.

But the notes here are not important, they won't stop tragedies, they won't make us perfect parents, partners or friends. They can't make the sun shine when we're at the beach. The words here are pointers and references to what we should be aiming at but they are just words, just ideas, but without giving them agency in the real world, without using them to shape our actions and responses they have no value. It is through us that they gain value, it is us who use the ideas and put them into practice. Without us this book has no way to do anything for us or those around us. We've leant on some smart and insightful people over the last few pages but it's our actions which people will remember not whether we had a snappy line or two two hand, no-one will really care about that. Without continual practice of the qualities we've touched on here the notes here are truly are wasted on us they truly are nothing.

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