

Three Steps to Developing More Willpower

What does it take to maintain resolve when the going gets tough?

By Merilee Kern, MBA



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 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 goals, can be among the most difficult life skills to manage and master—but it's also one with a powerful effect.

The significance of having little willpower cannot be overstated, since a lack of fortitude can adversely affect nearly every aspect of your life and how you are perceived by others. That includes levels of failure and success in the workplace; leadership capabilities relating to career and home and parenting life; the ability to maintain good habits (reliability, promptness, health, and

otherwise); the ability to manage compulsions, impulses, addictions, and bad habits; and myriad other obstacles, trials, and tribulations we're presented with daily. Life without willpower paints an ominous picture.

However much-desired or well-intended, the process of 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. Taking the initial steps to develop and maintain a strong will and self-discipline can be life changing.

With that in mind, I connected with Kanika Tolver, the author of *Life Rehab: Don't Overdose on Pain, People and Power*, a certified professional coach, and a thought leader who helps individuals realize career, business, life, and spiritual success. She offered this simple

yet insightful exercise that can help individuals develop more willpower through three steps: practice, progression, and patience.

1. Practice

Brainstorm 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 acknowledgment and acceptance.

Thinking comprehensively about our shortcomings and acknowledging them on paper produces a cathartic sense of awareness and urgency.

We all have weaknesses—whether we are procrastinators or “pushovers” and the like—that are undermining our ability to be happy and successful. However, thinking comprehensively about our shortcomings and acknowledging them on paper produces a cathartic sense of awareness and urgency. Although 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 that relate 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. They can include specific people in your professional and personal life, your job itself, or things like food, alcohol, television, the gym, and so forth.

Keep a running log of those as well, so that you remain mindful of exactly which aspects of life you seek to improve. Even try to list your adversaries from most to least important or powerful, with the areas that need the most work and that will affect 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 more 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

Maintain a journal of your daily progress—both wins and losses and challenges—and your feelings about 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). The “data” 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 experienced and overcome 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 can help guide and advise you when challenges present themselves.

3. Patience

Patience is indeed a virtue, because too few of us have it. But if you can exercise patience effectively, it can vastly strengthen your willpower. In fact, the two are entirely intertwined. We are a culture of instant gratification. When the universe does not deliver immediately, we tend to get disappointed, which can lead to a “giving up” or “giving in” mentality—both 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.

Surround yourself with people who have experienced and overcome the same struggles you have.

Winning the Game

Know in advance that every day of your journey may not be positive or may not 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 one, you could be well on your way to winning the willpower game. Cultivating 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!*

Merilee Kern, MBA, is executive editor of the *Luxe List* international news syndicate, entrepreneur, and award-winning author. She may be reached online at www.TheLuxeList.com.