10 Powerful Ways to Master Self-Discipline

Like everything else that brings progress, the greatest struggle is always within ourselves. That’s why you need to learn self-discipline.

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It may be hard to believe when you’re facing a hot-fudge sundae or the prospect of sleeping in versus hitting the gym, but studies show that people with self-discipline are happier.

People with a higher degree of self-control spend less time debating whether to indulge in behaviors that are detrimental to their health, and are able to make positive decisions more easily. They don’t let impulses or feelings dictate their choices. Instead, they make level-headed decisions. As a result, they tend to feel more satisfied with their lives.

There are things you can do to learn self-discipline and gain the willpower to live a happier life. If you are looking to take control of your habits and choices, here are the 10 most powerful things you can do to master self-discipline.

1. Know your weaknesses.

We all have weaknesses. Whether they’re snacks such as potato chips or chocolate chip cookies, or technology such as Facebook or the latest addictive game app, they have similar effects on us.

Acknowledge your shortcomings, whatever they may be. Too often people either try to pretend their vulnerabilities don’t exist or cover up any pitfalls in their lives. Own up to your flaws. You can’t overcome them until you do.

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2. Remove temptations.

Like the saying goes, “out of sight, out of mind.” It may seem silly, but this phrase offers powerful advice. By simply removing your biggest temptations from your environment, you will greatly improve your self-discipline.

If you want to eat healthier, don’t buy junk food. If you want to improve your productivity at work, turn off notifications and silence your cell phone. The fewer distractions you have, the more focused you will be on accomplishing your goals. Set yourself up for success by ditching bad influences.

3. Set clear goals and have an execution plan.

If you hope to achieve self-discipline, you must have a clear vision of what you hope to accomplish. You must also have an understanding of what success means to you. After all, if you don’t know where you are going, it’s easy to lose your way or get sidetracked.

A clear plan outlines each step you must take in order to reach your goals. Figure out who you are and what you are about. Create a mantra to keep yourself focused. Successful people use this technique to stay on track and establish a clear finish line.

4. Build your self-discipline.

We aren’t born with self-discipline – it’s a learned behavior. And just like any other skill you want to master, it requires daily practice and repetition. Just like going to the gym, willpower and self-discipline take a lot of work. The effort and focus that self-discipline requires can be draining.

As time passes, it can become more and more difficult to keep your willpower in check. The bigger the temptation or decision, the more challenging it can feel to tackle other tasks that also require self-control. So work on building your self-discipline through daily diligence.

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5. Create new habits by keeping it simple.

Acquiring self-discipline and working to instill a new habit can feel daunting at first, especially if you focus on the entire task at hand. To avoid feeling intimidated, keep it simple. Break your goal into small, doable steps. Instead of trying to change everything at once, focus on doing one thing consistently and master self-discipline with that goal in mind.

If you’re trying to get in shape, start by working out 10 or 15 minutes a day. If you’re trying to achieve better sleep habits, start by going to bed 15 minutes earlier each night. If you want to eat healthier, start by prepping lunch the night before to take with you in the morning. Take baby steps. Eventually, when you’re ready, you can add more goals to your list.

6. Eat often and healthy.

The feeling of being hangry – that angry, annoyed, irritated sensation you get when you're hungry – is real and can have a substantial impact on willpower. Research has proven that low blood sugar often weakens a person's resolve, making you grumpy and pessimistic.

When you're hungry, your ability to concentrate suffers and your brain doesn't function as well. Your self-control is likely weakened in all areas, including diet, exercise, work and relationships. So fuel up with healthy snacks and regular meals to keep yourself in check.

7. Change your perception about willpower.

According to a study by Stanford University, the amount of willpower a person has is determined by their beliefs. If you believe you have a limited amount of willpower, you probably won't surpass those limits. If you don't place a limit on your self-control, you are less likely to exhaust yourself before meeting your goals.

In short, it may be that our internal conceptions about willpower and self-control determine how much of them we have. If you can remove these subconscious obstacles and truly believe you can do it, then you will give yourself an extra boost of motivation toward making those goals a reality.

8. Give yourself a backup plan.

Psychologists use a technique to boost willpower called "implementation intention." That's when you give yourself a plan to deal with a potentially difficult situation you know you will likely face. For instance, imagine that you're

working on eating healthier, but you’re on your way to a party where food will be served.

Before you go, tell yourself that instead of diving into a plate of cheese and crackers, you will sip a glass of water and focus on mingling. Going in with a plan will help give you the mindset and the self-control necessary for the situation. You will also save energy by not having to make a sudden decision based on your emotional state.

9. Reward yourself.

Give yourself something to be excited about by planning a reward when you accomplish your goals. Just like when you were a little kid and got a treat for good behavior, having something to look forward to gives you the motivation to succeed.

Anticipation is powerful. It gives you something to obsess over and focus on, so you’re not only thinking of what you are trying to change. And when you achieve your goal, find a new goal and a new reward to keep yourself moving forward.

10. Forgive yourself and move forward.

Even with all of our best intentions and well-laid plans, we sometimes fall short. It happens. You will have ups and downs, great successes and dismal failures. The key is to keep moving forward.

If you stumble, acknowledge what caused it and move on. Don’t let yourself get wrapped up in guilt, anger or frustration, because these emotions will only drag you further down and impede future progress. Learn from your missteps and forgive yourself. Then get your head back in the game and refocus on your goals.

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