

Say Yes To Life

Institute For Unlocking Human Potential
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“To share the age old wisdom with all and to provide the opportunity for everyone to experience life at its fullest and challenge everyone to Dare to Dream Big to realize their full potential”

N. Pas Paskaran
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npaskaran@gmail.com
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Greetings to all:

In this issue, we will present an article titled “One Factor that Changes Everything in Our Life” by Alexander Green

I hope that you will gather insights on how to live our lives effectively and enjoy the abundance and prosperity that life has to offer.

With Best Wishes for an Abundant and Successful Lifestyle.

One Factor that Changes Everything in Our Life
by Alexander Green

A single factor overwhelmingly determines your success in life. It maximizes your talent and intelligence and minimizes roadblocks and negative circumstances. It determines your physical health and financial security. It colors your personal and professional relationships. It affects your wellbeing and longevity.

Without it, even people with exceptional genes, good luck, privileged backgrounds or superior educations will falter. Yet those who have it experience less anxiety, greater happiness and more life satisfaction. It even defines your character, determining the quality of person you become.

What is this all-important factor? It’s willpower, that special mix of determination, persistence and self-control.

Studies show that willpower is a better predictor of academic success than intelligence, a stronger determinant of leadership ability than charisma and more important to marital bliss than empathy. If you want to improve your life, willpower is a good place to start.

Most of us recognize this. According to the American Psychological Association, Americans name lack of willpower as the No. 1 reason they fail to meet their goals.

The good news is science is showing us how we can develop more willpower - and improve virtually every aspect of our lives.

Take my old friend John Reed, for example. John is one of the most focused and accomplished people I know. He holds a medical degree and Ph.D and is the chief executive of Sanford-Burnham in La Jolla, one of the nation's leading cancer research centers. He is the author of more than 800 scientific papers. (For years, ScienceWatch ranked him as the world's leading scientist.) Last month John accepted the position as head of research - with a multi-billion annual budget - at Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche.

In addition to his academic and professional achievements, John is a committed triathlete, a loving husband and father, and one of the nicest guys you'd ever meet. How does he do it all? I asked him last week and he ticked off six principles he lives by:

1. Set BHAGs. (Big, hairy, audacious goals.)
2. Don't waste time - make every hour count.
3. Never stop learning. Be a sponge for knowledge.
4. Say "yes" far more than you say "no." Try new things / try new ways.
5. Exercise every day - no excuses.
6. Eat healthy all the time, consistently. (No mammals.)

Clearly, this works for John. (Heck, it should work for anyone.) Yet, aside from his natural abilities, what has really propelled John is indomitable drive and willpower. How can the rest of us get more of that?

Psychologists report that many of us live at the mercy of our cravings and desires, our lives dictated by impulses rather than conscious choices. We spend rather than save, sit rather than move, watch TV instead of reading an improving book, and overeat instead of refraining, knowing that our short-term whims are undermining our long-range goals. Life becomes a struggle rather than an enjoyable challenge.

Yet we can change this, starting with a bit of self-awareness. Everyone struggles with some level of distraction, procrastination or addiction. Even if you have great willpower in some parts of your life, it is probably lacking in others. I'm very disciplined about investing, for example, and pretty good on diet and exercise. But if you saw how I "organize" my office or the size of my music collection, you might go screaming for the hills.

If we want to replace old habits with better ones, it is important to first recognize why we lose control and what we can do about it. In [The Willpower Instinct](#), Dr. Kelly McGonigal, a health psychologist and lecturer at Stanford University, offers several suggestions:

Reframe your choices. When you are tempted to act against your best interests, always stop and frame the decision as a conscious choice between immediate gratification and a longer-term reward.

Breathe slower. Research shows that if you slow your breathing to four to six breaths per minute - 10 to 15 seconds per breath - it shifts the brain and body from a state of stress to greater self-control. This makes it easier to resist cravings.

Take 10 minutes. When you don't act on an immediate impulse, you give yourself time to pass on that first cigarette, second brownie or third cocktail. Ten minutes is often all it takes to cause an unhealthy or unwanted impulse to pass. If your problem is procrastination, flip this solution around and tell yourself that you'll spend just 10 minutes tackling an unpleasant task - like cleaning the garage or filing your income taxes - and then quit. (Of course, once you get started you may not want to stop.)

Make it positive. Shame and embarrassment actually undermine your willpower. So consider your challenges in a positive light. If you're trying to lose weight, for instance, think of all the tasty and healthy things you can eat rather than the long list of things you can't.

Imagine your future self. It helps to visualize yourself enjoying the fruits of your newfound self-control. You skipped the party and hit the books, so see yourself accepting that diploma. You stuck to your fitness regimen, so imagine sliding into your skinny jeans. Make a habit of asking yourself whether it's worth trading something you really value for a momentary pleasure.

Exercise. This is the wonder drug for self-control. Exercise calms you down, relieves stress and acts as a powerful anti-depressant. Better still, exercise outdoors where you get the added benefit of fresh air and sunlight.

Sleep more. Sleep deprivation can make you susceptible to temptation, stress and cravings. Even a single good night's sleep raises brain functioning to a higher level.

Pre-commit. Pay in advance for those music lessons. Splurge on an expensive gym membership or personal trainer. When you make it inconvenient to back out, you increase the likelihood of following through.

Write down your goals. There are few things that increase your personal effectiveness more than committing your goals to paper and reviewing them daily. This practice keeps your ambitions front and center and helps you avoid distractions.

Meditate. Neuroscientists have discovered that meditation leads to a wide range of self-control skills, including greater attention, better focus, and more impulse control. Research also reveals that meditators find it easier to lose weight or end an addiction.

Be a morning person. Self-control is greatest in the morning and gradually declines throughout the day (which is why you start visualizing that glass of merlot by 5 p.m.). If you have a willpower challenge - like mastering the piano or learning a foreign language - schedule it for the morning.

Find a support group. Studies show that good habits, positive attitudes and determination are contagious. So, as much as possible, avoid associating with people who have the bad habits you are trying to ditch. Instead, seek out the company of others who share your goals.

Be realistic. Like me, you probably have friends who make annual resolutions to quit

eating carbohydrates, stop drinking, and exercise daily - all at the same time! No wonder they give up a week later. Any one of these is a serious hurdle. Big willpower goals like these are more effectively tackled one at a time.

Understand that we are all tempted by immediate gratification because our brains did not evolve to respond to future rewards. If your ancestors on the plains of Africa got a chance to indulge in sugar or salt or fat, for instance, they chowed down. After all, they didn't know when they might have the opportunity again. But in a world where sweet, salty and fatty foods are plentiful and cheap, this biological imperative works against us.

Our rational selves and our tempted selves will always be at odds with each other. This is simply the human condition. But to the extent that we can control our desires, emotions, attention and behavior, we can achieve the things we want and avoid the things we don't.

Willpower is simply the ability to do what you should do, when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not. (Successful people make a habit of doing the things unsuccessful people don't want to do.) Self-discipline is the key. It is the magic quality that makes everything possible, allowing you to rise as far and as fast as your talents and abilities will take you.

People like my friend John have made a habit of subordinating the self that seeks short-term gratification and developing the self devoted to a higher purpose.

Perhaps we all secretly crave someone who will make us do what we ought. But that person doesn't exist. That's why you should do everything you can to motivate your greatest ally: The one in the mirror.

Credits for Publication:

Alexander Green is the Investment Director of The Oxford Club. The Oxford Club newsletter is ranked among the top investment letters in the nation for 10-year performance by the independent Hulbert Financial Digest. Alex is the author of three national best sellers including, most recently, [Beyond Wealth: The Road Map to a Rich Life](#). He has been featured on Oprah & Friends, CNBC, National Public Radio (NPR), Fox News and "The O'Reilly Factor," and has been profiled by The Wall Street Journal, BusinessWeek, Forbes, and Kiplinger's Personal Finance, among others.

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