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10

KEYS TO MENTAL  
TOUGHNESS

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO  
ACHEIVE YOUR GOALS

As athletes, we're either moving forward or backward — we are never just standing still. Most people don't even realize that they are moving backward until things in their life aren't going the way that they had expected. My question for you is this: when was the last time that you intentionally made yourself uncomfortable? It is against human nature to be uncomfortable, so it isn't something that is going to happen on its own. If you are having trouble remembering the last time that you were intentionally uncomfortable, there's a good chance you are moving backward, inhibiting your attempts to progress.

Having personally reached that breaking point where I've had to decide to continue or quit, I'm continuously reflecting on ways that I can push myself. Whether it be fitness, speed, endurance, or even growing my business and challenging my mind, developing mental toughness is a huge part of my success.

I would like to share with you some of my thoughts that have helped me to succeed. I am hoping that you can implement them and that you see success in your own life.





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# START BY DEFINING WHAT **MENTAL TOUGHNESS** MEANS TO YOU.

There are a lot of ways to describe a competitor who's mentally tough. Here are a few that resonate with me:

- ▶ They remain calm under pressure.
- ▶ They're unfazed by whatever conditions they encounter.
- ▶ They may experience some apprehension or excitement leading up to an event, but they never allow this to distract them once the action begins.
- ▶ They're driven, rather than discouraged, by competitors they believe to be faster or stronger.
- ▶ They're ultimately confident in their own abilities.



Mental toughness may be an abstract concept, but it's linked to some very incredible results. Before you can hope to overcome any challenge - before it can hold any meaning - you have to get crystal clear on exactly what you want to achieve. If you don't know what you want, you will never achieve it.

I don't believe mental toughness is about motivation, inspiration, or even courage. Like any other goal in life, it's about:

- ▶ Honing in on your target
- ▶ Evaluating what's needed to reach it
- ▶ Identifying the obstacles in your way
- ▶ Laying down a detailed plan of attack
- ▶ Being flexible when there are speed bumps

Every athlete wants to be mentally strong, but the secret behind mental toughness is simple: There's nothing magical or mystical about it, it's simply the state of mind you achieve when you deliberately embrace the right habits, and learn-to conquer distractions.





## 2 BE CONSISTENT IN YOUR HABITS AND KEEP CAPTURING WINS.

I'm no braver, tougher, or more talented than the next athlete, I'm just more consistent in my training and outlook. Mental toughness is like a muscle that needs to be worked to get stronger, and the best way to do that is by intentionally pursuing a certain level of discomfort.

**Fortitude** - mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, danger or temptation courageously. Fortitude is the result of accumulating wins, no matter how small, by facing your fears. So if you're not constantly pushing yourself out of your comfort zone, facing fears, and charging forward with courage, you're going to have trouble accomplishing your goals and progressing in life.

Remember, you start each new day with a personal choice: to pursue the habits that form the foundation of mental toughness, or not.





## 3 TAKE STEPS TO LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES - THE PAST HOLDS IMMENSE VALUE.

We're often told we should learn from our mistakes, and I definitely agree with that philosophy. It's not always easy, but it is always worth it to make the effort to be a better person. When something goes wrong, and you completely miss the mark on whatever you were aiming for, use it as an opportunity to learn something new.

The past is history, and it certainly doesn't define who we are today. But it can serve as a great training tool for cultivating mental toughness. When you make a mistake, spend some time thinking about what went wrong, don't obsess over it, but mull it over - then decide how you're going to prevent that same mistake in the future.

An important point to keep in mind is that spoken words can have a powerful mental impact. Beating yourself up verbally, when you fail, will not only make you feel worse, but definitely won't get you closer to hitting your target the next time. Instead of wasting time, feeling sorry for yourself, talking about how you messed up, take action. Apply what you learned from your mistakes, becoming a better version of yourself going forward.



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## PRACTICE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BY LEARNING HOW TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE PRODUCTIVELY

Emotional intelligence is a pretty important term when we talk about getting a handle on mental toughness. When you're an emotionally intelligent person, it means you have the ability to:

- ▶ Recognize your own emotions
- ▶ Recognize emotions in others
- ▶ Respond appropriately to both

Mental strength isn't about ignoring or suppressing your emotions, it's about allowing yourself to experience them - for better, or for worse - and working them through your mind and body. You then can take those emotions and channel them into something productive.

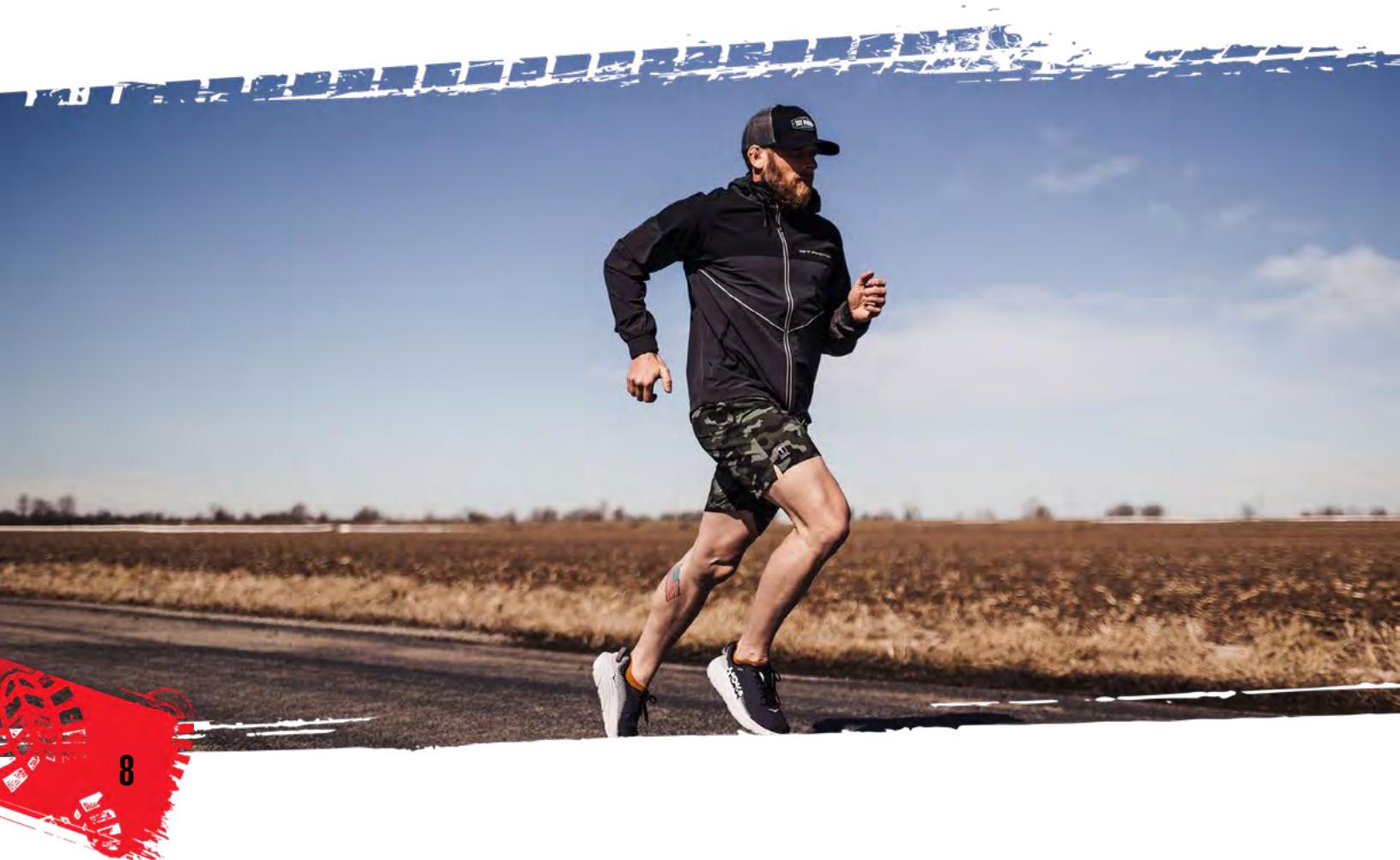


We all know people with whom it is difficult to interact. This can be a boss, a neighbor, or even a family member. Negative emotions surface, and are just one of the many distractions that we have to learn how to conquer in order to be mentally tough. Mentally tough people manage their interactions with others by approaching potential conflicts rationally. They do this by:

- ▶ Identifying what they're feeling
- ▶ Considering the other person's perspective
- ▶ Never allowing anger or frustration to add fuel to the fire

Being able to explore common ground and work toward a valid solution is ultimately what emotional intelligence and fortitude are all about.

It goes without saying that some people will always have the potential to frustrate and exhaust you, but once you've built up the mental resilience to take them with a grain of salt, they'll no longer have the power to bring you down. In fact, you'll learn to view those people a great opportunity to practice your emotional intelligence training.





# 5 CHOOSE TO EMBRACE CHANGE.

Change is the only real constant in life. People who accomplish their goals, and cross the finish line first, tend to be the same people who've learned to handle change effectively. Adaptability is huge in the pursuit of mental toughness. You've got to be flexible if you're going to find a way around whatever's blocking your path today.

In general, people are terrified by the unexpected. If you are allowing fear to control you, it is one sure sign that your mental strength needs to be strengthened. When fear is controlling you, it is a threat to your ambitions; you then start to plan for failure, instead of anticipating success.

To stay mentally strong, you have to embrace change the same way you embrace every other aspect of your training. Because as the source of all opportunity in life, you cannot get better without change.





# 6 LEARN TO SAY “NO” - AND MEAN IT.

**Stress** - the kind that comes from feeling like you’re not in control - is the natural enemy of mental resilience. There isn’t much in this world that makes us feel less in control than the inability to say no. Take just a brief moment and think about the situations in your life where you wish you could say no. Sometimes we think it is so simple to say no, but when it comes down to actually doing it, it is kind of hard. As part of your toughness training, you’ve got to learn to deny both yourself and others when necessary. This is especially true if:

- ▶ There’s a chance that giving in to impulse or self-gratification may set you back or cause personal harm
- ▶ A new obligation is likely to interfere with, and keep you from honoring your existing commitments
- ▶ You aren’t honoring yourself when you should be

Research from the University of California in San Francisco suggests that the more difficulty you have saying no, the more likely you are to experience stress, burnout, and even depression (three things, incidentally, that also hamper emotional intelligence). So don't be afraid to make that "no" loud and clear, even if it can be a little scary.





# 7

# MAKE A HABIT OF PICTURING YOUR OWN SUCCESS.

There's a lot to be said for visualizing your way to success. The reason mental imagery exercises are so effective is that the brain often has trouble separating what actually happened and simply a thought.

Olympic gold medalist Lindsey Vonn has been quoted as saying, "By the time I get to the start gate, I've run that race 100 times already in my head, picturing how I'll take the turns." When I was preparing for the Fifty, I had already visualized crossing the finish line in each state many times. I never doubted that I would cross that finish line in each state, because I had already done it many, many times.

So try setting aside a few minutes each day to mentally watch yourself win. Visualize yourself not only accomplishing your goals, but also the path you're going to take to achieve them. It may involve physical problems you're going to resolve along the way, or mental hurdles you're going to overcome, but visualize conquering them all and it will become natural to prevail.



## 8 EAT HEALTHY. PERIOD.

When it comes to diet and physical performance, “garbage in, garbage out” takes on a whole new meaning. There’s evidence to suggest that your energy, mood, and immune system are all linked to the health of your gut. Since nothing impacts your digestive system more than what you choose to eat and drink, it only makes sense to reduce or avoid foods that are known to be inflammatory (think: dairy, gluten, and alcohol). Dominate your plate with vegetables and fruits, and the rest will usually fall into place.

My wife will drink a green smoothie before we have a celebratory meal. This way she keeps her blood sugar balanced, has a liquid-nutrient dense snack, and she doesn’t go crazy eating foods that aren’t good for her. The best approach to healthy eating is one of mind over matter: avoid the pre-packaged and processed ‘foods’ in favor of vegetables, fruits, nuts and other fresh foods that you prepare yourself.



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## CAFFEINE IS A PICK-ME-UP, NOT A CRUTCH.

Some athletes make the mistake of associating caffeine-induced adrenaline with better physical performance. While this may be true in the moment, it's not always the case where mental agility is concerned. Caffeine should be used in moments where you need a pick-me-up, not a standard in your diet.

I am always shocked when I see people walk out of the gas station, first thing in the morning, with a 64 oz. soda. This dependency on soda is keeping the soda companies rich, and it is keeping people sick.

One of the side effects of too much caffeine is the fight-or-flight response it triggers: great for moving quickly for short periods - not so great for making rational, wellconsidered

choices. Thinking clearly while you're making crucial decisions can be life  
altering, don't let a caffeine dependency limit your mental and physical potential.



## 10 PRIORITYZIE PROPER REST TO ENHANCE YOUR MENTAL TOUGHNESS.

What's an endurance athlete without strength of will? It's a well-documented fact that sleep deprivation compromises both your concentration and your resolve (read: mental toughness). Find a routine that works for you at bedtime to help you relax. Decide how many hours of sleep you need to feel well, and do n't settle for anything less.