

21 Ways to Achieve Lasting Happiness and Success

THE POWER OF SELF-DISCIPLINE



**NO
EXCUSES!**

BRIAN TRACY

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Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Introduction](#)

[PART I - Self-Discipline and Personal Success](#)

[Chapter 1 - Self-Discipline and Success](#)

[Describe Your Ideal Life](#)

[Do Your Own Thing](#)

[Join the Top 20 Percent](#)

[Starting with Nothing](#)

[Hard Work Is the Key](#)

[The Great Law](#)

[Success Is Predictable](#)

[The Secrets of Success](#)

[Pay the Price](#)

[Learn from the Experts](#)

[Mental and Physical Fitness Need to Be Ongoing](#)

[Become All You Can Be](#)

[Success Is Its Own Reward](#)

[Chapter 2 - Self-Discipline and Character](#)

The Great Virtues

The Test of Character

The Big Payoff

The Development of Character

The Structure of Personality

Always Behave Consistently

Do the Right Thing

What You Dwell Upon Grows

Chapter 3 - Self-Discipline and Responsibility

From Childhood to Maturity

Get Over the Mistakes Your Parents Made

The Fatal Fallacy

An Attitude of Irresponsibility

Eliminating Negative Emotions

Psychosomatic Illness

Blaming Is Easy

The Antidote to Negative Emotions

Money and Emotions

Responsibility and Control

Never Complain, Never Explain

[Self-Mastery and Self-Control](#)

[The Only Antidote Is Action](#)

[Chapter 4 - Self-Discipline and Goals](#)

[The 3 Percent Factor](#)

[Multiply Your Chances of Success](#)

[The Discipline of Writing](#)

[Success Versus Failure Mechanisms](#)

[Take Control of Your Life](#)

[The Seven-Step Method to Achieving Your Goals](#)

[The Ten-Goal Exercise](#)

[Select One Goal](#)

[Make a Plan](#)

[Use “Mindstorming” to Get Started](#)

[The Great Law of Cause and Effect](#)

[Chapter 5 - Self-Discipline and Personal Excellence](#)

[Your Biggest Investment](#)

[You Are the President](#)

[What Got You Here Won’t Get You Any Further](#)

[Join the Top 20 Percent](#)

[No Limits on Your Potential](#)

[The Keys to the Twenty-First Century.](#)

[Ordinary into Extraordinary.](#)

[Make a Decision](#)

[Follow the Leaders, Not the Followers](#)

[The Answers Have All Been Found](#)

[Set High Income as a Goal](#)

[Use the 3 Percent Formula to Invest in Yourself](#)

[Three Simple Steps to Become the Best](#)

[The Achievement of Mastery.](#)

[Talent Is Not Enough](#)

[Two Hours Each Day Will Get You to the Top](#)

[Form the Habit of Continuous Learning](#)

[You Can Be Rich or Poor: It's Your Decision](#)

[Increase Your Income 1,000 Percent](#)

[One Half of 1 Percent Per Week](#)

[26 Percent Better Each Year](#)

[Seven Steps to the Top](#)

[Be the Best!](#)

[Chapter 6 - Self-Discipline and Courage](#)

[Fears Can Be Unlearned](#)

Fear Paralyzes Action

Do the Opposite

Visualize Yourself as Unafraid

Learn to Speak on Your Feet

Eliminate Two Fears at Once

Confront Your Fears

Move Toward the Fear

Leaders Have Two Types of Courage

Deal With the Fear Directly

The Disaster Report

The Real Antidote

Chapter 7 - Self-Discipline and Persistence

The Reward of Persistence

Your Ability to Respond

Optimism Gives You Resilience

Be Proactive Versus Reactive

Look for the Gift

Resolve in Advance

PART II - Self-Discipline in Business, Sales, and Finances

Chapter 8 - Self-Discipline and Work

[Separate the Relevant from the Irrelevant](#)

[Develop an Excellent Reputation](#)

[The Law of Three Helps You Prioritize](#)

[Calculate Your Hourly Rate](#)

[Get on the Same Page About What Work Is Most Important](#)

[Work All the Time You Work](#)

[Who Works Hardest? The Secret Survey](#)

[Pay the Price](#)

[The Forty Plus Formula](#)

[Look the Part: Dress for Success](#)

[Chapter 9 - Self-Discipline and Leadership](#)

[Four Stages of Development](#)

[Leaders Have Vision](#)

[A Leader Is a Standard Bearer](#)

[Walk the Talk](#)

[Set the Standards](#)

[Set Values and Principles](#)

[Seven Principles of Leadership](#)

[The Inevitable Crisis](#)

[Self-Control and Leadership](#)

Leadership Qualities

Leaders Rise to the Top

Chapter 10 - Self-Discipline and Business

The Law of Competition

The Customer Is Always Right

You Must Be Better

Challenge Your Assumptions

Identify Your Ideal Customer

Know Your True Costs

The Purpose of a Business Is to Please Its Customers

Set High Standards

Think About the Solution

Chapter 11 - Self-Discipline and Sales

Business Success or Failure

The Discipline of Generating Sales

Overcome Your Fear of Rejection

Increase Face Time with Customers and Prospects

Remain Positive and Optimistic

How to Double Your Sales Income

Control Your Sales Activities

Improve Your Ratios

Keys to Sales Success

Start Early

Set Higher Standards for Yourself

All Sales Skills Are Learnable

Chapter 12 - Self-Discipline and Money

The Reasons for Financial Failure

Spending Makes You Happy

Rewire Your Responses About Money

Associate Happiness with Saving

Save Throughout Your Lifetime

Practice the 1 Percent Formula

The Payoff Is Tremendous

Income Increases Don't Help

Practice the Wedge Principle

The Miracle of Compound Interest

Chapter 13 - Self-Discipline and Time Management

You Can't "Save" Time

Assess the True Value of Everything You Do

Personal Strategic Planning

Think Before You Act

Priorities versus Posteriorities

Identify the Consequences

Managing Your Time

Practice Single-Handling

1,000 Percent Return on Investment

Keep Yourself Focused

Start Today

Chapter 14 - Self-Discipline and Problem Solving

The Inevitable and Unavoidable Crisis

Perform at Your Best

Keep Your Mind Clear

Stepping Stones to Success

A Nine-Step Method for Solving Problems Effectively

The Big Reward

The Determinant of Your Success

PART III - Self-Discipline and the Good Life

Chapter 15 - Self-Discipline and Happiness

The Law of Control

The Reason for Happiness

[Happiness Is a By-Product](#)

[Five Ingredients of Happiness](#)

[Five Ingredients of Happiness](#)

[Never Be Satisfied](#)

[Chapter 16 - Self-Discipline and Personal Health](#)

[Living a Long Life](#)

[Seven Key Health Habits](#)

[The Five Ps of Excellent Health](#)

[Get Your Weight Under Control](#)

[Change Your Set Point](#)

[The Fatal Flaw in Dieting](#)

[The Formula for Permanent Weight Loss](#)

[Live to Be One Hundred](#)

[Chapter 17 - Self-Discipline and Physical Fitness](#)

[Listen to the Experts](#)

[Get Started First Thing](#)

[Trick Yourself](#)

[Increase Your Intelligence](#)

[Make Exercise a Part of Your Lifestyle](#)

[Join an Organized Sport](#)

[Develop New and Better Habits](#)

[Chapter 18 - Self-Discipline and Marriage](#)

[The Key to a Happy Marriage](#)

[Birds of a Feather](#)

[Love Is Our Greatest Need in Life](#)

[Different Strokes Require Tolerance and Understanding](#)

[Male-Female Communication Styles](#)

[Relationship-Building Takes Effort](#)

[The Disciplines of Listening](#)

[Total Commitment Is Essential](#)

[Be Willing to Change](#)

[The Four Questions You Should Ask](#)

[Your Spouse Should Be Your Best Friend](#)

[Chapter 19 - Self-Discipline and Children](#)

[Your Greatest Responsibility](#)

[How Children Spell “Love”](#)

[Setting New Priorities](#)

[Long-Term Thinking](#)

[The Greatest Gift Is Love](#)

[Discipline Versus Development](#)

Question Your Beliefs

Set a Good Example

Be a Role Model

Building Character

Always Tell the Truth

The Foundation of Self-Confidence

The Power of Forgiveness

Teaching Your Children Is Never Ending

Be Their Role Model

Chapter 20 - Self-Discipline and Friendship

The Core of Personality

The Key to Happiness

The Law of Indirect Effort

Raise Other People's Self-Esteem

Seven Ways to Make People Feel Important

Be Concerned About Other People

Chapter 21 - Self-Discipline and Peace of Mind

Outer Versus Inner Success

The Need to Be Right

Refuse to Blame Anyone for Anything

[Give Up Your Suffering](#)

[Practice Forgiveness](#)

[The Forgetting Curve](#)

[Get Over It and Get On with It](#)

[Forgiveness Is Selfish](#)

[Accept Responsibility and Forgive](#)

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No Excuses!

*The Power
of Self-Discipline*

BRIAN TRACY



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This book is fondly dedicated to my friend and partner Eric Berman, one of the most disciplined and determined people I have ever met.

Introduction: The Miracle of Self-Discipline

“There are a thousand excuses for failure but never a good reason.”

—MARK TWAIN

Why are some people more successful than others? Why do some people make more money, live happier lives, and accomplish much more in the same number of years than the great majority? What is the real “secret of success?”

Often I begin a seminar with a little exercise. I ask the audience, “How many people here would like to double their income?”

Almost everyone smiles and raises their hands. I then ask, “How many people here would like to lose weight? Get out of debt? Achieve financial independence?”

Again, everyone smiles, some people cheer, and they all raise their hands. Then I say, “Wonderful! These are great goals that everyone has. We all want to make more money, spend more time with our families, be fit and trim, and achieve financial independence.

“Not only do we all want the same things, but we all know what we have to do to achieve them. And we all intend to do those things, *sometime*. But

before we get started, we decide that we need to take a little vacation to a wonderful fantasy place called ‘Someday Isle.’

“We say that ‘Someday I’ll read that book. Someday I’ll start that exercise program. Someday I’ll upgrade my skills and earn more money. Someday I’ll get my finances under control and get out of debt. Someday I’ll do all those things that I know I need to do to achieve all my goals. Someday.’”

Probably 80 percent of the population lives on Someday Isle most of the time. They think and dream and fantasize about all the things they are going to do “someday.”

And who are they surrounded by on Someday Isle? Other people on Someday Isle! And what is the chief topic of conversation on Someday Isle? Excuses! They all sit around and swap excuses for being on the island. “Why are you here?” they ask each other.

Not surprising, their excuses are largely the same: “I didn’t have a happy childhood,” “I didn’t get a good education,” “I don’t have any money,” “My boss is really critical,” “My marriage is no good,” “No one appreciates me,” or “The economy is terrible.”

They have come down with the disease of “excusitis,” which is invariable fatal to success. They all have good intentions, but as everyone

knows, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

The first rule of success is simple: Vote yourself off the island!

No more excuses! Do it or don't do it—but don't make excuses. Stop using your incredible brain to think up elaborate rationalizations and justifications for not taking action. Do something. Do anything. Get on with it! Repeat to yourself: “If it's to be, it's up to me!”

Losers make excuses; winners make progress. Now, how can you tell if your favorite excuse is valid or not? It's simple. Look around and ask, “Is there anyone else who has my same excuse who is successful anyway?”

When you ask this question, if you are honest, you will have to admit that there are thousands and even millions of people who have had it far worse than you have who have gone on to do wonderful things with their lives.

And what thousands and millions of others have done, you can do as well—if you try.

It has been said that if people put as much energy into achieving their goals as they spend making up excuses for failure, they would actually surprise themselves. But first, you have to vote yourself off the island.

Humble Beginnings

Very few people start off with many advantages. Personally, I did not graduate from high school. I worked at laboring jobs for several years. I had

limited education, limited skills, and a limited future. And then I began asking that question: “Why are some people more successful than others?” This question changed my life.

Over the years, I have read thousands of books and articles on the subjects of success and achievement. It seems that the reasons for these accomplishments have been discussed and written about for more than 2,000 years, in every conceivable way.

One quality that most philosophers, teachers, and experts agree on is the importance of self-discipline. Discipline is what you must have to resist the lure of excuses.

It is self-discipline that enables you to “vote yourself off the island.” It is the key to a great life and, without it, no lasting success is possible.

The development of self-discipline changed my life, and it will change yours as well. By continually demanding more from myself, I became successful in sales and then in management. I caught up on my schooling and took an MBA degree in my thirties, which required thousands of hours of determined study. I imported Suzuki vehicles into Canada before anyone else, set up sixty-five dealerships, and sold \$25 million worth of the vehicles, and this is all after I had started with no knowledge of the industry. What I had, however, was the discipline and determination to learn

what I needed to know and then apply what I needed to do.

I got into real estate development with no knowledge or experience, applied the power of discipline, which was then backed by hundreds of hours of work and study. I then went on to build shopping centers, industrial parks, office buildings, and residential subdivisions.

With self-discipline, I have built successful businesses in training, consulting, speaking, writing, recording, and distribution. My audio and video programs, books, seminars, and training programs have sold more than \$500 million in thirty-six languages and fifty-four countries. Over the years I have consulted for more than 1,000 companies and trained more than 5 million people in live seminars and talks. In every case, the practice of self-discipline has been essential to my success.

I discovered that you can achieve almost any goal you set for yourself if you have the discipline to pay the price, to do what you need to do, and to never give up.



Who Should Read This Book?

This book is written for ambitious, determined men and women who want to achieve everything that is possible for them in life. It is written for people who are “hungry” to do more, to have more, and to be more than they ever

have been before.

Perhaps the most important insight of all with regard to success is that to achieve greatly, you must become a different person. It is not the material things you accomplish or acquire that matter so much as it is the *quality of the person you must become* to accomplish well above the average. The development of self-discipline is the high road that makes everything possible for you.

This book will serve as your step-by-step guide to becoming a remarkable person who is capable of remarkable achievements.

A Chance Encounter Reveals the Reason for Success

Some years ago, I was attending a conference in Washington, D.C. During the lunch break I was eating at a nearby Food Fair. The area was crowded, so I sat down at the last open table by myself, even though it was a table for four.

A few minutes later, an older gentlemen and a younger woman who appeared to be his assistant came along, carrying trays of food and obviously looking for a place to sit.

Having lots of room at my table, I immediately arose and invited the older gentlemen to join me. He was hesitant, but I insisted. Finally, he sat down, quite thankfully, and we began to chat over lunch.

It turned out that his name was Kop Kopmeyer. As it happened, I immediately knew who he was. He was a legend in the field of success and achievement. Kop Kopmeyer had written four bestselling books, each of which contained 250 success principles that he had derived from more than fifty years of research and study. I had read all four books from cover to cover, each more than once.

After we had chatted for a while, I asked him the question that many people in this situation would ask: “Of all the 1,000 success principles that you have discovered, which do you think is the most important?”

He smiled at me with a twinkle in his eye, as if he had been asked this question many times, and he replied without hesitating, “The most important success principle of all was stated by Elbert Hubbard, one of the most prolific writers in American history, at the beginning of the twentieth century. He said, *‘Self-discipline is the ability to do what you should do, when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not.’*”

He went on to say, “There are 999 other success principles that I have found in my reading and experience, but without self-discipline, none of them work. With self-discipline, they all work.”

Thus, self-discipline is the key to personal greatness. It is the magic quality that opens all doors for you and makes everything else possible.

With self-discipline, the average person can rise as far and as fast as his talents and intelligence can take him. But without self-discipline, a person with every blessing of background, education, and opportunity will seldom rise above mediocrity.

Your Two Worst Enemies

Just as self-discipline is the key to success, the *lack* of self-discipline is the major cause of failure, frustration, underachievement, and unhappiness in life. It causes us to make excuses and sell ourselves short.

Perhaps the two biggest enemies of success, happiness and personal fulfillment, are first the Path of Least Resistance and, second, the Expediency Factor.

The Path of Least Resistance is what causes people to take the easy way in almost every situation. They seek shortcuts to everything. They arrive at work at the last minute and leave at the first opportunity. They look for get-rich-quick schemes and easy money. Over time, they develop the habit of always seeking an easier, faster way to get the things they want rather than doing what is hard but necessary to achieve real success.

The Expediency Factor, which is an extension of the law of least resistance, is even worse when leading people to failure and underachievement. This principle says, “People invariably seek the fastest

and easiest way to get the things they want, right now, with little or no concern for the long-term consequences of their behaviors.” In other words, most people do what is *expedient*, what is fun and easy rather than what is *necessary* for success.

Every day, and every minute of every day, there is a battle going on inside of you between doing what is right, hard, and necessary (like the angel on one shoulder) or doing what is fun, easy, and of little or no value (like the devil on your other shoulder). Every minute of every day, you must fight and win this battle with the Expediency Factor and resist the pull of the Path of Least Resistance if you truly desire to become everything you are capable of becoming.

Take Control of Yourself

Another definition of self-discipline is *self-mastery*. Success is possible only when you can master your own emotions, appetites, and inclinations.

People who lack the ability to master their appetites become weak and dissolute, as well as unreliable in other things as well.

Self-discipline can also be defined as *self-control*. Your ability to control yourself and your actions, control what you say and do, and ensure that your behaviors are consistent with your long-term goals and objectives is the mark of the superior person.

Discipline has been defined as *self-denial*. This requires that you deny yourself the easy pleasures, the temptations that lead so many people astray, and instead discipline yourself to do only those things that you know are right for the long term and appropriate for the moment.

Self-discipline requires *delayed gratification*, the ability to put off satisfaction in the short term in order to enjoy greater rewards in the long term.

Think Long Term

Sociologist Dr. Edward Banfield of Harvard University conducted a fifty-year study into the reasons for upward socioeconomic mobility in America. He concluded that the most important single attribute of people who achieved great success in life was “long time perspective.” Banfield defined “time perspective” as “the amount of time an individual takes into consideration when determining his present actions.”

In other words, the most successful people are long-term thinkers. They look into the future as far as they can to determine the kind of people they want to become and the goals they want to achieve. They then come back to the present and determine the things that they will have to do—or not do—to achieve their desired futures.

This practice of long-term thinking applies to work, career, marriage,

relationships, money, and personal conduct—each of which is covered in the pages ahead. Successful people make sure that everything they do in the short term is consistent with where they want to end up in the long term. They practice self-discipline at all times.

Perhaps the most important word in long-term thinking is *sacrifice*.

Superior people have the ability to throughout their lives make sacrifices in the short term, both large and small, so as to assure greater results and rewards in the long term.

You see this willingness to sacrifice in people who spend many hours and even years preparing, studying, and upgrading their skills to make themselves more valuable so that they can have a better life in the future, rather than spending most of their time socializing and having fun in the present.

Longfellow once wrote:

“Those heights by great men, won and kept,

Were not achieved by sudden flight.

But they, while their companions slept,

Were toiling upward in the night.”

Your ability to think, plan, and work hard in the short term and to discipline yourself to do what is right and necessary before you do what is

fun and easy is the key to creating a wonderful future for yourself.

Your ability to think long term is a developed skill. As you get better at it, you become more able to predict with increasing accuracy what is likely to happen to you in the future as the result of your actions in the present. This is a quality of the superior thinker.

Short-Term Gain Can Cause Long-Term Pain

There are two laws that you fall victim to when you fail to practice self-discipline. The first is called the “Law of Unintended Consequences.” This law states that “the unintended consequences of an action can be far worse than the intended consequences of that behavior because of a lack of long-term thinking.”

The second is the “Law of Perverse Consequences,” which says that “a short-term action aimed at immediate gratification can lead to perverse, or the opposite, consequences from those at which it was aimed.”

For example, you might make an investment of time, money, or emotion with the desire and intent to be better off and happier as a result. But because you acted without carefully thinking or doing your homework, the consequences of your behavior turned out to be far worse than if you had done nothing at all. Every person has had this experience, and usually more than once.

The Common Denominator of Success

Herbert Grey, a businessman, conducted a long-term study searching for what he called “the common denominator of success.” After eleven years, he finally concluded that the common denominator of success was that “successful people make a *habit* of doing the things that unsuccessful people don’t like to do.”

And what were these things? It turned out that the things that successful people don’t like to do are the same things that failures don’t like to do either. But successful people do them anyway because they know that this is the price they have to pay if they want to enjoy greater success and rewards in the future.

What Grey found was that successful people are more concerned with “pleasing results,” whereas failures were more concerned about “pleasing methods.” Successful, happy people were more concerned with the *positive, long-term consequences of their behaviors*, whereas unsuccessful people were more concerned with *personal enjoyment and immediate gratification*.

Motivational speaker Denis Waitley has said that the top people were those who were more concerned with activities that were “goal achieving,” whereas average people were more concerned with activities that were

“tension relieving.”

Dinner Before Dessert

The simplest rule in the practice of self-discipline is to eat “dinner before dessert.” In a meal, there is a logical order of dishes, and dessert comes last. First, you eat the main courses and clean your plate; only then do you have dessert.

There is a cute but misleading bumper sticker that says, “Life is short; eat dessert first.”

Just think what would happen if you came home after work and, instead of eating a healthy dinner, you ate a large piece of apple pie with ice cream. What kind of appetite for healthy, nutritious food would you have afterward? With all that sugar in your stomach, how would you feel? Would you feel re-energized and eager to do something productive? Or would you feel tired and sluggish and ready to write off the day as largely finished?

You get the same result when you go for a drink or two after work and then come home and turn on the television. These are simply different forms of “dessert” that largely eliminate your ability to do anything useful for the rest of the evening.

Perhaps the worst part of all is that, whatever you do repeatedly soon becomes a *habit*. And a habit, once formed, is hard to break. The habit of

taking the easy way, doing what is fun and enjoyable, or eating dessert before dinner becomes stronger and stronger, and it leads inevitably to personal weakness, underachievement, and failure.

The Habit of Self-Discipline

Fortunately, you can develop the habit of self-discipline. The regular practice of disciplining yourself to do what you should do, when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not becomes stronger and stronger as you practice it. You refuse to make excuses.

Bad habits are easy to form, but hard to live with. Good habits are hard to form, but easy to live with. And as Goethe said, “Everything is hard before it’s easy.”

It is hard to form the habits of self-discipline, self-mastery, and self-control, but once you have developed them, they become automatic and easy to practice. When the habits of self-discipline are firmly entrenched in your behavior, you start to feel uncomfortable when you are not behaving in a self-disciplined manner.

The best news is that all habits are ***learnable***. You can learn any habit you need to learn in order to become the kind of person that you want to become. You can become an excellent person by practicing self-discipline whenever it is called for.