



PRINCIPLES



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1 Introduction

“Life is indeed terribly complicated – to a man who has lost his principles.” – G.K. Chesterton

The objective of this document is to catalog my own principles so that I can accelerate the process of deciding what I want, deciding what’s true, and deciding what I’m going to do about it. This document will also help me communicate my principles to and iterate on my principles with colleagues, players, coaches, and friends.

1.1 What Are Principles?

Principles are ways of successfully dealing with reality to get what you want out of life. They work like this: for every situation, rather than saying to yourself ‘I’m right’, you should ask yourself ‘how do I know I’m right?’ Once you establish the criteria you use to deal with a particular situation successfully, write those criteria down – that is your principle.

When you operate like this, every problem you encounter becomes a puzzle. And when you solve the puzzle, you get a gem - a principle. And if you write down your principles, others are able to read them and vet your decision-making and give you feedback if they disagree with you.

Having tried-and-true principles will allow you to start seeing every situation as “another one of those”, i.e. as a situation where you can apply a particular principle and voila, the problem is solved. Continually refining your principles and discovering new principles over time will improve your decision-making.

“Once you know the way broadly, you’ll see it in all things.” – Unknown

“If you understand a general principle, you don’t need to see every one of its illustrations.” – Henry David Thoreau

1.2 Why Have Principles?

The purpose of having principles is to become the master of your natural impulses, i.e. your passions, feelings, and desires. Like in Plato’s *Allegory of the Chariot*, principles guide your emotions and desires like a charioteer guiding horses. In this allegory, all three – Reason, Emotion, and Desire - need to be working well together to achieve great results. But as the charioteer, Reason has the final say on how the race should be run. Even though Emotion and Desire have more raw power, they would be hopelessly ineffectual on the racetrack without Reason as their guide. The better your Reason, Emotion, and Desire can work together in this manner, the more races you will win. Principles themselves are simply Reasons, articulated.

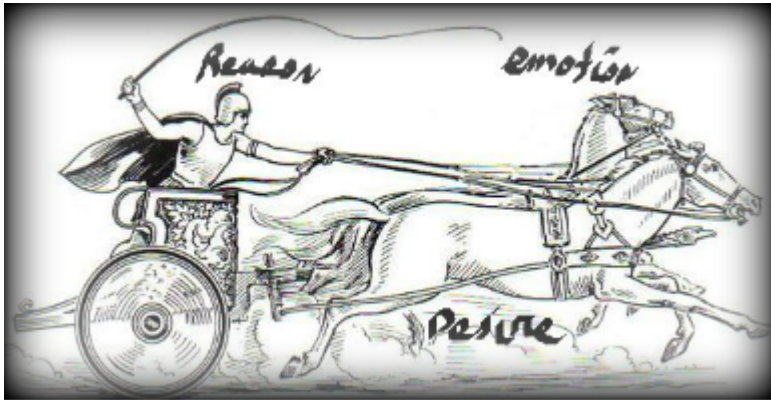


Figure 1.1 Plato's *Allegory of the Chariot*

In Plato's *Allegory of the Chariot*, Reason is a charioteer guiding the horses of Emotion and Desire. The better they work together in this manner, the more races they will win. Principles themselves are simply Reasons, articulated.

To use a different analogy, imagine that your passions, feelings, and desires are keys on a piano. Your principles are the sheet music that tell you which notes to play when. The better your principles, the better the music that you will play. On the other hand, if you play the piano without regard to the sheet music, you are unlikely to produce beautiful music. Similarly, if you succumb to your emotions, passions, and/or desires without regard to your principles, you are unlikely to be successful in life.



Figure 1.2 Piano keys & sheet music analogy

Picture your passions, feelings, and desires as piano keys. Your principles are the sheet music that tell you which notes to play when. Ignoring the sheet music is not a good idea if you want to play beautifully. Similarly, ignoring your principles is not a good idea if you want to be successful in life.

1.3 The Bottom Line: Discipline = Freedom

Author Jocko Willink has this great concept that *Discipline = Freedom*. What this means to me is that operating in a principled manner will help you get what you want. If you truly want to achieve what you want to achieve, then you will need to act in a disciplined, principled manner. By doing this, you are free to achieve anything. On the other hand, if you allow your emotions, desires, and/or passions to control you, then you become a slave to them, and you are not free to achieve what you want to achieve.

In summary, your principles exist to help you get what you want out of life. Operating in a disciplined, principled manner will free you from limitation.

“Self-discipline is a form of freedom. Freedom from laziness and lethargy, freedom from the expectations and demands of others, freedom from weakness and fear and doubt. Self-discipline allows a player to feel her individuality, her inner-strength, her talent. She is master of, rather than a slave to, her thoughts and emotions.” – Sports Psychologist Harvey Dorfman

“In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock.” - Thomas Jefferson

2 What I Want: Meaningful Work & Meaningful Relationships

The first objective of my principles is to help accelerate the process of deciding what I want. Over time, I have realized that the two things that I want are: meaningful work and meaningful relationships.

Meaningful work is work that I feel engaged in, work that I can really get my head into, work that puts me into a “flow” state. Work with others is meaningful when I feel we are all on a mission together.

Meaningful relationships are those in which there is mutual care and respect, those that I feel good about, and those in which each can do something for the other without expecting anything in return. Relationships are meaningful when I feel they will last a lifetime.

How did I decide that I want this? Sigmund Freud gave me a clue when he declared that, “Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.” More to the point said Freud, “Love and work, work and love, that is all there is.” It seems to me that, if Freud is right, and I think he is, then you have a choice: your work and your relationships can either be meaningful or not. It seems to me that it is better for your work and your relationships to be meaningful than for them not to be.

It is important to note that, if forced to choose, I would pick meaningful relationships over meaningful work. In other words, I believe that the relationships I build with others are more important than the material success I may be able to achieve through work. Lonely people who achieve material wealth are miserable. Sociable people who do not achieve material wealth are content. The relationships you build with your teammates are more rewarding than any hardware you win together. It’s not knowledge or wisdom or power, but love that conquers in the end.

“When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the coach will win the relationship game.” –NBA Head Coach Quinn Snyder

3 My Core Values: Truth, Love, & Attention

“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” –Stephen Covey

My three core values are Truth, Love, and Attention. It is through these core values that I plan on achieving meaningful work and meaningful relationships.

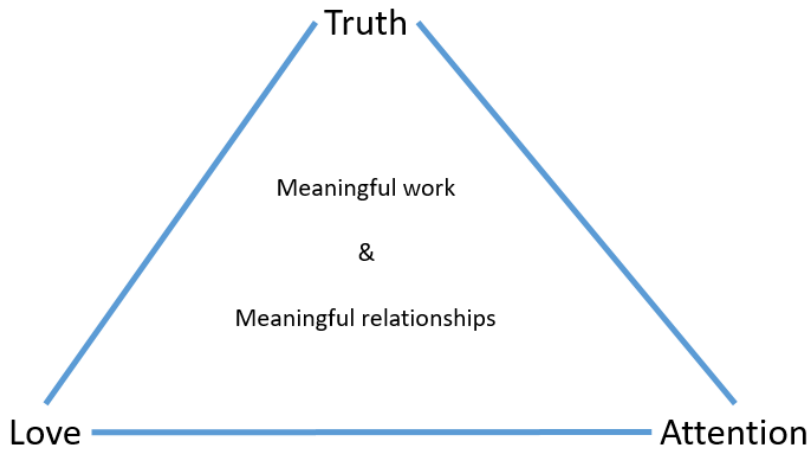


Figure 3.1 My Core Values of Truth, Love, and Attention Will Help Me Achieve Meaningful Work and Meaningful Relationships

What I want are meaningful work and meaningful relationships. In order to get them, I have adopted the core values of Truth, Love, and Attention.

3.1 The Great Truth Proof

First, I need to prove to you that there is such a thing as truth. If there were no such thing as truth then it would be silly to adopt it as a core value.

The most basic proof for truth is that to suggest that there is no such thing as truth would be fundamentally illogical: if I were to propose that “there is no such thing as truth”, on what grounds could I claim that statement to be true? Q.E.D.

In general, things that must be true, sometimes called “First Things”, sometimes called “Axiomatic Laws”, sometimes simply called “the Tao”, are true because they cannot be otherwise - because you cannot refute them without immediately falling into contradiction. Such things are said to be necessarily true, or true by the power of necessity. Truth is my first principle because how could I claim to know anything without first claiming that there is such a thing as truth?

3.1.1 Things That Must Be True

As examples, here are some things that must be true, i.e. things that are true by the power of the necessity. I’m sure there are many more, but these are my favorites:

The first example is time. If one were to suggest that “time does not exist”, one would have to use time to create that statement, and one would rely on the listener spending time to consider that statement. Thus, time must exist - you cannot deny time without immediately falling into contradiction - time is true by the power of necessity.

Another example: one cannot reasonably claim that “I will not tolerate intolerance” because, in making that claim, one is being intolerant! Not tolerating intolerance is intolerant! To suggest that you will not tolerate intolerance is a self-refuting proposition - it is inherently illogical to make that claim. Therefore, it is important to recognize that you must by necessity be intolerant of some things after all.

As I said, I’m sure there are many other examples. The overarching point is this: don’t fall into the trap of thinking that there’s no such thing as truth. That is self-evidently not true!

3.2 Tell the Truth

In verb form, adopting the core value of Truth simply means this: tell the truth. This seems simple enough, but it is actually quite difficult to sustain. It is especially difficult to sustain if you act in ways you are ashamed of. If you are going to tell the truth, you need to act so that you can tell the truth about how you act. If you can do this, you have integrity. Most people say they want to have integrity, but they don’t realize that this is how you actually get it. Telling the truth and acting so that you can tell the truth about how you act is the only way to have integrity.

“I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.” – George Washington

“The truth of things is the chief nutrient of superior intellects.” – Leonardo Da Vinci

“If it is not right, do not do it; if it is not true, do not say it.” – Marcus Aurelius

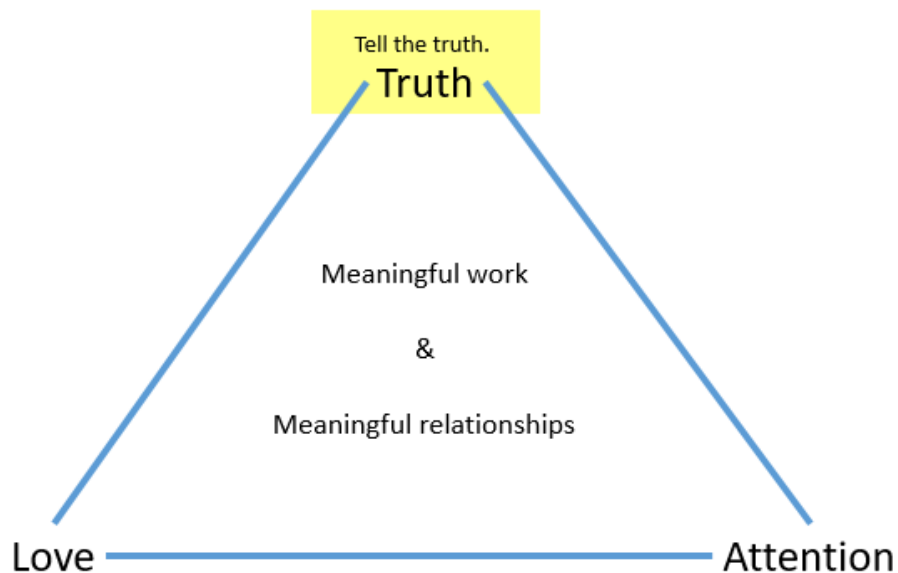


Figure 3.2 Tell the truth.

In other words, don’t lie. This way you are operating with integrity.

3.2.1 Don’t Lie Like Pinnochio

The Disney movie *Pinnochio* contains many great lessons about the importance of being honest. Early on in the story, Pinnochio makes several mistakes, including not going to school, that lead to him being locked in a cage by Stromboli, the evil puppeteer. Just as Pinnochio’s conscience,

Jiminy Cricket, is trying to comfort Pinocchio, a Blue Fairy reappears out of the night sky and comes down to confront Pinocchio about the mistakes he has made. Here is how that scene plays out:

****BEGIN SCENE****

Jiminy Cricket: Oh, buck up, son. It could be worse. Be cheerful... like me! Aw, take it easy son. Come on, blow. Atta boy. Oh well, it stopped raining anyway. Hey, that star again! The lady! The Fairy! (the star shines through the clouds)

Pinocchio: What'll she say? What'll I tell her?

Jiminy Cricket: You might tell her the truth.

Blue Fairy: Why, Pinocchio!

Pinocchio: Uh... hello!

Blue Fairy: Sir Jiminy!

Jiminy Cricket: Well! Excuse me. This is a pleasant surprise! Ha-ha!

Blue Fairy: Pinocchio, why didn't you go to school?

Pinocchio: School? Well I... (hesitates)

Jiminy Cricket: Go ahead, tell her.

Pinocchio: I was going to school 'til I met somebody.

Blue Fairy: Met somebody?

Pinocchio: Yeah. Two big monsters! With big green eyes (his nose begins to grow) Why I...

Blue Fairy: Monsters? Weren't you afraid?

Pinocchio: No ma'am, but they tied me in a big sack.

Blue Fairy: You don't say! (Pinocchio nods) And where was Sir Jiminy?

Pinocchio: Uh? Jiminy?

Jiminy Cricket: Psst. Leave me outta this.

Pinocchio: (the more he embroideries his adventures, the more his nose grows) They put him in a little sack.

Blue Fairy: No!

Pinocchio: Yeah!

Blue Fairy: How did you escape?

Pinocchio: I didn't. They chopped me into firewood! (now his nose is so long it resembles a tree branch with three birds!) Oh, oh! Look! My nose! What's happened?

Blue Fairy: Perhaps you haven't been telling the truth, Pinocchio.

Jiminy Cricket: Perhaps?

Pinocchio: Oh, but I have! Every single word! Oh please help me! I'm awful sorry.

Blue Fairy: You see, Pinocchio, a lie keeps growing and growing until it's as plain as the nose on your face.

Jiminy Cricket: She's right Pinoke, you better come clean.

Pinocchio: I'll never lie again, honest. I won't.

Jiminy Cricket: Please Your Honor, uh, I mean... Miss Fairy. Give him another chance for my sake. Will ya? Huh?

Blue Fairy: I'll forgive you this once, but remember, a boy who won't be good might just as well be made of wood.

Pinocchio & Jiminy Cricket: We'll be good, won't we?

Blue Fairy: Very well, but this is the last time I can help you (she touches the cage with her wand and Pinocchio is free, with his nose back to normal)

Pinocchio: Gee, look, Jiminy! My nose!

Jiminy Cricket: Hey, we're free. Come on, Pinoke.

****END SCENE****

Pinocchio, of course, makes several more mistakes throughout the movie before finally learning his lesson. The takeaway from this scene is crystal clear: don't say things you know aren't true. *A lie keeps growing and growing until it's as plain as the nose on your face.* Telling the truth and coming clean is purifying. Lying and stewing in dishonesty is cancerous. Don't make the same mistake Pinocchio made. Tell the truth and operate with high integrity.



Figure 3.3 Don't lie like Pinocchio.

Telling the truth is the only good option, even and especially when it's after you've made a mistake.

3.2.2 *The truth isn't a set of facts. The truth is an approach to discussion.*

Sometimes, if not oftentimes, you won't know what's true. How could you? After all, nobody knows everything, and most of us know very little indeed.

But living out a core value of truth doesn't mean knowing lots of facts. Instead, living out a core value of truth means having a good-faith commitment to approaching discussions and to

approaching life in a truthful manner. Not lying and approaching things truthfully will lay the foundation for goodness and beauty to flourish.

3.3 Choose Love

In verb form, adopting the core value of Love simply means this: choose love. We cannot always choose what happens to us, but we can always choose how to respond; that is, we can always choose to respond in a loving fashion. This seems simple enough, but it can actually be quite difficult to sustain. It's important to remember that, no matter what happens, we can always choose to respond in a loving way.

There is a story about a married couple who goes to a marriage counselor, and the marriage counselor asks what's wrong with their marriage, and the wife says that what's wrong is that "We don't love each other anymore.", and the marriage counselor simply responds "Do." This marriage counselor knows that love is a choice. We chose to practice love every day through our actions. If you are walking on campus and you pick up a piece of trash on the ground - this is an act of love. If you go out of your way to help carry equipment - this is an act of love. If you put your honest thoughts on the table with each other - this is an act of love.

One more thing about Love: the most important kind of love is "tough love". We can use tough love to get at harsh truths. For example, if Jamie isn't making her free throws because she isn't practicing enough, you should point that out to her. To not point it out would be to rob Jamie of the opportunity to improve. In the final analysis, there is no difference between kindness and accuracy. In this way, truth is the best servant of love.

It's our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities. - Dumbledore

Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams. – Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamozov

"Great love springs from great knowledge of the beloved object, and if you little know it, you will be able to love it only little or not at all." – Leonardo Da Vinci

"Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained." -C.S. Lewis

"...yet see how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when once love comes to bend them." - Herman Melville: Moby Dick

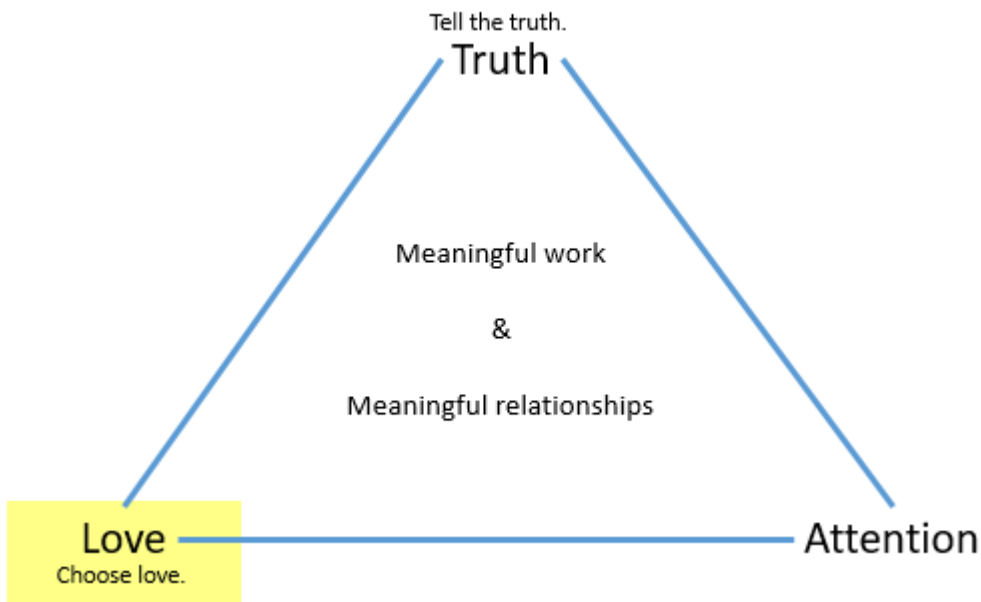


Figure 3.4 Choose love.

We cannot always choose what happens to us, but we can always choose how to respond; that is, we can always choose to respond in a loving fashion.

3.4 Pay Attention

In verb form, adopting the core value of Attention simply means this: pay attention. This seems simple enough, but it is actually quite difficult. Truly paying attention means that you are trying your best to heed what Super Bowl-winning football Coach Tom Coughlin urged his team to do, that is to “Be where your feet are.” Learning to focus your attention is a master skill that has unlimited application. Only by focusing our attention on what’s true can we figure out what to do about it.

You may have noticed on the back of a one-dollar bill the pyramid with the eye at the top. This is the Eye of Providence which sees all things. That the eye is at the top of the pyramid and is surrounded by rays of light is a reminder that attention is primal - that we all need to aspire to pay attention to everything that’s around us. Only by paying attention with truly open eyes will we learn the things we need to learn.

“Truth eludes us if we do not concentrate with total attention on its pursuit.” – Alexander Solzhenitsyn

“There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something... You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after.” –The Hobbit

“If you really want to be a game-changer, become a master observer. Just the willingness to stop and look at things that no one else has even bothered to look at enables game-changers to identify points of meaning. The simple process of focusing on things that are normally taken for granted can be a source of great power and creativity. We learn when we observe. We pick up on clues. We figure things out. That is what preparation is all about.” – Peyton Manning

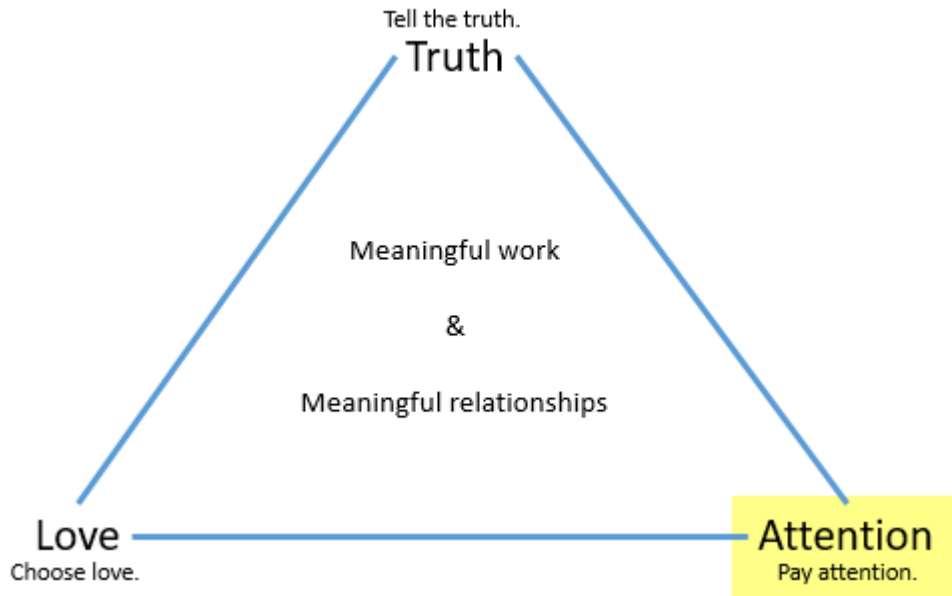


Figure 3.5 Pay attention.

Heed Coach Tom Coughlin’s directive to “Be where your feet are.” You need to pay attention if you are to learn the things you need to learn.

3.5 Truth, Love, & Attention

Tell the truth. Choose love. Pay attention. These are my core values, my most fundamental principles. Notice that they’re all connected. Truth is the best servant of love. The eyes see better when guided by love. Pay attention to learn the truth. Adopting these core values will help me achieve meaningful work and meaningful relationships.

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” - Simone Weil

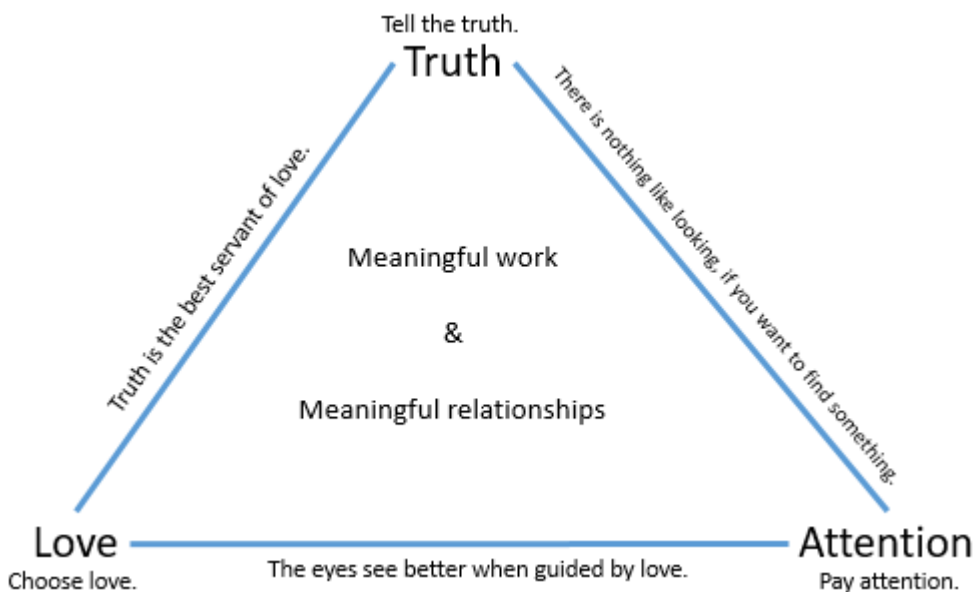


Figure 3.6 Truth, Love, and Attention

Notice that Truth, Love, and Attention are all connected. This unified system of core values will help me achieve meaningful work and meaningful relationships.

3.6 Culture = Destiny

Until now, we have spoken about principles as specific to individuals, i.e. as articulated reasons that people choose for themselves. But in order to get what you want out of life, you're going to have to work well together with other people. By and large, the way people are with each other (i.e. their culture) will determine the quality of their outcomes together.

In order to operate well together, i.e. in order to have a great culture, we need to have shared values and agreed-upon principles. Only if we can hold ourselves and each other accountable to core values and agreed-upon principles will we ever be able to build a great culture.

Of the core values, truth is the most important. The specifics of a great culture might be different on different teams, but all strong cultures are built on people being truthful with each other. Each individual on the team needs to feel that they have not just the right, but the obligation to speak up if they see something wrong. This includes holding both themselves and others to agreed-upon high standards of behavior.

For example, if you were to observe Jamie slacking off in the weight room, how would you handle it? Would you feel obligated to share your observations with Jamie (the healthy thing to do)? Or would you gossip about it behind Jamie's back (the cancerous thing to do)? It's these questions – i.e. how we operate with each other – that will determine our success more than anything. If we want to have a truly excellent destiny, we will need a culture of truth and excellence.

Standards are not rules issued by the boss; they are a collective identity. - Mike Krzyzewski

The secret to basketball is that it's not about basketball. – Bill Simmons

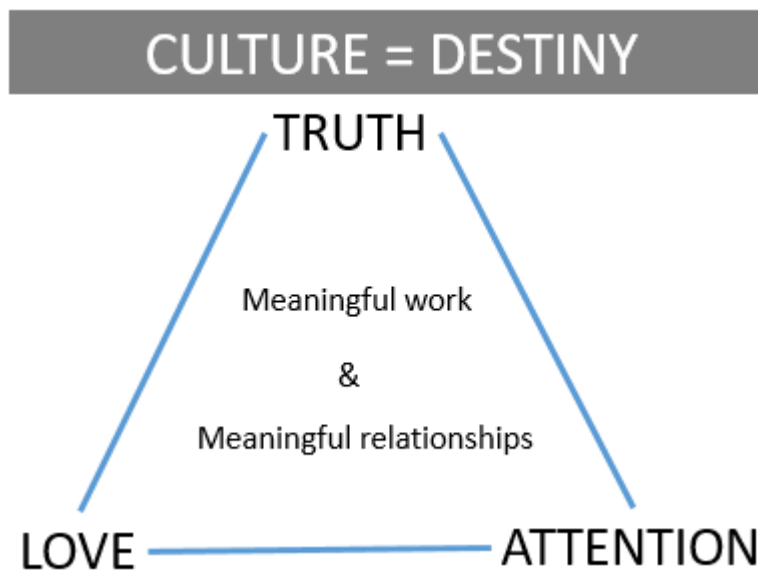


Figure 3.7 Culture = Destiny.

In order to have an excellent destiny, we will need to hold ourselves and each other accountable to our core values of truth, love, and attention.

3.7 The Bottom Line: Think for Yourself

At the end of the day, what I want more than anything is for you to think for yourself. I can't tell you what to do. It is up to you to decide what kind of life you want to have, and what type of team you want to be. Not only do I want you to think for yourself, but I need you to think for yourself. By each of us thinking for ourselves, together we can figure out what's true and what to do about it.

My core belief is that people often choose to keep too great a distance between who they are and who they wish to be, and that is a tragedy. Do you want to have integrity? If yes, tell the truth, and act so that you can tell the truth about how you act. Do you want to be a loving person? If yes, choose the loving response, no matter what happens. Do you want to learn more things? If yes, pay attention. It's that simple. But the choice to act it out is up to you.

“Examine things as they appear to your own mind; objectively consider what is said by others, and then establish your own convictions. Trust nothing and nobody but yourself.” – Epictetus

“Absorb what is useful Discard what is not Add what is uniquely your own.” – Bruce Lee

“Don't just be an echo – find your true voice.” – Dr. Cornel West

“A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it.” – G.K. Chesterton

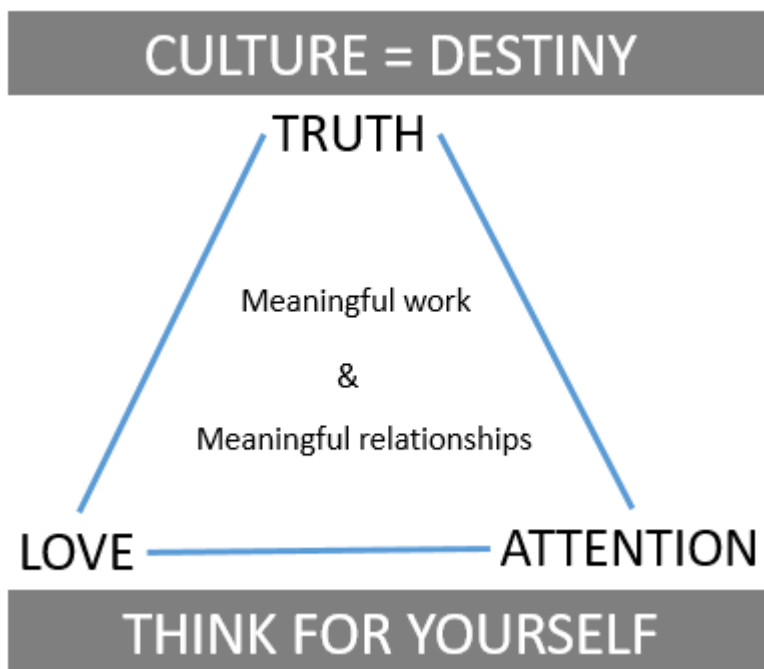


Figure 3.8 Think for Yourself.

No one can tell you what to do. You need to think for yourself.

4 My Biggest Barriers: Ego Barrier & Blind Spot Barrier

By-and-large, people face two major obstacles on their way to achieving what they want to achieve. These are your ego barrier and your blind spot barrier.

4.1 Ego Barrier

Each of us will face situations where we have to choose between doing what's best for ourselves and doing what's best for the team. In every one of those situations, the expectation is that you will do what's best for the team. It's that simple.

Just because it's simple doesn't mean it's easy. If you and Jamie are competing for a starting spot, and Jamie wins the competition, what will your response be? Will you whine and pout (i.e. what's best for your ego)? Or will you "suck it up" and congratulate Jamie while redirecting the negative emotions you may be feeling into working more on your game (i.e. what's best for the team)? Again, the expectation is that, in every one of these situations, you will do what's best for the team.

"Those who only look at themselves do ever radiate nothing." – Far Eastern proverb

"To cherish the ego is to cherish misery." – Alan Watts

"Every person must decide at some point whether they will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness." – Martin Luther King Jr.



Figure 4.1 At a Crossroad

Each of us will face situations where we have to choose between doing what's best for ourselves and doing what's best for the team. In every one of those situations, the expectation is that you will choose what's best for the team. By doing this over and over again, one decision at a time, you are overcoming your ego barrier.

4.2 Blind Spot Barrier

Everyone has blind spots. The gap between what you know now and what you need to know is wide. The gap between the player you are now and the player you could be is wide. You don't yet have all the answers, and you don't yet know what you don't yet know. And what you don't yet know is actually more important than what you already know. This is true for all of us. You should be aiming constantly to close this gap as best you can.

"I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." – Sir Isaac Newton

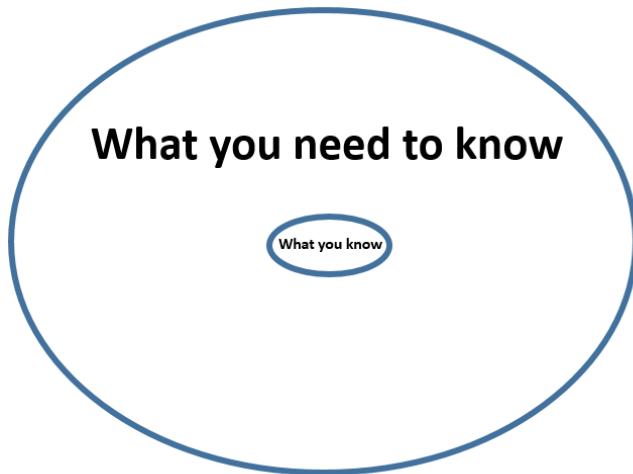


Figure 4.2 Blind Spot Barrier

Each of us has “blind spots”. We each know very little compared to what we need to know. By aiming constantly to close this gap, you are overcoming your blind spot barrier.

WHAT I KNOW

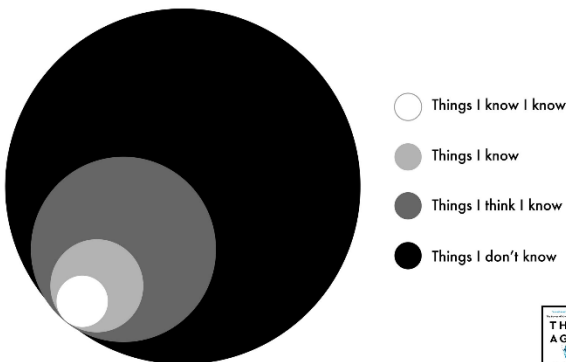


Figure 4.3 What I Know (Adam Grant)

Another way of looking at it is, in combination with your ego barrier, you probably think you know more than you actually know. Knowing that you think you know more than you know lets you know that you have a lot more to know.

4.3 The Bottom Line: Human Fallibility

All humans are fallible. We all make mistakes. None of us have fully vanquished our ego, and none of us knows everything that we need to know. There's no use in lamenting over our fallibility because all humans are fallible, and that's actually a beautiful part about being human. Instead, the best thing to do is try our best to understand our ego barriers and blind-spot barriers so that over time we can reduce these vices and become less fallible.

“There are only two types of people: sinners who think they are saints, and saints who know they are sinners.” – Peter Kreeft

“Each of us is guilty before all and for all.” – Zosima, The Brothers Karamozov

“It is mercy – not justice, or courage, or even heroism – that alone can defeat evil.” – Peter Kreeft

5 My Biggest Weapons: Sacrifice, Humility, Friendship, & Words

Overcoming your ego barrier and blind-spot barrier can be difficult. Luckily, you have four weapons in life that will help you face these barriers. Those four weapons are sacrifice, humility, friendship, and words.

5.1 Sacrifice

Sacrifice is all about foregoing good alternatives for even better alternatives. It takes a very mature person to be able to do this. A couple of examples:

If your principles tell you to work out every morning, and you wake up one morning and you “don’t feel like it”, going back to sleep is a good alternative. But an even better alternative is to get out of bed and work out anyways. If you do this, you would be sacrificing extra sleep for a productive workout.

If your principles tell you to not eat sweets before a basketball game, and your roommate offers you a beautiful-looking chocolate chip cookie before the game, eating that cookie is a good alternative. But an even better alternative is to say “no thanks” and stick to your pre-game diet. If you do this, you would be sacrificing eating a beautiful cookie for more productive play in the game.

A wise person uses experience, knowledge, and good judgment to make necessary sacrifices. Making necessary sacrifices will be paramount if you want to overcome your ego barrier and your blind spot barrier.

“The important thing is this: to be ready at any moment to sacrifice what you are for what you could become.” – Charles Dickens

5.2 Humility

Humility is the recognition that what you know is much less than what you need to know, and that who you are pales in comparison to who you could be. If you have humility, then you will be open-minded and curious about new things you can learn about and improve upon. Operating with this mindset will be crucial if you want to overcome your ego barrier and your blind spot barrier.

A good didactic for this comes from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. When Horacio sees Hamlet’s father’s ghost and he doesn’t know what to believe because he doesn’t believe in ghosts, Hamlet says “Horacio, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophies.” Shakespeare’s point is that our mental model of the world is never complete and there’s always more we could know. Living out a core value of truth means having the humility to know that you don’t know it all and the desire to honestly and forthrightly pursue truth with an open mind.

“Humility is a restraint on the arrogance and infinity of the appetite of man.” – G.K. Chesterton

“Thoroughly conscious ignorance is the prelude to every real advance.” – James Clerk Maxwell

5.3 Friendship

Friendship is the highest value in human life. More than in wisdom or in strength, you can trust in your friends. Having great friends and being a great friend will be paramount if you want to get what you want out of life. A wise ruler cares for justice, but even more for friendship.

“We must recognize that we are more than ‘homo sapiens’. We are ‘homo vinculum’ – the one who bonds with others. And these bonds are what will save us. They always have.” – Dr. Sue Johnson

“Without friendship life is no life at all.” – Cicero

“You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin – to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours – closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo.” – The Lord of the Rings

5.4 Words

True words are as powerful as anything. If you say what you think is true then you can shape a chaotic reality into order. In a sense, that is what I am doing by writing these words: I am articulating myself so that I can clarify for myself and for others what I believe to be true and good. In doing so, I am trying to manifest truth and goodness in the world. This is (hopefully) helping myself and others overcome our egos and lessen our blind spots.

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” – Proverbs 25:11

“If names be not correct then language is not in accordance with the truth of things.” – Confucius

“Words can be like x-rays – if you use them properly, they’ll pierce through anything.” – Aldous Huxley

5.5 The Bottom Line: Human Courage

Courage is required to use any weapon. You will need courage to make the sacrifices you know you should make. You will need courage to have humility and to stay open-minded and curious. You will need courage to make friends and to be a great friend. And you will need courage to use your words and say what you know is true.

The word “courage” comes from the Latin root “cor”, meaning “heart”. It takes heart to choose what’s right over what’s easy. It takes heart to practice your values, not just profess them. It takes heart to choose to be brave over being comfortable. If you say what you know to be true, then you do so with all of your heart.

Don’t forget: courage doesn’t mean that you don’t get afraid about using your weapons; courage means that you don’t let the fear stop you. In other words, even if lower-level you is generating emotions of fear, courage means that upper-level you will feel that fear but decide to use your weapons, anyway.

“Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.” – Sir Winston Churchill

“Fear of failure is the saddest reason on earth not to do what you were meant to do.” – J.K. Rowling

6 Looping

“Anytime something goes wrong, the proper response is to say ‘thank you’.” – Oprah Winfrey

Looping is so important that it gets its own chapter. By “looping”, I mean the process of improving over time. All of us will fail, but what matters most is not that we fail but how we respond to failure. To give you a picture, here is what looping looks like:

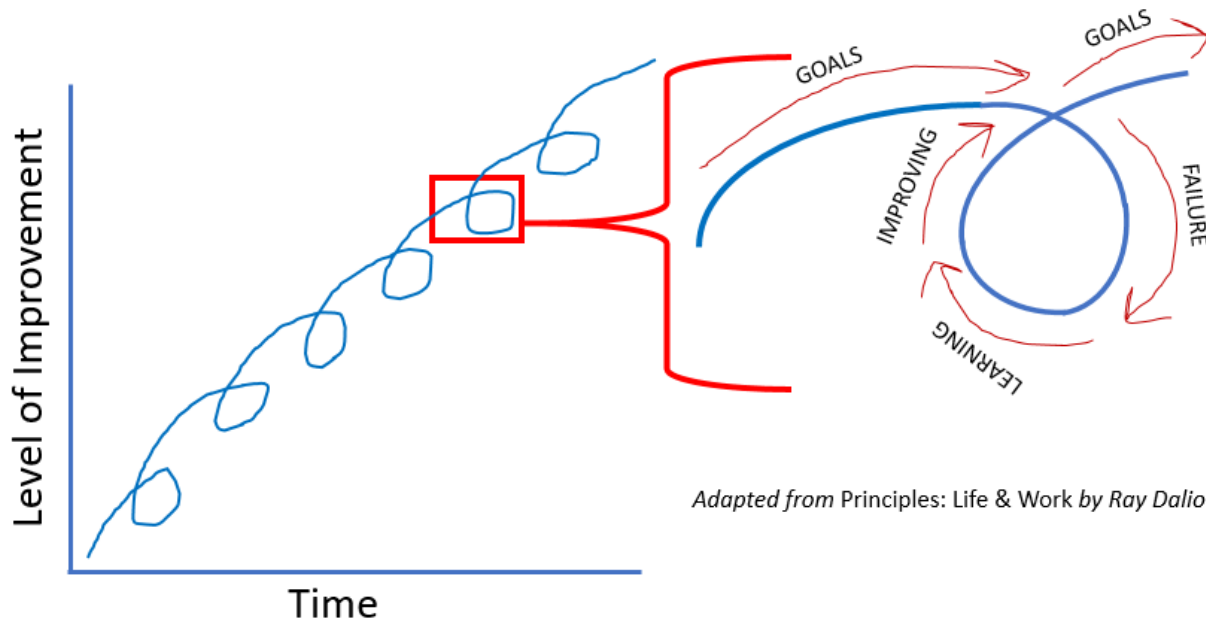


Figure 6.1 Looping

Looping is the process of getting better over time.

As you can see, each loop begins with a goal, then proceeds to failing at that goal, which leads to learning, which leads to improving, which leads to achieving, which leads to a more audacious goal. Notice that you cannot improve over time without failing. That is, failure is a necessary part of the improving process. If you can learn to fail well then you will improve over time. If you cannot cope with failure then you will not improve.

By “coping with failure”, I simply mean reflecting on your failures in an honest way. It’s the old adage that you should “treat every failure as a learning opportunity”. The formula for this is PAIN + REFLECTION = PROGRESS. When you feel the pain of failure, that’s a good thing, because it’s a cue that if you reflect upon the situation, you will improve. What you should not do is avoid pain or ignore pain, because doing so will prevent you from progressing.

Another way of saying this is the old adage of “no pain, no gain”. Just like in the weight room, if you want to get stronger, then you have to push yourself. Some people find this stressful, but it should actually feel quite exhilarating. Working hard is fun because

improving is fun. In every facet of life, if you are not pushing yourself then you are not improving. And if you are not improving then you are missing out on the thrill of failure.

Not only should you fail well, but you should also fail quickly. If you loop quickly, then you will improve quickly. If you loop slowly, then you will improve slowly. Thus, “failing forward fast” is best.

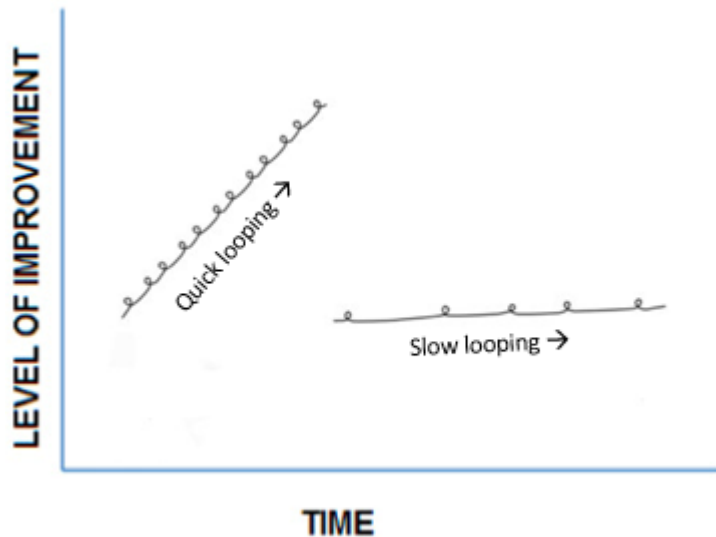


Figure 6.2 Quick Looping vs. Slow Looping

Looping is the process of getting better over time. If you fail early and often, you will learn the lessons you need to learn more quickly than if you drag your feet and avoid the pain of failure.

How quickly you loop is much more important than where your starting point is. Anyone who has studied exponents in math understands this. If you just focus on improving 1% every day then you will soon find that you are in a much better place than where you started, and you are much better off than someone who started out ahead of you but did not improve.

1% BETTER EVERY DAY

1% worse every day for one year. $0.99^{365} = 00.03$

1% better every day for one year. $1.01^{365} = 37.78$

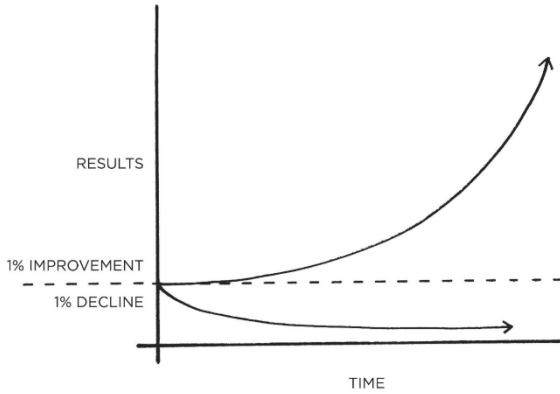


Figure 6.3 1% Better Every Day vs. 1% Worse Every Day

If you improve by 1% every day for a year, then you will be >37x better than where you started. On the other hand, if you get worse by 1% every day for a year, you will end the year almost at 0.

Knowing that looping takes time and effort also gives you an advantage. You need to devote time to reflecting on your mistakes in order to improve. In *Think Again*, psychologist Adam Grant lays out this point exactly:

LEARNING SOMETHING NEW TIMELINE



- Oops I made a mistake
- I should think about my mistake
- Now I can learn from my mistake
- Wow I knew less than I thought



Figure 6.4 Learning Something New Timeline (Adam Grant)

It's important to recognize that looping takes time, and that reflection is a key part of the looping process.

It's important to remember that you can improve at just about anything if you're good at failing. In particular, it's a good idea to improve at wielding your four biggest weapons of sacrifice, humility, friendship, and words. All of us are imperfect at making necessary sacrifices, being humble, making friends, and using our words. That's ok. The important thing is to loop well so that you can get better at wielding these weapons over time. To give you some concrete examples, here is what it would look like for a hypothetical university student, Jamie, to go through the looping process and improve at wielding her weapons of sacrifice, humility, friendship, and words:

6.1.1 Getting Better at Making Necessary Sacrifices

Having been an A student in high school, Jamie arrives at university and is confronted by the harsh reality of earning a D on her first chemistry exam. Rather than whine or pout, she treats this as an important learning opportunity. She starts foregoing some late nights out so that she can wake up earlier to study more. She establishes a habit of waking up at 7 am every morning to review her chemistry notes before her first class. After making this sacrifice over and over again, her chemistry grades improve. More importantly, Jamie learns a valuable lesson that she will have to make necessary sacrifices if she is truly going to get what she wants. In this scenario, her sacrificing late nights out for earlier morning studying helped her reach her goal of getting better chemistry exam scores. In the future, Jamie will be better at identifying and making the necessary sacrifices to get whatever it is that she wants.

6.1.2 Becoming More Humble

Having been a primary scorer on her high school basketball team, Jamie arrives at her university team and is confronted by the harsh reality that she is not scoring as many points in practice as she did in high school. Rather than being prideful and hubristic that "the team's style of play doesn't fit her game" or "she's not getting the same referee calls that I used to", Jamie comes to the harsh realization that she's not as good a player as she thought she was, and that she has a lot she can improve on. Realizing this, Jamie sets out to improve her game. She asks her coaches and teammates about ways she can improve. She searches on Youtube and reads books about how to become a better player. She gets in the gym and works hard both at improving her weaknesses and her strengths. Over time, she becomes a better player and is able to score more points in games. What's even more important is that not only has her basketball game improved, but she has adopted a humbler mindset, and she goes about in all spheres of her life humbly trying to improve and learn new things.

6.1.3 Becoming a Better Friend

Having had a couple of very close friends in high school, Jamie arrives at university and realizes that she needs to make some new friends. At first, she's not great at making friends. She is confronted by the harsh reality that she may not be as caring or as funny as she thought she was. Soon enough, Jamie summons the courage to start taking more risks and reaching out to her classmates. By taking these risks, Jamie becomes better at connecting with others, at going out of her way for others, and at creating inside jokes with others. This leads to Jamie acquiring new friends. Upon acquiring new friends, Jamie feels better-supported in her new environment, and she finds more joy in taking risks and sharing experiences with others. Not only will these friends be invaluable over the course of her lifetime, but this experience has given her the tools that she needs to make more new friends as she moves forward in life.

6.1.4 *Getting Better at Using Words*

Having had a pretty easy go of it in high school, Jamie is confronted by many difficulties when she reaches university. Rather than let those difficulties simmer and turn into bigger problems, Jamie confronts her fear of talking to people and decides to actually use her words to articulate what she's feeling so that she can figure out what's true and what to do about it. Not only does her vocabulary improve, but her propensity to use her words becomes greater and greater. She realizes that speaking true words is a great way and perhaps the only way to solve problems. Not only does this skill help her solve problems in university, but it will help her solve problems throughout her lifetime.

Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better. – Pat Riley

If there is no struggle there is no progress. – Frederick Douglas

If you're not making mistakes, then you're not doing anything. – John Wooden

Man needs difficulties, they are necessary for health. – Carl Jung

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor. – Henry David Thoreau

The only sustainable competitive advantage is the ability to learn faster than competitors. - Arie de Geus

After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. – Nelson Mandela

7 Principles

Until now, we have talked in relatively abstract terms about principles, core values, barriers, weapons, and looping. In this chapter, it's time to get concrete. Articulated in this chapter are my actual, numbered principles. In other words, the prior chapters were about “how to be a good cook” and this chapter contains the recipes themselves. Again, these principles are simply ways of dealing with reality so that I can get what I want out of life. Over time, hopefully, I will discover new principles through successful encounters with novel problems or through the wisdom of others.

7.1 Set clear, ambitious goals.

When setting goals, be specific and set a “high bar”. As Nietzsche said, “He whose life has a why can bear almost any how.” On the flip-side, when you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there. Only once you know what your goals are can you build a process to achieve them.

Nietzsche once observed that laziness is the root cause of the failure of a human being to find his authentic self; by setting ambitious goals and sticking to them we can conquer this innate laziness. Know that achieving ambitious goals is not easy - if it were, then everyone would do it; but wisdom is the ability to reject good alternatives to pursue even better ones - laziness might be tempting in the short run, but in the long run setting clear, ambitious goals will lead to a better, more fulfilling life.

“A ship in port is safe, but that's not what ships are built for.” – Grace Hopper

“The biggest risk you can take is not taking any risk.” – Peter Thiel

“I saw the angel in the marble and I kept carving until I set it free.” – Michelangelo

7.2 Value the process over the goal.

As Tom Landry, Super Bowl-winning football coach, put it: “setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with the plan.” In other words, you should focus your attention on building and refining what Nick Saban calls with capital letters “The Process”. Aim for paradise, but concentrate on today. The system is the solution.

It’s important to recognize that reaching the goal itself may not be as valuable as the experience that comes in making the supreme effort to achieve that goal. That is, the process may be even more rewarding than the victory. The journey matters more than the destination.

“Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.” – Zen proverb

“You are the same person on the mountaintop as you are on the trail.” – Unknown

“The biggest thing that has changed for me — and you might be shocked when I say this — is that I’ve actually become, through the years and through the experiences, a lot less outcome-oriented and a lot more process-oriented. I think that approach carries over to the players because then they become less outcome-oriented, and they’re more focused on process, they’re more focused on one play at a time.” - Nick Saban

7.3 Build a basketball meritocracy.

The best basketball wins. Period. The goal is to build a program where the best basketball gets put on the floor. This means that other considerations such as seniority and favoritism will not come into play. Everything will be based on basketball merit.

7.4 Recognize that playing well is more important than winning.

In a basketball meritocracy, winning is important, but playing well is even more important. You cannot always tell the quality of the play from the outcome of the game. You could win a game and play poorly, or you could lose a game and play well. What matters most is that you play as well as you can, and you try to improve your play over time.

“Curiosity is a bigger motivator than results.” – Elwyn Berlekamp

7.5 Get over yourself.

Gregg Popovich calls it “the cancer of me”. Players and coaches get caught caring more about themselves than caring about the team’s success.

It’s critical to understand that it doesn’t matter where the best basketball comes from. As a coach, it doesn’t matter if the janitor comes up with the idea - if it’s a good idea, then we should use it. As discussed in previous chapters, there will always be times when we have to decide between doing what’s best for ourselves and doing what’s best for the team. In every one of those situations, you should do what’s best for the team.

A candle does not lose any of its brightness by lighting other candles. If you give yourself to others then you will find the best of yourself.

7.6 Operate with a “Growth Mindset”.

As discussed previously, everyone has blind spots. What matters most is not that you have blind spots but how quickly you are able to cure them. To cure them quickly, you will need to operate with what psychologist Carol Dweck calls a “growth mindset”. As Professor Dweck explains, “In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.” Said differently, if you are humble enough to understand that there is a lot you still need to learn, then you will grow and develop quickly and progress towards achieving your goals.

Growth mindsets are required of students but also of teachers. Great teaching doesn’t just communicate facts – they ignite curiosity. On the one hand, students must learn facts because the eyes cannot see what the mind does not know. On the other hand, students must know that there is always more left to know. Striking this balance is paramount for good teaching.

In getting over yourself, you overcome your pride. In operating with a growth mindset, you develop your humility. Pride makes us artificial; humility makes us real.

7.7 Be a culture carrier.

A great culture carrier will loop quickly towards developing their weapons of sacrifice, humility, friendship, and words, not only so that they can overcome their own ego barrier and blind-spot barrier, but also so that they are serving as a role model for others to do the same. Specifically, as it relates to words, a culture carrier will take responsibility for maintaining a culture of excellence by fighting for it, which includes speaking up and holding others accountable for speaking up when something looks bad. If you ignore a situation that needs correcting, then you establish that as your standard.

“The single most important ingredient once you get the talent is internal leadership. It’s not the coaches as much as one single person or people on the team who set higher standards than the team would normally set for itself.” – Coach Mike Krzyzewski

“Champions behave like champions before they’re champions: they have a winning standard of performance before they are winners.” – Bill Walsh

“He who does not punish evil commands that it be done.” – Leonardo Da Vinci

7.8 Play the game as if you have something to learn.

Personally, I admit that I didn’t always play the game as if I had something to learn. I used to carry myself as if I already knew everything, and learning something new was almost accidental rather than something to be sought and cherished. This was a bad, fixed mindset.

Luckily, I discovered that every day the world has something to teach us if we only pay attention. In Roald Dahl’s last book, *The Minpins*, he writes “And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don’t believe in magic will never find it.” Pay attention and you will learn many lessons you never even knew were there.

An example: when I moved into a new apartment in NYC, I had to figure out the quickest route to walk to work. Naturally, I turned to Google Maps and took the route it suggested. But rather than walk to work as if I already knew everything I needed to know, I walked to work with the

sense in the back of my mind that I still had something to learn. One day, I noticed something: there was a passageway I could take that shaved a full minute off my commute time. This may sound banal to you, but to me it was magical - I opened my eyes to the world, and I learned something new that would benefit me every day I made that commute.

If you play the game as if you have something to learn, you will learn the lessons you need to learn. If you play the game as if you have something to learn, you will be shocked at how fast you can improve.

“In order for real learning to happen we need to let a little forgetting happen.” – Elizabeth Bjork

7.9 Be authentic and suffer no fools.

Part of having integrity is being authentic with the people you meet. Some people, when you meet them, have a stench of inauthenticity. Usually, these people are a bit full of themselves and lack genuine humility. Don't be one of those people. Have humility and be real with people. Then see through the inauthenticity of others.

“For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourself are wise.” – Paul the Apostle

7.10 Enter the Stretch Zone.

The organization Outward Bound has a concept that is helpful in thinking about the optimal pace of personal evolution: they speak of a Comfort Zone, a Stretch Zone, and a Panic Zone. It's best to spend most of your time in the Stretch Zone - this is where learning takes place. When you are talking to a baby that is learning how to speak, you speak to them at a level above their current competency. By using words that they don't yet understand, you are putting them in the Stretch Zone and creating the conditions for them to improve. Re-discover your inner-child and enter the Stretch Zone.

“You get nowhere until you get uncomfortable.” – Sean Bartram

7.11 Recognize that Pain + Reflection = Progress.

As discussed previously, “no pain, no gain”. If you leave the weight room after a lift and your muscles are not tired, then you probably didn't get stronger. If you do a workout and you did not sweat, you probably didn't improve. Chase after pain, reflect on your pain, and you will improve. The Navy Seals call this “embracing the suck”. If you are not feeling any pain then you are probably not improving. Don't quit while you are in the Valley of Disappointment (see below).

THE PLATEAU OF LATENT POTENTIAL

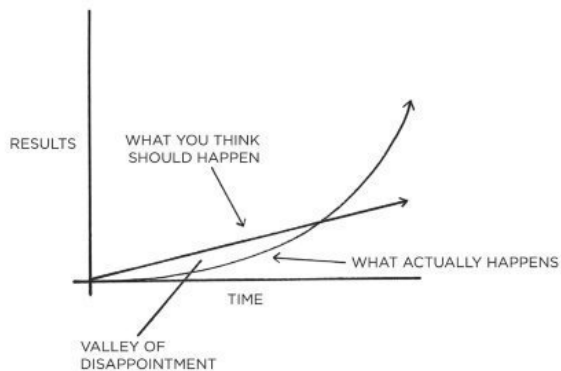


Figure 7.1 The Plateau of Latent Potential

Most people think that improvement should be linear. When they find they are not improving in a linear fashion, they quit in what's referred to as the "Valley of Disappointment". If they have the fortitude and courage to stick with it, they make it out of the valley and improve faster than they ever expected to.

The years teach much the days never know. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

7.12 Have patience and push through to results.

You have to have patience and push through to results. As the best player on a basketball team, it can be extremely frustrating when your teammates do not demonstrate an equal desire as you to win, or when their play is not as good as you hoped it would be. As these frustrations bubble up, it's important that you stay patient and take the long view. Getting caught up in the frustrations of any one moment is short-sighted and counterproductive, whereas understanding the bigger picture can give you a healthier sense of what might be wrong and how you can improve things.

Another good example of this is practicing skills. Too often, novices won't believe they can learn a particular skill, and they succumb to the tendency to stick with what they know. It's important for such novices to realize that sometimes you have to practice things *before* you believe in them. If you practice and practice and push through to results, you'll end up with a trusted skill you never thought you could acquire.



Figure 7.2 What Success Really Looks Like

Most people think that success is a straight line. In fact, success can often look zig-zagged and clumsy. If you can maintain your patience and push through to results, you will eventually succeed.

“We certainly had our rocky times, but we still stuck to it, we figured out our way through it and came out better because of it. I think the most important thing is sticking to it, being patient. Sometimes things work out. Sometimes they don’t.” - Kobe Bryant

“‘Go back?’ he thought. ‘No good at all! Go sideways? Impossible! Go forward? Only thing to do! On we go!’” – The Hobbit

“Time and patience are the strongest warriors.” – Leo Tolstoy

“Perseverance and spirit have done wonders in all ages.” – George Washington

“Good luck is another name for tenacity of purpose.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Nothing will work unless you do.” – Maya Angelou

7.13 Never succumb to the temptation of bitterness.

“However bad life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at... While there’s life, there is hope.” – Stephen Hawking



Figure 7.3 There is Always Hope by: Banksy

The principle of never succumbing to the temptation of bitterness (which is a Martin Luther King Jr. quote) is well-encapsulated by this Banksy street art.

7.14 Know that there is a relentless clarity at the heart of work.

Every basketball coach will tell you to “work hard”, but not every player knows what hard work actually is. My conviction is that there is a relentless clarity at the heart of work. If you’re working hard, you’ll know it. Your entire body and focus will be engaged, and you’ll be pushing yourself as hard as you can go, there won’t be any “slack in the rope”. If you have reached this relentless clarity then you are engaged in meaningful work. If you have reached this relentless clarity then keep practicing until you can’t get it wrong.

“The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.” – Robert Frost

“You don’t exist, only the task exists.” – Mike Tyson

7.15 Recognize that More Skill = More Fun.

When you’re just learning a skill, it can often be extraordinarily frustrating. For example, every novice piano player has many-a-time banged on the keyboard out of frustration of not improving at a skill quickly enough. This frustration is known to all novice learners of any skill.

It’s only by working through this frustration that you can get to the fun part of being able to use the skill. Tennis is more fun when you’re good at tennis. Golf is more fun when you’re good at golf. Piano-playing is more fun when you’re good at piano. Nothing is fun until you’re good at it.

7.16 Be courageous enough to step into the arena.

It is important to remember that “you cannot learn to ski by reading a book”. You need to strap on the skis and head down the mountain. The Theodore Roosevelt quote comes to mind: “It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man in the arena...”

Again, courage does not mean that you don’t get afraid; courage means that you don’t let fear stop you. Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to annihilation can that which is indestructible be found within us.

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” – Martin Luther King Jr.

“God will not have his work made manifest by cowards.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Life is like a narrow bridge that must be crossed without fear. – Talmudic expression

“We find our voice through experimentation.” – Rick Rubin

“La critique est aisée et l'art est difficile [criticism is easy and art is difficult].” - Destouches, 1732

7.17 Focus on what you can control.

Common anger management advice: you cannot always control the things that happen to you, but you can always control how you react to them. Worrying about things you cannot control is a waste of time and energy. Since you have a limited amount of time and energy, better to use it only on things within your control.

One common mistake is to compare yourself to others when such comparisons aren't helpful. You should compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today. Comparison can be the thief of joy - don't let it be. For example, if you can bench press 100 pounds, work on improving to 110 pounds; don't worry if a teammate can already bench press 200 pounds. If you focus on improving yourself 1% every day you will progress tremendously.

Similarly, in basketball, it is important that you play the game “one possession at a time”. If you are able to wipe out all other distractions and focus on winning each and every possession, then you will be satisfied with the result. If you waste time thinking about anything else other than the possession that is before you, you will stall out.

7.18 Fail well.

As discussed, human beings are fallible creatures. Human beings make mistakes. This is true of everyone. It's important to recognize that we will all make mistakes. My goal is to create a culture where it is okay to make mistakes, but it is unacceptable not to learn from those mistakes.

It is silly not to love your mistakes. Real success means going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm. As Freud put it, “From error to error one discovers the entire truth.” By failing well, you will succeed.

7.19 Self-assess, don't self-obsess.

Perfectionists spend too much time on little differences at the margins at the expense of the important things. The 80/20 rule states that you'll get 80% of the value out of 20% of the information or effort, and that you'll spend 80% of your time getting the final 20% of value. Understanding this rule saves you from getting bogged down in unnecessary detail once you've gotten most of the learning you need to make a good decision.

“Nothing is as good or as bad as it seems.” – Dr. Scott Galloway

7.20 Anticipate problems early.

There is a skill called “visualization” where people are able to anticipate problems ahead of time and mitigate them before they happen. Rather than hoping things go well, you should go in

expecting problems. Understand that you are going to fail and try as best you can to avoid mistakes before they happen.

“The general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple before the battle is fought.” – Sun Tzu

7.21 Turn complaints into insights.

Don't be a complainer or a whiner. The thing that you're complaining or whining about is just pain you're feeling related to a problem that is solvable and should be dealt with. Diagnose why the outcome isn't what you want and how you can fix it. If you operate with this mindset, you will treat pain as an opportunity to reflect and generate insight rather than to reflexively complain about it.

“Be a force of fortune instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.” – George Bernard Shaw

7.22 Be a shaper, not a chirper.

Once you identify what needs to be done, then you have to go and do it rather than just complain about it. Ray Dalio likes to make the distinction between a “shaper” and a “chirper”. A shaper is someone who comes up with unique and valuable visions and builds them out beautifully (typically over the doubts and opposition of others). Shapers are people who can go from visualization to actualization. A chirper, on the other hand, is someone who repeats stale ideas and complains about things without the practical thinking and determination to implement any solutions.

Chirpers waste others' time. Shapers are the greatest among us.

Well done is better than well said. – Benjamin Franklin

7.23 Be accountable and own up to your mistakes.

Sometimes we try to hide our mistakes to “save face”. It's okay to make mistakes, but it's not okay not to own up to them. It's important to remember that what's done in the dark will come out in the light. An accountable person will front-run the embarrassment of her mistakes by owning up to them ahead of time.

7.24 Constantly get in sync.

Getting in sync with each other is the best way to invest your time. Everyone needs to be “on the same page”, otherwise there is no point in moving forward because you may be moving in different directions. Constantly get in sync with each other. That means that the players on the court need to stay in sync with what the coaches want and expect. To this end, hearing is not a substitute for listening. You need to truly listen to each other so that everyone to row the boat in the same direction.

7.25 Put your honest thoughts on the table.

It is a basic principle of justice that a person has a right to face their accuser. If you have integrity, you will be willing to say what you honestly believe. Let's put all our honest thoughts on the table so that we can figure out what's true and what to do about it. After all, we just want to get to the right answer - it doesn't matter where that answer comes from.

As a coach, this means that you need to be honest with your players. There is no worse course in leadership than to hold out false hopes soon to be swept away. Holding out false hopes will damage your credibility.

As a player, it's important to remember that no one has the right to hold a critical opinion without sharing it. By not sharing a critical opinion you are robbing the team of a chance to improve, and you are robbing yourself the opportunity to figure out whether or not your opinion is true.

"Unexpressed negative emotions never die." – Chris Voss

"The truth always works." – Becky Hammon

7.26 Avoid trial by gossip.

I really can't emphasize this point enough, because I see it over and over again. When we aren't willing to put our honest thoughts on the table, it leads to "trial by gossip". One player or a group of players may gossip in the cafeteria about something they think the coach did wrong that day. Rather than bring this up with the coach, they continue to gossip about it and the problem grows. This leads to a "house divided" that cannot stand. This type of trial by gossip is a cancer and needs to be eradicated. Have integrity and put your honest thoughts on the table - this type of transparency will allow us to figure out what's true together.

Never say anything about someone that you wouldn't say to them directly, and don't try people without accusing them to their face. That's how an honest person operates.

"Talk to, not about." – Anthony Mason

7.27 Before you shoot the arrow of truth, dip it in honey.

If you are going to put your honest thoughts on the table, you may speak harsh words. That's ok, but over time I've learned it's best to "dip the arrow of truth in honey" before you shoot it. That is, you can provide important, softening context to a harsh truth and still get your message across.

For example, you might say, "I know you may not want to hear this, but I think you were being arrogant just then." That sounds a lot nicer than saying bluntly, "I think you were being arrogant just then."

The point is that you still want to deliver the truth, but you want to do so in such a way that it will be well-received by the listener.

7.28 Understand that stories are sticky.

People get attached to stories. There's nothing like a good story. You could make the most logical argument possible, but that won't resonate like a good story will. If you can couch your point in a good story, then that will be the most effective way to communicate it.

It's very difficult to put forward a message without being propagandistic. The best way to do that is through stories.

"No one ever made a decision because of a number. They need a story." – Daniel Kahneman

"Man will become better when you show him what he is like." – notebook of Anton Chekhov, 1921

7.29 Value content over style.

By the same token, what someone says is more important than how they say it. Everyone has a particular style (harsh or subdued, verbose or terse), but that style usually has no bearing on the truth of what they're saying. It's important to see past their style and just evaluate the merit of their arguments.

7.30 Practice the art of thoughtful disagreement.

When you are willing to put your honest thoughts on the table, disagreements are going to arise. This is a good thing because this gives us the opportunity to figure out what's true and what's not true.

Thoughtfully disagreeing with someone means that you're arguing as if you're right, but listening as if you're wrong. There are tricks to doing this, such as repeating back to a person what they have said, or invoking the "two-minute rule" where one party has the right to speak uninterrupted for two minutes.

If we want to operate in a culture of truth and excellence, it is critical that we are able to disagree without being disagreeable.

7.31 Triangulate early and often.

When you are having a disagreement with someone, it is a great idea to "triangulate" your disagreement with another, believable person. Getting a mutually agreed-upon "independent opinion" on the issue is very often a helpful trick to resolving any disagreement. In an ideal world, you would just call on two or three of the world's leading experts in solving that particular problem to see how they would deal with it. For example, when I injured my shoulder in baseball, rather than go to one doctor and just blindly heed his advice, I went to three different doctors and had them talk to each other and disagree with each other to find the best solution as to what to do about my shoulder. This type of triangulation will very often lead to the best outcome.

7.32 Recognize that minority opinions improve decisions even when they are wrong.

We should not disparage minority opinions, we should celebrate them! Minority opinions improve decision-making even when they are wrong!

I believe what George Washington said: "When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly." Today's psychologists sometimes refer to this as groupthink, when an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome results from a group's desire for harmony or conformity. Luckily, disagreement is the antidote to groupthink! For goodness sake, share your minority opinion - it will make us better!

7.33 Be willing to admit when you are wrong.

Marcus Aurelius said "If anyone can refute me...I'll gladly change. It's the truth I'm after, and the truth never harmed anyone. What harms us is to persist in self-deceit and ignorance." When we thoughtfully disagree with each other, we have to be willing to admit when we're wrong. A tree that does not bend will break.

“All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong and repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.” - Sophocles

7.34 Understand that all those who weaponize guilt will live to regret it.

When someone admits that they’re wrong, or if someone is found to be guilty of something, you never want to weaponize that guilt or hold it against them. Being found guilty is bad enough – to weaponize that guilt is an unnecessary pile-on that you will live to regret.

“It is useless to meet revenge with revenge. It will heal nothing.” – Frodo, Lord of the Rings

7.35 Use believability-weighted decision-making.

Some companies work autocratically - the boss may ask her employees for advice, but she ultimately makes the decision. Some companies work democratically - everybody gets one vote, and the most votes wins. Neither of these will lead to the best outcome. Instead, time permitting, people’s opinions should be weighted by their believability, i.e., by how credible they are at dealing with that particular type of problem. For example, if in a room full of professors a question arose about Ancient Greece, then all the professors would have the right to weigh-in, but the professors with Ph.D.’s in Classics would have their opinions weighted most highly. This means that the majority may not always be right. This means that the boss may have to implement a decision that she disagrees with. But this is also the most logical way to make decisions as a group - everyone’s believability should be weighted. On a basketball team, it means that a freshman’s opinion may be weighted less than a senior’s. As the freshman builds up credibility over time, their opinion will become more believable.

Believability-weighted decision-making can be used in other beneficial ways, too. Let’s say that you set a screen and are called for an offensive foul. You become furious because you feel strongly that it was a legal screen. Rather than becoming emotional about it and thinking “I’m right”, ask yourself “how do I know I’m right?” Do your teammates think it was a foul? Do your coaches think it was a foul? If they do, it was probably a foul.

Remember: wisdom is the ability to see both sides of the story and weigh them appropriately. By practicing believability-weighted decision-making, you are bringing yourself closer to the truth.

“None of us is as smart as all of us.” –Kenneth H. Blanchard

7.36 Don’t confuse your right to have an opinion with a right to make decisions.

Everyone has the right to an opinion, but at the same time, everyone needs to accept the outcomes of the agreed-upon decision-making process. If everyone were just allowed to do what they think is best, without regard to the agreed-upon decision-making process, there would be anarchy. Anarchy is not a path to achieving excellent outcomes. In order to avoid anarchy, you need to accept the verdict even if you don’t agree with it.

7.37 Be evidence-based.

Evidence is the key element in determining guilt or innocence in a court of law. Regrettably, most people do not look thoughtfully at the facts and draw their conclusions by objectively weighing the evidence. Instead, they make their decisions based on what their lower-level them wants and then they filter the evidence to make it consistent with those desires. If you want to

stay “above the line”, you need to remain equanimous by de-coupling your ego from your beliefs. Collect the evidence, weigh the evidence, and make your decisions based on the evidence. This is the best way to make decisions.

7.38 When possible, use measurements to track your progress.

Part of articulating your problems is creating metrics that help you define success. For example, if one of your problems is that you are out of shape, rather than generalizing and saying “I am out of shape”, be more specific and include a measurement, something like “I want to get my mile time below 7 minutes” or “I want to weigh less than 200 pounds”. This will allow you and others to track your progress against your goal. “What gets measured gets managed.”

7.39 Don’t play favorites.

If you assign someone a high believability in a certain area, it shouldn’t be because they are your favorite, it should be because they are credible. Human beings are social animals and naturally try to build coalitions with each other to improve their status. Don’t let your loyalty to a particular person influence how you weigh their opinions. It’s best to think of yourself as a doctor diagnosing the problem - evaluate the symptoms scientifically and try to arrive at the best answer. Personal loyalties should not come into play.

7.40 Know when it’s ok not to have an opinion.

Sometimes your credibility on a particular issue is so low that it’s best not to have an opinion. In these situations, it’s probably best just to listen and learn - let others who are more credible make the decision.

7.41 Recognize when it is ok to agree to disagree.

You are not going to be able to resolve every disagreement. When the cost of the effort you are spending trying to resolve a disagreement is exceeding the benefit you will get from resolving that disagreement, it’s time to agree to disagree.

Remember: if you are using believability-weighted decision-making, you are not always going to be happy with the outcome. But it is important to honor the result of the believability-weighted decision, else the whole decision-making scheme will fall apart. It would be illogical just to “cherry-pick” the believability-weighted decisions you agree with, but to make autocratic decisions when the believability-weighted decision is not the one you favor.

Everyone needs to agree that the standards for resolving our disagreements are fair, otherwise, nothing will get solved. If you are at an impasse, it may be okay to agree to disagree - move on and come back to it later.

“When I disagree with a rational man, I let reality be our final arbiter; if I am right, he will learn; if I am wrong, I will; one of us will win, but both will profit.” – Ayn Rand

7.42 Don’t put off making critical decisions.

Sometimes it’s ok to agree to disagree; other times, it isn’t. Martin Luther King Jr. once lamented that “‘wait’ almost always means ‘never’”, that justice too long delayed is justice denied. You have to have the courage to confront difficult problems.

As an example, in some situations, you will not have enough time to make a high-quality decision. It is said that a basketball coach makes more decisions during the course of a game than

a fighter pilot would make in the air. Not all of those decisions are going to be perfect, but the worst thing would be to become crippled by indecision.

In general, you will want to delay decisions as much as possible until you have as much information as possible. But a wise person will understand when she needs to make the decisions that need to be made.

7.43 Use the “U.S. Army After-Action Review” to diagnose bad outcomes.

Sometimes you will have bad outcomes. That’s okay. Use these bad outcomes as an opportunity to improve. An after-action review (AAR) is a structured review or de-brief process for analyzing what happened, why it happened, and how it can be done better in the future.

In conducting this review, be specific - describe who was responsible and why. An honest AAR will lead to better decision-making in the future; a dishonest AAR is a waste of time.

7.44 Recognize that, by and large, if it’s mentionable, it’s manageable.

People often become overwhelmed with their problems because they either choose not to or are unable to articulate them. For example, small children tend to cry out of frustration if they are not getting what they want but are unable to articulate why or how. This is why it’s important to articulate problems that arrive with careful, precise speech.

One trick I use is to write my problems down. I find that the act of writing helps me clarify my thinking. Rick Rubin, the legendary music producer, advises artists that “you don’t know what the story is until you write it.” If you can articulate your problem(s) then usually you can build a machine to get around them.

Whenever you are fed up with life, start writing: ink is the great cure for all human ills, as I have found out long ago.” – C.S. Lewis

“A problem well-put is half-solved.” – John Dewey

7.45 Believe that any obstacle yields to stern resolve.

Human beings are stronger than the greatest challenge that can be put before them. Don’t tolerate unacceptable problems. In life, you can have anything, you just can’t have everything.

7.46 Build a machine to get around your problems.

Your machine is the people, processes, and tools you use to achieve your outcomes. If a bad outcome arises, you can usually get around it by adjusting your machine.

As an example, let’s say that you are constantly misplacing your car keys. This is a bad outcome because nobody likes wasting time searching for their car keys. Once you articulate that this is a problem, you can build a machine to work around it. You may decide to buy a small key basket and put your keys inside the basket every time you walk through the door. The investment you make in the basket may be worth the time it will save you searching for keys.

Observe that this extremely simple machine involves people (you), a process (putting your keys in the basket every time you walk through the door), and a tool (the basket itself). If your machine is not producing the outcomes, you want then usually one, two, or all three of these things need to be changed.

“Average leaders have quotes. Good leaders have a plan. Exceptional leaders have a system.” – Urban Meyer

7.47 Get the people right.

The most important part of your machine is the people. PEOPLE + CULTURE = RESULTS. What you’re doing matters less than who you’re doing it with.

“The largest pool of capital is human.” – Gary Becker

7.48 Understand the difference between not managing, managing, and micromanaging.

Not managing is rolling the balls out and saying “good luck”. Micromanaging is focusing too much on the minutiae of the tasks, and not focusing enough on the people doing the tasks. Managing is focusing on the people while keeping the tasks they are assigned to do in your peripheral vision. It is crucial to strike this balance well.

The tighter you grip the bike the harder it is to balance.

Plans must be simple and flexible.

7.49 Understand the difference between role definition, role acceptance, and role enthusiasm.

On a team, it’s important that people’s roles be defined and they everybody is on the same page as to what their roles are. However, what’s even more important is that people are enthusiastic about their roles. You don’t want anyone to be bitter or resentful about the role they’re playing. Everyone’s role is critical to the team success; that doesn’t mean everyone has the same role. Everyone’s role being valued leads to high team morale, which increases the probability of success.

7.50 Build good habits.

All of us have bad habits. I, for example, bite my nails. That’s ok. Sometimes, there is no need to fight old habits - just start new ones. For example, in order to stop biting my nails during games, I chew gum.

Good habits allow us to avoid decision fatigue and optionality paralysis. Steve Jobs wore the same outfit every day - this was a good habit. Albert Einstein ate the same food every day - this was a good habit. Disciplined habits give us the freedom to focus on what really matters.

Moreover, good habits can be a shortcut to unlocking our best selves. Not reaching your full potential is very often just a case of not building the right habits. It’s usually impossible to think your way into right action - but building good habits allows you to act your way into right thinking.

By focusing on building good habits, we are repairing the roof while the sun is shining. You cannot wait until the championship game to develop good habits - they need to be developed from the onset. If at the start we sustain good habits, by the end our good habits will sustain us.

“If your habits don’t reflect your dreams and goals, change your habits.” – Kobe Bryant

“I know from long experience that if you make an effort in training when you don’t especially feel like making it, the payoff is that you will win games when you are not feeling your best. That

is how you win championships, that is what separates the great player from the merely good player. The difference lies in how well you've prepared.” – Rafael Nadal

7.51 Be good at the things that happen all the time, the things that take no talent.

You want to be good at the things that happen all the time, the things that take no talent, because oftentimes those are the things that offer the greatest return. By being good at the things that happen all the time, the things that take no talent, you will make every day your masterpiece.

7.52 If you want people to do something, make it easy.

Let's be honest: good habits are almost impossible to build. People almost never live up to their New Year's resolutions. Understanding this, if you do want to build good habits, you need to make it really easy on yourself. If you don't want to eat sweets, don't keep any in your house. If you want to go to the gym every day, find a "gym buddy" and keep each other accountable. In this way, your prefrontal cortex can front-run the urges your limbic system is likely to produce when confronted with temptation.

7.53 If you want people not to do something, make it difficult.

By the same token, don't be naïve about how difficult it is to discourage bad behaviors. People tend to cheat and take the shortest route possible to avoid doing the hard things. Knowing this, it's important that if you don't want somebody to do something you make it very difficult. You may want to consider using public shaming to discourage bad behavior.

“Show me the incentive and I'll show you the outcome.” – Charlie Munger

7.54 Pay attention to details.

The legendary coach John Wooden would begin his first team meeting of each season the same way: he would teach his players how to tie their shoes. He would go into detail about the fit of the shoes, how they should be a little worn before the first day of practice to avoid blisters, how they should be tied firmly but not too tight to produce rips, how to tie a proper knot so that they do not become undone, etc. That same attention to detail carried through everything Wooden's teams would do for the rest of the season.

The importance of details cannot be understated. As Bill Belichick, the legendary Super Bowl-winning sports coach, said, “Attention to detail is everything.”

Champions are champions not because they do anything extraordinary but because they do ordinary things better than everyone else. That is, champions do the details better than everybody.

If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. – William H. McRaven

7.55 Recognize the importance of 2nd- and 3rd-order consequences.

Most people just think about the 1st-order consequences. For example, you might decide to eat a cookie because you know that eating the cookie will give you pleasure in the short-run. But the 2nd-order consequence of eating that cookie will be that it will get in the way of your fitness goals. And the 3rd-order consequence of eating that cookie will be that your teammates will see

you eating the cookie and they will think it is okay for them to eat cookies. I'm not saying never eat cookies. I'm saying we need to give the 2nd- and 3rd-order consequences due consideration.

This happens at a societal level, too. The climate change debate, for example, could be looked at as one where society is prioritizing the 1st-order benefit of using fossil fuels today over the 2nd- and 3rd-order consequences of damaging the environment tomorrow. Good decisions are those that consider both the short-term and long-term consequences.

Another way of putting this is that you should pursue what is meaningful, not what is expedient. This can be more difficult but is ultimately more rewarding.

7.56 Don't scratch every itch.

Lots of times, scratching an itch only makes the itch worse; conversely, if you have the mental fortitude not to scratch the itch, oftentimes the itch goes away on its own. No itch lasts forever.

When scratching the itch makes the itch worse, you probably shouldn't scratch it. In basketball, this means that you shouldn't argue every call. It also means that you shouldn't respond to every opponent's trash talk. Let those itches roll off of you like water off of nylon.

In politics, you may have noticed that politicians do not always respond to attacks against them. Even though it is tempting to respond, it works to their strategic advantage not to scratch that itch. By not scratching the itch they are taking 2nd- and 3rd-level consequences into account.

Sometimes it's better to let sleeping dogs lie. – Proverb

7.57 Realize that sometimes it's better not to know.

It may be counter-intuitive to reconcile living with a core value of truth while at the same time believing that sometimes it's better not to know. Don't get me wrong – I believe that by-and-large, it's always better to know the truth. Too often people shield themselves from harsh truth, which handicaps their growth. If you're not sure, it's probably better to know than not to know.

At the same time, I have come to believe that in certain cases it's better not to know. One example of this is *Lord of the Rings*: when Frodo and his hobbit friends are taken by their elf friends to a magical place called Rivendell, they first have their eyes blindfolded so that they won't know how to get to Rivendell. This is because lots of evil creatures would like to know the way to Rivendell, and if Frodo and his hobbit friends knew the way then they would likely be captured and tortured and the safety of Rivendell would be compromised.

This is just one example, but I'm sure there are many more. The point is that it's not a contradiction to live with a core value of true while at the same time believing that sometimes it's better not to know. It takes judgement and wisdom to know when to know and when not to.

7.58 Recognize the different “levels” of decision-making.

There is the outcome, but then there are the things that led to that outcome. As Einstein said, you cannot solve a problem at the level at which it was created. If you want fruit, you need to pay attention to the roots, not the fruit.

In basketball, this means that you need to focus more on creating good shots for yourself and forcing bad shots for the opposition than on the actual outcome. In the short-run, bad shots can go in and good shots can rim-out, but in the long-run, the team with the best “shot expected value” differential is going to succeed.

One piece of advice re: different levels of decision-making: treat yourself as if you were someone that you are responsible for helping. Ask yourself, “what advice would a person who only wants the best for me give in this situation?” By doing this, you will be going “one level up”, you will be decoupling your ego from your beliefs, and you will make unanimous decisions that take 2nd- and 3rd order consequences into consideration.

For example, it would have been very easy for me to have kept my job in finance. I was making good money, my hours weren't terrible, and I was living in a city that I liked. But rather than succumb to inertia, rather than avoid the 1st-order pain I knew would come after leaving my job, I asked myself, “what advice would a person who only wants the best for me give in this situation?” I decided that an independent person who only wants the best for me would tell me to quit and pursue my dream of becoming a coach - that I was still young and could afford to take a risk. So that's what I did. And I do not regret it.

Lots of people avoid confronting harsh truths, to their detriment. Doing this leads to chronic remorse, which is a most undesirable sentiment. Someone who only wants the best for you would advise you to confront that harsh truth and figure out how to deal with it.

7.59 Recognize that it is especially difficult to evaluate yourself.

Most people have a tendency to overestimate their own abilities, they suffer from illusory superiority. In psychology, this is called the “Dunning-Kruger effect”. One example: 40% of engineers think they are in the top 5% of their profession. Obviously, this cannot be the case.

It is important to remember that you cannot read the label while you're sitting inside the jar. Triangulate with others to figure out if what you think about yourself is actually true.

“The greatest deception men suffer is from their own opinions.” – Leonardo Da Vinci

7.60 Recognize that sometimes it's ok to deviate from the truth temporarily so that you can get what you want.

Stephen Spielberg's Lincoln had a great quote that encapsulates this principle: “A compass [will] point you True North from where you're standing, but it's got no advice about the swamps and desert and chasm that you'll encounter along the way. If in pursuit of your destination, you plunge ahead, heedless of obstacles, and achieve nothing more than to sink in a swamp... What's the use of knowing True North?” This is why, for example, Lincoln enforced the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (which was a law that required escaped slaves to be returned to their masters) even though he knew slavery was wrong - because he knew to enforce this law was a necessary evil in order to reach his goal of emancipating the slaves.

Another example: if a Nazi knocks on your door, do not tell him where the Jews are hiding. Sometimes lying is justified.

This principle should be used very infrequently and with extreme caution. Most of the time you should tell the truth and put your honest thoughts on the table so that you can figure out what's true and what to do about it. But sometimes it's ok to deviate from the truth temporarily in order to get what you want.

7.61 Value the art of relaxed concentration over all other skills; in other words, win the Inner Game.

“It isn’t the mountains ahead to climb that wears you out; it’s the pebble in your shoe.” – Muhammad Ali

All of us have flashes of “oneness” when we’re completely immersed in the moment, inseparable from what we’re doing. We can only achieve this when we are in a state of relaxed concentration; this is sometimes called the state of “flow”. When you step onto the court, “click-in” to this state of flow together.

Bill Russell describes what winning the Inner Game feels like: “At that special level, all sorts of odd things start to happen. It’s almost as if you are playing in slow motion. During those spells, I could almost sense how the next play would develop and where the next shot would happen. Even before the other team brought the ball inbounds I could feel it so keenly that I’d want to shout to my teammates, it’s coming there!”

While it is important to hunt after this state of being “in the zone”, it is also important to recognize that, realistically, many of the minutes you play you will not be “in the zone”. Even when you are not “in the zone”, staying relaxed and concentrated is your best bet for success.

Here is some advice for staying relaxed and concentrated, and for winning the Inner Game:

7.61.1 Don’t over-coach.

Benjamin Franklin once said, “Tell me and I will forget; teach me and I may remember; involve me and I will learn.” The fact is, humans learn best by imitating others. To learn how to ski, first ski behind a better skier than yourself. This means that, by and large, teachers should eschew “instructions”; instead, invite “experiential learning”. Sometimes a valid instruction derived from experience can help if it guides you to your own experiential discovery, but, by and large, the less “instruction” interferes with the process of learning that is built into your very DNA, the more effective your progress is going to be. Be honest about what is actually going on - stay with the truth moment to moment. As Carl Rogers used to say, “the curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change”. Teach through experience, learn through experience. The more complicated you get, the harder it will be for your players to play with “rational instinct”.

“Teach in bullet points, not paragraphs.” – Kevin Eastman

“If you’re explaining, you’re losing.” – Ronald Reagan

7.61.2 Don’t think.

To quote Phil Jackson: “Basketball is a complex dance that requires shifting attention from one object to another at lightning speed. To excel, you need a clear mind totally focused on what everyone on the floor is doing. The secret is not thinking. This doesn’t mean being stupid; it means quitting the endless jabbering of thoughts so that your body can do instinctively what it’s been trained to do without the mind getting in the way.” Timothy Gallwey speaks of a “Self 1”, which is the analytical, ego-driven, “voice in your head” prone to worrying and ruminating, and a “Self 2”, which is your unconscious, intuitive, and physical body. We get into trouble when Self 1 tries to tell Self 2 what to do; the goal of not thinking is to get Self 1 out of Self 2’s way. Thinking takes too long - when you think too much, your feet slow down. The goal is to get

yourself to the point that you are playing with “rational instinct”. The trick getting there is a principle I articulated earlier: play the game as if you have something to learn. Genuine curiosity is a hack for emotional control. Watch the world with glittering eyes - your body already knows what to do. Let it run through you.

“Be quick, but don’t hurry.” – John Wooden

7.61.3 Stay neutral.

“Neutral thinking” is a new buzz word that I really believe in. Espoused by Trevor Mowad, neutral thinking means never speaking negatively about yourself or your situation. Avoid negativity and stay neutral.

“Don’t speak negatively about yourself, even as a joke. Your body doesn’t know the difference. Words are energy and cast spells, that’s why it’s called spelling. Change the way you speak about yourself and you can change your life.” – Bruce Lee

“They’ve asked me to talk about the last hundred years of psychological research; it can be summed up in this statement: people by and large become what they think of themselves.” – William James

7.61.4 Breathe through your nose, wiggle your toes.

In *The Oxygen Advantage*, Patrick McKeown outlines why breathing through your nose & breathing less is best for athletes. For one, breathing through your nose increases the amount of CO₂ in your blood, which allows your muscles to better-absorb oxygen. In addition, breathing through your nose is performed by the sympathetic nervous system, which keeps you relaxed. McKeown says that you want to breathe through your nose so lightly that your nose hairs hardly move. Avoid sighing. Here are some exercises you could try:

- Blow-up several balloons by breathing through your nose, then blowing up the balloon, then breathing through your nose again. This will oxygenate your blood and prime you for peak performance.
- Breathe in through your nose, out through your mouth, then hold your breath and jog ~15 yards. This is much harder than it sounds. This exercise is a good one to incorporate into a warm-up and is akin to training at high-altitude.

There are lots of different, good exercises that can be found by Youtubing “Postural Restoration Institute”.

Wiggling your toes will, miraculously, relax your whole body.

“Warriors assistant coach Keith Smart noticed Curry’s leg would quiver when the game was tight. It was almost like a nervous twitch. Smart offered a suggestion: purposefully tense all the muscles in your body. Hold it, feel the stress, then suddenly release. It worked...deep breaths slow the game down considerably.” – from a Jackie McMullin article

7.61.5 Maintain good posture & body language.

When at rest, stand up straight with your shoulders back. It should feel as if your spine is pointed towards the heavens. Also, adopt professional mannerisms; your face should rarely express self-doubt. Even if you feel self-doubt, most of the time it’s better to fake it until you make it. Maintaining good posture & body language will put you in a position to succeed.

7.61.6 Visualize success.

Great athletes constantly visualize themselves being successful. When success does eventually come, it is no surprise to them. Tiger Woods, for example, always used to picture himself winning The Masters. When it came time that he had a one-stroke lead headed into the final hole, he was not thinking to himself *Wow, I cannot believe I'm here!!* He was thinking to himself *This is where I'm supposed to be.* If you cannot see yourself being successful in your mind's eye, then you probably will not be successful. Visualizing your success is a good thing to do before every game, perhaps during the National Anthem.

7.61.7 Game time = party time.

If you're a partier (I myself am not), you probably start feeling good even before you get to the party. Maybe you sing Miley Cyrus in the shower. Maybe you dance in front of the mirror. I don't know. What I do know is that this is how you should feel before a game. You work really hard in practice to hone your skills and get better. Come game time, just go out there and have fun. This is your time to party.

7.61.8 Stress is good.

People often mis-appraise their physiological responses. They think that stress is bad, but the opposite is true: stress is good.

Stress is simply your body preparing you to perform well. Adrenaline, sweaty palms, and butterflies in your stomach all prep you to focus on the task at hand. Research has shown that changing these physiological responses is quite hard, but changing the way you interpret the physiological response is quite easy. That is, correctly appraising your physiological response will improve your performance.

An example: 5-seconds left in the game, down by 1pt, call a timeout. Big moment. Most people would tell themselves to "calm down" in that moment. That won't work. Instead, stand up, smile, say "wow, I'm feelin' it right now, and I know you do too. That means we care, and that means this moment matters. This is our body prepping itself for this moment. We don't know what's going to happen, but let's go let it rip."

7.61.9 The next one is always in.

There's only one shot that matters in basketball: the next one. If you believe this, then you know that you should "flush your failures" and operate with the mentality that "the next one is in".

7.62 Recognize that people are wired differently.

What works for one person might not work for someone else. As a coach, you may have to tailor your message differently for different players. The best disciplinary strategy will match both the student and the teacher.

The trick is to be curious enough to want to understand how the people who see things differently from you came to see them that way. All behavior makes sense with enough information. Understanding others' behavior will be interesting and invaluable, and the richer perspective you gain will help you decide what to do. Understanding others' stories and struggles requires much more time and effort than condemning them, but it is vastly more rewarding.

"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves." – Carl Jung

“To understand a man makes it impossible to hate him.” – Voltaire

“If you want to change the way you feel about somebody, change the way you treat them.” – Tony Robbins

7.63 Love your neighbor as yourself.

The human beings in the room will always matter more than the paper-thin “friends” or “likes” you see on the computer screen; will always matter more than any high-arching philosophies or opinions you may have. The most marked teaching of this comes in *The Brother Karamazov*, when a layperson named Madame Hohlakov comes to Father Zosima, a spiritual advisor, and confesses her hatred of her neighbors. Basically, Madame Hohlakov tells Father Zosima that she’s eager to give charity to far-away causes (i.e. she insists that she has a decent, generous heart), but she can’t stand the people that live in her own community. Father Zosima tells her in no uncertain terms that active love of your neighbors is a necessary ingredient for the heart’s fulfillment, saying:

“Strive to love your neighbour actively and indefatigably. In as far as you advance in love you will grow surer of the reality of God and of the immortality of your soul. If you attain to perfect self-forgetfulness in the love of your neighbour, then you will believe without doubt, and no doubt can possibly enter your soul. This has been tried. This is certain.”

The point is this: anyone who cares about “humanity as a whole” but does not care for the immediate of neighbor is seriously missing somebody. Show me a person who has “all the right universal opinions” but who mistreats their own parents, their own children, or their own neighbors, and I will take no moral lessons from them.

“Kind words are short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless.” – Mother Theresa

7.64 Do your job; in other words, soar with your strengths.

Everybody’s role is essential to success – but that doesn’t mean that everyone has the same role.

The oboe player need not worry about playing the flute. The offensive lineman need not worry about making the pass. Tristan Thompson doesn’t worry about creating his own shot, he just worries about setting good screens and getting offensive rebounds.

The trick is to figure out what you’re good at and to pair yourself with others who are good at the things you are not good at so as to hide your weaknesses. A good coach will build a system that accentuates her players’ strengths and hides her players’ weaknesses. A good game plan will attack the opponent’s weaknesses and take away the opponent’s strengths. Once you figure out what each other’s strengths are then you are free to soar with your own strengths. Build symbiotic relationships to help hide your weaknesses and then focus on doing what you’re best at. Remember: only focus on what you can control.

Bill Russell once described what it was like to be on a team where everybody does their job: “By design and by talent the Celtics were a team of specialists, and like a team of specialists in any field, our performance depended on individual excellence and how well we worked together. None of us had to strain to understand that we had to complement each other’s specialties; it was simply a fact, and we all tried to figure out ways to make our combination more effective... the Celtics played together because we knew it was the best way to win.”

“If you do something pretty well, do it occasionally... If you do something great, do it as much as you can.” – Scott Brooks

“We must seek to do our life’s work so well that nobody could do it better.” – Martin Luther King Jr.

7.65 Leverage the power of the pack.

From *Law for the Wolves*, by Rudyard Kipling:

*“Now this is the law of the jungle, as old and as true as the sky,
And the wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the wolf that shall break it must die.
As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk, the law runneth forward and back;
For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.”*

A good team is greater than the sum of its parts. To a player who has overcome her ego barrier, this will become obvious. If we cannot leverage the power of the pack then we will not succeed as a team.

“We must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.” – Ben Franklin

“We must either learn to live together as brothers or we are all going to perish together as fools.” – Martin Luther King Jr.

“Teamwork is the essence of life.” – Pat Riley

7.66 Expect excellence, not perfection.

Perfect is the enemy of good. Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection then we can catch excellence. Everyone makes mistakes. The only unacceptable mistake is to not learn from your mistakes.

The greatest enemy of a good plan is the dream of a perfect plan. – Carl Von Clausewitz, Prussian general & military theorist

7.67 Don’t overestimate people’s ability to change.

By-and-large, people are who they are, especially in the short-term. You’re pretty much the same person you today as you were yesterday. You will find yourself very frustrated if you expect yourself or others to change quickly. Usually, people are who they are.

7.68 Don’t underestimate people’s ability to change.

By the same token, you should never underestimate someone’s ability to change. People can go through massive transformations over the course of their lifetimes, and you underestimate their ability to do so at your peril. In general, human beings are stronger than the greatest challenge that can be put before us. Nobody likes being underestimated, and nobody likes being belittled.

“There is a lot more in [him] than you guess, and a deal more than [he] has any idea of himself.” – The Hobbit

7.69 Don't underestimate your enemies.

It is a grave mistake to underestimate your enemies. They are very often more capable than you give them credit for, and you are very often less capable than you give yourself credit for. In general, you should assume that your enemies are much better than you think they are. This will force you to be better prepared and thus lead to better success.

7.70 Don't underestimate someone who overestimates themselves.

This is true of your enemies, but it's also true of your friends, teammates, and colleagues. Many of the best basketball players overestimate themselves. Lots of them think they're the best player in the league. Even if this isn't technically true, it's this deep belief in themselves that's part of what make them so good. Superlative performance is often fueled by superlative confidence.

7.71 Understand that calm is contagious.

When the general is calm, the troops are calm. This is a key insight from Navy Seal Commander Rorke Denver. It is the general's responsibility to be a culture carrier, too. If the general expects the troops to be calm and collected under pressure, then she should model that for her troops.

"He who would be calm must first put on the appearance of calm." - Shakespeare

7.72 Recognize that a quiet gym is a losing gym.

A quiet player is a selfish player. Rather than be selfish, be selfless and help your teammates by using your words. Encourage your teammates by using your words. Say what you see. Speak up. Echo calls. Communicate early, loudly, and continuously. Every successful team does these things.

"Verbal and visual gratitude helps conquer selfish attitudes." – Greg White

7.73 Recognize that great effort springs naturally from great attitude.

If you have a great attitude and you are choosing love every chance you get, great effort will spring naturally. And if you do this for yourself then you are setting a good example for your teammates to do the same.

"You've got a choice – you either come in and let your circumstances control your attitude, or you let your attitude control your circumstances." – Brad Stevens

7.74 Be a joy to play with.

Some people on the basketball court are simply fun to play with. They are excellent competitors, they want what's best for the team, and they are not afraid to fight for excellence. Be this player, and expect others to be the same. If you enjoy playing with others, then they will enjoy playing with you.

7.75 Spend resources wisely.

Whether it's money, energy, or some other limited resource, you will want and need to spend it wisely.

7.76 Don't go to a doctor whose plants are dead.

By and large, how you do one thing is how you do everything. Dead plants are probably a good indication of shortcuts taken in other areas. You don't want to go to a doctor who takes shortcuts.

Another version of this principle is John Waters' advice: "If you go home with somebody, and they don't have books, don't fuck 'em! Don't sleep with people who don't read!" In this case, not having any books is a good indication that maybe this person is too shallow and not somebody to be intimate with.

7.77 Manage risks well.

An empire that cannot sustain a blow and remain standing is not really an empire. You need to build a risk-management system where you can sustain multiple blows and still remain in the game.

"Risk is what's left when you think you've thought of everything." – Carl Richards

"Prudence is the mother of all virtues." – Aristotle

7.78 Prepare for the 100-year storm.

Every 100 years there is a terrible storm. No one thinks it's coming because it hasn't happened yet in your lifetime, but oh boy is it coming. When it does come, you better be prepared.

There are lots of different types of "100-year events". Floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, financial crises, pandemics, etc. If you add up the probability of one of these "100-year events" occurring in a given year, the odds are uncomfortably high.

If you worry you don't have to worry, and if you don't worry then you need to worry. The implausible happens more often than one would expect.

7.79 Don't brag about the future.

As confident as you may be, the future is never certain. Have humility about risks both known and unknown.

7.80 Be careful who you trust.

Not everyone wants what's best for you. ~2% of humans are psychopaths and will take advantage of you every opportunity they get. It's important to distinguish between who you can and cannot trust. Try to surround yourself with people who want what's best for you and avoid associating with people who don't. Be careful who you trust with what information, else you are bound to experience harm that you could have otherwise avoided.

7.81 Recognize who is "inside the tent" and who is "outside the tent".

If you are "inside the tent", then we trust that you have the team's best interest at heart, and we can put our honest thoughts on the table with you and we can work through them together in a loving way. If you are "outside the tent", then you do not necessarily have the team's best interest at heart, and we cannot trust you or give you access to privileged information. It is a grave mistake to share things you shouldn't with people who are outside the tent. If you care about the people who are inside the tent then you won't do that.

7.82 Don't make unnecessary enemies.

You want to keep people on your good side as much as possible. You never know who you may need to advocate for you in the future, or who might sabotage your progress if given the chance.

One good example of this is hiring committees – you never know who will be on the next hiring committee you face. The more enemies you've made, the more likely it is that someone on that hiring committee will either be one of your enemies or know one of your enemies. Either scenario will be detrimental to you. Therefore, you want to minimize your enemy-making as much as possible to make the path towards achieving your goals easier.

7.83 Recognize that you can't be all things to all people.

Don't try to please everyone, because you'll end up pleasing no one. American businessman Scott McNealy once said "It's better for half the market to love you and half to hate you, than for nobody to care." If you don't have any haters then you're probably not doing anything interesting with your life.

7.84 Understand why the Supreme Court doesn't broadcast its hearings.

The Supreme Court knows that, if you want an environment where people can truly speak your mind, you can't turn a hearing into a public circus. If people feel they are being watched then they will be guarded or fake about what they say. On the other hand, if the hearing is held only among those who are "inside the tent" then people will feel free to speak their minds.

7.85 Don't answer questions that will get you in trouble.

The fifth amendment is there for a reason: no one should feel compelled to be a witness against themselves. If someone outside the tent asks you a "gotcha" question designed to pigeon-hole you into taking a particular point of view or to get you to say something you don't really mean, just reject the premise of the question and don't answer it or saunter past it. When you're on thin ice, your safety is in your speed.

7.86 Eschew white lies.

An explanatory example of why it's best to avoid telling white lies: two friends are at a coffee shop, one has made plans to see another person but doesn't feel like it anymore. She calls that other person and leaves a voicemail with some white lie excuse about why she's canceling that plans. The friend sitting next to her then begins to question her friend's integrity and wonders if she's ever been the recipient of this kind of white lie treatment.

The point is this: white lies fracture friendship. If you are really friends with someone, you can tell them the truth.

Don't do things that you know are morally wrong. Not because someone is watching, but because you are. Self-esteem is just the reputation that you have with yourself. – Naval Ravikant

7.87 Recognize that not everyone who wants to be your friend can be your friend.

Being a true friend takes time and commitment, and you have limited amounts of time. Sometimes good people will want to be your friend, but you simply won't be able to accommodate them. Other times, evil people will want to be your friend and you will have to

reject them because you do not share the same values. In either case, you will have to learn to be selective about who you commit to being friends with and you will have to choose those friends wisely.

7.88 Control the narrative.

Like it or not, people who are outside the tent always have a narrative in their heads about what's going on inside the tent. It's important that you don't ignore this narrative. If you ignore the narrative then over time you or your team's reputation may become so damaged that it is impossible to recover. If you control the narrative as best you can then you and your team will be free to operate in a way that's successful.

Treat your brand like a political candidate and control the narrative. Don't give bulletin board material to the other side. Even great leaders sometimes say things for strategic reasons. Reputation is something that you can lose in buckets but you can only win back in drops.

7.89 Tell your own story lest others tell it for you.

A good way to control the narrative is to tell your own story. Don't be shy about engaging with outsiders about what's going on inside the tent, because that only produces uncertainty and curiosity. Be an advocate for yourself and articulate your own story. As an example, Kobe Bryant used to talk to reporters about what was going on and what his team dynamic was like. In this way, he controlled the narrative around his team. Telling your own story is a better alternative to having others tell your story for you.

7.90 Enter through the ground floor.

When you take over a program, you may have high and lofty goals. But you need to build a solid foundation if you want to create a beautiful building. The curtain rises on the play already in progress. Don't try to come in with your pie-in-the-sky ideas and expect it to work out. You need to "enter through the ground floor", meet people where they are, and build from the bottom up.

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. - Unknown

7.91 Wait until the snow stops to shovel the driveway.

In the midst of a storm, sometimes the best thing to do is wait. Effort is wasted by those who are too impatient to wait for the storm to pass.

If you wash and then iron, you get a different result than if you iron and then wash. The sequence of things matters.

7.92 Don't be afraid to teach character as well as knowledge.

As a teacher, others will question you for teaching character. They will want you to "stick to what you know" and focus on the task rather than on the individual performing this task. Don't listen to these voices of dissent. You have to have the courage to teach character as well as knowledge.

"Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education." – Martin Luther King Jr.

7.93 Don't be stupid online.

At Goldman Sachs, they tell employees to ask themselves “How would this look on the front page of the Wall Street Journal?” before sending an email. By-and-large, that's a good rule to have, both for email and for social media.

7.94 Recognize that invisible threads are the strongest ties.

Sometimes, it's good to get your team to simply sit in silence together. This simple exercise can make people resonate with each other in profound ways.

Your best friend doesn't need to ask you how you're doing; they just know. It can become this way with teams as well.

“Silence is one of the greatest gifts that we have.” – Mr. Rodgers

“If I were a physician and if I were allowed to prescribe just one remedy for all the ills of the modern world, I would prescribe silence.” – Soren Kierkegaard

7.95 Dress for success.

It's important that we look good if we want to play well. Again, people often keep too great a distance between who they are and who they envision themselves to be. Your best self will be dressed for success.

7.96 Understand that success leaves footprints.

It's a good idea to look at people who've been successful at achieving what you'd like to achieve to see if you have any blind spots with regard to how you ought to achieve your own goals. Understand what steps people before you took to become successful, and decide whether or not it's a good idea to follow those footsteps. You need to be able to learn from other people's mistakes, not just your own.

Gary Kasparov, a world-famous Russian chess prodigy, once lamented in his 50's that younger chess prodigies could beat him. The reason is that younger chess prodigies have been able to study all of Gary Kasparov's previous games, so they have been given a significant leg up having learned from the “footprints” that Kasparov left. If you ignore such footprints, you surrender a tremendous competitive advantage.

People seldom improve when they have no other model but themselves to copy. - Oliver Goldsmith

7.97 Make your house beautiful.

Your “house”, i.e. your environment, matters. It makes an impression on everyone else, and it makes an impression on you. Utility breeds beauty, but beauty can also breed utility. If you spend the time to make your house beautiful you will not regret it.

“A house is more a home by being a work of art.” – Frank Lloyd Wright

7.98 Don't listen to stupid rules.

It takes a very wise person to understand when a rule is so stupid that it's not worth listening to, but such rules are out there. Usually, rules are there for a reason, and out of love, courtesy, and

respect to those around you they should be obeyed. But some rules are so egregious and baseless that they ought not be obeyed. Rosa Parks is a good example.

7.99 Understand that a day without laughter is a day wasted.

Life is short, and laughter is a great commodity. Take the work seriously, but don't take yourself seriously. Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly. The shortest distance between two people is a laugh.

It's also worth noting that laughter has been found scientifically to be an important leadership trait. In their book *Humor, Seriously*, authors Jennifer Aaker & Naomi Bagdonas describe one study that found "the teams that had humor demonstrated better communication and problem-solving, and performed better as a team, both during the meeting itself and over time." They conclude that "humor allows people to relax, to access higher order thinking, and to feel safe sharing bold and creative ideas." In other words, the great thing about laughter is that your guard is down, and when your guard is down new ideas can come through you. Sounds important for team functioning to me!

Among those whom I like or admire, I can find no common denominator, but among those whom I love, I can: All of them make me laugh. - W.H. Auden

7.100 Sing songs about sad things to avoid excess cynicism.

As bad as things are, they can always be worse. Part of the reason why Jews recount the story of Passover at seder every year is to remind themselves that once they were slaves and now they are free. Just like singing a sad song, this reminds us not to be too cynical about our current circumstances. In this way, sad songs, sad stories, or sad art in general help defend us against excess cynicism.

When no words are possible no words are needed.

7.101 Understand that all that glitters is not gold, and that all that is gold does not glitter.

Sometimes, a glitzy thing is just a scam. Peacocks strut because they can't fly.

Other times, gems are hidden in the rough, unseen by most observers. It's important to be able to spot them when you see them.

7.102 Understand that the pen is mightier than the sword.

This is an historical truth – ideas change the world more than wars do. Knowing how to write allows you to influence others and be effective in the world. Knowing how to write is paramount for being successful.

"Be clear, be concise, be interesting – in that order of importance." – James Miller

"The greatest ideas should be expressed in the shortest words – the greatest statues need the least drapery." – Unknown

Sonnet 65

By: William Shakespeare

*Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall time's best jewel from time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.*

7.103 Choose your peers through reading.

What you give your attention to is what you become. By reading books, you are choosing your peers and benefitting from the best thinking in history on a particular subject.

What's more, great books don't teach themselves. Not only should you read the best of what has been written, but you should also read the best of what has been written about the best of what has been written. Finding the best teachers of the best books can be life-changing. Don't underestimate how much there is to learn from a great book.

The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them. - Mark Twain

7.104 Understand that grief is the price we pay for love.

This Queen Elizabeth II quote is very instructive. Better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all. The more you love something the more vulnerable you are. Nobody has a complete heart unless it's been broken.

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation." - C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves

"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." - Winnie the Pooh

7.105 Recognize that the purpose of an institution of higher education is to acquire knowledge, preserve knowledge, and disseminate knowledge.

Participation on the basketball team should not interfere with this core purpose; if anything, it should reinforce it. This is usually only a problem at the Division 1 level: athletic directors forget that athletics exist to serve the institution, not the other way around. For this reason it makes sense that the NCAA limits practice time; those rules should be followed to a T. We should absolutely get everything we can out of every second we spend together as a team, but student-athletes should keep in mind that they are in college to get an education first and to play basketball second. Coaches, too, need to keep this in mind and let the players know where they stand on this issue.

8 Principles Terminology

This section describes some of the most important principles terminology used throughout this document. These are: “above the line” vs. “below the line” decision-making, and “upper-level you” vs. “lower-level you”.

8.1.1 “Above the Line” vs. “Below the Line” Decision-Making

Leadership expert Jim Dethmer talks about the distinction between “above the line” and “below the line” decisions. When you are “above the line”, you are using your rational mind and applying your principles to make decisions. When you are “below the line”, you are allowing your emotions, passions, and/or desires to hijack the reasonable part of your brain, and you make decisions that are at odds with your principles.

For example: let’s say your principles tell you to exercise every morning. You wake up one morning, and your emotions and desires are telling you to stay in bed. If you are operating “above the line”, you get up and exercise. If you succumb to your “below the line” self, you go back to sleep and neglect exercising.

Another example: let’s say your principles tell you to never eat sweets before a basketball game. One day before a game, your friend offers you a delicious-looking chocolate chip cookie. If you are operating “above the line”, you tell your friend no thanks. If you succumb to your “below the line” self, you eat the cookie (and likely end up regretting having done so).

“Above the line” decisions are those which are consistent with your principles. “Below the line” decisions are those which are at odds with your principles. By staying “above the line”, you are able to master your emotions, desires, and passions. By falling “below the line”, you allow your emotions, desires, and passions to master you.

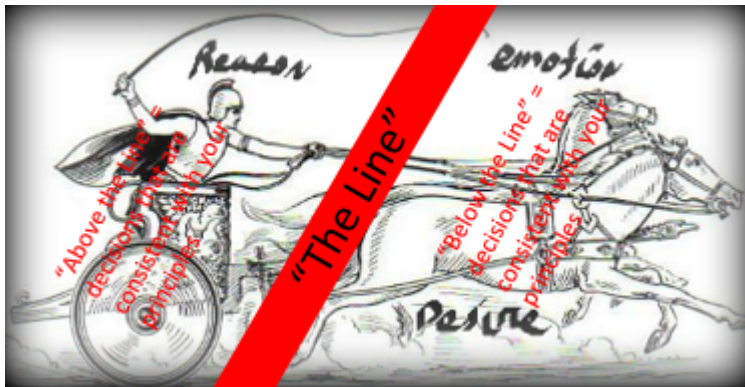


Figure 8.1 “The Line” Illustration #1 – Charioteer Analogy

“Above the line” decisions are those which are consistent with your principles, i.e. those which are reasonable. “Below the line” decisions are those which are at odds with your principles, i.e. those that are driven by emotion & desire without regard for reason.

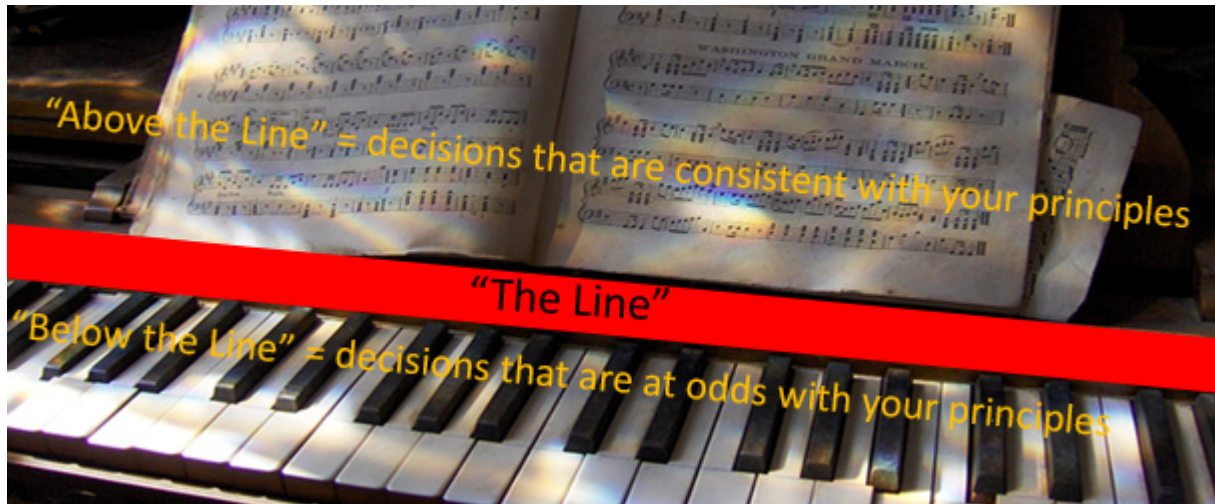


Figure 8.2 “The Line” Illustration #2 – Piano Analogy

“Above the line” decisions are beautiful and follow the “sheet music” that are your principles. “Below the line” decisions are scattered and made without regard to the sheet music.

8.1.2 “Lower-Level You” (Amygdala) vs. “Upper-Level You” (Prefrontal Cortex)

It is helpful to understand how different parts of your brain compete to pull you “above the line” or “below the line”. Your feelings, passions, and desires are most importantly controlled by your amygdala, which operates subconsciously. This is what I refer to as the “lower-level you”. Your reason is most importantly controlled by your prefrontal cortex, which operates consciously. This is what I refer to as the “upper-level you”. Your amygdala is an archaic part of your brain you share with most animals; your pre-frontal cortex is a more evolved part of your brain that is more uniquely human. These two parts of your brain, i.e. the “two yous”, fight to control your decisions and to pull you above or below “the line”. (Note that the exact neuroanatomy is more complex than I’m making it out to seem.)

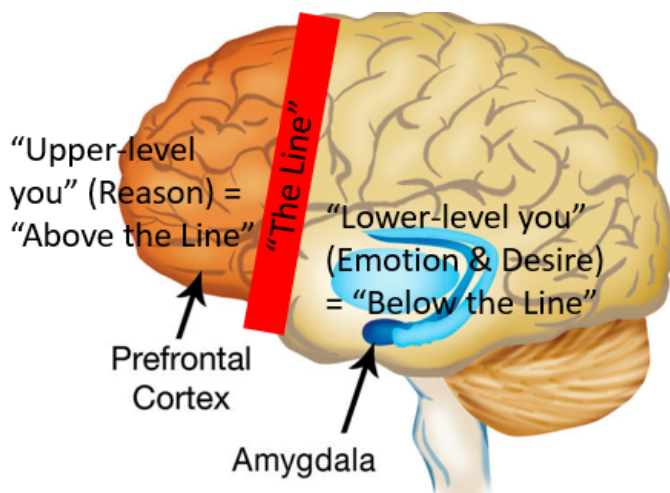


Figure 8.3 “Lower-Level You” (Amygdala) vs. “Upper-Level You” (Prefrontal Cortex)

Your amygdala, i.e. “lower-level you”, competes with your prefrontal cortex, i.e. “upper-level you”, to pull you “below the line” or “above the line”, respectively.

By-and-large, it works like this: when something arouses you, the amygdala “lower-level you” sends a “fight or flight” instruction to your body, causing your blood pressure to rise, your breath to shorten, and your muscles to tense up. This instruction is the decision your amygdala “lower-level you” wants you to make. However, it is possible or even likely that this decision will be at odds with your principles. At this point, it is up to your prefrontal cortex “upper-level you” to either obey or disobey the amygdala “lower-level you” instruction.

For example, let’s say your principles tell you to always ask a question in class if you think it’s important. When the moment comes, your amygdala sends you a “flight” response, causing your blood pressure to rise, your muscles to tense up, and your breath to shorten. You become petrified that your question will sound dumb to others and that you will embarrass yourself by asking it. Now, your prefrontal cortex has a choice: should you obey your amygdala’s instruction and not ask the question? Or should you stay true to your principles and ask the question anyway, regardless of what your amygdala is telling you? If you stay “above the line” and ask the question, “upper-level you” (i.e. Reason) wins. If you succumb to being “below the line” and stay silent, “lower-level you” (i.e. Emotion & Desire) wins.

This “two yous” dynamic is constantly at play. When someone gets “angry with herself”, her prefrontal cortex is sparring with her amygdala. When someone asks, “Why did I let myself eat all that cake?” the answer is “Because lower-level, Emotion & Desire you won out over upper-level, Reason you.”

The message is this: don’t let your “lower-level” amygdala get the best of you. In order to stay true to your principles, the “upper-level”, prefrontal cortex, reasonable you should always sign-off on your decisions. Just like in the charioteer analogy, Reason needs to sign off on how Emotion and Desire are running the race, not the other way around.

9 Principles FAQ

There are a few frequently asked questions I receive about my principles. I will use this section to collect and dispel some of these points of confusion. They are: shutting off your emotions vs. controlling your emotions, and emotional starvation vs. emotional fulfillment.

9.1.1 *Shutting Off Your Emotions vs. Controlling Your Emotions*

The purpose of having principles is not to shut off your emotions, desires, and passions. Shutting off your emotions is neither achievable nor desirable. Rather, your principles simply help you *control* your emotions to bring you closer to getting what you want. Again, just like in the charioteer analogy, the Reason charioteer needs strong & healthy Emotion and Desire horses, and Reason needs to be in control over them, too.

As example: let's say during a basketball game, an opposing player starts smack-talking you. Your amygdala generates a "fight" instruction, and your blood pressure starts to rise and your muscles tense up. There is no point in trying to shut off the emotions that the smack-talk is generating. Trying to do so will be futile, and will only make you more enraged. Instead, if you are acting in a principled manner, charioteer, Reasonable you will *redirect* your stimulated emotions and channel those emotions productively into your game. If you operate in this manner, you are staying "above the line" and help yourself achieve your goal of winning the game. By contrast, if you allow your emotions to pull you "below the line", you allow the smack-talker to frazzle you in a counter-productive way, and Reason is no longer in control. In any case, you will not be able to shut off your emotions, and your only good options are to harness them or to rein them in (just like a charioteer harnesses or reins in her horses).

A real-life example: During a heated 2nd-round series between the Boston Celtics & the Philadelphia 76ers in 2018, Joel Embiid responded to a reporter's question about Boston's fans trash-talking him in the following way: "I love that type of emotion because it kind of elevates my game knowing that there's a lot of fans out there that are talking trash and saying some crazy stuff... I love when people trash talk." Clearly, Joel Embiid was operating "above the line" and harnessing the emotions produced by the crowd's trash talk in a productive manner.



Figure 9.1 Joel Embiid harnessing his emotions.

Rather than trying to shut-off his emotions, Joel Embiid harnesses the emotions that are generated by the crowd's trash-talk to improve his play.

9.1.2 Emotional Starvation vs. Emotional Fulfillment

Far from starving your emotions, one of your goals should actually be to use your principles to help you achieve emotional fulfillment. Humans are hard-wired to need emotional fulfillment, and if you do feel emotionally fulfilled you are much more likely to be successful in life. To return back to the charioteer analogy, horses that are well-nourished and cared for are more likely to win races for you. Don't starve your horses or neglect them. Treat them well and they will obey you.

Notice that I'm not talking about emotional fulfillment at a superficial level. When you decide to eat a cookie you may claim to feel "emotionally fulfilled" temporarily, but over the long-term, if you eat enough cookies you will feel emotionally empty and distressed by your lack of discipline. This type of chronic remorse is a most undesirable sentiment. Instead, I'm talking about a deeper emotional fulfillment where you feel connected to others and secure about where you are in the world. This is the type of emotional fulfillment that all humans deeply need, in all stages of life, from the cradle to the grave. If you don't have it, you can use your principles to get it. You shouldn't think that living a principled life will leave you emotionally starved; to the contrary, living a principled life is a great way to become truly, deeply emotionally fulfilled.

"One lesson I've learned is that if the job I do were easy, I wouldn't derive so much satisfaction from it. The thrill of winning is in direct proportion to the effort I put in before." Rafael Nadal

10 *If* by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

11 *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by John Donne

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or if thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

12 *As I Walked Out One Evening* by W. H. Auden

As I walked out one evening,
Walking down Bristol Street,
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing
Under an arch of the railway:
'Love has no ending.

'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet,
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street,

'I'll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry
And the seven stars go squawking
Like geese about the sky.

'The years shall run like rabbits,
For in my arms I hold
The Flower of the Ages,
And the first love of the world.'

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
'O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.

'In the burrows of the Nightmare

Where Justice naked is,
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.

'In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away,
And Time will have his fancy
To-morrow or to-day.

'Into many a green valley
Drifts the appalling snow;
Time breaks the threaded dances
And the diver's brilliant bow.

'O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you've missed.

'The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

'Where the beggars raffle the banknotes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer,
And Jill goes down on her back.

'O look, look in the mirror,
O look in your distress:
Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless.

'O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart.'

It was late, late in the evening,
The lovers they were gone;
The clocks had ceased their chiming,
And the deep river ran on.

13 Slogans

From time-to-time, I hear a slogan that I like and that makes sense to me within the context of my principles. I will catalog those slogans in this section.

- a. “Humble & Hungry” – Villanova Men’s Basketball (Jay Wright)
- b. “Hungry for more” – Ryan Mee
- c. “Hard work, Dedication, Results” – Lower Merion High School Men’s Basketball (Greg Downer)
- d. “Five Pillars: Humility, Passion, Unity, Servanthood, and Thankfulness” – University of Virginia Men’s Basketball (Tony Bennett)
- e. “Loose but focused” – Tom Segura
- f. “Pursuit over perfection” – Ritchie McKay, Liberty Men’s Basketball
- g. “Balance with priorities” – Pavel Tsatsouline
- h. “Grateful for everything, entitled to nothing.” – Jack Clark, Cal Berkely Rugby
- i. “To virtue, knowledge” – Smith College motto
- j. “Clear and connected” – Nate McMillan

14 Glossary

From time-to-time, I hear definitions of words that I like and that makes sense to me within the context of my principles. I will catalog those definitions here.

- a. **Ability** is what you are capable of, **motivation** determines what you do, and **attitude** determines how well you do it. – Lou Holtz
- b. An **adventure** is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An **inconvenience** is only an adventure wrongly considered. – G.K. Chesterton
- c. **Adversity**, if you learn to use it right, will buy you a ticket to a place you couldn't have gotten any other way. – Tony Bennett
- d. **Adversity** is truth serum.
- e. **Anger** is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured. – Mark Twain
- f. A real piece of **art** is a window into the transcendent.
- g. Great **art** stretches the taste, it doesn't follow the taste. – Steve Jobs
- h. **Authenticity** is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are. – Brene Brown
- i. A thing of **beauty** is a joy forever. – John Keats
- j. **Beauty** will save the world. – Fyodor Dostoevsky
- k. **Beauty** reminds of lost possibility. **Beauty** ennobles.
- l. All grand **beauties** withhold their deepest secrets.
- m. True **behavior change** is really identity change. – James Clear
- n. **Character** is what you do when no one is watching. – John Wooden
- o. **Citizenship**, properly understood, begins with gratitude.
- p. **Compassion** is the understanding of a problem or the suffering of another and acting to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering.
- q. **Connection** is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued. – Brene Brown
- r. **Consistency** is the trademark of every champion. – PGC Basketball
- s. **Contemplation** is visual perception prompted by loving acceptance. – Josef Pieper
- t. **Courage** is the willingness and ability to work through obstacles despite feeling embarrassment, fear, reluctance, or uncertainty. – Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement
- u. **Courage** is almost a contradiction in terms: it means a strong desire to live taking the form of readiness to die. – G. K. Chesterton
- v. **Courage** is grace under pressure. – Ernest Hemingway
- w. **Curiosity** is having a strong interest in knowing something but without attachment to the outcome. – Dr. Andrew Huberman
- x. **Dialogue** is the pathway to truth.
- y. If you are concerned with consequences of doing something or not, you are being obedient. **Discipline** is doing the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason, regardless of consequence.
- z. **Discipline** is dedicated striving toward a valuable goal, not the arbitrary punishment it is often conflated with.
- aa. **Discipline** is the bridge between goals and accomplishment. – Jim Rohn
- bb. The gap between desired outcome and required action is **discipline**. – Lauren Johnson
- cc. **Experience** is what you get when you don't get what you want.
- dd. **Focus** is the bridge between explanation and application. – Kara Lawson
- ee. **Forgiveness** means choosing to let go of anger and resentment towards yourself or someone else, to surrender thoughts of revenge, and to move forward with your personal power intact. – Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement

- ff. True **friends** don't need to ask you how you're doing; they just know.
- gg. One of the most beautiful qualities of true **friendship** is to understand and to be understood. - Seneca
- hh. **Friendship** improves happiness and abates misery by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief. – Cicero
- ii. Virtue is the parent and driving force of **friendship**.
- jj. **Generosity** is luck going in reverse.
- kk. **Genius** is talent set on fire by courage. – Henry Van Dyke
- ll. **Gratitude** is happiness doubled by wonder. – G.K. Chesterton
- mm. **Gratitude** begins when we recognize that we are the beneficiaries of a great and multifaceted inheritance.
- nn. **Gratitude** begins where our sense of entitlement ends. – Buzz Williams
- oo. **Hard work** is the price of admission for the opportunity to reach excellence. – Jay Bilas
- pp. **Humility** is the recognition of personal insufficiency and the willingness to learn.
- qq. **Humility** is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less. – Timothy Keller
- rr. **Humility** doesn't mean having a low opinion of yourself, it means having no opinion of yourself. – Peter Kreeft
- ss. **Ignorance allied with power** is the most ferocious enemy justice can have. – James Baldwin
- tt. **Integrity** is never saying something behind someone's back that you wouldn't say to their face. – Ray Dalio
- uu. **Integrity** is a closeness of fit of what you would say to someone's face and what you would say about them when they leave the room. – Sam Harris
- vv. **Knowledge** is prediction – anything that increases your ability to predict the outcome. – Daryl Morey
- ww. **Knowledge** is the pathway from slavery to freedom. – Frederick Douglas
- xx. **Legacy** is planting seeds in a garden you'll never get to see. – *Hamilton Broadway Musical*
- yy. **Love** is not jealous, rude, or boastful. **Love** does not insist on its own way. **Love** is unselfish, sacrificial, kind, and just. **Love** seeks the good and the well-being of the other. **Love** makes room and space for the other to be. – Bishop Michael Curry
- zz. **Love** isn't how you feel, it's how you make somebody else feel.
- aaa. **Love** is the desire for being to flourish. – Jordan B. Peterson
- bbb. **Love** is the only engine of survival. – Leonard Cohen
- ccc. **Love** is a gift that should be freely given. **Trust** is a privilege that should always be earned. Therefore, you can still **love** somebody you don't **trust**.
- ddd. The greatest **love** a parent can show their child is discipline. – Urban Meyer
- eee. **Maturity** is the ability to forego good options for even better ones. – Ray Dalio
- fff. **Passion** happens when love and purpose collide.
- ggg. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of **playing**, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. – William Shakespeare
- hhh. **Preparation** is what stops the fear. – Alex Honnold
- iii. **Risk** is the odds that something will prevent you from achieving your goals.
- jjj. **Risk** is what is left over after you think you've thought of everything. – Carl Richards
- kkk. **Reputation** is what you're perceived to be; **character** is what you really are. – John Wooden
- lll. **Science** means knowledge; it doesn't mean wisdom. (e.g. eugenics) – Dr. Brian Keating
- mmm. **Self-esteem** is the reputation that you have with yourself. – Naval Ravikant

- nnn. **Stupidity** [is] overlooking or dismissing conspicuously crucial information. – Adam Robinson
- ooo. **Success** is the peace of mind attained only through self-satisfaction in knowing that you did the best of which you are capable. – John Wooden
- ppp. **Teaching** is the ability to inspire learning – Nick Saban
- qqq. **Toughness** is not thinking or accepting that you have a ceiling, but that you have another step to take, another level to reach, another gear. – Tom Izzo
- rrr. **Toughness** is what helps you be able to maintain the discipline that you need to do what you need to do, when you're supposed to do it, the way it's supposed to get done. – Nick Saban
- sss. **Toughness** is being able to physically and emotionally perform your task through any condition. – Brad Stevens
- ttt. **Toughness** is a relentless pursuit to get better every day; it's an obsession to finish. – Frank Reich
- uuu. **Toughness** is experiencing something that is subjectively distressing and then leaning in, paying attention, and creating space to take a thoughtful action that aligns with your core values.
- vvv. Mental **toughness** is doing what's right for the team when everything's not going great for you.
- www. Mental **toughness** is doing what's right for the team when it might not be right for you. – Mike Lombardi
- xxx. Mental **toughness** is the ability to focus on the next most important thing. – Jack Clark
- yyy. **Tyranny** is the deliberate removal of nuance. – Albert Maysles
- zzz. **Vice** enslaves us. **Virtue** liberates us.
- aaaa. **Virtue** is the habitual and firm disposition to do good.
- bbbb. **Virtue** begins with understanding and is fulfilled by courage. – Demosthenes
- cccc. **Wisdom** is the ability to see both sides of the story and weigh them appropriately. – Ray Dalio
- dddd. Intelligence plus experience equals **wisdom**. – Naval Ravikant
- eeee. A lot of **wisdom** is just recognizing the long-term consequences of your actions. The longer-term you're willing to look, the wiser you'll seem to other people. – Naval Ravikant

15 Acknowledgments

This document was Ray Dalio's idea. He challenged his readers to write down their own principles, so I did. I hope my principles would make Ray proud.

Lastly, I grateful to my friends and family who have provided invaluable feedback on my principles and on my writing. I look forward to your future criticisms and to our future discoveries of new principles together.