



THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

KNOW THY
WILL

TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR
WILLPOWER



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Introduction:

I'll never forget that moment.

I picked up Charles Duhigg's book, [*The Power of Habit*](#), and had the most incredible rush of excitement.

“This is what Albert Einstein must have felt when he first pondered relativity!”



Author: Colin Robertson

It was the first time I discovered that willpower was more than a metaphor. I learned the real science behind what willpower actually is, how it works, and how it can be strengthened.

Since that moment I have been on a mission to understand everything I can about the science of willpower – then share it with as many people as possible.

This book will teach you about willpower in practical and understandable terms.

It will prove to you that willpower is a more important factor in your success than talent, IQ, or family wealth.

It will disprove all of the myths about willpower and show you what it really is.



Finally, it will explain how we developed willpower over time and give you simple, yet powerful, strategies that you can use to overcome whatever willpower challenges you face.

Mastering your willpower is a life-long battle. And the first step to winning that battle is understanding what you are up against.

I hope this Ebook will shed some light on your current beliefs about willpower and inspire you to take a big step on your journey to accomplishing whatever goals you wish to achieve.

CHAPTER 1:

The Power of Will



The year was 1970 and psychologists Walter Mischel and Ebbe B. Ebbesen invited a group of 4-year olds into a laboratory for what was surely the toughest test of their short lives.

They were put in a room by themselves with a delicious, tempting, marshmallow on a plate in front of them. They were told that they could eat the marshmallow if they wanted to right now, *but if they could wait just 15 minutes*, they would earn a second marshmallow.

As a 4 year-old, this was painful to say the least.

Most of the children simply could not resist and ate the marshmallow right away.



The ones who attempted to resist the temptation devised many coping strategies. They tried not looking at the marshmallow, so they covered their eyes or turned around so that they could not see it.



Others tried to distract themselves by starting to kick the desk, tug on their pigtails, or stroke the marshmallow as if it were a tiny stuffed animal.



Ultimately, less than 1/3rd of the kids were able to earn the second marshmallow.



This study was originally conducted to see at what age children begin to learn the benefits of delaying gratification.

They conducted the same study with 6 year-olds and found that they were indeed more successful in delaying gratification than the 4 year-olds.

These results proved that we learn the benefits of delaying gratification for larger rewards as we grow older. Test completed – *or so they thought.*



Marshmallow Test Success!

The researchers conducted a follow-up study of the original 4 year-olds that came into the laboratory when they became adolescents. The ones that were able to wait for the 2nd marshmallow were described by parents and teachers as significantly more competent than those who were unable to wait.



Continuing studies showed that the successful kids beat their peers on almost every measure of life success!

They achieved more academically, had higher incomes, better health and reported higher satisfaction in their lives.



The ability to wait for a second marshmallow as a 4 year-old proved to be a better predictor of success than:

1. IQ
2. School rating
3. Level of education
4. Standardized test scores
5. Family income

Those who had the willpower to earn a marshmallow at age 4 also had the willpower to earn great grades, a great job, and a great life.



CHAPTER 2:

Where Willpower Comes From



There it is. The piece of cake on the dessert cart that seems all too tempting. Despite your goals of health and fitness, it feels like your entire body is willing you to say, “YES!! Eat the cake!! Get it before the dessert cart leaves!!”

Then another voice comes into the picture. It says, “But wait! This is a new year! And I promised myself that I would resist dessert!”

The internal debate ensues. Sometimes you give in, sometimes you summon the willpower to resist.

We all face this challenge. Whatever the short-term temptation is, you face a direct competition between what you *want* to do and what you *should* do.

You know you *should* resist the unhealthy food to become the slimmer, healthier self that you want to be. You know you *should* get your work done now, so you won't be stressed and trying get it done at the last minute. You know you *should* close your tab, head home, get a good night's sleep, and be productive tomorrow morning.

But doing what you *should* is not always easy. Part of you wants to be healthy, be productive, and build for a better future. But another part of you wants to indulge, kick back, and live for the moment.



How We Developed Desire

A situation like this is a reflection of two different parts of your brain with competing desires, motivations, and controls over your final decision.

You see, millions of years ago, our ancestors had three very simple goals:

1. Find food.
2. Find a mate.
3. Stay safe from predators.



These three goals were our key to survival, and they were not exactly easy to achieve.

Back then, humans were weak and vulnerable creatures.

We stood less than five feet tall. We did not have the strength of a gorilla, the talons of an eagle, or the teeth of a tiger.

All we had to defend ourselves was our superior intelligence. Over time, this resulted in our brains developing to give us the energy and motivations to meet those top three priorities.



When we saw a chance of getting food, our brains gave us an extraordinary level of energy and focus to help us hunt that food down.

When we saw a chance for reproducing, our brains gave us a rush of desire to ensure we did not miss the opportunity.

When we began to exert ourselves too much, our brains gave us the motivation to rest so that we could conserve our energy.



These basic motivations were developed in what is called the *limbic system*—or, as I will refer to it throughout this book, the *primitive brain*.





The Limbic System

-or-

“The Primitive Brain”

Over millions of years, these motivating forces are what ensured the survival of our species.

They were so powerful, in fact, that even today, they motivate us in the exact same way – to acquire food, safety, and rest – despite what our higher goals and aspirations may be.

Whenever we get cravings, whenever we get anxious, and whenever we just want to relax on the couch instead of exercise, we can thank our primitive brain for giving us the desire to eat, worry, and rest.



The Development of Willpower

After millions of years of living this life and focusing on securing food, shelter, and a mate, we discovered something profound:

“it will be far easier to accomplish these things if I join a tribe!”



So we humans began to band together. We started building communities and depending on one another for survival.

Our brains, which had once been evolved to solely act on our personal needs and desires, now had to think about the wellbeing of others.

In order to survive, we not only had to work together to hunt and defend ourselves, but we also had to “play nice”. No stabbing anyone in the back, no taking someone else’s food and no stealing someone else’s mate. Otherwise, you were banished from the tribe and left to fend for yourself.

So we had to learn “right from wrong”. We had to think about how others would perceive our actions. We had to ask ourselves, *“how would I feel if someone else stole my food?”* This led us to *think about the situation and decide whether or not to act* on our most primitive instincts.



Welcome to the first development of willpower.



All of the sudden, acting solely on our own survival instincts could lead to trouble. So now we had to question the consequences of our actions to see if they may hurt us in the long run.

This higher level of thinking led to the development of the pre-frontal cortex – the “modern brain” – which is responsible for creativity, communication and willpower. When our primitive brains gave us the desire to steal food from our fellow tribesmen, it was the pre-frontal cortex that gave us the willpower to resist.

This ability to resist our basic urges helped us remain a solid member of the tribe and helped ensure our survival. Since this age, we have developed our willpower immensely. As we began developing scientific theories, technology, and art, we began rewiring our brains to focus more on creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving.



What this means in our world today.....

Today, our pre-frontal cortex is more evolved than any other time in history. This has given us a greater ability to exert willpower and self-control than ever before.



However, the modern brain was developed millions of years after the primitive brain. It has had a much shorter period of history to evolve and grow stronger.

So, even today, the brain will naturally place our primary functions higher on the priority list than self-control. This means that we are still doomed to struggle with the desires of the brain that formed millions of years ago.

Which is why we still have struggles resisting food, sticking to a budget, and pushing through the gym doors.



Despite Desire, We Always Have a Choice.

In order to hold ourselves back from doing things that would exile us from the tribe, our pre-frontal cortex developed to be the "final decider" of our actions.

No matter how much we were tempted to steal food or steal a mate, our brains developed so that we never had to act on those impulses. We would always have the ability to choose our final action – it just required willpower to do so.

This means that even when we are the most tired, the most tempted, and the most likely to give in to short-term temptations, we always have the ability to choose our ultimate actions.

So no matter how tempting that cheesecake, or how stressed you feel from work, **remember that you will always have the strength to make the right decision - no matter how hard that may be.**



CHAPTER 3:

Categories of Willpower



If you were to ask 10 people what they use their willpower for you would get 10 different answers.

We use it to get out of bed, to eat healthy, to stop procrastinating, to stay up late studying and to take on many other challenges. But do these all use the same willpower muscle in the same way?

In her book, [*The Willpower Instinct*](#), Stanford Health Psychologist Kelly McGonigal describes the ways we use our willpower by breaking it into 3 categories. Each of which uses a different part of the modern brain.

WILL Power



The first is *will power*. This is the willpower the students used to persevere on the puzzle.

It is what we use to force ourselves out of bed when the alarm goes off, it is what we use to make it to the gym, and it is what we use to stay late working at the office.

Any time our natural inclination is to stop, rest, or give up, but we make the conscious decision to take action, we are exerting this form of willpower.

Ultimately, this is the power to say “Yes”.



WON'T Power



The second is *won't power*. This is what most of us think about when we think of willpower. It is the ability to say “no” to temptations such as food and shopping sprees. It is what we use to control our emotions and hold our tongue in front of the boss.

Any time our natural desire is to act on an impulse and we make the conscious decision to control our behavior, we are exerting this form of willpower.

Ultimately, this is the power to say “No”.



WANT Power



The third is *want power*. This is the most important form of willpower that we have. It is the ability to see the higher purpose behind our actions and work toward our long-term goals.

Any time we feel like there is just no way we can ignore a temptation, or persevere through a challenge, yet we find something deep within ourselves to do the right thing, we are exerting this form of willpower.

Ultimately, this is the power to say “Whatever it takes!”



Each category of willpower is exerted in the modern brain. But not all 3 categories exhaust our willpower muscle in the same way.

Will power and won't power tap into the same energy source when they are called into action.

That's why when you use your *will power* to make it through a stressful day at work, you have less *won't power* to resist unhealthy food when you get home.



Want power, however, acts much differently.

Although it still requires energy to use your *want power*, it requires much less than the other forms. When you are fully committed to a passion, purpose, or long-term goal, you will use up less mental energy than if you were to use your *will* or *won't power*.



Know Thy Will

For example, let's look at two men who are successful executives. One man is happily married and the other is single.



Both men begin receiving sexual advances from their attractive young coworker. As the boss, both men know that **any relationship with a coworker is a bad idea.**

However, the happily married man will have a much easier time saying “no” to the temptation because he has a commitment to a greater purpose – his marriage, his family, his love – than the single man who does not have those things.

The married man will use his *want power* to resist the temptation because the prospect of sex is not nearly as valuable to him as his family.

Whereas the single man, who doesn't have nearly as much to lose, will have a harder time resisting the temptation by using his *won't power*.



This phenomenon occurs in many other challenges as well.

A father will have an easier time quitting drinking if he does it to be a good role model for his kids.

An athlete will push herself harder if she is training for a marathon than if she is just jogging for recreation.

An employee who derives purpose out of her daily work will find it easier to get out of bed in the morning than if she was doing a menial job.



In all of these cases, people are still exerting their willpower, but it is far less than they would without a higher purpose.

On your journey to accomplish your goals, it is incredibly valuable for you to shift to using your *want power* as much as possible.

This task is much simpler than you may think. You do not need to have an inspiring purpose, a meaningful job, or a motivational speaker “pump you up”. A simple change in perspective is all it takes.



CHAPTER 4:

Maximizing Your WANT Power



“I’ve done 20 Ironman Traithlons, who needs this?”

Said Joe DeSena, founder of [The Spartan Race](#), as he was in the middle of doing the Utah Ironman Triathlon. Joe is renowned for pushing his body to the limit, but this time he felt like he had pushed his body as far as it could possibly go.

He completed the 2.4 miles of swimming, 112 miles of biking and was 10 miles into the 26.2-mile run. But then his body decided that it had enough. He became so nauseous that he had to walk over to an ambulance where he started vomiting uncontrollably.

Joe was about to declare defeat and take his spot on the “Did Not Finish” list. After all, what did he have left to prove? He already finished the Ironman Triathlon 20 times before this! What would it matter if he finished it a 21st time?

Then he saw a woman with only one leg run by him.

When he saw this woman pushing herself through a physical feat that many 2-legged people don't even try, it changed his perspective.



He was no longer feeling sorry for himself. He was no longer viewing the final 16.2 miles of the race as something that was not worth doing. Seeing this woman gave Joe the strength he needed to start running again.

She was a source of inspiration to him. Despite his pain, despite his nausea, despite his body telling him to STOP, for the final 16.2 miles of the race, he was able to keep pace and cross the finish line with her.



The Power of Perspective

How did Joe DeSena do this? He was vomiting uncontrollably!

How did he find the strength to not only finish the race, but to keep pace with this woman? What was it about her that seemed to change DeSena's outlook so much that he was able to overcome all of his natural instincts to quit? **The answer lies in the power of our perspective.**

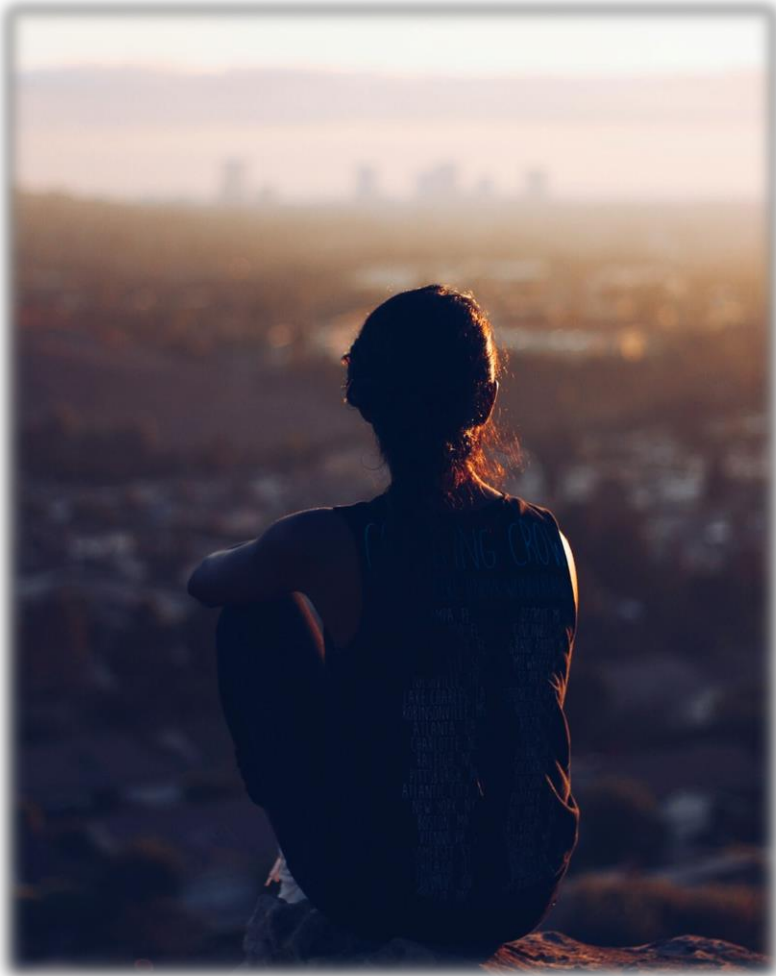
When it comes to achieving our goals, few of us stop to consider the power of our point of view.

We believe that making it to the gym will be just as hard whether we see it as an obligation or we see it as an opportunity.

We believe that eating healthier will be just as hard whether we are doing it because we want to “look better” or if we are doing it to live a longer and happier life. *But this is not the case.*



Our point of view in accomplishing our goals is one of the key factors that determine whether or not we will see them through to completion.



And you do not need to see something as inspiring as a one-legged woman finishing the Ironman to change your perspective.

Research shows that simply by changing your language, you can shift your mindset and tap into your *want power*.



“Get to” versus “Have to”

When we set a plan to accomplish our goals, many of us begin to set a plan that we “have to” follow.

You want to become more fit, so you “have to” go to the gym 3 times per week. Then when your friends invite you out after work, you politely decline claiming that you “have to” go to the gym.

Meanwhile, your brain is subconsciously paying attention to these cues. By saying that you “have to” do it, you are claiming that there are better things that you *want* to do, but you're restricted by a plan you set weeks or months ago.



When you view this plan as an obligation that you “have to” follow, your brain will begin to motivate you to skip it – especially when you are low on willpower. It wants to take the easy way out, so it will come up with excuses to take a break today and resume your plan tomorrow.

You can completely switch this motivation, however, by changing your perspective to “get to”.

You get to go to the gym today and improve your fitness.

You get to order a salad for lunch instead of pizza and feel good about yourself afterward.

You get to go to work today and earn the lifestyle you enjoy.



Try this simple technique the next time you feel like you “have to” do something to achieve a long-term goal. This will shift your brain from using *will power* to using *want power*.



“I Can’t” versus “I Don’t”

When most people take up the age-old practice of watching their waistline, their typical response to deny a temptation is to say, “I can’t”.

But is it possible that saying “I can’t” might actually *increase* the likelihood that these people will give in? Researchers at Boston College wanted to find out. So they brought a group of undergraduate students into the lab to test if how you say “no” to a temptation matters.

They separated the students into 2 groups. Both groups were dieters with the intentions of cutting out sweets. They were both offered Hershey’s Kisses and asked to resist the temptation to eat them for 24 hours. One group was given the instruction to resist by saying “I can’t eat chocolate” and the other was given the instruction to say, “I don’t eat chocolate”.



Then they were to bring back the same Hershey’s Kisses the next day to prove that they resisted the temptation (the researchers marked the Kisses to ensure that nobody cheated by bringing in different ones).



Success Rate

39%

“I Can’t”

62%

“I Don’t”

The next day, only 39% of those who said, “I can’t eat chocolate” were able to resist the temptation. Meanwhile, 62% of those who said “I don’t eat chocolate” were able stay strong!

Simply saying, “I don’t” *worked almost twice as well as* saying “I can’t”!

As with “get to” and “have to”, saying, “I don’t” rather than “I can’t” shifts your perspective.

Think about what you’re really saying when you use, “I can’t”. You’re saying that *you would* eat the chocolate, but there is some outside reason that is preventing you from indulging.

It doesn’t matter if that outside reason is an experiment or a diet plan, you see it as some factor that is preventing you from having what you really want. “I don’t”, however, changes your perspective to that of a person who simply does not eat chocolate. You begin to identify yourself as someone who eats healthy. This will shift you from *won’t power to want power* and the craving for your vices will begin to subside.



Willpower is more than a metaphor.

. There is a real science behind the mental strength that it takes to pull yourself out of bed in the morning, deny yourself tempting foods, and even push your body 16 more miles after it has said “enough”.

The biggest mistake that people make with their willpower is putting far too many demands on it. When you use willpower to persevere through a long, stressful day of work, you’re not going to have as much left to lace up your running shoes, or cook yourself a healthy dinner.

However, even when your willpower is at its weakest, you can still stick to your goals by shifting your perspective.

You will have more willpower to commit to your goals if you “get to” do it, rather than “have to” do it.

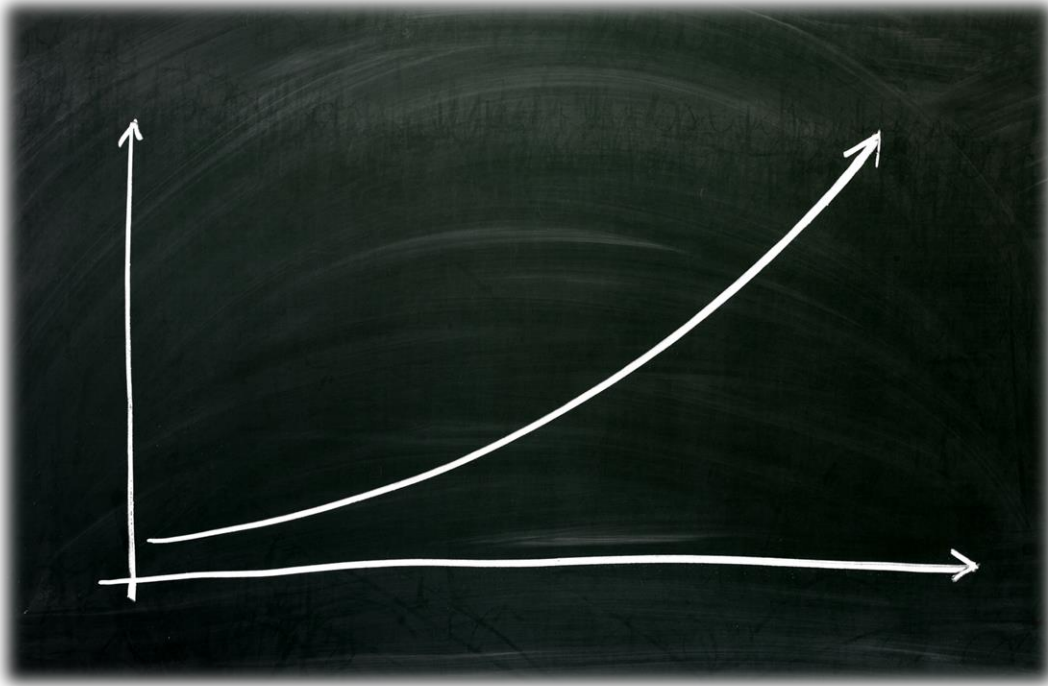
Similarly, you will have more willpower to deny temptations if you “don’t” indulge, rather than “can’t” indulge.

Understanding these principles is the first step toward mastering your willpower and achieving whatever goals you have in life.



CHAPTER 5:

How to Make Your Willpower Last



At 21 years of age, Jonah Hill exploded onto the Hollywood scene. His lead role in the comedy *Superbad* not only made audiences laugh, but also turned him into one of the most beloved comedic actors of his generation.

It landed him many follow-up roles in movies like *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Funny People* and *Get Him to the Greek*. In each of these movies, Hill played the chubby, jovial, funny guy – a role that he played with brilliance. But in 2011, Hill wanted to mature as an actor and as a person.

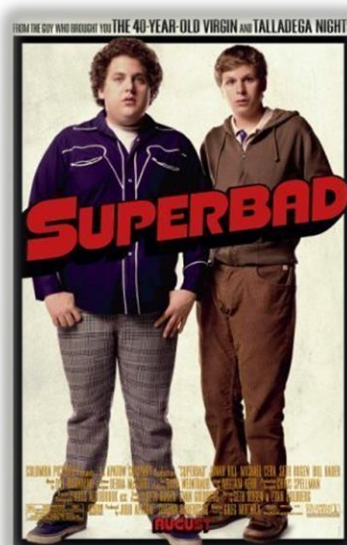


He took the second lead role in Moneyball with Brad Pitt – a role in which he would play a statistics genius, rather than your typical “bro”. With this new role, Hill wanted to get into better shape.

With extra motivation from Pitt, he saw a nutritionist. Hill loves Japanese food, so the nutritionist put him on a “sushi diet”. This diet helped Hill famously lose 40lbs and look remarkably slimmer. A look, Hill said, revealed his new level of maturity as an actor and a person.



“I met you guys — meaning everyone, media, audiences, strangers — when I was 21 or 22 years old, with Superbad. And I was a kid — if you had a public record of yourself at 21, you’d sound like an idiot...Now I’m almost 28, and I’m growing up in front of strangers. So for me, who I was then is a lot different than who I am now. So being healthier came along with maturity.”



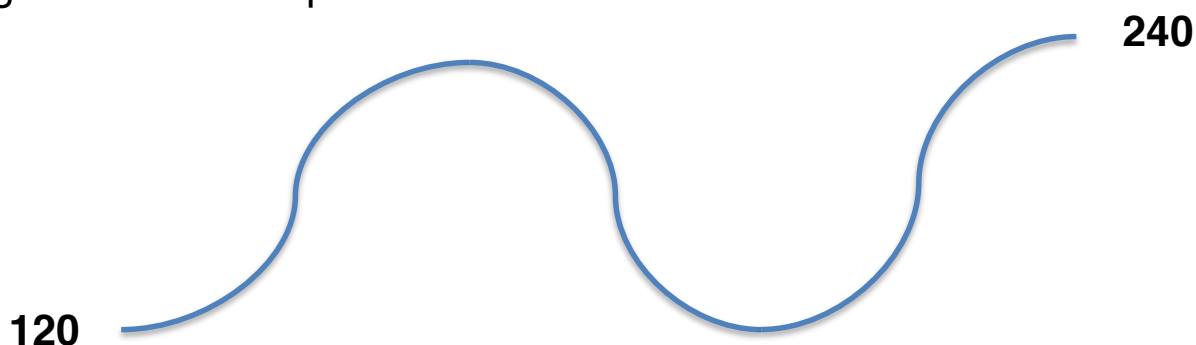
After Moneyball, Hill continued to get both serious and comedic roles. But as an audience, we slowly started to see him put the weight back on. In 21 Jump Street, we saw a slim Hill next to Channing Tatum. But by the time they started shooting 22 Jump Street, Hill was noticeably thicker. Then in The Wolf of Wall Street, we saw Hill back at the weight he was before he shed so many pounds.

Hill continued to put weight on and hit a new all-time weight high of 270 lbs – a number that his friends were seriously worried about. He was back to eating pizza, junk food and indulging in his favorite beverage, beer. Clearly he still had many problems trying to control his weight, despite his access to the best nutritionists and fitness professionals that money could buy!



Hill is not the only person, or even celebrity, to have major problems maintaining their weight-loss.

Over her lifetime, Oprah Winfrey has famously fluctuated from as low as 120lbs to as high as 240lbs – never seeming to be able to get it off and keep it off.



It is not as if these two celebrities lack willpower either. Oprah is renowned across the world for her prodigious work ethic that helped her get to the top. Hill, too, had the discipline to get paid a mere \$60,000 for his role in *The Wolf of Wall Street*; showing that he is able to put his long-term career goals before his short-term wealth.

So if not due to a lack of willpower, why do these two – and millions of others across the world – have such a hard time maintaining their goals once they have reached them? And, more importantly, what can we do to ensure that when we finally reach our goals, we are able to make them stick for a lifetime?





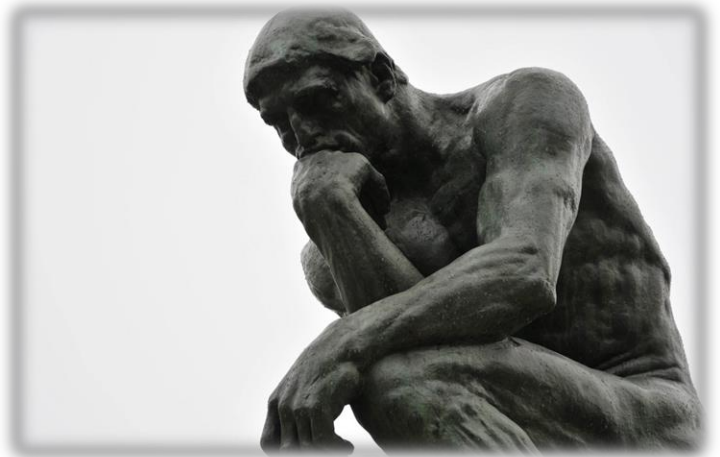
One would think that maintaining a goal – whether it be keeping weight off, or sticking to a budget – would be the easy part. That the struggle of adjusting your lifestyle and choices to achieve the goal in the first place is the truly hard part. Simply maintaining it is much easier.

However, there are many factors that become a problem for us only once you've actually reached your goal.



Loss of Self-Awareness

Perhaps the most important factor that prevents you from maintaining your goals is simply a loss of self-awareness. When you are on the journey to achieving your goal, you become mindful of each of your decisions.



You see how the daily choices that you make are a part of a larger picture. You see that the impulse purchase, or the craving for cheesecake, are both threats to your long-term goals, so you do your best to avoid them.

When you are trying to maintain your goals, however, you begin to devalue these daily decisions. You no longer see them as threats to your goals and think in terms of “what is one slice of cheesecake going to hurt, really?”

The answer, of course, is nothing. But that mentality applied day-after-day, decision-after-decision, eventually adds up and sends you right back where you started.



Moral Licensing

The natural extension to the loss of self-awareness is a trap that your brain plays on you known as “Moral Licensing”. your brain is incredibly good at applying logic and reasoning to the world around you. This has given you the ability to see problems, brainstorm, and come up with innovative solutions.



However, this same logic has also given you the ability justify “bad” behavior because you’ve been “good” in other areas of your lives. When you accomplish your goal, you can feel as if you have earned the right to allow yourself to indulge.

In this state of mind, when you come across a temptation, your usual internal debate gets cued up. The primitive part of your brain sees the temptation and immediately tells you “YESSSSS! Get it! Now!!”



Moral Licensing

But then in comes your logical, rational, pre-frontal cortex (the self-control area of the brain) to calm things down and control your emotions. It will then use logic to debate the emotional brain and say “But if I give in, then I won’t reach my goal!”

Under normal circumstances, if the pre-frontal cortex doesn’t win, it at least puts up a good fight. But if you have already reached your goal, then what reasoning does your pre-frontal cortex have? Instead it will use logic to agree with the primitive brain and rationalize your right to indulge.

This is exactly what takes place with moral licensing. Instead of an epic battle between temptation and self-control, we have the two sides agreeing with each other, leaving you no defense against temptation.



The Zeigarnik Effect



Whenever you attempt to remember something important, your brain will set up an internal reminder system to help you out. You use this to remember what to buy at the grocery store, what tasks are on your to-do lists, and also what your long-term goals are.



The Zeigarnik Effect

However, once you have completed the task, your brain will essentially “check it off the list” and no longer store it in your memory. This is known as the Zeigarnik Effect – named after a psychologist who was blown away by his waiter’s ability to remember his order perfectly, then completely forget it once he served it to him.

This same phenomenon happens when you are achieving your goals. You set up an internal reminder in your brain to “stick to your budget” “say ‘no’ to that cheesecake” and “get to the gym”. But once you have completed your financial or weight-loss goals, your mind naturally “checks it off” of your internal to-do list.

So you no longer receive those reminders when you come face-to-face with the cheesecake, or the clock turns 5pm and you are supposed to head to the gym. Because the reminders have been essentially wiped from your mind, it is harder for you to find the motivation to do the small things on a daily basis that will help you maintain your goals.



Focus on the Process

All of the traps listed above stem from the fact that you have “completed your goal”. Because you have completed your goal, you no longer need to worry about it as much any more. You “deserve” to indulge and you can check it off of your internal to-do list. All 3 of these



things can be overcome by simply switching the focus of your goals to the process, rather than the result.

By focusing on the process, you will never lose your self-awareness. Rather than thinking that you are “done” by losing 40 lbs, **you begin to focus on the next step in the journey.**

You continue to find healthy foods and experiment with healthy recipes that you enjoy eating. You begin to get stronger, faster and more fit in the gym. You start to enjoy the process of getting better.



Focus on the Process

You will also avoid the trap of feeling that you “deserve” to indulge. It is important to reward yourself, of course, but you should never take your foot off of the gas pedal. Focusing on the process ensures that you will always be thinking about how indulging will affect your progress.

Finally, because you are focused on the process, your internal reminder system will never stop helping you. It will constantly be recognizing the things that will help you progress, or potentially derail you from achieving your goals.

This will give you the ability to make your willpower last for the long term.



Conclusion

To be truly successful in making your goals last for the long term, you must embrace the fact that greatness is a journey without an end. It is important to have deadlines, it is important to have rewards, it is important to achieve small wins, but your goals should never truly be finished.

The minute you take your foot off of the gas pedal is when you start to lose focus on what was once so hard to accomplish. Jonah Hill and Oprah Winfrey went through a lot of pain and personal torment to become healthier. But as soon as they accomplished their remarkable results, they began to slip right back to where they started—and ended up even worse.

You can avoid this fate by focusing on the process and not the result. You must embrace the idea that no matter what you have accomplished today, it will always be merely good compared to what you can accomplish next.

Greatness is a journey and not a destination.

