

How to Improve Willpower, Change Habits and Behavior for a Healthy, Wealthy and Happy Life

What is the Single Greatest Correlation with Future Success?

Charles Duhigg, author of the book *The Power of Habit*, describes the marshmallow test as follows:

The Marshmallow Test

In the 1960s at Stanford, a researcher took his daughter and a whole bunch of her friends, put them in a room one by one, put a marshmallow in front of them and he would say, okay, look here's the deal. You can eat that marshmallow. I'm going to leave the room for ten minutes; if when I come back the marshmallow is still there, then you will get a second marshmallow. This experiment has been replicated.

It was found that about 10% to 15% of the four-year olds could resist a marshmallow. The children that could resist the temptation were more successful later in life. They were getting their homework done more frequently and they were showing up for class more times. They were more popular in high school, not necessarily because they were prettier or richer but because they were just better at being friends. They got into better colleges, got better and higher paying jobs, got married earlier and stayed married longer.

Hundreds of studies on willpower since then have found that **willpower seems to be the single greatest correlation with future success, more so than high IQ, more so than having rich parents with a lot of resources.** Willpower seems to be this thing that prepares people for life.

Now the question is: Can we train people to improve their willpower? And the answer by Charles Duhigg is: **yes, through habits. By choosing a reaction ahead of time. And by making people conscious of what they're going to do when they feel hot blooded, in a cold blooded state.**

Habits have cues (triggers), routines and rewards. Many of our decisions or behaviors are habits. Motivated by rewards, we develop bad habits and follow them automatically where our brain actually turns off. You can improve your willpower and change your habits if you become aware and pay attention to what's driving these nearly subconscious behaviors and decide your actions ahead of the time.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.” Aristotle

The Power of Habit: Charles Duhigg at TEDxTeachersCollege
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMbsGBlpP30>

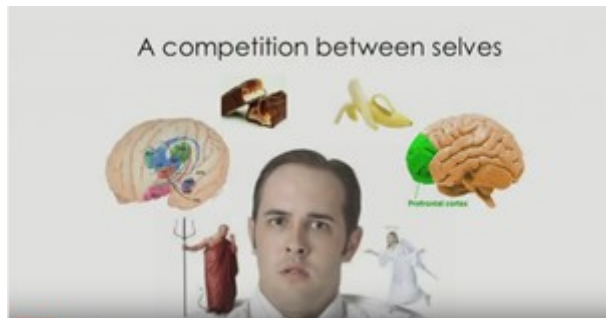
The Willpower Instinct

The Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D, book *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It* is an excellent work and very powerful to help people improve their willpower to achieve their goals. She is teaching a course on the same topic at Stanford University. Below is a summary of important points from her presentation at Google Talks:

Willpower Challenges:

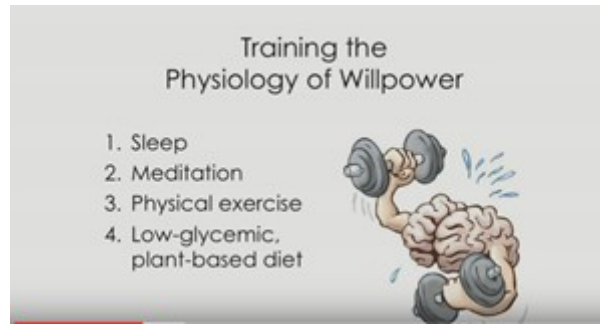
What challenges do you have? Not doing homework/studying, exercising, getting up on time, washing dishes, etc.?

One Brain Two Minds (Prefrontal Cortex)



We actually have one brain but two minds. There is a competition between selves and we are completely two different people based on which mind takes over. Based on mindset, energy and stress level, your brain will meet your willpower in a different way and will make one choice today and another tomorrow. One part of your brain focuses on **instant gratification** but other part of your brain called Prefrontal Cortex helps you focus on **delayed gratification** or long term goals. Scientific research shows that you can make this part denser and better connected as follows.

Training the Physiology of Willpower



All of the above four items can make your prefrontal cortex denser and better connected and thus improve your willpower or self-control. Tiny interventions can bring a major change in your willpower challenge or behavior. For example, if you do not have enough sleep or are tired, your willpower challenge will be harder.

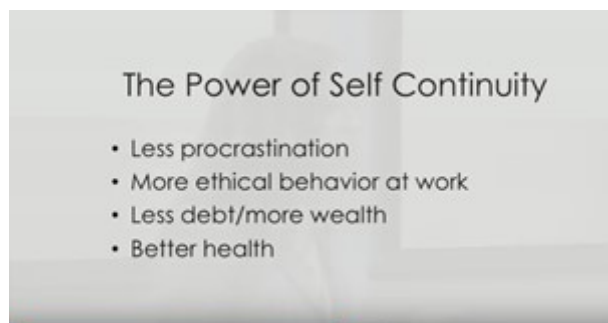
Note about Meditation: Meditation is simply sitting quietly (every morning/evening) for 5-20 minutes and paying attention to your breathing (breathing in and out.) Try to slow down your breathing. When your thoughts wander, try to bring your attention gently back to your breathing. Meditation trains you to create a buffer between your thoughts and actions thus improving self-control.

What if you have a Willpower Failure?

Forgive Yourself for Willpower Failure: Do not be too hard on yourself as it will only make you more depressed and more prone to willpower failure.

Turn bad days into good data: Analyze what went wrong and plan better for the future.

Meet Your Future Self



Your future self is real. His happiness and his pain are real. It is you, really. The more you connect with your future self, the more control you have on your behavior. Imagine you are talking to your future self

at retirement age (or 5, 10 or 30 years from now.) What's going on? What is important in your life right now? Are you healthy? Do you have enough money to retire comfortably? Are you happy? People who connect to their future self and communicate with them are more likely to exercise and save money for retirement than people to whom their future self is a stranger.

Imagining Success is Good, Imagining Failure is Better

The Power of Pessimism

- Most optimistic smokers and dieters more likely to fail.
- Optimism about future behavior licenses self-indulgence today.
- 75% of cases investigated for fraud by the SEC are the result of unrealistically optimistic initial profit projections.

If you are a student, it is good to imagine you graduated from the school and now have a good career, making good money and have a happy life. But it is better to imagine that you dropped out of school and are back to the same old job and problems. Now you may plan better to ensure that it does not happen.

Plan for Setbacks/Obstacles

Defensive Pessimism

1. What is your goal?
2. What would be the most positive outcome?
3. What action will I take to reach this goal?
4. What is the biggest obstacle?
5. When and where is this obstacle most likely to occur?
6. What can I do to prevent the obstacle?
7. What *specific thing* will I do to get back to my goal when this obstacle happens?

Surfing the Urge

1. Notice the thought, craving or feeling.
2. Accept and attend to the inner experience.
3. Breathe and give your brain and body a chance to pause and plan.
4. Broaden your attention, and look for the action that will help you achieve your goal.



Be mindful of “a few seconds” things (such as taking a phone call from a friend who likes to talk long, watching TV or going to Youtube only for a few minutes) that can trap you to waste hours when you need to focus on your studies.

Tips for surfing the urge:

- Try to hold your breath for 15-30 seconds to practice self control.
- Try to hold your temptation for two minutes such as for smoking a cigarette.

Summary

Willpower Rules

1. Train your willpower physiology.
2. Forgive yourself.
3. Make friends with your future self.
4. Predict your failure.
5. Surf the edge.



There are only two burdens in life. One is the burden of discipline (self-control) that weighs in ounces, and the other is the burden of regret that weighs in tons.

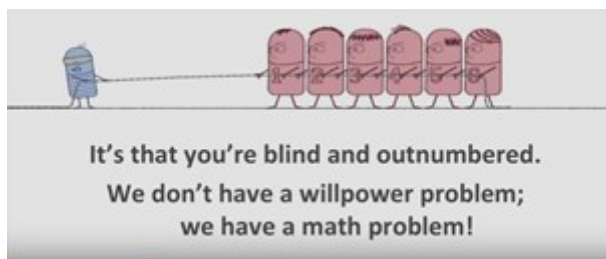
Source:

Willpower Instinct: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5BXuZL1HAg>

Six Sources of Influences

(Note: This part is taken from “Change Anything! Use Skillpower over Willpower by Al Switzler at TEDxFremont)

You don't have a Willpower Problem; You are Blind & Outnumbered

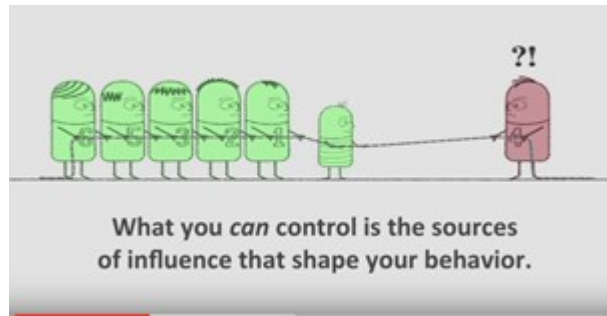


The 6 Sources of Influences:

1. Personal Motivation- Do I want to? Am I motivated? (How much do I want to change and why?)
2. Personal Ability- Can I do it? If not, can I learn a skill to achieve it?
3. Social Motivation- Do I have encouragement and support? Someone who keeps me on track? (Identify friends from accomplices. If you can't turn accomplices to friends, i.e. they are not serious in helping you, stay away from them!)
4. Social Ability- Do I have someone to coach me, give me feedback to improve?
5. Structural Motivation- Do I have any rewards or incentives to keep me going?
6. Structural Ability- Am I in an environment which helps to control my space? Is it possible to make my good behavior easy and my bad behavior hard? (e.g. if you cannot study at home, go to a library or come to school to study; get rid of junk food in the house. Make healthy food easily available and junk food out of reach.) Remember, it's not a willpower problem, it's a math problem.

Nos. 1 and 2 derive from yourself. Nos. 3 and 4 derive from external help. For Nos. 5 and 6, you need to make plans in advance to create the environment.

Control Sources of Influences that Control You



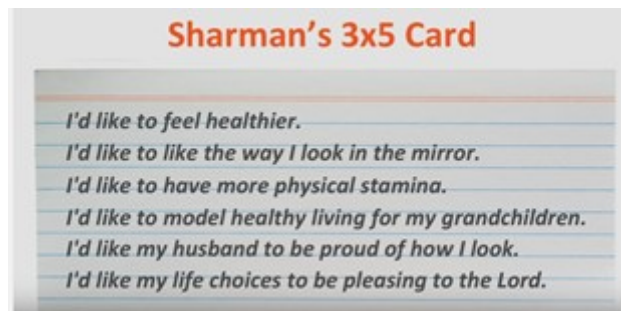
The Science of Change



Identify your crucial moments: You are not tempted 24/7. Identify which time, place, and/or people makes you most tempted.

Create your vital behaviors: What do you have to do when you are at risk. (If you can refocus your behaviors, not succumb to the urge, for just 3 or 4 minutes, you can get back to wanting to do your own behaviors.)

Write Reasons to Achieve Your Goals in a 3x5 Card



Here is Sharman's 3x5 card that lost 107 lbs. She read this card when she was tempted to eat say cheese cake in a party, etc.

Turn Bad Days into Good Data



Finally, the last step is to turn bad days into good data. To prevent relapse, you have to plan for what happens if you ever failed to control your behavior. Understand what went wrong, analyze it, talk to someone about it, know what to do about it, etc. A plan is not a plan until it specifies how you deal with setbacks.

Source: Change anything! Use Skillpower over Willpower: Al Switzler at TEDxFremont
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TX-Nu5wTS8>

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Albert Einstein

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Socrates



Source: How to Find Fulfilling Work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veriqDHLXsw>

- Zafar Khizer
President

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