



we talk so often about the physical being the easy part, about it being a mere manifestation of the way we see the world, of the decisions we have already made. training, the gym - it never made sense to me until the problem was framed as a psychological one - but now what? if you have made the decision to be better - decided to change and accepted the premise that this is a mental game more than anything, what do you do next?

this thread is a constant. we at the station are always trying to find better, more effective ways to manage our progress, to control our growth. the beauty of a project such as this is the diversity - the bringing together of so many individuals, so many viewpoints and skill sets towards a common goal. Here is a short list, a few key points distilled from countless hours of exploration. These are building blocks, tools that we have found useful. I hope they can function as a primer of sorts, to start the flow, to be a spark, for none of us evolve in a vacuum, this is one path i would be happy to see more crowded.

Onward, to the real work...

### **1: create distance**

as a culture we spend so much time focused on the immediate, the problem at hand, excluding all else. sometimes the intimacy we have - with our problems, with our abilities, blinds us to the greater picture. when you are uncomfortable it seems as if nothing else in the world matters, your one little problem becomes everything. the ability to keep perspective in such a situation, to see beyond the next thirty seconds, is an important step in creating meaningful change. there are a number of studies about delayed gratification, about "present bias" and procrastination (a wonderful summary is available [here](#)) - to grossly oversimplify, your brain basically views your future self as a different person, as an "other" and all the work you are doing presently benefits them, not you. in every iteration of the study, it seems to show that the ability to delay gratification allows an individual to succeed - so how do we build that? in practice, i have found re-framing the problem to be helpful - if my mind looks at that future self as a different person, then so will I. to take it even further, I try and think *as that future self* and work backwards - treating the present self as the "other". basically, try and think from the perspective of the person you wish to be, and of your current self (your body, your habits) as what is holding you back. think of it as something like a puppy - in need of training. it does not respond to logic or argument, it responds to conditioning. work and reward. punishment and bargaining. it throws temper tantrums and must be handled, coddled, and dealt with. realize when you are having a tantrum. realize that giving in will just reinforce that behavior. we call this part "rolled up newspaper" training - the decision to treat yourself like you would treat a 200#

toddler that wont listen to logic. when i am not feeling well, i will still go to the gym, i tell myself i am just going to do my warm-ups, that if i don't feel well i can cool down and go home. 99% of the time, as soon as i am warmed up i feel fine, i was just being lazy. it is amazing how many other situations this type of bargaining works for - sometimes giving yourself a "way out" is what gets you moving in the first place, then every time you approach the finish line, just ask "can i do more?" 1 more rep, 1 more interval. if i can do one, then why not five? when i felt hungry, i would take a second to make sure i was actually hungry and not just bored - sometimes i would make myself wait 30 minutes, just to see if it would pass, just to see if it was a want, or a need. i would ask myself these questions as if i were talking to a child, and i am still amazed at how often it worked. whenever i had a sweet craving i would take a small square of dark chocolate - 99% cocoa and let it melt under my tongue. bitter and rich, it would quell my cravings, as weeks went on the cravings became less, i had to switch to unsweetened baking chocolate, but i managed to (mostly) kill the sweet tooth. it is about stimulus and response - have a tantrum and here is what happens - training, in the most basic sense.

the distancing step also works for emotions. i always try and see emotions as a vehicle for information, usually things too fast or too subtle for my conscious mind to recognize. the problem is that the emotional information is messy, interconnected and riddled with triggers and potential landmines. filtering that can be tricky, to say the least. the first step is often trying to decode your feelings, to try and separate the information from the vehicle. i always try and think about usefulness; years ago i saw a poster that read - *you are the result of 4 billion years of evolutionary success, fucking act like it* - this stuck with me, thinking about emotion as being something selected for, something that provided an edge, and in accepting that, learning to use it as a tool. cravings, frustration, mood swings, the knee jerk like/dislike that overcomes you when you first meet a person - these are usually indications of patterns, of imbalances, warning lights preparing you for what is about to come next. these are teaching moments, if you can recognize them. it is simply your body trying to communicate with you, trying to get something. the "what" is the information, the emotion is the vehicle - it is just another form of training to teach yourself not just to react, but to respond to these feelings with curiosity, with pragmatism and attention to detail. the emotion is often simply an envelope, by creating distance we can avoid being overwhelmed and make use of the contents.

## **2. get uncomfortable**



i was once told that the secret to being comfortable in bad situations is to realize how uncomfortable you can be and still survive. this is a discussion is about limits; about thresholds. that whole "the work never gets easier, you just get harder" mentality. it is about stress and response. we are adaptive creatures, our bodies do what they have to and nothing

more. our bodies and our minds seek comfort, they seek stasis, they will rise only as far as we force them. want to get stronger? tell your body it is not strong enough. tell your body that getting stronger will make your life easier. tell your body that it will be worth it. draw a line in the sand, just out of reach. strive, stretch, work hard and reward yourself. control your growth. like the cultivation of a bonsai tree – bend, but never break, tie off and cut clean, all according to a plan. be a little bit better, every day, every week. make sure you are just a little bit uncomfortable, that you are telling yourself if you were just a little bit stronger, a little bit lighter, a little bit... whatever, that life would be easier.

whether we are aware of it or not, we are always trying to make our lives easier. most times, our initial reaction is to try and alter our environment, it allows us to avoid any personal responsibility, and any of the truly difficult change. we find different surroundings that enable us to maintain our comfortable, familiar behaviors. shitty people move to a different city and carry out the same actions made their current lives unsustainable. only when we ignore that initial flight response, when we tell our bodies that changing the environment is not an option, do we begin to change ourselves. when that stress comes from training or from the gym, our body makes us sore to tell us not to do the thing anymore, to tell us to find an easier way. keep grinding, keep moving forward and it feels like your body accepts that this new stress is now going to be normal. necessary. now the easiest thing to do is to change. to fit. to adapt. if this increase in physical stress is also coupled with ample food and rest, you are essentially telling your body that the change is working. that it is successful. that it is earning an advantage as long as it keeps moving in the direction you tell it.

this increased stress is a little like patience, it never becomes easy, it just gets cheaper. you can handle more stress, larger steps. but mind your spending; overreaching has its cost, and dramatic changes are usually only temporary. willpower is a finite resource – so start small. for example, a study by case western reserve university showed that brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand increased your stamina for focusing on tasks. basically, you are priming your brain – making it a little bit uncomfortable by breaking a habit, but then rewarding it immediately. completing the task relieves the discomfort and prepares it to accept higher levels of temporary discomfort expecting that the reward (completion) will come. managing your spending is critical. a certain level of stress functions as a primer, but too much quickly becomes self sabotaging. some psychologists refer to it as [ego depletion](#) – [David McRaney](#) makes a useful analogy – think of your actions as some sort of plane on autopilot, the mere act of steering it, of any variation to the pre-programmed path causes it to burn fuel at a wildly accelerated rate. the first main point is to accept that going anywhere other than exactly where you are headed will be costly and uncomfortable. once that is out of the way, you can start to develop a plan to conserve fuel.

### **3. embrace ritual**

like most things, [your willpower is affected by how you individually view it](#). look at your own life – most often the most self motivated people, the most resilient, don't see it as anything special. it is normal for them, habitual, comfortable. it is not a surprise that it is easier to do what we are comfortable with; it is also reasonable that on a long enough time line anything can seem comfortable. a ritual can be thought of as something of a “proto-habit” – it is a deliberate action, undertaken mindfully to create an unconscious action. the simplest example is driving to work – the first time we drive to a new job or meeting place we are constantly looking at addresses and cross streets, checking the clock to make sure we are on schedule, we are moving with purpose and awareness. but make that drive enough times and one day we find ourselves in our driveway at home after work and don't remember a thing about how we got there, or stranger yet, we show up at work on a Saturday because we took a couple turns and fell into autopilot. our brains are startlingly lazy. conserving energy has always been evolutionary advantageous – our brain automates tasks that it sees as repetitive and makes a “program” of sorts. running a program is cheap, writing a new one is

expensive. ritual is simply a method of writing a new program.

willpower is the act of resisting an unconscious action. ritual is a way to consciously construct an action - how we automate and make them unconscious. rituals are used in practically every religion in the world, they are used because they work. a ritual is simply another tool. it can be a checklist, or a way to deal with stress. the keys are being consistent and being deliberate. realize that you are building a program, and the more times you run it, the stronger it will be. the problem is most of us are trying to rewrite programs we have run literally thousands of times. lets say that we can undo 1 year of bad habits with 1 month of perfect behavior. how long will we have to behave before we are back at a level playing field? this is not to be discouraging, it is to give a little perspective. this is a long haul. ritual is the stopgap. it is a measure we can engage between deciding to change and becoming fundamentally different.

#### **4. play to win**

quitting is just another habit. the more often you quit the less cognitive dissonance it causes, basically if you quit enough times you start to see yourself as a quitter, and expect that outcome. the same can be true about follow through. stacking the deck - creating situations where you are set up to win can create momentum. i am not talking about t-ball here, they still have to be victories - real, hard fought victories - for this to work. the idea is to ramp up your goals, to create momentum by making a habit of following through. this is a difficult balance - choosing goals that are hard enough to elicit the proper stress, but reasonable enough to not risk derailment. find out what motivates you - use it. fear or challenge, reward or consequence, the only useless tool here is the one you refuse to use. this is where things can get interesting, can get mercenary.... make a list of all the things and people in your life, a cost benefit analysis in relation to your goals. what helps and what hurts. who adds to your momentum and who robs you of your energy.

cut accordingly.

#### **5. suffer better**



a good friend sent me a shirt, all it said was "[suffer better](#)". needless to say, i appreciate the sentiment. change is hard. we get it. suffering better can mean a lot of things, one point is to keep our lamentations to a minimum. venting about how hard something is just convinces us that it is difficult and we are special because we are doing it. realize that, in the grand scheme of things, what you are doing probably isn't that hard. convince yourself of it. lie to yourself if you have to. suffering better involves finding a reason, something worth suffering for. it is about

framing, seeing the discomfort as something worthy, something to push against, to savor even. your sense of self is a tool here - who do you want to be? do you want to be the person who is constantly bitching about their situation, or the one who quietly handles business? do you want to be the person who quits when things get uncomfortable or the person who follows through with what they say, every time? if you can convince yourself that quitting is more costly, more damaging than following through, the small and momentarily "suffering", the short term discomfort pales in comparison to accepting that you are not the person you claim to be.

do things that remind you who you **want** to be. be around people who make you strive to be better. build a self image incompatible with the bullshit you wish to avoid - one brick, one decision at a time. remember that there are some bridges worth burning. remember that the discomfort you feel now is temporary. is worth it. is making it easier for next time. remember that this "suffering" is small. is personal. is yours and yours alone. make it count. make it mean something. have some fucking grace. some humility. work through things. own your mistakes and do better next time. this feeling is the price of change, this is what you asked for. this kind of suffering is merely the cost of becoming the person you wish to be. let it do its work, burn through the layers of bullshit and posturing. difficulty will strip us down, grind and polish and expose us. for what we are. for what we have made of ourselves. take action, take responsibility, and take pride in your work.



*this is not suffering. this is empowerment.*