

Personal Excellence

ESSENTIALS

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Willpower Woes
*3 ways to develop better
self-discipline and control*



Releasing Greatness
*Apply nine proven
guidelines*



When To Call It Quits
*Factors which could help
you make the decision*



Ask For Forgiveness,
Not Permission
*The importance of
judgment and
responsibility*

THE 4 KEYS TO BUILDING RAPPORT

Tearing down the WALL

Mark A. Vickers

Willpower Woes

3 ways to develop better self-discipline and control

 By Merilee Kern

Willpower. We all want it. We all need it. But far too many of us just don't have what it takes to stay resolute and determined when the going gets tough. Indeed, maintaining self-control and self-discipline when facing challenges at work and at home, or when aspiring toward ambitious future goals and objectives, can be among the most difficult life skills to manage and master—but it's also one of the most impactful.

The significance of having low willpower cannot be overstated, since a lack of mental strength and fortitude can adversely affect nearly every aspect of your life and how you are perceived by others. This includes levels of failure and success in the workplace; leadership capabilities relating to career and home/parenting life; maintaining good habits (reliability, promptness, health and otherwise); aptly managing compulsions, impulses, addictions and bad habits; and a myriad of other obstacles, trials and tribulations we're presented with on a daily basis. Life without willpower paints an ominous picture.

However much desired or well-intended, the process to developing willpower to benefit your professional and personal life can seem impossible, especially when faced with difficult situations, coercion or pressure from others, toxic relationships and certainly addictions of any sort. However, taking the initial steps to develop and maintain a strong will and self-discipline can be life changing.

With this in mind, I connected with the author of "[Life Rehab: Don't Overdose on Pain, People and Power](#)," Kanika Tolver—a Certified Professional Coach and thought leader who helps individuals realize career, business, life and spiritual success. She offered this simple yet insightful 3-step exercise that can help individuals develop better willpower through practice, progression, and patience

1. Practice

- Brainstorm all of your weaknesses—as many as you can think of—and write them down. When you identify your weaknesses on paper, it initiates the process of acknowledgement and acceptance. We all have weaknesses, whether it's procrastination or being a "pushover" and the like, that are undermining our ability to be happy and successful. However, thinking comprehensively about our shortcomings and confessing them on paper produces a cathartic sense of awareness and urgency. While any scrap of paper will do, it's best to invest in a simple journal where you can keep an ongoing log of your flaws and faults that are likely working against you at work, at home and in social circles.

- Cultivate a list of adversaries. As with your list of weaknesses above that related to your own personality and character traits, it's also advisable to identify those people and other aspects of your life that challenge your willpower. This can include specific people in your professional and personal life, your job itself, or things like food, alcohol, television, the gym, etc. Keep a running log of these as well so that you remain mindful of exactly what aspects of life you seek to improve. Even try to put this list from most to least important or impactful, with the areas you need the most work on, and that will impact your life most significantly, at the top.

- Set small, achievable goals for turning your weaknesses into strengths. For each weakness, set small incremental goals. Setting

unrealistic goals can lead to disappointment, which often leads to self-sabotage and self-doubt—all of which undercut your efforts to develop stronger willpower. Most of us have spent years repeating a bad habit or suffering a bad relationship. With this exercise, it's now time to make a conscious choice to make small changes to negate the damage done. A collection of successful small changes will likely lead to big changes, which can lead to life changing transformations. Reward yourself for even the smallest of victories along the journey. Revel in each achievement, however tiny.

2. Progression

- Now that you are aware of what about yourself you need to "fix" and in what circumstances, journal your daily progress—both wins, losses and challenges—and your feelings in relation to each. Over time, you will be able to analyze the "data" and discern patterns, including where you fell short, in what circumstances you remained steadfast, and what made you uncomfortable (and which way that ultimately swung). This will expose ways to better apply willpower and manage situations to your benefit. Progression requires transparent hard work and constant self-evaluation. But the prospective payoff is immense.

- Surround yourself with people who have experience and overcame the same struggles you have. Associating with people who can give you good, proven advice that can be validated with personal anecdotes and insights is priceless. One great strategy is to find an "accountability partner," support group, mentor or professional coach who can provide valuable objective perspectives and help guide and advise you when challenges present.

3. Patience

- Patience is indeed a virtue because all too few of us have it. But, if you can effectively exercise patience, it can vastly strengthen your willpower. In fact, the two are entirely intertwined. We are a culture of instant gratification, and when the universe does not deliver immediately we tend to get disappointed, which can lead to a "giving up" or "giving in" mentality—either of which are the enemies of willpower. It's hard to practice a new habit and continue down the path of progression with an impatient mindset. Know in advance that every day of your journey may not be positive or deliver the result you seek, but practice, progression and patience *will* ultimately enhance your self-control.

With a big dose of motivation and just a little bit of effort put forth with an exercise such as this, you could be well on your way to winning the willpower game. Cultivating a mental fortitude is not just a life luxury—it's a mission-critical key to promoting positive change, maintaining favorable habits, and bolstering your drive to achieve in all aspects of life. Carpe diem! **PE**



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