

## THE POWER OF DISCIPLINE –

### DOING WHAT OTHERS DON'T SETS YOU APART

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Discipline. It's hard work. It's unglamorous. It's mostly private. For these reasons, discipline doesn't tend to be a very popular subject these days. But for those who embrace its rigors, discipline delivers benefits far beyond what you see on the surface.

Webster defines discipline in part as "training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character." Uh-oh, these are dangerous subjects in today's political environment. But another aspect of discipline is "orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behavior; self-control." Self-control is something everyone can relate to and when you master it, you gain strength and power. When you practice self-control, you lift yourself above the fray, choose your actions and reactions, and keep your wits about you when others are losing theirs.

Discipline is hard work. It requires constant attention and awareness, especially as you begin to develop it. When you learn a new procedure at work, discipline means practicing the procedure again and again, making sure you are getting the result you desire. Discipline in learning means that you resist taking a shortcut, even though it seems harmless enough. The hard work of discipline sometimes keeps you working longer than your friends and maintaining concentration when they are relaxing or playing. Successful people in all walks of life practice their skills over and over again, gaining ever-higher levels of proficiency. Michael Jordan, at the peak of his career, still showed up earlier than anyone else on game day so he could practice.

Discipline is unglamorous. In a world of celebrity watching, glitz, and glamour, discipline is pretty boring stuff. Discipline requires focused attention on something you want to be good at, not constantly turning your head to see what someone else is doing. (Or worse, turning your head to see who's watching you.) Discipline starts with a goal, outlines a plan for achieving the goal, then puts into action all the necessary little things that must be done to achieve the goal. Done well, discipline doesn't call attention to itself; there's no desire for the stage, no interest in making headlines.

Discipline is mostly private. Discipline requires you to do a thing the right way whether anyone else is looking or not. It means being precise in your work even though others around you don't demand precision. It means telling the truth even though others probably wouldn't know whether you were or not. It means continuing to practice your skills even when you are already better than most of your associates and even when others make fun of your intensity. Discipline is about building your own self-confidence, taking quiet pride in your accomplishments, and developing a healthy esteem for the progress you have made. It is not about impressing others. (A happy irony is that disciplined people often do impress others; sometimes greatly.)

Discipline is fundamental to learning. It is required for growth. It is absolutely essential to success in any undertaking.

Sadly, discipline seems to be fading fast from the landscapes of our schools, homes, and businesses. In too many cases, it's not being taught. It's not being required. It's not being practiced. In business, for example, many workers shuffle into work each day, make their way through the day in an apathetic and languorous manner, and leave at day's end feeling tired and discouraged. Shortcuts are favored over the painstaking work that is required to produce top

quality results. Mistakes are frequently ignored or glossed over. Managers often hesitate to correct or insist on attention to "the little things." Some don't want the hassle; others fear creating bad attitudes among their workers. Too bad. With close attention and an insistence on getting the little things right, workers enhance their competence, which improves self-confidence, and ultimately generates pride in work done well.

Everyone, in little ways each day, finds reasons to avoid discipline. Think about all the decisions you postpone that you know you should make now. Or the difficult meetings or conversations you put off, promising yourself that when you have more energy or time, you'll handle them promptly. But when do you ever find that extra energy or time? What about the little errors you discover at the last minute when a report is due or a package needs to get into the mail? Even something as little as failing to correct someone who mispronounces your name shows a reluctance to be disciplined in your daily actions.

While it would be easy to get carried away with minutia, the point is that when you let little things slide, your attention wavers, your dedication falters, and the habit of discipline starts slipping away. One result is that you begin to feel progressively worse about your ability to deal with difficulties. And as little situations pile one on top of another, pretty soon you feel overwhelmed.

By making a commitment to discipline in the small details of your daily work, you take advantage of a golden opportunity to create for yourself an important competitive advantage. When you stay focused, attend to situations promptly, and continually practice the skills of your work, you will notice in time that your competence has grown. Your ability to make decisions has improved. Your ability to work as a trustworthy member of a team, completing complex projects on time, will give you great satisfaction. And while you are gaining strength and confidence through your dedication to discipline, others will be noticing your specialness. You will be different. You will be stronger. You will be better.

