

About the Author



Scott Abel has been involved in the diet, fitness, and bodybuilding industries for over four decades. His academic background is actually in sociology, but after his Masters degree he soon moved on to bodybuilding and coaching bodybuilders and everyday people. Scott's online fitness coaching is his main focus, and he specializes in physique transformation rooted in a mindset for *longterm* success. He helps people lose weight and *keep* it off. He helps bodybuilders get ripped for shows, but in a way that prevents insane post-contest spirals. He helps figure competitors bring out their best bodies. He helps people maintain leanness year-round with his "Cycle Diet." For

those not ready for full coaching, he also provides one-time custom diets and one-time custom workout plans. He takes on *any* clients willing to do the work. For more information, visit him at his website at scottabelfitness.com.

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Introduction

I still take on coaching clients for a variety of very different goals, but year after year I see many of the same issues in new clients who've had trouble in the past with achieving or sustaining goals. For example, many people come to me after having lost weight in the past, but they were unable to sustain it. This is something I can help with, though the solution is not just about a specific diet or training program, as many new clients expect. Sometimes it's just a tweak to their diet. Sometimes we have to learn to coax their metabolism, so there's not rebound. But often—very, very often—it's really about mindset, and what I call the psychology of achievement.

Although I believe there's no substitute for real, one on one coaching, this is the book I might have on hand to give to any potential client, whether they came for weight loss, or they were getting ready for a physique or bodybuilding show, or they were pursuing a non-fitness-related academic goal. It *all* applies. Of course, in the case of being unable to sustain, say, something like weight loss, there are physical and metabolic reasons why someone might gain the weight back, but even these reasons are much easier to deal with when your mindset is already in the right place. And this is true of any “external” reason that is standing between you and your goal. Often the external obstacles are very real, and very valid. But as

you can imagine, they are still much easier to deal with when you have the right mindset. This is the book I would have on hand to give yo any client so that they could succeed “longterm.”

If there is a “secret” to the psychology of achievement, it is that once you’re being true and focused on the *process*, and being authentic and self-compassionate, then instead of desperately trying to “maintain” a goal, you *build off it*, and achieve something even greater. You do it with renewed energy, while feeling refreshed, because you’re taking care of your body and your mind. You’re treating your body well with sleep. You’re using supportive self-talk. You’re harnessing productive routines. Your motivation fuels your goals, and your goals in turn fuel your motivation. You don’t feel worn out, but ready to achieve something more. **This book is about how to do that.**

Final note:

The chapters in this book can be read in any order; however I suggest reading the “Mastery” chapter last.

Chapter 1.

Mental Fitness

How is it that some people can seem to go out and decide on a goal and then achieve it, while others struggle and never quite get there? Easy questions to ask, not so easy questions to answer. I've spent a career investigating these questions. Human behavior and achievement fascinate me. I've spent my career in the service of helping people reach their goals. I've helped make hundreds of physique champions and cover models, but I've also helped people overcome eating disorders, lose over 100 lbs., and rebuild their lives. I've helped people with all sorts of other forms of achievement that can't always be measured.

While I can say I've helped people with these accomplishments, ultimately these are their accomplishments, not mine.

And for every person who achieves such goals, there are many more who do not. There are even more people who do achieve a goal and then remain stagnant, or they achieve a goal only to watch it slip away, like so many people who lose weight only to gain it all back again.

What I do know for sure is that what separates those who achieve goals from those who do not is the mind. I call it Mental Fitness. I've said thousands of

times, my belief is that “mindset determines behavior,” or more accurately, “quality of mindset determines quality of behavior.” Too many times you are led to believe that if you just follow some specific recipe for achieving a goal, then you will achieve it. That is the problem. It’s not the recipe that matters, it’s the chef! You can’t simply behave your way to achievement if your mind is not primed to take you there.

What is important to me when helping others is not just their immediate goal, but the change in their mental fitness that can come by doing what it takes to achieve that goal. Any individual achievement can be and should be a building block of character. It should create a domino effect, so that you just become “the kind of person” who sets a goal and then achieves it. There is no greater loss than achieving a goal only to not have the process of getting there not build your character as well. And that is why this project is about “how to achieve any goal *and build on that achievement.*”

Mental Fitness

In four decades of a career and reputation built on helping thousands of people achieve their goals, I can tell you the difference between those who get there and those who don’t is mental fitness. In terms of those who achieve their goal, keep it, hone it and build on it—it all comes down to mental fitness.

Rather than giving you a simple definition of mental fitness, let’s make it more personal. Before you can

begin building your mental fitness foundation you need to discover just how mentally fit you actually are... or are not. Do not worry, because just like other forms of fitness you need to see where you are at: as in, are you a beginner, intermediate, advanced, or just pretending.

Below is a “Mental Fitness and Emotional Maturity” checklist. Look it over and honestly rate where you are within this check list:

Mental Fitness and Emotional Maturity Check List

- How mentally tough do you consider yourself to “truly” be? What evidence do you have to support your claim?
- How well do you bounce back from mistakes?
- How well do you handle adversity when the chips are down?
- How well do you accept feedback and critique from others?
- How well do you handle pressure? Do you create self-induced needless pressure?
- How strongly do you believe that you can accomplish your goal – a little, or a lot?
- How well can you stay focused on the task at hand? Or are you a modern stimulus junkie of Facebook posts, Tweets, music and allowing yourself to be constantly bombarded and

therefore distracted with needless stimulus?

The above list is meant to get you thinking about how you think and feel in a general sense.

Now, think of the word “fitness” and what that entails and depicts. “Fitness” is often defined as being well-suited and capable to the task at hand. Often it refers only to physical fitness, as in “having a developed capacity for performance based on exercise and nutrition.”

Mental fitness is just like physical fitness. It is built from *exercising* it, and from feeding it good nutrition (in this case, healthy thinking). Bad nutrition would be “stinkin thinkin,” which is the equivalent of being a mental couch-potato.

As with physical fitness goals, improving your mental fitness is a long-term project that requires daily exercise and repetition. You need to honestly “check yourself” if you are getting complacent, just as you would “check yourself” if you started missing workouts or going off the rails on your diet. Mental fitness is a well-developed “state” of mind and state of being. It is never stagnant. It doesn’t atrophy because it must always be practiced and exercised to progress to the next level.

One element of mental fitness that we will get into is the element of focus. You need to remind yourself constantly that extraordinary goals require extraordinary effort, and often extraordinary sacrifices.

Only losers look for short-cuts. Mental fitness is your way to your goal and beyond it to better things as well.

And just like developing any other great skill, all the tools throughout this project are about getting comfortable with the basics and fundamentals. You work outward from there. This is true in any industry, and it is true of any developed skill or talent. It's no different for mental fitness either. The fundamentals and the basics that we will be addressing in this project are what you can count on to serve you for a life time, just as with regular physical fitness.

Mental fitness has nothing to do with “talent.”

I've seen many competitors who finish out of the running, and yet they are the most mentally fit people in the competition – or in pursuit of any goal. It's just a *fact* that mentally fit people, when they compete of course they want to win — every competitor does — but mentally fit people also have self-preservation in place. In other words, mentally fit competitors want to win, while “head-cases” want to win at all costs, no matter what it does to their lives, their relationships, their bodies.

Mentally fit people are like Trevor Timmins, now head of scouting for the Montreal Canadiens hockey team. He is a former client, and a longtime friend. I told him early on when we were both in university that his “frame” was not built to go extremely far in bodybuilding. Did he crumble? No. He focused on what mattered. He did a few shows because he enjoyed the challenge. He did well in them. But it wasn't “win at all costs.” Now, 20 years later, he

maintains an *incredible* physique (while many former “winners” have grown overweight and have totally lost their former physiques) all while working an incredibly rewarding yet high stress career with tonnes of travel.

Once mental fitness is regularly exercised and practiced you can begin to hone it. Below are some of the key components of advanced mental fitness. Study these points and address which ones you have and which ones you do not currently possess or you need to work on.

Advanced Mental Fitness

- You know and understand that mental fitness itself is a requirement for true and authentic self-improvement. Excelling at anything requires weeks, months and even years of consistent hard work. Without mental fitness as a foundation, this kind of consistency simply doesn't happen.
- Determination, focus, confidence, competence, consistency, and persistence – these are not “transitory” states of mind depending on what mood you are in. These things are “key indicators” of being mentally fit. They become part of who you are.
- Mental fitness means you are willing to look your fears directly in their face. This is not because you are not afraid, but in spite of being afraid. You know that fear is often just

an irrational emotion. Being mentally fit, you are in control of your emotions. Mental fitness means you understand that fear doesn't *ever* keep you safe. It is your decisive actions in spite of your fears and in the presence of them that keeps you safe and builds your strength, mentally and emotionally.

- Mental fitness means knowing how to calmly control your emotions so your emotions can't control you. You harness the power of your emotions and passions to work “for” you, not against you. Mental fitness means that if your passion powers and drives you, then your rationality and logic steers the wheel.
- Mental fitness means no one else has the power to break you or make you.
- Mental fitness means being able to block out noise and distraction and keep focused on the goal of what is right in front of you. You prioritize what is important and what is not. You know what is extraneous mental clutter and noise (like the distractions of social media—the modern stimulus addict's main weakness).
- Mental fitness means you recognize that multi-tasking is a myth. It means you know that trying to do six things at one time means

none of them get done well, not in real terms.

- Mental fitness means you not only “can” challenge yourself, but you *want* to do so. This has nothing to do with anyone else’s expectations. It’s just a calling from within yourself to be your best.
- Mental fitness means you know you have it in you to never surrender, no matter how many times you slip and fall, or even how many times you might “screw up.” It’s not something to feel bad about; it’s something to invigorate you.
- Mental fitness means doing what it takes to get the job done and done well, but *not* if “what it takes” leaves you with nothing left for your real life. Mental fitness recognizes “balance” as a *strength*.
- Most importantly to my mind at least, mental fitness can also be about learning to follow your self more, and the crowd, less.

Developing and strengthening your mental fitness also increases your confidence, because once confidence is simply a state of being and not a state of mind, you can relax and be on autopilot with “calm but assertive energy” as your foundation. At this point,

you don't stress over details because you don't stress. When you worry less and don't stress over senseless details – then you can focus even better on the things that do matter and the things you can control. Win-win.

So let me be clear: **Mental fitness is the beginning and end of a working psychology of achievement.** Without its development, you may achieve a goal here and there, but you are unlikely to keep it, benefit from it, or build on it. To me that doesn't equate to achievement or success.

Chapter 2.

Courage

Do you have courage?

How courageous are you on a scale from 1-10, with 10 being the most courageous? First, are we in agreement on what the term means? Let's explore "courage," especially as it pertains to the psychology of achievement.

If your desire is your wishbone, well it's fair to say that your courage has to become your *backbone*. It takes nothing to have desires. It takes courage to excel, to separate yourself from others. That is why few people ever do excel. Courage is harder to act on than comfort and convenience.

It takes courage to sacrifice over and over again, to work long, and to work hard, and then to work some more when you could be relaxing. It takes a kind of courage to workout when you're tired and you've had a hard day (at least, to do so again, and again, and again). It takes courage to focus daily on being your best and giving your all. It takes courage to keep fighting when you are losing, and to get up after being beaten down.

In this day and age it takes courage to stand by your convictions when those around you seem to have none. It takes courage to continue to pursue your goal

with enthusiasm when you encounter constant obstacles, and success is still far, far off. It takes courage to push your own limits and to break through your own perceived barriers.

Exercising your courage means taking risks. It means you might fail. It means taking yourself into the unknown where there are no guarantees.

I believe you have this courage; it's just that not everyone believes in the depths of it within them. You have more courage than you believe you do; you maybe just don't realize it.

To exercise courage you have to break-free of being a charter member in the "SNIOPS" club. That is, people who re "Susceptible to the Negative Influences of Other People." It is "safe" to be a member of the Peanut Gallery: to be someone hiding behind a computer screen criticizing people who are out there "doing, and risking, and challenging themselves to be better, and taking a stand on what they believe in; and becoming proficient in it." It takes no courage to stand on the side of the road and do nothing and go nowhere, while watching all the traffic whizzing by — traffic full of people following a path and going somewhere.

You can start exercising courage today. Okay, so you have 100 lbs. to lose? Meet that challenge with courage, and do it *today*, knowing that the journey is long, and that it is hard, and that it is easy to put it off until tomorrow. Courage is knowing that in order to succeed, you will need to change yourself. You will

have to get out of your comfort zone.

Okay, let's say you have food or eating issues. Again, meet that challenge with courage, and do it today. To overcome such issues will take courage, because you'll have to face the internal issues that are really causing the eating behaviour.

I see the difference every day between clients who make it, clients who fake it, and clients who keep failing themselves over and over again. Courage is always the missing ingredient. Only, it's not actually missing in them — they've just never called on it because deep down they don't believe they have it, therefore they don't realize the depths of their own courage either. And by the way, it's "faking it" if you only push yourself in the things you *like* doing. For instance, so many people write me and tell me how hard they workout, and they love working out, but they can't stick to a diet long enough to get their results. That is "faking courage" because anyone can push themselves in something they love doing. Exercise your courage by aiming it at what you know needs doing better! Not just at what's already easy!

Being courageous requires no exceptional skills, talents or intelligence. Think "Rocky" if it helps you picture courage in its rawest form. Exercising your courage requires no magic formulas or recipes. It doesn't require anyone else's expertise or version of how to do it. Exercising your courage can begin at any time. Right now. There is no special combination of time, place or circumstance where it is suddenly revealed to you and called upon. It doesn't require an

emergency or dire times. You can tap into it now. Exercising your own courage is an opportunity we all have.

The amazing thing about courage is this: **courage can never let you down. EVER.**

Courage isn't about learning how to be fearless. That's nonsense. Courage means being willing to act in spite of the presence of fear.

It's not enough to "find your answers" or something; you have to have the courage to live them as well.

Fear yells and screams at you "just go around it, go around it" but courage takes your hand and whispers, "Let's just go right through it!" Find that voice that whispers your strength to you. Start *tuning in* to it, and counting on it.

Chapter 3.

Controlling Emotions

Believe it or not, accomplishing goals and building on them has everything to do with tapping into the right emotions. That is, tapping into the emotions that serve you, and not letting less useless and self-sabotaging emotions affect your consistency and your commitment to the process at hand.

Make no mistake, the high-end achiever's mindset is all about using emotion *strategically* while seldom if ever being used *by* their emotions. Any long-term goal is something that stretches you. This means the element of risk is always present, and risk invites emotion.

Research shows that our minds find it easier to connect to negative emotions, especially in times of risk or crisis. This is likely an evolutionary effect that had to do with surviving as a species. Unfortunately, when it comes to achieving and sustaining some long-term goals, connecting to negative emotions is a guaranteed way to fail. Imagine your goal is to lose a substantial amount of weight. Do you really think you can accomplish and sustain such a goal if it means connecting with anger, frustration, hostility, fear and anxiety throughout the whole process of getting there and staying there?

Of course this will never work.

If you study a cross-section of high-achievers from as many fields as you can, you will find the most consistent achievers are masters of emotions, not slaves to them. Again, it's all about "properly and efficiently" using emotions where and when it counts, and never allowing yourself to be used by emotions. People who allow themselves to be used by their emotions, are eventually "used up" by them as well.

Think of your emotions like a campfire. They can cook your food and keep you warm, *if* you pay attention and tend to the campfire responsibly. But emotions can burn you and everything around you if they get out of control.

It's not about ignoring emotions. That will never work either. Just like ignoring a blazing campfire and hoping for the best isn't wise either. What you feel is real. You need to embrace that. But at the same time you don't need to indulge every emotion you feel either. You can choose to learn from them and learn from what you are feeling at any given time. You can ask yourself if what you are feeling is serving you in a healthy way. You can ask yourself if indulging this emotion will move you closer or further away from your goal.

Being informed by your emotions is one thing, but being ruled by them is another. In the psychology of achievement, it's all about implementing a mindset that informs you, but also invigorates you and energizes you and moves you along in the process of advancing

you toward your goal. During the daily, weekly, monthly and ongoing process of working toward your goal, the fact is all kinds of emotions are going to surface. It's up to you to notice them and use them, or work around them and diffuse them.

When you let emotions like fear, anger, frustration, hostility, and resentment get the best of you... well, this will bring out the worst in you. And how is that likely to serve you in achieving your long-term goal? The key question is are you in control, or are your emotions running your mind's agenda? Before you can begin the kind of consistent self-disciplined behaviour required to achieve a real goal – you need to first be in control of your emotional self.

The past can engender unwanted, and sabotaging emotions to your present self. “The past got in my eyes” is an old saying from the Peanuts comic strip. In it, Lucy just dropped a fly ball she should have caught. Charlie Brown is the manager and the comic shows Lucy apologizing to Charlie Brown. She says, “Sorry I dropped that easy fly ball, manager. I thought I had it. But as the ball was dropping from the sky into my glove I suddenly remembered all the other balls I missed that I should have caught. And then, well ‘the past got in my eyes’ and I dropped it.”

You've seen this happen before. You've probably experienced it.

Worrying about a past mistake only leads to making a mistake in the present. Now, it's the “worrying” you need to surrender, not the “learning” from it. As the

saying goes: learn from the past, prepare for the future, but act in the present.

Your emotional recall of past scenarios that didn't turn out well — these only tarnish your ability to be fully present in the present moment. Don't let the past get in your eyes and blind you to all the possibilities around you! Worry and anxiety are usually about being stuck in the past or the future, but not the present. Both keep you from being authentically “present” and able to tap into the positive emotions that will serve you and invigorate you.

How to use your emotions to rule the present? There is an old saying to “hurry slowly” in matters of urgency. Learn to never hurry when it counts. A frantic mind is an irrational mind. It's the charged-up emotions that do not serve you, like anxiety, worry and nervousness. You start rushing, and then you get so far ahead of yourself that you make all the mistakes you were worrying about in the first place.

“Hurrying slowly” is about injecting calm energy into all you do, until it becomes a state of being, not a state of mind. Calm energy is the solution to any “spinning thoughts” that lead to irrational and impulsive sabotaging behaviors.

Hurrying slowly is about reminding yourself to be present. **When you are present you are more likely to employ emotions that serve you** for the present task at hand. This is how you stay grounded. And this is how you move forward in the process that takes you to your goal.

At the heart of any worthy commitment to a goal and to making achievements happen is one word:

PASSION

Passion is the positive emotional foundation for all achievements and accomplishments.

If you can't be passionate about what you are doing, then be passionate about who you are while doing it.

I've told many clients who've failed at dieting long-term that "their commitment is wrong." They try to make a commitment to "a diet" rather than a commitment to the kind of person they want to be; and seeing that person reflected in the diet-undertaking.

Any kind of weight-loss undertaking entails committing to a process that will eventually become tedious. That's life. The excitement of the challenge wears off, and then what? Tell yourself this: "I'm not the kind of person who would cheat on myself, and cheating on my diet is cheating on myself." This has kept me disciplined for decades, whether that means sticking to a diet-strategy I've set for myself, or sticking to a writing schedule that allows me to complete a long-term project like this book. It's not about "the diet" and it's not about "the book." It's about being the kind of person I expect myself to be.

These are ways to think and act in order to "control emotions" and not be "controlled by them." Learning to control emotions enhances your personal growth from one accomplishment to the next, and this

inevitably leads to self-mastery.

Chapter 4.

Self-Critique

Henry Ford once famously said, “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t—you’re right.”

It’s not just your actions and behaviors you do on a consistent basis that matter. Humans are not robots. You can’t just follow a script in zombie-like fashion and think that is all that is required to be a long-term goal you have for yourself. Your actions will shape your thoughts and emotions... and your thoughts and emotions will shape your actions as well.

Any goal you have will likely start with enthusiasm. Every successful person breathes enthusiasm into what they do. Good work never gets done with cold blood; the breath of enthusiasm creates the necessary heat of passion. Things done with passion will always have stronger imprints than emotionless recipe-following.

Every story of an amazing achievement has the breath of enthusiasm at its core, as well as the flaming heart of passion. You can’t create it in someone else, but you can always find it within yourself. In the psychology of achievement, any worthy goal is initially infused with both the attitude and the emotion of enthusiasm. It’s maintaining a high level of enthusiasm

that is challenging to the soul.

Enthusiasm begets passion. Both of these invite emotion into the process. While emotions are vital to achieving any goal, they are also a double-edged sword. Too much emotion can produce pressure and burnout; not enough emotion invested in your goal and you likely won't get far either. Without emotional investment in your goal, it becomes easy to quit when things get difficult. If the goal is worthy and substantial, there *will* come a time when things get difficult. If the goal were easy, then anyone could do it.

When this happens, reason lets you steer and control your passion and enthusiasm. As old the saying goes, "Let your passion drive you, but let reason steer the wheel." Reason can help you channel emotions when the task gets challenging, as any worthy challenge will do.

If things aren't working well, you have to pay attention so you can improve. It's amazing to me how many adults take on a goal and expect to be "good at it" from the very beginning. When this isn't the case, they give up or quit.

You have to be mature enough to be self-critical during the process of achieving your goal. Being self-critical allows you to learn and grow. Frankly, this personal growth should be the underlying foundation of any goal to begin with. But like enthusiasm, passion and emotion, being self-critical can also be a double-edged sword.

You need a bit of self-critique. Yet more often than not, being self-critical leads to failure rather than success. You need to balance self-critique with acknowledgement of your successes. No one ever self-hated their way to a major accomplishment. You must forgive yourself for your mistakes and slip ups, without excusing yourself for them. If you don't do this then you can't learn from them.

If you only focus on your mistakes, slip-ups, failures and self-criticism, then your mistakes will control you. The mind can handle mature and responsible critique, but it will shut-down or rebel against abuse—especially self-abuse.

There is a fine line between rational self-critique, and immature self-abuse that produces insecurity and fear. Such insecurity and fear will always end up drowning your enthusiasm and passion. When it comes to self-critique, it needs to be mature and rational, not immature and emotional. Self-critique should always be about trying to get better, do better, and be better. It should never be about emotionally-charged judgmental energy.

If you struggle with this it's because after you make a mistake you blame yourself, put yourself down in your own mind over and over again and generally make things worse. Do not dramatize a molehill into a mountain. Do not ignore and trivialize your other positive actions. Doing so drowns out and taints your enthusiasm.

When self-critique is always based in self-judgement

instead of positive learning, you will only engender negative self-sabotaging emotions. You'll be on the wrong end of the double-edged sword of self-critique. It will cut you deep.

The key is to differentiate between mistakes, slip-ups and failure. Making mistakes ought to be expected. It is unrealistic for you to think you will be perfect from the get go. It is unrealistic to think there won't be slips-ups along the way to achieving a long-term goal. Mistakes and slip-ups happen even at the highest levels of professional activity. They must happen. As Michael Jordan said:

I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.

If your self-critique produces fear and self-judgment it is likely to paralyze you. This will never sustain you. Self-critique should always be task-related. What could you have done differently? What could you have done better? What do you need to do to get better for next time?

Self-critique is about getting better. This means finding examples where you can improve. Slip-ups and mistakes are there to serve you. You can be self-critical with them in order to improve. Do not stay locked in

immature emotional self-punishment.

Passion is a good thing. Enthusiasm is a great thing. Self-critique is a very... utilitarian thing.

Self-critique should NEVER be something that diminishes your passion and enthusiasm toward the process of achieving your goal. Your mind is a powerful thing. “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t—you’re right.”

Chapter 5.

Fear of Failure

Fear of failure sabotages goals. I see it constantly in my work.

I see it with people who are desperately trying to lose weight. They write me with questions and the anxiety they have practically jumps off the page.

One of the reasons anyone succeeds in fitness (or any area) is because they enjoy the process. You can't do that with an overwhelming fear of failure. People with a fear of failure can't truly enjoy the level of experience it takes to reach their goal. They overthink everything. Fear of failure just makes failure even more likely. Fear creates inner tension, tension diminishes clear thinking and that diminishes optimum performance at anything you are doing. People who truly enjoy the process seldom fear slipping up and messing up. They just learn from them and move on.

A fear of failure doesn't keep you on your game. It keeps you second-guessing it. It keeps you second-guessing yourself. In a way, fear shrinks you. It constricts you in thought and emotion. When you want the results but can't stand the process, or the process makes you anxious *until* you can't stand it, you are not very likely to reach your goal.

The fear of failure comes from becoming internally self-conscious, instead of staying externally task-conscious. You turn your focus inward and make it about your own self-perception. You create a sense of pressure and angst. The task ceases to be an invigorating challenge; it becomes a way to judge yourself as either good or bad, worthy or unworthy. That just fans the flames of fear.

When you are not afraid to fail and slip up, meaning you know it's possible but you don't fear it, then your success is more likely. Fear of failure drains you, especially emotionally. This sabotages passion and commitment and discipline. Without those emotional elements solidly in place, failure is likely. When you don't fear failure, the process itself invigorates you and gives you a sense of competence, confidence, and "mission."

Take people who successfully take up fitness long term. They don't think of working out as something they can "fail" at. It's just not possible. If they don't manage to bench press this or that weight, it's not a failure; they're just not strong enough for that particular weight yet. When you don't fear failure, diet and training are just challenges.

The Perfectionist Mindset

Fear of failure often stems from the perfectionist mindset. Beneath your desire to succeed and achieve your goal is an ultra-critical, demanding, and judgmental voice. This internal voice beats you up and

beats you down. It never lifts you up. That is an exhausting experience to keep repeating. It makes failure more likely, and it makes *quitting* more likely as well. The perfectionist mindset is much different than the excellence mindset.

The excellence mindset is about knowing that you've given your best effort. This includes discipline, commitment, and consistency. The perfectionist mindset is about "not making any mistakes," which is simply unrealistic. Most of life is based in individual failures. Failing comes from testing yourself. Sometimes it's bad timing, sometimes you aren't ready yet. But failing to get to some goal doesn't have to define you.

If you believe that if you don't achieve your goal then you're a loser, or if you believe if you don't accomplish this or that then no one will love you, or if you believe that taking a risk is dangerous, or if you believe anything less than perfect is unacceptable, then you will fail at the larger goal the moment a minor slip up occurs.

Research shows that the perfectionist mindset leads to procrastination. Those who procrastinate don't do anything, because if you don't do anything then you can't fail and be judged.

When high-achievers think of fear, they frame it like this: "Fear is a phantom," "fear is an illusion" – and my favorite – "Fear is an ugly mistress!"

What you find depends on where you are looking.

If I'm looking in the ghetto area of a city, I will find all the things that go with it. If I'm looking at a gated community in an exclusive area of the city, I am likely to find all the things that go along with that as well. Your mind works the same way.

Fear of failure is a reflection of the slums of your mind. But there is a whole other area of your mind—a high-end achiever's mindset. You can tap into that for wealthy reflections of a "can-do" attitude without a fear of failure. That is what you need to do and that is where you need to look. Find the wealth and comfort and riches in the mind.

Chapter 6.

Focus

No long-term achievement is ever accomplished without “focus,” though this is often left unaddressed. Once the ability to focus is developed it will serve you for a lifetime. Most people take something like this for granted, but it is a mistake to do so.

The higher you climb in any field or endeavor, and the higher you climb to get to your goal, the greater is the importance of mindset. Mindset refers not just to the job of getting to your goal – but to staying there and building from there as well. So many people miss that. Here we will examine “focus” as it relates to the “psychology of achievement.”

Your “ability” to focus is the one thing that allows you to build on any achievement. It is something you develop. It all begins with embracing the reality that achieving and sustaining any worthy goal requires inordinate amounts of dedication, commitment, and a consistency of practice and mental focus.

If you look at these elements above then it is obvious that getting to your goal is a lot about “grit.” Staying there and building from that achievement is about character.

Some people use the terms concentration and focus

interchangeably. I don't have a real problem with that. I do it myself sometimes. But there are some distinctions worth pointing out. Concentration is wider in scope than focus is. Concentration is the long-term residue of "here and now" focus. Concentration skills are more durable and flexible, and last a longer duration than what we mean by the term 'focus' when it comes to the psychology of achievement. While concentration is wider in scope, focus is narrow and precise. Concentration is the whole target; focus is the bull's-eye. Targeted or directed focus is like a laser beam.

Both are skills attained and required for accomplishing any goal. They are both required for sustaining that achievement once you get there. Very seldom can you have one without the other. Think of them as "twin siblings" who support each other.

Faulty Focus vs. Effective Focus

Faulty focus will bring down any commitment to a long-term goal like a house of cards that's been hit by a slight breeze. Effective focus builds and sharpens focus as an ability in and of itself; and this increases the likelihood of accomplishing any goal. Both faulty focus and effective focus can be depicted as "cycles" – as circles that complete themselves and begin again. I will illustrate them to you this way, with the arrows indicating the next steps in the mental circle:

Faulty focus >> Begins with a lack of mental clarity, often stemming from too much environmental

and mental stimulation >> this leads to negative arousal states like tension, anxiety, racing thoughts, adult ADD/ADHD and stress >> This then leads to faulty execution of effort, inconsistent effort, starting and stopping, starting and slipping then restarting >> This creates doubting self-talk >> This feeds poor behavior, and your actions become less than excellence, less than your best effort >> Of course, this feeds your “faulty focus” and then the circle is complete and it all begins again.

On the other hand...

Effective focus >> Lends to a calm and quiet, confident inner energy system. This amounts to a non-negative arousal state. >> The muscles and physiological systems are less tense and uptight. Your physiology is in a more better state of readiness. >> As a result this lends to consistency of action, and allows you to take care of even the most tedious details of the process required to move toward the goal. >> This lends to excellence and a desire for excellence in behaviour >> This feeds and nurtures motivation, competence and confidence. >> And finally, this of course re-feeds and re-fuels “effective focus” to complete the circle. The circle begins again.

YOU are in control of either one of these cycles.

Obstacles to Effective Focus Cycles

You need to identify what stands in the way of your focus. Remember, focus is a skill and like many other

skills you can learn it and then you can get better at it by practicing it.

You need to control the things you can in order to make your mental and physical environment “right” to engender proper focus. For instance, if the immediate task at hand requires mental focus (like studying for exams, for example) then don’t think you can be on social media, have your phone on, be listening to music at the same time, and tell yourself you “are focused” on studying! That is rubbish. Get real.

Research has shown time and again that “multi-tasking” is a myth when it comes to being productive and efficient. Remember real focus is like a laser-beam. It is single-minded in purpose. Practice it as such.

There are many other obstacles to proper and effective focus as well. One of the reasons people fail to meet and sustain weight-loss or physique-transformation goals is because they are too focused on the desired *outcome*. Focusing on long-term outcomes is probably one of the biggest obstacles to actually achieving the long-term outcome you are striving for. You must train yourself to focus on the *process* – to focus on the specific behaviors, actions, and practices you will have to engage in every single day, and engage in with a positive attitude toward it as well. That requires a focus in the here and now.

You cannot “want the outcome, but hate the process.” That kind of attitude is infectious. It will sabotage your concentration and your ability to focus on what you need to do right now, today.

When you focus on the process required to getting closer to your goal, and NOT the long-term desired outcome you seek, you dramatically increase your chances of making real progress toward your goal and toward sustainable achievement. You build and solidify your “grit” by focusing on the process. If you focus on “how” you practice and commit to what it takes to get there, as in having the right, positive attitude, you will continue to refuel your quality of focus. Reaching your goal will become a foregone conclusion, and not a distant dream or fantasy of “someday.”

To accomplish the achievement you are pursuing the Zen expression holds true that, “The goal is the process, and the process is the goal.” This is something I preach incessantly to my clients and to anyone who will listen. The attitude you bring to practicing your process every day — that is what separates those who get there from those who don’t.

Focus is what allowed me to do so well at university. Here’s the key: at university I never, not once, pulled an “all-nighter” studying for exams or writing papers, nor even when writing my thesis. My undergraduate thesis was completed by Christmas, something that was unheard of at that time and I received an A+ grade for it. I also scored a grade of 100% on a social psychology exam, and at the time it was the first time in the history of the course that anyone had ever done that. My study habits didn’t change at all. EVER. I studied every morning from 5:30 to 7:00 am, then I went to the gym to workout. And then I studied another 90 minutes later in the day – usually from 4:00

pm to 5:30 p.m., when I would stop to eat dinner. For five days per week I never studied more than that, or less than that, no matter how much work I had or didn't have. But when I studied, it was always without distraction: no music, no television, nothing else. I was simply "focused."

Let's use weight-loss as another example. People who decide on these goals need to be even more realistic, in terms of realizing your life doesn't just stop and wait for you while you go after these goals. If you have real-life issues come up as you are pursuing your cosmetic-appearance goals, you need to make sure you turn around and face these real-life issues right away, as soon as possible and in the best way that you can. Doing so doesn't "get in the way" of your cosmetic fitness goals; it actually feeds your them. Dealing with stressful situations that come up as you are trying to focus on your goal may not be easy; but the alternative is to let such issues fester. During the process of accomplishing any goal you have to face whatever 'other things' come your way as soon as they do. This is part of overall "life fitness." It's thinking about the bigger picture.

You should NEVER use weight-loss or physique-transformation goals as a means to avoid your life. I witness this all the time. Your smaller life-goals like these should be a way to engage yourself in your own life as a stronger, more complete person. Ideally, you are engaging your life as an extension of who you are, and not a pretension of who you want to be. To accomplish any a goal like this by putting your real-life

aside doesn't ever allow you to build from that goal and become a person who can easily move on to other accomplishments.

Finally, another obstacle to quality focus worth is allowing yourself to become too emotional. When your emotional arousal level gets too high, your concentration level drops. When these aroused emotions are negative emotions, like anxiety, anger, frustration, envy, guilt, shame and the like, then your physiology changes for the worse. Your muscles constrict, your heart rate increases, you have shallow breathing and your body releases stress hormones. Your body is now negatively feeding your emotional arousal level, and the emotional arousal level is fueling a stress reaction in your body. This is a negative feedback loop. Your focus and your concentration become cloudy and weak. From there, impulses move in and make you act in self-sabotaging ways.

You end up thinking that this is a behavioral issue, when actually it is an emotional fitness or emotional arousal issue. The whole cascade of events that I just outlined is often the exact scenario that leads to eating disorders and other impulse control issues. People "eat" in order to "relieve" an aroused emotional state. A feedback loop is created when the guilt of eating creeps in and creates more negative emotional arousal.

The fact is no worthy long-term achievement was ever accomplished without an element of quality focus. What is important to keep in mind at this point is that focus – is, was, and always will be – a practice that is single-minded in purpose. *Focusing on your focus*

will engage your mind and develop the skill of focus
itself.

Chapter 7.

Habits and the Power of Routine

Nothing is so integral to achieving a goal, yet so often overlooked and dismissed, as habits and routine.

If it is your “routine” to do what you *want* to do before you do what you *need* to do, then your routine is working against you.

The best way to implement a routine is to teach yourself to want to do what you need to do to reach your goal. You make it a priority. Part of effective and efficient time-management is establishing productive “routines” for your day. The conscious practice of daily routine leads to the unconscious habits of success and achievement. There is a reason that militaries put so much emphasis and value on “routine.” They make a person more “effective” all around, regardless of circumstances.

Simply put, if you want to become better at something, if you want to achieve something, then you need to develop a routine that leads you to your goal and to your success. You need to develop a routine that can become habitual and easily repeated.

As Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” The absence of excellence is also a habit.

A routine is something that you do regularly that you control and that has purpose. For example, as I mentioned earlier in this project – when I was in university I had “a study routine” where I studied or did my assignments from 5:30 am to 7:30 am – Monday to Friday with another 90 minutes in the afternoon, no exceptions. By the end of my education I’d won four scholarships for academic performance. I had my thesis completed by Christmas instead of late spring like most other students. I received an A+ on that thesis and in my whole time at University I never once had to “pull an all-nighter” to study for an exam. It all felt easy to me. Why? Because it was routine. I valued routine and structured my day around my academic responsibilities. Once the routine was in place, following it was automatic. It allowed me to structure other things around it as well—during my time at university is when I first started winning bodybuilding shows.

Routines consistently help anyone stick to what it takes to achieve something and help you perform better in terms of higher performance and “excellence” as well in the process of getting there. The trick is in finding the routine that works best for you. Routines eliminate distractions by knowing what you will be doing and when you will be doing it. In the absence of regular solid routines, you won’t focus as well as you could on the task at hand. The more of your daily habits you can make into regular routine, the better. This includes training times, meal times, study times, leisure times, and of course sleep and wake times. When clients of mine run into trouble, it is

often because they write and tell me things like “weekends screw up my routine and throw me off.” Yet there is nothing stopping people from continuing the routine of getting up and going to sleep the same time every day, regardless if it is a weekend or not.

Simply put, the easiest way to an achievement is via establishing regular routines for yourself. These become effective because they help you to automatically focus at higher levels of consistency and compliance to the task at hand, whatever it may be.

However, routines may indeed have to be “flexible” or you may need to be flexible within them. What this means is that drastic changes to routines may sometimes be necessary (but not always). This is something you have to examine for yourself. Sometimes drastic changes throw you completely out of whack. But simple and subtle changes can help. For instance if you are a morning person, maybe you get up even a bit earlier in your day to take care of some chores or workout. If you are a night owl then maybe you stay up a bit later, so that while everyone else in your household is asleep, you prepare your diet meals for the next few days.

I’ve always been a morning person, so forming my work responsibilities and my workouts around a morning routine allows me to get more done! Gradually over the years I went from getting up at 6:00 am when I was young to arising earlier and earlier and I now get up at 4:00 am – seven days per week regardless of what is going on. That is my “routine.” I stick to it. Finding a routine that works for you keeps

you on task and enhances your productivity. It is also something that builds momentum for you: moving you closer and closer to achieving your goal.

Over time even your physiology adapts to your routine, so that your body clock and your physiological system becomes “in-tune” and “tuned into” your routine. You get tired at regular bedtimes, your body awakens as you get to the gym, your concentration and mental-muscles kick in when it’s time to do mental work. Routine is a powerful, productive habit to have. It creates mental and physical “preparedness.”

Now, your routines should be consistent, not compulsive. When your routine suits you it will be geared toward improving your quality of focus, and this improves your competence, which in turn improves your confidence. Routines that become habits prepare your mind and body on a regular basis for the doing of “right now.” Being able to have routines that set you, your mind, and your body to a task, they can set your mind and body on “effective autopilot” in a habit of consistency that feeds and fuels achievement. Many high achievers talk about how boring their daily routine may “appear” to others. But that is how they accomplish their goals. They develop routines that they value and stick to, and which they *want* to stick to.

There’s no way around it, the benefits to regimentation and structure and routine outweigh any benefits to not having them in place, especially if you have a goal you want to accomplish, and if that goal is the kind that is going to take some time—like getting a

degree or permanently transforming your body.

To achieve any goal the whole of your life must be considered and factored into the equation. Establishing a routine helps you to be clear about what you are doing for the day, and for the next hour or two. When you know what you will be doing this hour and next, this morning and this afternoon and at what time, outside distractions won't side-track you. You get more done, and you get it done more efficiently and effectively and with less energy drain on you as well. Regimentation, routine and structure may sound like the stuff of a boring life, but it's how major achievements get accomplished!

Routines are also what you need AFTER you've accomplished your goal or made your achievement. People spend so much time focused on how to get to their goal that they end up totally blind-sided as to how to "stay there." Just because you achieve a goal, or get good at something or even master it, doesn't mean that "you've arrived" and you can now slack off. Imagine a golfer who turns pro and wins his first tournament. Do you think he now slacks off from practicing his skills? And how do you think he improves his skills at that level? ROUTINE is how! When a team wins the Stanley Cup, you can be sure they celebrate, but sometime after the celebrations are over, what happens? They *get back into their routines*.

Regimentation and routine are things that must "endure" as part of your mental skill-set. If you are a person seeking sustainable long-term permanent weight-loss or physique transformation, but you detest

regimentation and routine... well it is not likely to work out well for you. That is the reality-math of it.

It's one thing to just "participate" in trying to reach some goal or achievement you have. It's quite another thing to do it well, and do it effectively and efficiently. Routine helps you to do that. It helps you to excel beyond just "participating." If you undervalue or overlook what routine can do for you, you just make achieving that goal even harder to do.

Start with assessing and evaluating your daily routine and look for ways that you can enhance it, and improve it.

Chapter 8.

Commit to Excellence, Not Perfection

I'm a person who collects quotes and clichés and puts them to use in my own mind. I do it for clients as well. I've always felt that popular wisdom quotes and clichés exist for a reason. They exist because they resonate. If I can conjure up in my mind simple expressions, quotes, and clichés when I need a push, they become valuable psychological tools.

One of the quotes that has always stuck with me for many years is a quote I ran into way back in University. It resonated with me deeply. Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." I've used it elsewhere in this book.

Making excellence a habit in your mind and then in your actions—this is a process that can never fail you.

The great Coach Vince Lombardi said, "The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavour." Once excellence becomes a habit, things just seem to flow and come to you. There is an "ease" and "simplicity" to everything.

Ironically we live in an era where mediocrity is commonplace, as if mediocrity itself is a goal. People want to do so many things, so they seldom get good or

excellent at anything. Mediocrity allows for people to be able to indulge their desires for social interactions with friends and family, keep up with their jobs, entertain themselves, and go along without exhausting themselves. Or so it seems.

Inner excellence however is something that rejuvenates the soul and the spirit. Things done with an attitude of inner excellence are things done with a personal investment in yourself in the task at hand. This matters. When inner excellence becomes a habitual way of approaching your life and engaging your life, then as Aristotle said, the quality of your life, of your inner-life of wellness and your outer material life, the quality of these two important elements of your life get better — as Coach Lombardi hinted at in his quote above.

To achieve any goal and build from the accomplishment you need to become your own MVP (most valuable person). You do so by achieving excellence *within*. Inner excellence is a way of thinking and behaving. It is a quality of mind that tells you from the inside that no matter what the circumstances, you are always accountable for your own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Inner excellence is about being able to “truly” stay positive even in the most negative scenarios and predicaments. It is about dealing with adversity in an immediate and confident way. When you are an MVP in your own life, you live your life “on” purpose and “with” purpose, even if that purpose is nothing grander than doing good work and enjoying your day.

People with inner excellence perceive their vocations and their interests as challenges. They get motivated by the challenge, not fearful of failure within it. When practicing inner excellence becomes a habit, you possess an unconditional high self-esteem and self-image. You have a “can do” attitude, and you have a will to prepare and invest in the work and you have an acknowledgement that there are no short cuts to achievement. People with inner excellence believe the harder they work, the harder it is to surrender or quit, so that the achievement is inevitable. They don’t play the blame game. They *want* to go the extra mile, just to find out what’s there. And if nothing extra is there, they don’t feel like they’ve wasted their time.

People with inner excellence are big enough to turn away from trouble and strong enough to face it when they have to. But within themselves they are fair, and honest about their own effort, their own character, and their own circumstances. People with inner excellence are “self-aware” but in a very self-supporting way. As you can see “inner excellence” goes beyond winning and losing and a lot of “numbers” that can make you feel better or worse about yourself.

Working on your inside, will always show on the outside. Inner excellence is a vehicle to committing to yourself in an honest and constructive way. When you do, not much else can stand in your way either.

As the saying goes, “Chance favors the prepared mind.” Confidence lies in knowing what to do when facing any new situation: And this kind of confidence

only comes with real-world, hands-on experience. No one can “study their way” there. Successful people continue being successful because they learn to trust their talents, then re-invest in those talents, then practice and exercise those talents – and then, simply... “lather, rinse, and repeat.”

This is what the habit of excellence looks and feels like. When you practice inner excellence long enough you get to experience what is often called “being in the zone.” Being in the zone is a life-experience where you are qualitatively engrossed and immersed in what you are doing. You connect yourself with the activity and the activity connects you to yourself.

When you are “in the zone” you have switched from a training mode to a trusting mode. This is part of living inner-excellence. You’re not fighting yourself. You are not afraid of anything. You are absorbed in the moment. It’s self-replenishing, not self-depleting. Everything becomes clear. You become spiritually relaxed, even if you are physically exerting max efforts.

When you are “in the zone” your mind is, in a way, extremely *quiet* because it is so engaged. There is no external noise or “stuff” distracting you. You are able to anticipate moment to moment what will happen next. You are absorbed and immersed, not obsessed and concerned. It’s a completely different mindset that can suddenly vault you ahead in terms of steps to success.

It all starts with first just doing what needs to be done, as it needs to be done.

“Practice” and “discipline.”

“Disciplined-practice.”

“Practiced-discipline.”

These are the keys to excellence becoming a habit rather than a single act. These are also the path to wellness. With practiced-discipline and disciplined-practiced, good things can happen to ordinary people, or even less than naturally talented people, as long as you stay persistent, and work hard. Then something happens. You become talented. You become less ordinary, less mediocre, and you excel. Goals stop intimidating you; they invigorate you.

People committed only to mediocrity will think of “inner excellence” in terms of what it *takes*. This is naive. They seldom consider what “inner excellence” *gives back*. These people often assume that inner excellence just means a lot of sacrifice and self-denial. The opposite is true. Inner excellence leads to a better quality of life and a lot personal freedom and peace of mind. Inner excellence is self-engagement on a higher level. It should be something to put into practice as a daily approach to life, not just in terms of a commitment to a particular goal.

Commit to excellence, not perfection.

Chapter 9.

Mindfulness and Mental Fitness (part 1)

There is a lot more to a “psychology of achievement” than just being able to reach *a* goal. You should be able to sustain that goal (for example, losing weight and keeping it off). You should be able to build upon each and every goal you attain.

Someone who gets things done and accomplishes all that they set out to do—this should become part of who you are. Many people achieve a single goal only to fail miserably at other aspects of their life. That is not a worthy trade-off. One achievement should be the foundation for the next, and then the next. Building on an achievement so that the “achievement-mindset” simply becomes ingrained in you is high-level mental fitness.

At the highest echelons of mental fitness is what I (and many others) call “mindfulness.” Proper mindfulness can lead to many things. Mostly it leads to a sense of contentment and resolution. A worthy accomplishment is diminished significantly if the process of getting you there is filled with anguish, stress, anxiety and worry. Mindfulness is the qualitative difference in the achievement-mindset.

I work mostly in the physique-transformation arena, through coaching and life-coaching. I consider the two

to go hand in hand. I have witnessed over and over again clients who cannot reach or sustain a goal because their process of getting there is tainted with emotions like worry, stress, anxiety, doubt and fear. Mindfulness means being present, and the more present you are, the less these types of sabotaging emotions can actually sabotage you.

After looking at the initial information package I have new clients send me after they sign up, one of the things I tell many of them is that, even if their focus is weight loss or getting “ripped” or whatever, the most important part of your body to focus on – and to make lean and fit – is the part of the body *above* the neck!

Natural talent and ability only gets you so far. Eventually you reach a point where everyone else is just as talented and able in your field as you are. Then what?

What if you trained and exercised your mind as deliberately as you train and exercise your body? What if you connected these two together, like partners in a dance? You would be unstoppable.

Think of mindfulness as mental management. Mental management is about knowing and accepting a mature approach to the process of achievement. Mental management and mindfulness are about knowing that where the mind goes, behavior follows. It is not the other way around. Mental management is about embracing that “quality of mindset determines

quality of behavior.”

The mistakes most people make to focus too much and only on the desired long-term outcome, like losing so much weight, so many weeks from now. That isn't being “mindful.” You lose sight of the present. You lose sight of the process that'll get you there. The more you focus on an outcome at the expense of the present moment, the more likely you tend to create stress and anxiety within yourself. This only tarnishes and stains the quality of your presence in the present. That should be your focus: presence in the present, and presence in the process.

For example, if you want to get an undergraduate degree, or a grad degree, if you think about four or more years of study, it will seem daunting and overwhelming. All you can do is stop thinking about that, and focus on the present. Attend classes. Study for each one. Get into a powerful, but do-able routine. This will keep you present. As you think less about how “daunting” the goal is, there will be less and less tension and anxiety. I used to do this both for my academic work and my bodybuilding. Forget the length of time it takes to diet down for a show. Focus on the present. Focus on your present routines. Be present *in* the present.

The only thing you can control is your commitment to the process that takes you to your goal. You have no immediate control of that goal, or when and how you will arrive there. You can only prepare well today and “in-the-now.” When you commit to “right now” in terms of the quality of your preparation, and you

are committing to the process that leads you to your goal. That is the smart thing.

“The process is the goal, and the goal is the process.”

— Zen expression

To live this way is to live *mindfully*. The more you practice this, the more adept you become.

Some goals have no guaranteed outcomes. As I studied harder and got on top of things at University I had no doubts I would earn my degree. But the same was not true in my bodybuilding aspirations. I had never had any control over whether or not another competitor would look better than me on contest-day. That was out of my hands. But what was well within my control was that I could “prepare like a champion.”

Now, to achieve any worthy long-term goal, the going will get tough at times. When this happens, you need to remind yourself why you are doing this. This can help you re-commit to your daily ritual, and train your mind to see it through. Sometimes you lose your purpose along the way of pursuing your long-term goal. That is normal. Life pulls us in all kinds of directions. It helps every so often to hit “refresh” in your mind so you can get back to work with renewed vigor and vitality.

“Hitting refresh” isn’t about focusing on the outcome, however. It’s a reminder of the “purpose” behind your goal. That reminder helps keep you

“mindful” and focused on right now and in the present.

Let’s say you have a long-term weight-loss goal.

The day to day drudgery of doing what it takes to get there can sometime lull you into complacency. Make a list and write down the reasons the goal is important to you. Write down the “purpose” behind it. You could write things down like:

- “I need to be in better health.”
- “I want to have more energy.”
- “I want to want to play with my kids after a long-day.”

When you do things like this, you are hitting “refresh” in your mind. That keeps you present for the task at hand today, right in front of you.

In Part 2 we will examine in greater depth the nitty-gritty of putting mental fitness into practice.

Chapter 10.

Mindfulness and Mental Fitness (part 2)

By now you know and understand that mindfulness and mental fitness means little if you don't make them a part of your psyche.

You should think of mental fitness as being like every other muscle in your body. The more effectively and consistently you exercise your mental fitness and train to strengthen and condition it, then the more effectively it is going to work for you. Building mental fitness is just like building physical fitness. It requires time and effort. You can't just "read" about it and expect to benefit from it, not any more than you can read a fitness book and suddenly be in shape. This is where most people fail. They gather "information" but never put it into practice in a meaningful way.

The more you work on yourself from the inside, the more it will show on the outside. Most people try to do the opposite, so they get stuck. I see this all the time when Coaching people for weight-loss and physique transformation. Although they "say" they are working on their inner selves their thoughts and actions show that is not really true. They focus their thought and emotion on the outside: their appearance, their digital persona, what people think of them. That is not mental fitness. The outside-in focus seldom

works. Trust me on that, I've witnessed this over and over again. The outside-in approach makes you too vulnerable to environmental and other influences. That makes any task and process a very unpredictable and unstable one.

The fitness and diet and fashion and cosmetics industries want you to always focus on your appearance and what other people think of you as well. They want you focused on the outside-in approach. Without a foundation of mental fitness, you are pretty much helpless against these influences.

Building mental fitness and working from the inside-out is not as complicated as people seem to think it is, or want it to be. Making things more complicated than they are is a sign of our times. It is a convenient excuse to hide behind. I see this all the time in my work as a Coach. People want to turn simple concepts into complicated rocket science.

The truth is simple and simplicity is the truth. If I had my way, people would write this expression down somewhere and put it where they had to see it dozens of times per day. It would remind you that answers are revealed in simplicity. It is our own minds that confound and complicate things.

When you clear away the mental clutter you can see and feel the simplicity in the path ahead of you. Your thoughts directly correlate to how much stress you feel and experience. Your emotions flow from your thoughts and vice versa. This is what leads to self-mastery. You pay attention to your thoughts so you

can direct them better. Paying attention to your thoughts is a sign of inside-out living.

Learning to pay attention to your thoughts and then “changing the channel if you don’t like the programming” is known as self-directed thought. Self-directed thought is key to high-level mental fitness and mindful awareness. The law of “habitual thought” dictates that your mind is going to remember and react automatically to your most dominant thoughts. Therefore the mind works “for you” most effectively when you are directing your own thoughts, and doing so by telling your mind what to do and how to think. You can also direct the attitude you have toward doing it as well.

This *doesn't* mean telling your mind what “not to do” and what “not to think.” This is mental self-sabotage. **Remember, what you focus on, expands.** Focusing on what you *don't* want only makes it more alive and real in your mind.

Many clients who struggle with weight tell me that they constantly telling themselves “don’t think about food” or “resist temptations to go off the diet.” As I tell them, thoughts like these do not relieve the mind of burdens. Thoughts like these keep the mind focused on the exact things you want to eliminate. What you focus on, expands. This leads to feelings of stress, anxiety and pressure.

The other day a client wrote me and included a list of her “triggers” for negative emotions and for overeating. I wrote her back and merely said “That’s

interesting. Now make me a list of ‘triggers’ you notice lead to positive moods, and no desire for indulgent eating!” She couldn’t find any. For her, it is something to work on.

If you don’t learn how to use your mind, your mind will use you, and abuse you. As Freud said, “Intelligence is always put to use in the service of a neurosis.” Statistics show that generally, people with eating disorders or alcohol dependency issues are very intelligent and sensitive people. But their thoughts keep them trapped in their struggle. They instead try to “fight it and resist it” and that seldom works for long. They focus too much on the struggle. They overthink it, and that brings stress and anxiety.

As Einstein said, “We can not solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.”

Once thoughts lead to heavy emotions like anxiety you start to experience and feel stress. When you are stressed you tend to start focusing on the wrong things — they very things that keep you anxious and stressed. This is the mistake of “thinking with emotions.” What you want to do instead is use emotions to think.

Let’s me explain with an example. A common scenario we hear a lot about is a spouse leaving a relationship for someone else, often blindsiding the spouse who is left abandoned. I’ll use the example of a client I dealt with recently. She and her husband have two young children under the age 5. The husband had some kind of mid-life crisis and ran off with a

younger woman. It's cliché, but it's cliché for a reason. It happens all the time. Now my client is left behind with two young kids, and she is all on her own to figure it all out. There are two examples of how her thinking process could unfold over this scenario:

1. She could do the usual carousel of “How could he do this to me? I don't deserve this! What kind of man does something like this?” These are reasonable things to think, but they are thinking with emotion. She is using her pain to think. These thoughts are absolutely 100% understandable, but they do not move her forward. None of these thoughts change the reality of the situation at all. All these kinds of thoughts will do is intensify her emotion and her pain.
2. She could instead use her emotions to think. She could say, “Okay, what am I going to do now? I have to get out of this house because I can't afford it. I have to keep the kids from being hurt by this more, than they already will be. I may have to find another job to support the three of this. I'll put out feelers with all my friends. It's time to lean on them for help.” These are examples of using emotions to think. Instead of example 1 and going around and around because of emotional thinking, the thoughts in example 2 are thoughts that deal with the reality of the situation and begin to move her forward.

As you can see, there is a difference between intelligence and mental fitness. Mental fitness stays present. It remains mindful. It uses emotions to think, it doesn't think with emotion. In Part 3, we'll examine ways you can facilitate mindfulness and mental fitness in yourself.

Chapter 11.

Mindfulness and Mental Fitness (part 3)

Mindfulness is about being truly present; it is not about sitting with your legs crossed in a field and chanting or anything like that.

Being truly present keeps you focused on the process. It facilitates concentration. Mental fitness is what is necessary to keep that achievement mindset sustained, and keeps it growing so that accomplishing one goal leads to another.

Many people have been chasing your tail (or, your personal narrative tale) long enough. Any achievement or long-term goal is won in the mind first, not in the recipe or list of steps you might think get you there. It's not the recipe, it's the chef. These goals are won and accomplished first in your mind and then in your behavior, not the other way around.

Mental training and mindfulness teach you to think more clearly and use your mind more effectively. You learn how to not think with your emotions, but instead you use your emotions to think. There is a big difference between these two levels of thinking. The first step in developing your mental fitness is to pay attention to your thoughts.

You need to catch yourself in any “stinkin thinkin”

and from there you need to challenge your mind. Say to yourself, “Okay, this is what I was thinking. That thought doesn’t serve me well. What could I have been thinking instead that would serve me better and be better for me?”

This is a way to begin the process of developing your mental fitness. It’s simple. You think about what you are thinking about. Then you (yes *you*) direct your thoughts from there. Just like with television: if you don’t like what’s on, you change the channel.

Prevention

The concept of prevention may seem odd at first in regards to developing mental fitness. But it’s really common sense if you think about it. Pro-active prevention of issues and problems and obstacles—like stress—is always the straightest path to a goal. A little prevention is far superior to necessary intervention. As Einstein said, “Smart people solve problems; geniuses prevent them.”

Look to see what it is about your goal that triggers stress, anxiety, or self-sabotage. This way you can work to manage it before it occurs. Be more proactive and less reactive. What do you think is easier, trying to quit smoking or preventing the issue entirely by never taking it up in the first place?

You can practice simple “prevention” techniques like these:

- Stay on top of your schedule. Not only is procrastination the thief of time, but it's the birthplace of anxiety. Don't let your tasks and to-do lists pile up by continuing to ignore them.
- Stop *over*-scheduling yourself. You can't just keep adding things to your to-do list and expect to get them all done, or all done well and in a way that invigorates you with energy. Your energy cannot just be "spent" all day long; it must be "restored" as well.
- Hang out with people who are happy and well-adjusted; people who can make you laugh. If you don't know any, then hang out alone instead, even better. Leave the "misery loves company" people. Don't allow yourself to fall into the pit of someone else's pity party. People who lack their own healthy coping skills will be energy vampires in YOUR life.
- Get to know yourself in a quiet state by slotting in time for solitude.
- Laugh and laugh often. Laughing is healthy and boosts your immune system, and humor is a fantastic means for transitioning between moods. It is also likely to lead to lighter thoughts as well. This invigorates the soul and replenishes your vitality.

- Get better quality sleep. If that means starting with an extra hour of sleep every night, then make that investment. Going to bed just one hour earlier than usual, while still getting up at the same time every day, then sticking to this for one year will result in the equivalent of an additional 45 nights of sleep. Your body will feel the difference and thank you. People are more sleep deprived than ever.
- Improve your self-talk. I have discussed this throughout this project in various chapters and that is because it so relevant and so important. I've been preaching about this since I began Coaching decades ago. For some people, this is a real challenge. I can't believe the way people talk to themselves. Self-talk is everything when it comes to achievement strategy and performance. Remember, it's about learning to approach your goal and your life from the inside-out.
- Learn to listen to your body and see it as your partner, not your project, and not your enemy. The more fatigued your body is, the greater is the chance of you getting sick, injured, or burned out. Everyone gets tired now and then, for sure. But living in a chronic state of fatigue takes tiredness to another level. Tiredness is a short-term state; fatigue is a prolonged physiological state of repressed vitality. It's not something to brag about or a

badge of honor to wear.

All of the above are simple mental-skills-training that can help you manage your stress in a “preventative” way.

Think of developing your mental fitness to be a cousin to the concept of “Kaizen.” Kaizen is defined as constant daily learning and improvement. It’s an approach and philosophy of life aimed at continued learning and improvement through personal observation and experience, in other words, living from the inside-out. I think the relevance of Kaizen to a psychology of achievement and the achievement-mindset is obvious.

Finally, I offer you this quick comparison column of the difference between typical “everyday thinking” when the mind is left on “auto-pilot” vs. higher-end mental fitness and mindful thinking that takes control of what you are thinking about. You should refer to this check-list often to keep yourself “mindful” in the development of your mental fitness.

Everyday Thinking >> **Mindful Thinking**

Analytical >> **Descriptive**

Judgmental >> **Exploratory and Flexible**

Past and future oriented >> **Present Oriented**

Juggling Multiple Thoughts >> **“Managing” one thought at a time**

Distracted/Multi-tasking/Stimulus ADHD >>
Focused and Focused Concentration

Reactive thought process >> **Self-directed
thought process**

Chapter 12.

Nine Paradoxes

In the psychology of achievement there are dozens if not hundreds of paradoxes. A paradox can be defined as a statement that is seemingly contradictory, or opposed to common logic and yet true.

So many people try to follow someone's else's path or recipe to success and achievement. The phrase "success leaves clues" is a very valid one. But individual psychology varies. Following someone else's recipe for achievement may work for small goals, but for larger accomplishments you must forge a different path and write your own recipes and scripts.

If you want to "build" on an achievement then you have to realize that any accomplishment must represent more than a destination you've reached.

As you build from one accomplishment to the next, you often learn that what got you there, won't *keep* you there. A whole new set of strategies and tactics are often needed at this new, higher level. You go from following recipes to becoming the chef. You realize the old football coach's adage that, "If you're going to make me responsible for the dinner, then you better let me buy the groceries." You learn there is more than one way of doing things. You learn that the 'one way' you're used to is no longer the path, but instead it

often becomes an obstacle.

I remind you again the mind is like a parachute; it works best when it's open.

If you are paying attention you learn that there are “paradoxes” in learning what works and what doesn't. Some of these paradoxes will be unique and apply only to you: others are more general and represent a common theme that exists across industries. For myself, for instance, in my early days of training to develop my scrawny physique I thought you had to “get strong to get big.” This only led to injury and frustration for me. The idea that size and strength weren't 100% correlated seemed paradoxical to me. I had to try my own way. That's when things finally took off for me.

The prevailing industry “recipe” was an obstacle, not a solution.

Let's discuss some other paradoxes.

Experience is More Important Than Knowledge

In the grand scheme of things, nothing beats in-the-trenches years and years of real-world experience. The best coaches in any sport are those who were immersed in their field in the front lines for decades. They built their knowledge from experience. No one can book-study their way to expertise. Yet we see this every year with people coming out of university with degrees in biomechanics, yet in the real-world training

environment, their knowledge often shows up as a serious liability.

Throughout my career I have witnessed more than a few PhDs in nutrition compete in physique shows and bomb miserably. Their “knowledge got in their way.” Without real-world years of experience they had no grasp of nuance, and their knowledge became a liability. In other words, “knowing *about*” something is different than “knowing” it. You have to be immersed in the culture of a thing to understand it and truly know it.

Less is more

Another paradox that is true is that less is more. As you progress along in any given field you learn this valuable lesson: sometimes the highest form of action is *inaction*. For example, rest and recovery are part of the stimulus and response sequence. Go, go, go often leads to nowhere, no way, no how. Without rest and recharging, we become stale, burned out, stressed and susceptible to injury or illness.

I have had clients who are in and out of the industry in a whirlwind. When they weren't training, they were consumed by gathering information and go, go, going to get there faster and better. What happened? They never got there at all. Frying a fish is spoiled by too much poking at it. Especially as you mature in any given field, doing “more” can just lead to burnout and exhaustion.

The less is more paradox teaches you the difference between spending time, wasting time, and investing your time. Or as the old adage goes, “More isn’t better; better is better.”

Stop “Trying Too Hard”

So often, the harder you try to do it perfectly, the further you get from doing it well, or completing it at all. So often, “over-trying” leads to underperforming. It’s like “over-thinking.” Trying harder is a mentality that often leads you to where you don’t want to go.

Let go your grip on “trying harder and harder” and learn when trying hard, is hard enough. “Over-trying” leads to underperforming because it creates useless “tension from within,” mentally and physiologically.

There is a fine line between passionate devotion and obsession.

Let Go of Control

You can’t control every detail. The attempt at “over-control” often leads to you being out of control. Similarly, you can gain control by giving up a “need” for control.

Performance improves when you surrender to the demands of the process, rather than trying to always be in control of the process.

Over the years I have had clients obsessing over

minor details of the process that would have no bearing on reaching their goals or not reaching their goals. These clients were not earning a living off their physique, yet they were more obsessed with controlling every detail of the process than I ever was when I *was* earning a living from my physique. At some point this need to “over-control” every detail sabotages the joy and passion that needs to be in place to see any long-term goal through to fruition. It’s the passion and joy that need to be refueled and replenished. Attempts to overthink and over-control incidental details of the process will deplete the emotional energies of joy and passion as you go along. You cannot “worry your way” to a long-term goal.

Go Back to Old Ways

One of the biggest mistakes I see by neophytes and wannabes is this constant search for “what’s new and better” even before they have mastered the basic alphabet of sound principles.

Yes, improvement to the next level often requires letting go of old ways for a while. But the paradox here is that improvement just as often requires *coming back* to the old ways as well. Tried and proven is often the better route than “new and improved.” There is a reason in any industry the term “fundamentals” is used so often. Fundamentals can require a career to master in any field of pursuit. Yet so often people just “assume” they’ve mastered these fundamentals, and that is a big mistake. Coming back to old ways is

something the mind and body can benefit from when it comes to a “reset” or a “reboot” of your system and how you approach accomplishing a goal.

The paradox here is that you should never truly leave behind “old ways” that served you well in the past. They are likely etched in your muscle memory and cerebral circuitry and will work well for you again and again if you keep revisiting them. I do this a lot with my own clients.

Get Worse to Get Better

What seems like a step backward can be a step forward. Often enough you do indeed have to get worse in order to get better. So many eager people think “accomplishment” is a linear line. Their egos get in the way. Anything worth accomplishing will present obstacles and complications along the way. This should be expected. No baby ever learned to stand up and walk without falling down.

If you don’t trip up and fall down somewhere along the line of following the process to your goal, then you will never learn how to stand up. If you never fall down or trip up somewhere along the way to accomplishing your goal, then your goal is simply too easy.

Let Go The Need to Succeed

If you’ve been struggling and failing at achieving

some goal you have for yourself then the probability of achieving the outcome you want increases when you let go of the need to get it. Give yourself permission to succeed, but then let go of the idea of getting there and focus on the *process* of it, and stay focused there. Stop looking for the finish line and accept that there isn't one.

There are what is called process-goals and end-goals. The little process goals are what take you there to the end-goals. The end goal is out of your hands, so you need to stop focusing on it and instead commit to shorter process goals. For instance, every year in the NFL, teams have an end-goal to "win" the Super Bowl. But that goal is not within immediate reach for *any* team. They have to break that "end-goal" down to process goals. They stay in shape week to week. They prepare for one team and then the next. They study film. They practice, practice, practice. They can't focus on some distant "end-goal" without focusing on the process. They have to "let go" of the end-goal, so that they can properly prepare "in the now."

It's the same with so many of clients with big weight-loss goals that will likely take a year or two to accomplish. They make it all about numbers and the end-goal. That is how and why they fail. What they should be doing is breaking it all down to smaller "process-goals." Little things like "I'm going to wait four weeks until my birthday before I eat any junk food again." That is an example of a realistic "process goal." It works the person toward the end-goal without a focus on the end-goal.

In the NFL The New England Patriots became famous for the mantra “Do Your Job.” This mantra is a good way to keep you present and focused on “process goals.” The “Do Your Job” mantra keeps you consistent. A process goal gets you to momentarily “let go the need to succeed” in terms of the end-goal itself. That way you can fully engage mentally, emotionally, and physically to the process and practice of what it takes to *actually* get you there.

The Law of Consistency

Consistent achievers achieve consistently because they think, act and practice consistently. That is what is called “the grind” and it is what makes success inevitable. It isn’t about “holy crap” sudden moments of discovery or leaps in improvement.” Consistency is far more important than doing something spectacularly just once.

All high-achievers can *behave* themselves into an achieving way of thinking; and they can *think* themselves into an achieving way of behaving.

It works both ways.

High-achievers know and understand that it’s all connected. Often it is not passion that leads to persistence; it’s often just as true that persistence ignites or re-ignites passion. Therein lies the paradox of showing up for “the grind.”

What Success Is

Finally in all of the paradoxes that exist out there, you need to know and embrace that there are differences between an accomplishment, an achievement, and success versus just “winning first place” at something.

There are many “hall of fame athletes” who never “won” Super Bowls or Stanley Cups. But they accomplished and achieved a great deal over the course of a great career. Conversely, I have Coached clients in the physique-competition world, who totally lost sight of all they had accomplished because they made it all about “winning 1st place.” That outcome was something not totally in their control. When they didn’t “win first place” they threw the proverbial baby out with the bath water because they couldn’t embrace all they had overcome and accomplished. They were “successful” but they couldn’t see it, because they made it all about the status of “winning.”

“Being a winner,” and achieving *real success*, over the long term, is often about far more than “1st place.”

Chapter 13.

Motivation and Goals

No worthwhile goal ever achieved without motivation. If your motivation is not also consistently fed, the goal again won't be achieved.

Some goals can be long-term, one-and-done things, like completing an online course. Other goals, like physique-transformation goals, require committing to lifestyle changes for life.

Either way, solid motivation fuels someone from start to finish. You need to link your goal to your motivation. But there are many things you need to consider and examine when partnering proper motivation with a worthy goal.

Your goals need to motivate you, and your motivation should fuel you to do what it takes to achieve those goals. It's a feedback loop. Motivation and goal-setting need to be mutually reinforcing, or it just isn't going to work. Motivation is the spark that creates the flame that provides the heat to power you to your achievement. If you are not properly motivated by your choice of some goal you want to achieve, then you are not going to achieve it. How many people are "properly" motivated by some New Year's Resolution they make every December 31? This

is not proper motivation. It provides no fuel, no *heat*.

Motivation must be felt on a deeper level. Motivation must extend beyond “desire.” Your motivation must be authentic.

You can tell if your motivation is authentic with the simple “get you out of bed” test. Does the goal you have for yourself, *right now*, make you want to leap out of bed in the morning to go after it?

This is your reality check. Many people go to bed at night “tormenting” themselves over the quest for their goals. That is not proper and authentic motivation. It is the opposite.

Obstacles to acquiring your goals will always be present, and they’ll come in many forms. For many of you, “your own mind” is your worst obstacle. For instance, in the physique transformation and weight-loss game, if you end up whining and complaining about “another day” of diet and exercise, then you aren’t going to last too long, no matter how much you may “want” the end result. Motivation must be authentic, and it also must be nourished if it is going to keep you going!

Your Goals

Adult goals must have maturity. Adult goals must be challenging enough to motivate you into action, yet not so unrealistic that they discourage you and douse the flame of motivation. It is fine *at first* to “have your head in the clouds” but your authentic motivation

should ensure that while your head may be in the clouds, your feet stay firmly on the ground. All the way along the path to achievement it's important to be challenged by something real and achievable, and something you can keep in front of you. This keeps your eye on the prize, so to speak, and prevents you from being overwhelmed by unrealistic fantasies of "someday."

Achievable goals will shape the priorities in your day-to-day life; and your priorities will shape the way you go about achieving the goal. A goal is about a desired "outcome," and this requires devoting your mental and emotional attention toward the efforts it will take to achieve that goal. A priority is about the process in the here and now. While the goal keeps you on track, "prioritizing" is the step-by-step process that takes you there. Your goal will shape and reshape your priorities. You can't set a new goal and maintain old priorities. Something has to give in order to achieve any worthy goal. This is the reality of achievement. It almost always involves sacrifice.

"Process Goals": The Key to Achieving Anything

There is a stark difference between a **process goal** and an **outcome goal**.

Outcome goals are the "what." Your outcome goals are what you are after in the end. They are what it is all about for you.

Process goals are the “how.” The process is the real goal, and the real goal is the process. Process goals of right here, right now, and today – are within your control. They are the priority. As the old joke goes, when tourist stops a local in Manhattan and asks him, “Excuse me, sir, can you tell me how to get Carnegie Hall?” the reply is, “Practice my friend, practice.”

“Practice” is the here and now of a process goal. To get to your final outcome goal down the road, your focus needs to *always be* on the right “now” of the process. Your focus should also be to bring a good attitude to it, as well. You can’t focus on the “someday” of your outcome goal and expect to achieve it with that kind of focus.

You can find good examples of “process goals” in professional sports. Every year there are teams with a good chance to win the Superbowl, or the Stanley Cup, or whatever. That is the ultimate outcome goal. But the only way to get there is to focus on the process-goals. Teams have to prepare for one game at a time, because only the top however many teams at the end of the season make it to the playoffs. But teams get there one game, one week at a time. They practice on certain days. They watch game film of their opponents at certain days and times. They meet with their different coaches at certain days and times. They workout to stay in physical shape. They practice their “game plan” on the ice, or the field. All of this requires the players and coaches to *not* focus on the outcome goal. They focus on the process. That’s the only way to do it.

The reason so many people fail to reach their goals is because they focus on the outcome goal. That is just too far away for motivation to sustain itself. You actually *get* to that ultimate outcome goal by learning to focus on the short-term process goals that, inch by inch, day by day, bring you closer to the final achievement.

You must hold yourself accountable to “process goals” for the day, for the week, and then repeat. It is normal to have a long-term “outcome” goal — something that comes from the heart and gets you excited whenever you think about it. But it is the daily grind of process that takes you there. You need to program yourself to *just show up*, each and every day, for the tasks at hand. You must also learn to show up in your own mind as well. This is how you get there long-term.

It is like climbing a staircase. You can’t just think about the top floor. You take it one stair at a time, to get to each floor above you. And you have to get to each floor above you in order to finally make it to the top floor. This is how process goals work. If you don’t focus on the reality of the priority of the process, then the outcome you desire simply won’t happen. You can’t climb from the bottom floor to the top without taking each stair and staircase in stride. You can’t focus on the top floor. You’ll trip on the first or second step. Again, as the saying goes, “You can’t get there from here.” You must handle both desire and reality.

Motivation

Motivation is sustained by keeping your focus not just on process goals, but process *statements* and process *self-talk*. Your self-talk needs to engage your daily process, not just your desired long-term outcome.

Daily self-statements and reminders fuel your motivation to keep you doing what it takes day to day, whether you feel like it or not. If you keep your thinking and self-talk statements invested in process goals, then those days where you just don't feel like doing what is required will become less and less frequent.

Use self-talk statements like these:

- “I’m on top of this.”
- “I’m all over getting this done today.”
- “I’ll put in whatever time is needed, and I’ll do my best doing it too.”

All of these things are self-talk statements that have to do with the “process of now,” not end-goals. The more you engage self-talk in “process-related” statements, the more invigorated and present you will become, and the more motivated you will stay.

It also serves you well to **focus more on task-mastery, but not perfection**. Focusing on mastery of the tasks and skills involved in the process is what will get you to your long-term desired outcome.

Stress

Part of “showing up” for your process goals is about recognizing that your motivation is preserved and protected by developing sound coping strategies for stress.

There are always going to be stressors in life, both predictable and unpredictable. The more tools you develop to cope with stress, the less energy drain you will experience from it. This will always help you preserve and maintain your motivation and keep it from being drained until you finally sabotage yourself.

Part of managing stress so that stress doesn't manage you is about taking care of yourself in a healthy way. If you want to manage motivation so you can stay enthusiastic about engaging in the process required to meet your goal, then you have to take care of physical basics: sound, quality sleep and wholesome nutrition are the foundations for doing so. Your body and your mind must be replenished because their energies get spent every day. It's like a bank account. You must deposit more than you withdraw if you want to have sustainable energy to meet your process goals.

If your life is out of balance, your inner “you” knows it. Your motivation will be drained. For my physique transformation, weight-loss and fitness clients I have to continually remind them, “You are not just a fitness enthusiast. You do not just have an appearance goal. You are a person with a real life.”

When you are overscheduled, overstressed and bombarded with stimulus, and you don't refuel these

energy resources, then of course your motivation will take a hit. You have to know when to dial things down. You don't factor in real life because you "aren't committed." You factor it in because you *are* committed, and you know you want and need your motivation to last in order to get to your goal.

When you focus on the misery, sacrifice, and pain associated with the process of achieving your goal, you'll only sap your motivation in the longterm, even if it feels good in the short term to think about how much pain you're going through to get to your goals.

External Motivation

Motivation must ultimately come from within, but external, situational motivation is fine. Whatever fuels you over the long term. You can be motivated by people around you, by movies and books that move you, by a story you heard, by something someone said to you, or whatever else. Yes, sustainable motivation will always come from within, but you can tap into situational and external sources of motivation as well to refresh and refuel yourself.

High-achievers know how to capitalize on *both*. So many things in your environment can either fan the flame of your motivation level, or douse it. It's a matter of what you choose to focus on, and *how you filter it* to your own advantage or disadvantage.

For example, way back in 1983, at my first bodybuilding contest ever, when someone I didn't care

for too much said, a few months before the contest, “Abel won’t do anything. He’ll never have abs good enough to compete.” That comment *burned* in me and I used it for motivation all the way to my contest. I not only won that contest, but I won best poser and best abs as well.

At the same time, a couple of years later I realized actually don’t respond as well to using negatives as motivators. I learned I prefer “positive incentives” for re-fueling and restocking my motivation levels.

The point is situational motivation can come from anywhere... if you pay attention. I could have let the comment keep me from competing, or allowed it to make me doubt myself. Instead I used it.

When you get right down to it, no one else is responsible for your motivation, and the level of your motivation, except YOU. Whatever they say, whatever you hear, it’s down to *you*.

One final word regarding goals.

It is okay to change goals. You don’t require anyone else’s approval to do so. Adjusting your goals or changing them doesn’t mean you’ve failed. It often just signals that you live in an adult world, and you are flexible and adaptable to your circumstances. That can be a very good thing.

Think of professional athletes who are too old to play their sport anymore after the age of 40. They still have half their life to live! Clinging to the same goal

would make no sense.

Flexibility and adaptability to the changing circumstances of your life is part of the successful mindset of the psychology of achievement as well.

Chapter 14.

Preparation and Lack of Preparation

Louis Pasteur once famously said, “Chance and good fortune both favor the prepared mind.”

Conversely there is also the expression, “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.”

In my business of coaching people towards physique and weight-loss goals, I often witness a lack of mental preparation. You can’t just behave your way to being prepared for what it takes to reach a goal. Mental preparation is not optional.

In my book *The Anti-Diet Approach to Weight-Loss and Weight-Control*, I talk about “weight-loss tourists.” These are people who become so focused on “recipes” of food, diet and nutrition, that they never are mentally “prepared” to sustain any kind of weight-loss once they accomplish it. It’s a lack of mental preparation, that causes them to remain only weight-loss “tourists,” constantly visiting the land of weight-loss, but never staying there permanently residents.

For many people who struggle to maintain a goal (like a weight loss or physique goal), what is lacking not more know-how, but simple mental preparation. Preparation is not just about taking care of your body. To compartmentalize your life that way is short-

sighted. Proper preparation is about taking care of *all* your responsibilities, so that you can organize, prioritize and time-manage a proper and consistent focus on whatever your current goal may be. Mental preparation considers the whole of your daily life.

In the modern sports-world and the world of high-performance, great Coaches always talk about “preparation.”

Real preparation is about being realistic about what it takes to reach a goal, and that spectacular results require a willingness to endure a ton of relentless *un*spectacular preparation!

As Bobby Knight said, “The key is not the ‘will to win’—everybody has that. It is the will to prepare to win that is important.”

Early in my own career I was once asked in an interview how I balanced my career as a coach for bodybuilding champions, while maintaining my own physique. I answered, “I was realistic about what it was going to take to get there. Then I mentally prepared myself to make those sacrifices.”

I have people who say things like:

- “I ran out of my regular food, and fast food was all that was available.”
- “I ran out of groceries before grocery shopping day, and fast food was all that was available.”
- “I was travelling and couldn’t take my own food with me, so I had to eat whatever, and

that meant eating fast food.”

- And one of my favorites: “I have kids in the house, and there is snacks and desserts and non-diet food around all the time. Sometimes I just end up eating it.”

All of these statements are the result of a lack of mental preparation.

Proper mental preparation begets prevention, and prevention is always better than repair. With enough real-world preparation, starting with mental preparation, you no longer have to “wing it” without a foundation. Solid preparation *is* your foundation. You don’t have to make things up as you go along.

With real, ongoing proper preparation you have so many options, backed with so much experience – that you are simply ready for anything. This is what Pasteur meant when he said that “Good fortune favors the prepared mind.” The properly prepared mind is one that prevents creating your own obstacles and becoming your own worst enemy. The properly prepared mind that is able to say “no” to smoking or taking recreational drugs is a mind that never has to consider the costs and consequences of repairing these habits and overcoming them.

Proper mental preparation is integral. Focus on it. Reasons and excuses for a lack of preparation include:

- Laziness

- Lack of discipline
- Lack of motivation
- Ignorance as to how to mentally prepare
- Procrastination
- Poor task management and time-management
- Poor lifestyle decisions (for example, staying up late and getting less sleep for no real reason)
- Resentment, hostility, frustration, or anger, either toward yourself, someone else or toward something going on in your life.

Most of the above reasons for a lack of preparation speak for themselves. But procrastination is a particularly insidious saboteur. Procrastination is not only the thief of time but the thief of preparation and therefore motivation as well.

The more you procrastinate doing a task – *any* task – the more you invite in all the *other* above saboteurs of proper mental preparation. Look at this list again and you can see how “procrastination” in particular can feed and fuel all the other ‘reasons and excuses’ for lack of preparation.

The truth of procrastination was best said by Edwin Markham:

“When Duty comes a-knocking at your gate, Welcome

*him in; for if you bid him wait, He will depart only to
come once more And bring seven other duties to your
door.”*

Procrastination is not only a sign of lack of proper preparation, it feeds that lack as well.

Make sure to wake up every day and remind yourself of the scout's motto: “Be prepared” and then go about doing so, toward whatever achievement or personal goal you have.

Competence is about consistency, not perfection. A properly prepared mind knows the value of consistency in thought and action. A properly prepared mind is one that is *able* to be consistent.

Spectacular results require a willingness to endure unspectacular preparation!

Chapter 15.

Pressure

The literal definition of physical pressure is about “force exerted on an object.” The same is true for how pressure as a concept actually *feels*. There is a sense of mental and emotional force being exerted on your soul and your spirit.

This type of “pressure” seldom leads to positive outcomes. There are dozens of quotes that glorify pressure and say how pressure makes diamonds and pressure moulds character. But that isn’t really pressure per se. I don’t call any perception or level of emotional arousal that facilitates high-performance and achievement “pressure.”

Why is it that a high-profile professional athlete will thrive in front of thousands of live viewers, and knowing millions of others are watching on television, yet someone else can fail a written exam or a driver’s test merely because of a sense of “pressure”?

For the record here, I failed my first driver’s test way back when I was 16. It wasn’t because I wasn’t a good driver. It wasn’t because I didn’t practice for hours and hours. I failed because of my perception of “pressure” I felt alone in a car, with a stranger who had power over me and my future. Feelings of “pressure” come from all kinds of places, whether rational or not.

Feelings of pressure that sabotage performance are almost always self-induced. They are matters of perception, not reality. One person feels dread and pressure when they think of public speaking; for another person, public speaking has no emotional impact at all.

We need to identify what emotional pressure is.

There is a major difference between a sense of pressure and a sense of arousal. For instance, the pro athlete example mentioned above. He or she takes pressure and turns it into a high arousal state conducive to maximum performance. Similarly, there is also a difference between a sense of anticipation and a sense of stress. When I failed my first driving test, the test produced a sabotaging sense of stress in me, and that led to a feeling of overwhelming pressure which eliminated my sense of positive anticipation for getting my license. Finally, there is also a difference between a sense of excitement and a sense of anxiety.

All these differences exist at the level of “perception,” and how we filter our circumstances. If you don’t understand your sources of emotional “pressure” then you are less likely to be able to do anything to reduce or eliminate them.

The kind of self-induced pressure I’m talking about here is about feelings of anxiety, worry, stress, and nervousness in the face of certain situations or circumstances. This kind of pressure comes from within. It’s a “perception,” not a reality. If you are experiencing feelings of pressure that are negatively

impacting your performance or your ability to do what needs to be done, then you have to own that you are the cause and the source, and *you* are solution, as well.

The signs of pressure include an inability to focus, and thoughts of dread, worry, or fear of failure. Other signs include racing thoughts and inability to focus, worry about what others are thinking about you, focusing on having to be “perfect,” focusing on “outcomes” and things beyond your control, and obsessing about past failures in similar situations. These all are either the result of feelings of pressure, or the cause of it.

I have had hundreds of clients who have lost weight on previous diets at previous times, and then gained all the weight back and then some. And now, when attempting to lose weight again, they have a tremendous feeling of pressure on them, because they are focusing on these past failures. It is this sense of pressure that will sabotage their efforts yet again if we don't deal with it.

Perceptions of pressure are almost always emotional in nature. They are almost always irrational. High performance athletes and artists don't perform at high levels “in spite” of the presence of negative emotions. They simply don't experience “pressure” in this way. For high performers, pressure is turned into arousal, and heightened arousal. This lends to their high-performance and achievement. These athletes don't turn “pressure” into negative emotional states like anxiety, stress, panic, fear, or irritation, so they are able to excel and to thrive in situations where others

would crumble.

When runaway emotions stemming from feeling of pressure are allowed to persist, then sabotaging behaviors are sure to follow. You should never think with your emotions, but rather employ your emotions to think. This is how high-achievers and high-level performers do it. They harness emotional energy and then *channel it*. They never let it turn into “pressure” that can negatively impact their effort.

Turning a perception of emotional pressure into a positive state of arousal and mental invigoration and challenge represents the higher-end of emotional fitness. No one can continually achieve important goals if those goals are always accompanied by perceptions of emotional pressure to perform. “Pressure” always seeks relief and release. It can’t just be allowed to run amuck, because eventually the “lid” will blow off. That is the essence of self-sabotage stemming from overwhelming pressure, when there are no constructive ways of channeling it.

Pressure comes in many forms. Running yourself ragged leads to a different type of pressure. If your body isn’t fueled properly, or properly rested, then your concentration and ability to manage stress decreases significantly. Acting, behaving and performing with confidence and full positive attitude and enthusiasm is compromised when your body is tired or run down, or when your physical energy is low from a long-term calorie deprivation diet. These kinds of stresses lead to a feeling of pressure that is physiologically induced. It leads to emotional pressure

and burnout.

How does a normal person deal with emotional pressure and any self-sabotaging feelings that follow? Focus on the things within your control. This always helps relieve the sense of pressure, both situationally and in general. The things you have control over include how well you prepare, how well you practice or follow the process, your quality and quantity of sleep, your diet choices, your attitude toward all of it, and where you place your mental and emotional attention all along the way.

Regimentation and ritual also help relieve pressure. This is why high-performance athletes on teams try to stick to regular practice times, team meals and the like. (And why coaches insist on it.) Regimentation and ritual can lead to certain actions, behaviors and thinking strategies becoming “automatic.” There are less things to “think about” and actions and behaviors become merely an element of follow-through. This tremendously reduces any self-induced “pressure.”

Finally, a fantastic way to manage the kind of pressure that produces negative emotional states like anxiety, doubt, and fear is to journal your thoughts and feelings and just “write.” This is a way to communicate with yourself. The opposite of this is bottling up your thoughts and emotions and trying to avoid them. How do you think that plays out over time? Writing gets your thoughts out of your own head, and it helps you to put words to feelings and confusion. Self-communication can help you talk yourself down from metaphorical ledges if you’re thinking of taking a rash

action. Journaling is a form of “emotional strength and conditioning.” It helps you label emotions and dissipate feelings and perceptions of self-induced pressure.

Few people outside the world of high-performance sports discuss this kind of self-induced pressure and how it can sabotage your efforts to achieving your goal. But it is an important discussion, especially for people who don't live in the world of high-performance athletics, and who have very real lives with very real distractions and commitments. Pressure is a state of mind. When you learn to own it and channel it, then it can become a positive state of arousal and excitement, one that is conducive to helping you achieve your goal, no matter what that goal may be.

Chapter 16.

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital is a new concept in psychology, especially positive psychology. Psychologists are examining what constitutes an overall “resourceful” mind, and what the effects are of such a mind in terms of performance.

You could say that people with psychological capital operate from the premise that, “Every problem comes bearing its own solution.”

Psychological capital is about the “assets” you have. According to the work of Fred Luthans and colleagues, the four components of psychological capital are:

1. Self-efficacy
2. Optimism
3. Hope
4. Resilience

1) Self-efficacy is the confidence to take on and devote whatever effort is required for the task at hand. The central element of focus here is task consciousness, not self-consciousness. Task

consciousness must be both effective and efficient. Self-efficacy is about wanting to choose to do the necessary work at hand. Confidence plays a part as well, in that the mind knows it has the resources to tackle the problem.

2) Optimism is not *just* an airy fairy idea of “looking on the bright side” of things, though there is an element of that, and air fairy or not, it is important. Optimism here is more about putting things in order so that you can work with the brighter side of things, and on them.

3) Hope is obviously connected to optimism. This is a kind of hope that reflects the hard work that went into the task. People who work hard at a given task or challenge cannot help but to be “hopeful” in achieving the desired result. As with optimism above, hope in this sense is not merely a “noun” that you do nothing about; it is an active kind of hope that inspires action and optimism, and by doing so, it rejuvenates itself. Hope and optimism are “practiced behaviors and actions,” and not just lazy positive attitudes to embrace.

4) Resilience is about being “real” when it comes to hope and optimism as actual practiced behaviors, and not just positive attitudes. Resilience involves bouncing back from a setback. Resilience involves a sticking-to-it mindset no matter how things are going in the present moment. You can see how optimism and hope will play a key role in resilience. In many other research sources resilience is referred to as “high-level emotional fitness” and one study showed

that resilience was a key element to overall life longevity.

So there you have the four components of psychological capital. These components of psychological capital mutually reinforce each other. When you have self-efficacy in place, it is easier to be optimistic about your work. When you are confident, and optimistic, it is easier to breathe hope into the task at hand. When these components of psychological capital are working for you, it is easier to be resilient in the face of setbacks, obstacles and slip-ups.

Psychological capital, like financial capital, refers more to a current mind “state” than it does to actual character “traits.” It is not ever something you either have or don’t have permanently; just like with money, you can build on what you have. You can invest it. Wealth begets wealth when you invest. There is an old saying that applies here, about wealth being the difference between people who work for their money vs. people who have their money work for them. Psychological capital works the same way. You can work hard trying to feel and acquire self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, or, *you can put these things to work for you.*

These components of psychological capital are things you earn more of as you work more toward any goal. As you approach living your life with inner excellence you will earn more and more psychological

capital.

Chapter 17.

Getting Out of “Ruts”

What is a rut? Where do they come from? How do you get out of one?

First things first: you can't experience being a rut until you have had some sort of achievement and success to begin with. That is an important distinction to keep in mind. Even among high-achievers and high-performers, ruts happen. Writers get writer's block, pro athletes go through performance slumps, and on and on.

A rut often doesn't have to be dramatic. It can often be little things that you can't overcome, but which used to be non-issues for you, things like avoiding snacking on junk food. You used to own it, now it owns you, and you don't know what to do about it. I have had many people become coaching clients simply because they need help out of a rut they find themselves in. Sometimes potential clients don't even realize that they are in a rut. They need it pointed out to them. More often than not, being in a rut comes on the heels of some big achievement or accomplishment. Many people don't make that connection.

Instead of acknowledging being in a rut, many people start judging themselves because they aren't

owning things that used to be easy for them to own. So they start calling themselves weak. They call themselves a failure. But they aren't weak and they aren't a failure. Ruts don't represent failure. Ruts are something else entirely.

One of the ways ruts happen is in trying too hard, for too long. Ruts happen when you make mistakes or slip-ups, and that is combined with the daily grind of trying too hard, with no other distractions to balance out your energy. Putting constant pressure on yourself, exerting extreme mental and emotional effort, with not much to show for it is a sure way to get yourself into a rut.

Commitment and obsession are qualitatively different things. Remember that. When you're in a rut, falling down leads to not getting up; it just leads to more falling down, especially when you don't take time to regroup mentally in order to stay committed and strong and optimistic toward the goal. In the worst case scenario you start defining yourself according to what is really only a rut. That only makes things worse.

It is said ruts are like a soft bed, easy to get into, hard to get out of. That is true. I've witnessed it over and over again in people who have high-level skills and have high-level energy, but are stuck in ruts... often "comfortable" ruts.

A rut starts in your head and ends in your behavior. A rut can also end up in your gut. Many people in ruts start having digestive issues because of the psychological toll the rut takes on them over time.

People in ruts start to overthink everything related to that rut. Not only does overthinking the situation not help, it usually makes the problem worse. What you focus on expands. As I quoted Einstein earlier, “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” That quote is never more fitting than when you’re in a rut, and trying to get *out* of a rut. Overthinking doesn’t help the situation because it only identifies all the elements that prove you are in a rut, instead of just finding simple ways out.

It helps to consider about what your thinking was like when you weren’t in a rut. You can “remind yourself” that you used to think better, but easier and simpler as well. Getting out of the rut requires thinking outside of it as well.

The key to overcoming being in a rut is to find a simple difference that will make a difference. This usually this means doing and thinking *less* about it, rather than more. Less thinking, less feeling, less judging, less measuring. I’ve had clients who were doing fine with their weight-loss goals and keeping weight-off. They decided they didn’t need Coaching anymore. They go on their own. They come back to me in a year or so, and they’ve gained a lot of weight back. How did this happen? It usually happens because they can’t leave it alone and “ride the wave” as I like to say. Something is working well for them, but then they start overanalyzing and studying other strategies and techniques. They start listening to outside sources. They start gathering information

when they don't have the proper knowledge base to filter it. They overcomplicated something that was already simple, effective and working well.

Being in a rut is like finding yourself in a hole. As the old saying goes, "If you find yourself in a hole, then know enough to stop digging. Don't go out and buy a shiny new shovel just to tell yourself that you are doing something about it."

Another way of simplifying the issue in order to see it more clearly is to just get completely away from it for a while.

Josh Waitzkin was once a child chess prodigy. He even had a movie made about him and his younger days. In his book, *The Art of Learning: A Journey into the Pursuit of Excellence* Waitzkin discusses the pressures of being a young child prodigy. His game suffered. Worse than that, his passion and love for the game was suffering along with it. Right in the midst of preparing for a big tournament his father took him away on a trip. There was no discussion allowed of chess or the tournament. Father and son spent father and son time, doing father and son stuff. It cleared Josh's head. It made it all simple again and he was able to let go of the pressure and just "play chess" again.

It may seem counter-intuitive but so often one of the best ways of climbing out of a rut is to just let it go completely for a length of time, and then come back to it with fresh energy and with new eyes and perspective. When something you love doing feels like drudgery, you may be in a rut. Getting out may be as

simple as finding the passion and love for it all again, and letting go of the extraneous stuff that comes with success and achievement.

I went through this myself a long time ago. I thoroughly enjoyed working out and reveled in it as “my time.” But as I got successful and made a name for myself all this other “extraneous noise and pressure” came with it. I didn’t like the noise and pressure. But what I didn’t realize at the time is that it was all this “other stuff” I didn’t like. I thought they had to go together. It made me feel like I was no longer connected to my passion for fitness and training. I needed to get away from it in order to see it clearly and to find my passion for it again.

Remember that a rut usually comes on the heels of success and accomplishment. Success and accomplishment usually come on the heels of a love and passion for what you are doing. It’s the extraneous stuff that gets in the way of that simplicity. A rut only lasts as long as the time it takes for you to find the “simplicity” again.

Chapter 18.

Self-Talk

We all talk to ourselves in our own heads. We don't just "think thoughts."

High-achievers don't let their brains get set to default. They don't have unruly thoughts that take over all their thinking. High-achievers harness the power of self-talk. The quality of mindset determines the quality of behavior.

How you direct your self-talk is all about the quality of mindset you create. Henry Ford famously said, "Whether you think you can, or think you can't—you're right!" High-achievers employ a positive, self-compassionate and self-supporting self-talk as an ally. Non-achievers and people who struggle allow their minds to be set to "default" and they can't harness the power of directed and purposeful self-talk.

As Ford alludes to, the things you tell yourself are powerful. Everyone says they know that, but few people act on it on a consistent basis in order to program their mind accordingly. You have control over the messages you send yourself. This means you have the ability and the capacity to harness the power of your own thoughts, as a way to improve your ongoing performance and engagement in every facet

of your life. Are you doing that? If not, why not?

Research shows people are more conditioned by cultural forces to jump to negative thoughts and conclusions rather than to self-supporting and self-compassionate self-talk. Again, you can't allow your mind to be set to "default," or you'll jump to negative thoughts and conclusions. You have to exercise your awareness to become stronger from the inside-out and less affected from the outside-in. High-achievers are inside-out self-directed, self-scripted people. They abide in their own voice. In doing so they are able to shut out outside-in saboteurs in the form of negative people or unfavorable circumstances.

What is the nature of your self talk?

When your self-talk is filled with anger and self-criticism you are sabotaging yourself. No one ever "self-rejected" their way to great accomplishment. You need to ask yourself and pay attention to whether your inner self-talk is calm, supportive and nurturing, as it should be.

Your self-talk has the ability to alter your emotional state in a way that can neutralize emotions that don't serve you. It can harness and use the empowering emotions that do serve you.

Here are examples of both positive and negative self-talk:

Positive Self-Talk >> Corresponding Emotional State

- “I can do this, I will do this, I am doing this”
>> *Excitement, anticipation*
- “I have heard of worse things than this” >>
More relaxed, more calm
- “I can always be bigger than my circumstances”
>> *Determined, purposeful, self-supporting*
- “I did it. It wasn’t as hard as I thought” “That was worth it!” >> *Relief, empowerment.*

Negative Self-Talk >> Corresponding Emotional State

- “I have to be perfect” >> *Anxiety, pressure*
- “What if I fail (again)!” >> *Worry, fear of failure, avoidance*
- “I always mess things up just when I’m doing well” >> *Hopelessness, apathy, self-defeat*
- “I let myself down again” “I failed again” >>
Sadness, depression, frustration, guilt/shame

The simple truth of it all is that you are responsible for what you tell yourself, and you are responsible for the thoughts you pay the most attention to. Are they self-supporting, or self-defeating? You can change the emotions you feel, from bad to good, or from indifferent to positive, by changing the dialogue in your own mind. I say to myself “I don’t like these thoughts, I’m changing the channel,” and then I just

think about more positive thoughts and deliberately generate some constructive self-talk.

If you practice this regularly and you control your emotions and use them for positive impact, this will also lead to more self-reinforcing self-talk in return. It creates a positive feedback loop where your self-talk, your thoughts, and your emotions all keep nurturing each other in healthy and productive ways. Of course the opposite is true as well. Negative self-talk invites negative thoughts, which produce negative emotions, and these also tend to keep nurturing each other as well. It's nearly impossible to achieve anything with a negative mindset like that running your spiritual agenda.

Therefore, it is the practice and exercise of *constructive* self-talk that matters. Do this consistently and your mind becomes disciplined, well-behaved, and well-trained. When you become fully aware that how you think controls both your reactions and responses to your life's circumstances, then you can be more "intentional" about engaging positive and self-supporting thought patterns over time.

Anyone can be positive for a day, or for a minute in a day. Anyone can walk around quoting Wayne Dyer or Oprah. But it takes much more to ingrain these positive thought patterns over time until they become "automatic" within you. Catching yourself and reducing or stopping your negative or un-supportive self-talk is a first step. *Consistent* practice and exercise of self-supporting, self-compassionate, and self-directed self-talk is what matters. If it doesn't come

“naturally” to you, that doesn’t matter. You can still do it. One little trick you can use, is if you don’t like your current self-talk, just change the channel.

Think of your mind like you do your muscles when it comes to productive and constructive self-talk. Just like a muscle, the mind has to be exercised consistently in order for it to become “more fit” and less “lazy.” Learning to engage self-supporting and self-compassionate self-talk until it becomes automatic may seem like a lot of work, with a lot of stops and starts. But the price of not doing, practicing, and engaging yourself in this way is simply more costly.

Mental positive thinking strategies like directed self-talk are a lot like parachutes. They slow things down and allow you to hit the ground gently after tough trials and tribulations. Your self-talk has a direct influence on your mental performance. Your mental performance affects *everything* in your life. Self-supporting and self-compassionate self-talk builds confidence, competence, composure and focus. This kind of self talk isn’t just a “tool”; it is a *must*.

Chapter 19.

The Quiet Mind

We live in a culture of “busy-ness.” Everyone is trying to out-busy everyone else. We live in a culture of constant stimulus bombardment as well. Most people are slaves to their mobile devices and the constant mental stimulation they provide. These things get in the way of a constructive and helpful psychology of achievement.

A calm mind is far more effective at creating a “proactive mindset.” The busy and overstimulated mind is more likely to create a “reactive” mindset. The proactive mindset is prepared for obstacles. The reactive mindset is unthinking. The proactive mindset uses obstacles as stepping stones. The reactive mindset panics at the first sign of an obstacle.

Quieting Your Mind

Having to “learn” to quiet your mind is an unfortunate reality of the stimulus-bombardment world we live in. For instance, one major issue in North America today is sleep deprivation due to anxiety, and minds that won’t shut off and be quiet long enough for quality sleep to follow.

Learning to quiet the mind before bed leads to

better sleep, which leads to better physical and mental health. While you are scrambling for some magic diet or supplements solutions for your stress issues, have you considered simply learning to “quiet your mind?” It’ll be more effective.

A quiet mind should be your “foundation” for managing your mental, emotional and physical energy channels. An effective energy management system isn’t about going 100 miles per hour from the time you wake up until the time you go to bed. That isn’t “management.” It leads to stress and exhaustion. Effective energy-system management is about a foundation of calm and relaxed energy, and good vibes in that state as well. Your energy can be “invested” but seldom “wasted.”

Now, what is effective energy management composed of? Constructive, self-enhancing energy management has two important elements.

- 1) The ability and willingness to pump yourself up when needed; and always having the energy reserves to do so – and - it’s seemingly opposite
- 2) The ability to relax and just “be” without a need for anything else.

When you know how to “do” both of these well, when you realize that you and not your circumstances are in control of both these energy states, then you will be able to adjust to any situation and scenario with the appropriate energy you need for them. This is living your energy from the inside-out. This kind of

energy awareness and management makes your energy both boundless and versatile.

These two abilities put YOU in control of your energy states and awareness. This lends to being more “proactive” in processing thought and directing it efficiently. From there, you can stop anxious high-energy states before they get going. The higher your energy state goes, the longer it is going to take to calm down.

Ever see a race horse after it crosses the finish line? Take note of how long it takes the jockey to slow that horse down again. Your mind works the same way once it starts “racing.” You may think that a “busy and reactive mind” is a productive one, but it’s not. The quiet mind should be the foundational energy state, and the master control.

There are several ways to “begin” to quiet your mind. For some people it will take practice. The next time you have to drive a distance of 20 minutes or more, do it with no music on, or any other stimulus in the vehicle. Just drive in total quiet. Do that a few times per week. This is just one way to “practice” and invite a quiet mind. I’m sure you could think of many more, and I’ll list a few below.

As the old Zen expression says, “Don’t just do something, stand there.”

Most people make mistakes or miss things because of a scattered focus and an eye toward what they need to do next, instead of what they need to be doing right now. “Productive” multi-tasking is a myth. The

research is clear on that. (It's abundant, too. Just Google it.)

Improved focus and function are the primary benefits of the skill of the quiet mind. This translates into getting more quality work done in less time, and feeling less “spent” doing it. The quiet mind therefore lends not to just more effectively managing energy states – but lends to renewing your energy resources as well. A racing mind exhausts you. The quiet mind renews you. Which one do you really think is paramount to a psychology of achievement that is reproducible?

The Physical Side of The Equation

This is the mental side of the quiet mind equation. But just as importantly, being able to *physically* relax pays dividends, especially when it comes to self-renewal and self-rejuvenation.

A nervous mind cannot reside within a physically relaxed body. This is why long hot baths, and relaxation massages, lying in the sun on vacations, and so on, all “feel” so good. The relaxed body relaxes the mind.

This means that another way people can learn to “quiet the mind” is by relaxing the body or connecting with it. I've had many clients in the past reach weight-loss goals and sustain them by switching from “doing cardio” to “practicing Yoga.” It worked for them because it relaxed and quieted their minds as well, so

that over time they felt renewed and rejuvenated, often for the first time in a long while. This gave them back the mental and emotional strength and resilience to choose to eat right and follow a regimen and stick to it, to achieve their weight-loss goal and sustain it.

I have dealt with far too many people who have reached a goal only to have the process of getting there suck the life-blood out of them. The experience of the resulting achievement was short-lived. What followed was a long duration of burn-out and apathy. **Managing energy states is about tapping into renewable and rejuvenating energy stores within you.** And that all comes from a quiet mind and a calm energy state.

A weak or exhausted body results in a weak and exhausted mind. Conversely, a weak and exhausted mind results in a weak and exhausted body. Start each day by making sure you are well-rested, and fuelled for the day. Not doing so invites burnout and several forms of exhaustion.

Where to Start: Tracking Your Energy Levels

Tracking your energy levels doesn't need to be a scientific process. In fact, it can be quite simple; and the simpler the better. You can track energy levels just by paying attention to them and rating them on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the low end and 5 being the high end. A typical energy awareness scale can be as simple

as this:

Exhausted — totally unable to focus and function; often accompanied by a state of apathy as well (rate 1-2-3-4-5)

Tired — you would rather ‘not’ focus and function (rate 1-2-3-4-5)

Somewhat tired — you just get through it and ride it out (rate 1-2-3-4-5)

Energized — you are high-energy, focus and function are in tune and everything feels “invigorating” to the soul (rate 1-2-3-4-5)

Brimming with energy — focus and function are constantly renewing you; you can’t be held back; your high-energy focus and function creates an investment in today that spills over to a positive anticipation for tomorrow (rate 1-2-3-4-5)

Where are you most of the time with respect to this scale? Rating yourself periodically with this scale tells you how effectively you are or are not managing your energy.

No one achieves an exceptional goal when they’re constantly exhausted, or even when they’re “somewhat tired,” if that feeling is constant. How are you feeling? Are you “in the zone” or are you lost in “the twilight zone?”

Different Kinds of Energy

I would like to add a final word here about transitioning between energy states.

Sometimes energy transition is imperative. For instance, the energy I bring to writing this book is different from the energy devoted to my workouts and exercise. If you are stuck in self-limiting energy states I can tell you that humor is a powerful tool for “transitioning” moods. You can’t physiologically experience two competing emotions simultaneously. You can’t be happy and angry in the same moment, not in terms of the way your body experiences these emotions. This is why humor is a powerful tool for altering moods for the better. Physiologically, you can’t laugh and be angry at the same time.

You will find that as you work on establishing “the quiet mind” you will also learn how to be better at “transitioning moods” for the task at hand as well.

Achieving a goal is one thing, but having a mindset where that achievement process is something that invigorates you, renews you, replenishes you, and rejuvenates you, so that you can pursue yet another achievement? That is the stuff of a satisfying life.

Chapter 20.

Visualization

People often mistake “visualization” as some kind of passive undertaking, or something akin to dreaming or daydreaming. It’s nothing like that. Real visualization is *active*. It engages the mind toward something you want, and engages your mind toward prioritizing that thing.

Visualization removes clutter from your mind, and makes the goal not just more realistic, but more clear. What your mind sees clearly it can prioritize into action and behavior. Visualization is not daydreaming, and it’s not fantasizing over some goal that would be “nice” to have someday. Real visualization is *deeper*. It is a process of mental engagement that leads you somewhere and makes your goals much clearer, and much more possible for you to engage in whatever form of practice and consistency is needed by the process that will lead eventually to your goal.

Visualization with vivid, clear imagery increases motivation, improves focus, reduces anxiety, and increases self-confidence. This is different than daydreaming about your goals. Visualization is a practice; it works. But it only works if practiced regularly.

You also can’t just visualize the end-goal you are

after. That is certainly part and parcel of the point of visualization, to see yourself owning the prize of achievement at the end of some long process, but there is more to it than that. **Real visualization must include you seeing yourself actively engaged in the process of achieving your goal.** Visualization can include considering obstacles that may get in your way, and visualizing how you'll get around them before they even happen.

Visualization is a way to keep your eye on the prize *while engaging you in the process of getting there.*

When a lofty goal involves deferred gratification, visualization keeps the goal real and present in the “right now,” and keeps it as part of your engagement in the process to get there.

When I was young we all gathered at the school yard to play whatever sport was in season at the time (baseball and soccer in the summer, football in the fall, hockey in winter, etc.). We always imagined “scenarios,” like it was overtime in game 7 of the Stanley Cup Finals. When children engage in play like this they are practicing a form of “visualization”—albeit a very raw form of it. They are creating scenarios that demand high performance and putting themselves in those scenarios with excitement instead of worry, and they are actively physically “practicing” the sport or activity while they “visualize” the positive outcome that they expect. This is all done naturally, but is incredible useful.

At the adult level the decision to “employ”

visualization is a conscious decision. This means there is conscious intention and purpose behind it. It is a self-directed effort to improve your commitment to yourself through repetitive mental imagery. High-achievers from all fields of endeavor employ vivid imagery as part of the tools they access in their mental-fitness toolbox. They don't have the time or the desire to "daydream," but they visualize, and visualize often.

Daydreams are self-indulgence without direction. Visualization is purposeful. It is a mental skill. Like most skills it takes practice to hone it in a way where it becomes a tool for self-perpetuating motivation.

Often I have clients who join my one on one Coaching because they are seeking a final solution to their weight issues. They have a lot of weight to lose and they want to lose it and keep it off. But their previous diet-attempts have resulted in them regaining all their weight back. This creates self-doubt in their minds, so self-sabotaging behaviors are not far behind. For these clients, I tell them that they have a long-term goal, but have not used short-term visualization to keep them compliant when it matters most. Many of them will cut out pictures of bikini models or physique champions they want to look like, and put these pictures on their fridges or bathroom mirrors. They are led to believe that this is a form of practicing visualization. But it's not, at least not completely anyway. This is too longterm. Remember, true visualization is a conscious decision *and* practice. There is nothing "conscious" about walking past

pictures of someone else all day long and pretending “that will be me some day.” Yes, that is partially visualization, but it lacks substance. It reduces what they are doing to “fantasy” if they’re not also engaging in visualization of the process that will get them there.

Rather than posting pictures of “other people” around their house for motivation, they would be better off starting their day with 5-10 quiet minutes visualizing their final appearance, but also visualizing being fully engaged in the process of getting there, *that very day*, and then beyond that day as well.

To be successful at reaching such long-term lofty goals, practicing visualization is a must. But you must visualize yourself not just having the end-goal or victory; you need to visualize yourself fully in the *process* of achieving it as well. Visualization is a conscious decision. What the mind can conceive the body can achieve. But *how* the mind conceives it is everything. Visualization needs to be a blend of realistic and hopefulness. It also needs to include seeing yourself “doing what it takes,” not just having what you want.

Visualization done in this way is advanced mental fitness. When practiced regularly it is like driving a car to your destination, rather than trying to run uphill toward it. Proper visualization is one of the primary “secrets” to success among high-achievers.

Chapter 21.

Time

For high-achievers, time is never taken for granted. It is a commodity that is cherished and valued, like money.

Part of effective time management is accountability with staying on a schedule. When you are accountable to how you spend your time, you end up accountable for “showing up” for the process at hand that can take you to meet your goals.

Another part of effective time-management is about paying attention to effective task management. Effective task management is about compartmentalizing things you need to do, so that you get them done in due order, with less dilly-dallying and back 'n forth. You need to ask yourself: What are the various time-consuming tasks of my day? How can I maximize my input into these tasks, so as to not “waste time” at any of them?

High-achievers tend to be organized people who thrive on routine and schedules for everything, even schedules for their free-time and family time if needs be. That’s a reality.

When you have times set aside for the most important tasks and this becomes “routine,” you will

be able to focus better, and better able to get into “the zone.” For instance, I write at a specific time of day and on specific days of the week. My mind “shows up” for that because it has been established through “routine.” When it is writing time, my brain quickly gets into the state it needs to. Similarly, I always do my workouts at a specific time of day as well, and my body and mind show up for that “automatically” as well.

Over time, this is how effective time management becomes effective task management. I’ve read books by high-achievers in several fields and it’s amazing how many of them comment that if you were to shadow them for a day or a week, what you would witness is routine, simply tedious, boring, and repetitive... routine. People ask them for their “secret” and almost always the answer is “routine.” When high achievers in completely different fields report the same thing as a “secret” to their productivity and success, it’s best to listen up.

Another part of effective time-management is about setting priorities. You can’t make everything a priority, because then nothing is a priority. A lot of prioritizing is about scheduling routines and sticking to them. Know when you are at your most effective, or your most productive, and slot in your high-priority tasks for that time period.

If you don’t have any established routines, you have to start somewhere. The most effective place to start is to have established and regular sleep and wake times. Research is showing this to be more and more

effective as a productive overall health strategy. Having regular sleep and wake times and sticking to them is a great way to get your body *and mind* into a rhythm. When people establish regular sleep and wake times, then several other “time management rituals” tend to simply “fall into place” around these times as well. It’s a great place to start managing time effectively and consistently.

Wasted Time

What about “wasted time?” We are a culture that produces waste as though it’s a valuable resource. We tend to do the same with time.

A lot of people tell me they can’t find the time to fit in their training or cook their meals or whatever. But they do seem to find time to keep up with the Facebook status of complete strangers. You might think that’s different because it’s something you can do at work, or when just “filling time,” but it’s all connected. The more time you “waste” the more time you are likely to continue to waste. Not wasting time is all about setting priorities and routines.

As I said above, this may sound boring and lack “spontaneity” but that is how goals are accomplished and sustained. You need to account for your time in an honest way – all of your time. When you start accounting for the time you waste, you can reclaim valuable time for the things that you say matter to you.

Start with the number, 168. I always tell clients who

focus on numbers that they are usually focused on the wrong kinds of numbers. For weight-loss, people tend to be all about the numbers on weight scales, and food scales, and calories burned and consumed. Instead, think of the hours you spend every day in some of the following activities, then multiply that number times seven for days of the week. Subtract your total from 168. Here are the most common activities to consider:

- Sleeping
- “Sleeping in” (separate from above if this applies to you even once or twice per week)
- Being at work, whether working or not, you are physically “there” for so many hours
- Commuting
- Eating, preparing meals
- Attending to relationship duties — as spouse or parenting, getting kids ready for school, getting them to activities and back
- Daily preparation times, morning rituals of showering, getting dressed, etc.
- Weekly errands of necessity (e.g. grocery shopping)
- Attending other functions and duties (miscellaneous stuff)
- Texting, emailing, talking on the phone
- Watching television, video games,

entertainment

- Surfing the internet, social media
- Socializing with friends, family etc.
- Add to this list anything else you can think of that applies to you in a more specific sense. Anything that takes time from your day
- Exercise, working out (including transit time to and from gym if applicable, shower time etc.)

Add up all these hours then multiply them times seven days, and subtract that number from 168. The number of hours left is the number of hours you can't account for. Those are "wasted hours." These are hours that could be devoted to the process of reaching your goals. Some people I've had do this exercise come up with 15 hours of wasted time in their week. Successful people "make time" even if that means sacrificing other blocks of it that don't contribute anything positive to their day or their goals.

When you prioritize time-management, everything get done, and you become much more effective with your 168 weekly hours, the same hours in a week everyone else has.

Remember, accomplishing something requires commitment and sacrifice. Lots of it. If the goal is extraordinary, like losing 100 lbs. then the effort must be "extraordinary" as well. A true commitment to a goal is always reflected by the quality of time devoted

to it, or not devoted to it. No one can just “add” another goal to their day and tell themselves they are being realistic about reaching that goal.

Optimum time-management boils down to two things: 1) effectiveness, and 2) efficiency.

- **Effectiveness** is about assessing whether you can get the job done, especially in regards to your high-priority commitments, tasks, and goals.
- **Efficiency** is the ability to get things done with the least expenditure of your energies and resources (mental, emotional and physical).

When you put these two together, you stop the illusion in your mind that being “busy” means being “productive.” Being busy is neither effective nor efficient because it tends to exhaust your internal energies and resources without renewing and replenishing them. “Busy” in and of itself is meaningless, because it speaks to quantity of time “spent,” not the quality of time “invested.”

General “busy-ness” will drain your energies by using them all up on tasks unrelated to your goals. “Productive” energy is “focused” energy, the kind that lends to both effectiveness and efficiency. This is only accomplished by exercising time-management skills on a daily basis. The reality of this is that daily grind – being a ‘grinder’ – is a good thing, at least when it comes to goal-setting and achievement. Being able to consistently “show up” isn’t easy, but it’s do-able, and

it's the path to success.

Chapter 22.

Mastery

The other chapters in this book can be read in just about any order. But this one should be considered the final one, and you should read this chapter last.

Mastery can mean many things. There are basic levels of mastery and then there are people who become “masters” by devoting their lives to a vocation, purpose, or profession. When it comes to this latter kind of mastery, Einstein said this: “Only one who devotes himself to a cause with his whole strength and soul can be a true master. For this reason mastery demands all of a person.”

This kind of mastery is a lifelong process. It requires diligent practice and practiced diligence. Whether we are talking about being a songwriter, an author, a professional athlete, or even “an expert” in some specific domain—all of these pursuits require constant learning and deliberate practice. As I’ve said numerous times throughout this project, it is *impossible* to study your way to a level of mastery in any field. Real-world experience is a must.

Mastery involves applying yourself in such a way that clarity, stability, and focus are easy and simple to tap into whenever the task demands it. Your level of mastery will be reflected in how well you do or do not

respond when things get muddled and messy, and when distractions abound. A true master is still able to tap into clarity and focus in order to get the job done, or accomplish a goal, regardless of external circumstances.

Mastery begins by first becoming efficient and proficient at the very basic skills and actions. This level of proficiency in “basic skills” can take much longer than most people realize, or have the patience for. Oh, it’s easy enough in any field to read about the operating principles and to understand them. But it’s another thing entirely to be able to put them into effective and efficient practice. In truth, only once you have implemented the basic skills and actions in practice about a million times over can you be a master of the endeavour at hand. No one ever learns to ride a bike or drive a car by reading a manual.

I have read many books explaining the process, methods, and principles of strength training and the elements of perfect technique involved in exercises like the squat and the bench press. But in reading these books, I could only understand and appreciate the nuances of what I was reading because I have done these exercises and lifts for millions of reps over the course of four decades training. If I’d just starting training, I would get something much different out of reading those book.

When you first learn to drive, you consider all the basics and you get familiar with them. But this is something everyone else who drives has already done. At first there is a lot to pay attention to. You have to

consciously think of where your hands are on the steering wheel, how your feet move from the gas to the brake and what level of pressure needs to be applied to these pedals. You have to learn to watch the road and use your mirrors at the same time. As you are learning to get a “feel” for driving (something you can never do by reading a book about it) you also have to combine this with a working knowledge of the rules of the road. You have to integrate these two things so you are not a threat to yourself or to anyone else. Then throw in obstacles like rain, snow, potholes, parallel parking, and all that.

But as you drive more and more you think less and less consciously about it. Once you have been driving for a while you are able to listen to music as you drive, have conversations, drink coffee – or do all of these at once. You have in essence become “in tune” and “tuned into” your vehicle and the process of driving. You can then set the process to “automatic.” This represents only a basic level of mastery. This is “the beginnings” to acquiring mastery. It’s still a far cry from Nascar.

Mastering basics in some vocations can take years, yet most people want to assume they are past that basic level before they are even close to being so. People also get involved with something, but then they get off-track and distracted, then back on track again, over and over. This is normal and common, and it’s why true mastery is so elusive. Mastery is when your vocation or pursuit is something that becomes fully integrated into your life, and is easily maintained. It

begins with mastering the basics. No one can read or write poetry without first mastering the basics of the alphabet and rules of vowels and consonants.

But for people who can indeed master the basics, doing so can be a transformative experience.

Once you get to a certain level of maturity within your mastery of any process, you won't need to be as consciously focused on the system or the methodology. You won't tend to focus on how you are working it, even though you are, always. At a certain level of mastery, you will start to apply yourself in more customized and personally flexible ways. You have a level of competence that you can trust, and you use that trust to engage, inspire and expand yourself. You engage the process like it is a heart-felt companion, because it is.

Mastery is a lifelong process, and only comes to those who know full devotion of spirit and attitude.

This whole project has pointed in one direction and toward one immutable fact. As Leonardo da Vinci said, "One can have no smaller or greater mastery than mastery of oneself."

The greatest accomplishment you can reach, the most important achievement you can ever possess, is a mastery of your self. Find that, and you find *everything* that matters.

Other Works by Scott Abel

On Amazon

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- [Better Abs, Stronger Core: Effective Abs Training WITHOUT Endless Cardio](#)
- [The Hardgainer Solution: The Training and Diet Plans for Building a Better Body, Gaining Muscle, and Overcoming Your Genetics](#)
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- [The Anti Diet Approach to Weight Loss and Weight Control](#)
- [Beyond Metabolism: How Your Brain, Biology, and the Environment Create and Perpetuate Weight Issues ...and What You Can Do About It](#)
- [Understanding Metabolism: The Truth About Counting Calories, Sustainable](#)

Weight Loss, and Metabolic Damage