

Your Limitations and the Logic of Self-Discipline

I've been able to get through most of my life without discipline.

Like many people, I work hard, I learn, and I'm smart, so I'm able to coast if I try. I can get away with not being ruthlessly disciplined – with not having a routine that I follow without fail. I can be scattershot, as long as I put *enough* shots and sufficiently creative shots in the air.

Since discipline is just about no one's favorite thing, I'm usually content to live like this. Most people are, too. For us, discipline seems like a great way to bring unhappiness and pain and gloom into our lives.

But I can really only allow myself to coast without discipline when I'm not looking squarely at reality. I can only value both my high aspirations for my life *and* my undisciplined self-improvement efforts when I'm being vague about my goals and my limitations.

When I look at my goals and my limitations clearly, discipline starts to make sense. It becomes a helper that I often ignore, to my own harm.

I want to be a writer. That's not going to happen unless I'm writing consistently – and not just writing consistently, but learning about and improving my writing consistently.

I want to have adventures in the world – marathons and hikes and sailing and more. That's not going to happen unless I'm physically fit enough to thrive in multiple different, challenging environments. And that's not going to happen unless I'm training my body through running, weight-lifting, etc.

Consistency means routine, and routine means discipline. As I've worked to implement a new daily morning routine in the last month, I've had to call on more discipline than I've used in much of my life. If I wasn't clear about the reason for discipline, I (like most people) probably wouldn't be doing it. Again, discipline appears arbitrary and unfriendly when it's not paired with self-interest.

But I have come to learn that to accept discipline in these things is just to acknowledge reality.

When I exercise self-discipline, I'm acknowledging that I am a limited human being. I am acknowledging that my strength and knowledge are limited, and that they need to improve. I am acknowledging that my time is limited, and that I do not have forever to mess around with scattershot improvement. I am acknowledging that I don't have hundreds of years to get around to working on my goals. I am also acknowledging that my

goals are farther away than I imagine them to be, and that the reason most people (including me) have not reached big goals is simply due to a lack of will.

Those are hard acknowledgements. But they're correct. And knowing that there is a clear logic to discipline makes self-discipline easier to accept.