

# The Joy of Discipline

Some of us cringe when we hear the word discipline. Whether you consider its meaning from a noun or verb perspective it can still make you feel a bit uneasy.

I believe the word discipline has had a bad rap and the negative implications haven't given us the opportunity to look at the power behind this word. For years I said that I wasn't disciplined with certain areas of my life. One of those was that I didn't stick with my health plan to get physically fit. I kept telling myself that I wasn't disciplined enough. That was in fact not true. Oh, I was disciplined alright. There were lots of things that I was doing with complete consistency. I found a myriad of alternatives to working out. And I did them in the true spirit of full out discipline – feeling like I had little or no choice! The real story was that I wasn't disciplined to the things that moved me forward and would help me reach my goal.

Even though my patterns of behaviour were not in line with my higher vision for myself I was dedicated to them. I frequently neglected my daily walks, used the time to sit at my computer and made excuses like the weather, aching joints or too much work to be done. These were patterns that I followed so routinely you would think that they were actually my preferred way of being. I also told myself that when a flash of creative inspiration came “out of the blue” it was okay to forego a sprint down the road. Apparently I was disciplined – to excuses and unhealthy choices.

Most of us have somewhere in our lives where we are “stuck” in a behaviour that does not serve us. It may have been helpful at one time, but those days are gone. For example, we may have been eating for two while pregnant but once we've weaned the baby we need to stop our ritual of second helpings. Likewise we might have stayed an hour late at work during a particularly intense project and now need to head home at the end of the day. And then there are those of us who overspend while complaining we have no money.

There's no real magic to figuring out what you are disciplined to. It just takes ... well, a little discipline. Here are some steps to get you started:

1. Identify an area of your life where you are not experiencing the results you would like. There may be more than one so don't overwhelm yourself. Pick something that has been going on for a while and you might have thought “Gee, I wish I was more disciplined.” Choose whatever jumps out at you – your subconscious may be trying to get your attention! Write this topic in nice big bold letters across the top of a blank piece of paper.

2. Now draw a line down the middle of the page. At the top of one side write the word: NOW. This is where you list all the behaviours, thoughts and attitudes that you are currently – either knowingly or unknowingly (at least until now) – committed to that are keeping you stuck. For example, I noticed that I was more committed to watching the morning news than going for my walk and that I used spending time with my husband as a reason to stay home. Use point form to capture all those ways you are actually disciplined to what you don't particularly want. Make sure you have at least twenty things on your list. Include the beliefs you may be carrying around in your head. For me, they sounded something like "I'll never get fit" and "I should be doing something more productive." Make sure that all limiting thoughts are on your list.

3. Next, at the top of the other side write: IDEAL. Under that word list all the behaviours, thoughts, attitudes that you feel would be your ideal in this area. Be specific as you list how you would behave, what you see yourself doing, how you might show up if you were in an ideal state of being. Again, use point form to simplify and be direct. An example from my list might be "Walking every day at 8:00 a.m." Again, make sure you have at least twenty things on your list. Include the positive perspectives that you might have used in the past to get motivated and any empowering beliefs that motivate you even as you write them down!

4. Now that you have these two lists you can check for any direct links. Where do you see yourself in exact opposition to what you would prefer? What do you notice about any correlations between the two lists? What surprises you most? What disappoints you? Are there places where you can immediately make changes?

These steps will show you precisely where you have been disciplined to something that does not support your best life. Being honest with yourself is the catalyst for change ... and it's been said that "knowing the way is not going the way." For certain, being aware is a powerful step towards change. What you do with this information will now determine your success. You will either choose to change or choose to stay the same. It is always a choice and right now, you are making that choice for yourself.

Here are some steps for recalibrating your discipline.

1. Choose one thing from your "IDEAL" list that you know for certain would have a dramatic impact on your results. Don't worry if it is something really small or seems insignificant compared to some of the bigger options. Choose the one thing – a self-empowering thought or behaviour – that you know for sure at a gut level would help you get out of a rut.

2. On the back of your page write down what the choice is in the form of a commitment. For example, mine might have been “I am committed to walking at 8:00 a.m. at least five days a week.” Notice that while I originally wrote walking every day I realized that it may be an unrealistic goal. But ... I’m not letting myself off the hook with something easy such as twice a week. I’m stretching and requiring more of myself. That will make the difference. Setting a goal that is both challenging and achievable will help you get the ball rolling. You can always raise the bar when you see how well you do.

3. Now that you have made this commitment it’s time to have it witnessed. Choose someone who will encourage and acknowledge your efforts. Ask them to listen as you read your commitment out loud and agree to check in with you weekly. Okay ... now some of you may be rolling your eyes and thinking this might feel a bit goofy. For one thing, we don’t necessarily want others to know we are struggling. Then there is the question of whether or not we “need” anyone else involved. Swallow your pride and invest in one of the most powerful tools you’ll ever have to be successful. When you have the committed support and accountability of someone who cares you automatically shift your internal dialogue. Now ... someone else is on your team. We were never meant to “go it alone” in this world and this is an excellent opportunity for you to invite someone else to share your experience. Who knows – they may decide to have you do the same for them.

4. The final step, of course, is for you to follow up – with yourself and your witness. One thing that is often overlooked is self-appraisal for the things we do right. It’s easy to end the week with a running grocery list of what we forgot or missed. Give yourself credit where it’s due and congratulate yourself for what you achieved. Often I encourage my clients to do this even on a daily basis. When our days get busy it’s easy to fall into the habit of climbing into bed at night bemoaning what didn’t get done. This is a perfect time to congratulate yourself for what you did accomplish and whatever life-affirming actions or thoughts you held for yourself.

Changes can occur in a heartbeat and we all know that for them to last we have to be diligent ... and disciplined. Creating a new discipline that reflects your idea of who you want to be and how you want to live your life is really just that simple. One step at a time!

Good Luck!

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