

WILLPOWER DOESN'T WORK

By Benjamin Hardy

INTRODUCTION

WHY WILLPOWER DOESN'T WORK

“Many people think that what the addict needs is willpower, but nothing could be further from the truth.”

The key to getting out of survival mode and overcoming the cultural addictions is not to exert more willpower. Your willpower is gone. It was gone the moment you woke up and sucked back into your smartphone. It was gone when you were bombarded by a thousand options and choices. White-knuckling your way to change doesn't work. It never did. Instead, you need to create and control your environment.

WILLPOWER DOESN'T WORK

According to psychological research, your willpower is like a muscle. It's a finite resource that depletes with use. As a result, by the end of your strenuous days, your willpower muscles are exhausted, and you're left to your naked and defenseless self--with zero control to stop the nighttime munchies and time wasters.

When it comes to achieving goals, making committed decisions involves:

- Investing up front;
- Making it public;
- Setting a timeline;
- Installing several forms of feedback/accountability; and
- Removing or altering everything in your environment that opposes your commitment

Rather than relying solely on your own internal resolve and strength, true commitment means you've built several external defense systems around your goals. It means you've created conditions to make the achievement of your goals inevitable.

YOU CAN DESIGN YOUR ENVIRONMENT TO PROPEL AND SUSTAIN SUCCESS

The pervasive self-help advice is to focus on yourself. This makes sense, because we live in a highly individualistic culture. We've been conditioned to ignore context and obsess about ourselves.

Environmental design is different. It's about creating conditions that make your success inevitable. For example, if you want to be focused at work, you need to remove all distractions from your physical and digital workspace. If you want to eat healthy, remove all unhealthy foods from your house. If you want to get creative insights, get out of town and relax for a day or two. If you want to be more motivated, take on greater responsibility and increase the stakes for both success and failure.

You design your worldview by proactively shaping your external inputs, such as the information you consume, the people you surround yourself with, the places you go, and the experiences you have. Most people, however, reactively and mindlessly respond to whatever environments they find themselves in, and thus develop a worldview leading to ineffective behavior and victimhood.

However, for the sake of simplicity, in this book *environment* is that which is *external*, not internal. For example, your environment includes your physical surroundings, the people you choose to form relationships with, the information you let in, the foods you consume and the music you listen to.

That which is external *shapes* the internal.

PART 1 - YOUR ENVIRONMENT SHAPES YOU

CHAPTER 1

EVERY HERO IS THE PRODUCT OF A SITUATION

The Story of Civilization

What Durant concluded was that history was not shaped by great men, but rather by demanding *situations*.

“I think Carlisle was wrong... ***the hero is a product of a situation*** rather than the result of being a product of the hero. ***It is demand that brings out the exceptional qualities of man...*** [Heroes] for the function of ***meeting a situation which demands*** all his potential abilities... I think the ability of the average man could be doubled if it were demanded, if the situation demanded.”

Take, for example, the Equality of Opportunity Project, a groundbreaking study performed by Harvard economists Dr. Raj Chetty and Dr. Nathaniel Hendren. This project mapped the likelihood a person will improve their economic situation in the United States.

The results are devastatingly and shockingly clear: Your chances of improving your socioeconomic status are based very heavily on the state and even specific ***county*** within that state in which you live. In some countries, you have a fighting chance to improve your economic situation, while in others your chances are dim, nearly zero. Your specific environment of origin has a direct and measurable impact on the rest of your life, unless you actively change it.

Or, as Durant saw it, you are either rising up or shrinking down from the demands of your situation. Most people are living small, not because they lack the inherent talent, but because their situation isn't demanding more of them. They haven't placed themselves in a position requiring them to become more than they currently are.

WHAT ABOUT FREE WILL?

Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer has said, “Social psychologists argue that who we are at any time depends mostly on the context in which we find ourselves. But who creates the context? The more mindful we are, the more we can create the context we are in... and believe in the possibility of change.”

Thus, it's not free will *or* determinism. It's not choice *or* environments. Instead, it is a choice *and* environment. More directly, it is the choice *of* environment. You are responsible for shaping and choosing the environments that will ultimately shape the person you become and the destiny you have.

THE NEW SCIENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

Your behavior doesn't come from your personality. Rather your personality is shaped by your behavior.

Of course, not everyone is in a position to buy a Tesla. But this same principle can be applied a myriad of ways. For example, by simply wearing different clothes, you'll feel different. If you want to feel more confident, dress better.

NATURAL VERSUS DOMESTIC EVOLUTION

Change is inevitable. Conversely, growth is optional.

CHAPTER 2

HOW YOUR ENVIRONMENT SHAPES YOU

EVERY ENVIRONMENT HAS RULES

Social norms are more powerful at controlling your behavior than your deepest ideologies and desires.

A person's life, then, is not a reflection of their deepest held values and beliefs. But instead, a person's life is a product of the social norms around them. If you remain in an environment conflicting with your personal rules, you have only two choices: Conform to a bad environment or battle it through willpower. Both of these are very poor options and ultimately lead to the same place.

CHAPTER 3

TWO TYPES OF “ENRICHED” ENVIRONMENTS

THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF HIGH PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

The next evolution of high performance and achievement takes the focus *off* the individual and places the environment at the forefront. Thus, ironically, the future of self help will

not be focused on “the self,” but rather, it will be *focused on the environment* that shapes the self. At the core of this new thrust will be the installment of enriched environments.

PART 2 - HOW TO MAKE WILLPOWER IRRELEVANT

CHAPTER 4

RESET YOUR LIFE

When it comes to having clarity about your life and goals, you need to give yourself a reset, regularly. The most successful people in the world purposefully carve out time in their regular schedules for unplugging, recharging, and resetting. Take the famous example of Bill Gates, who took “Think Weeks” where he would completely remove himself from work and all forms of communication. All he would do is think, learn, and rest. And he admits that his best ideas for Microsoft came during those rest and recovery weeks.

CHAPTER 5

DESIGNATE A SACRED SPACE

My car is my daily sacred environment, but only when parked somewhere away from my house. Every morning, I get in my car and leave my home environment, with all its triggers and energy, and park either in a different neighborhood or even outside the gym before working out. I then spend between twenty and sixty minutes reading a good book, writing in my journal, praying, and meditating. Without fail, the daily act keeps me inspired and moving the direction in life I want to go. Aside from my daily sacred environment, a few times per month I drive a few hours to a personally meaningful place where I can completely shut out the world for a few hours.

CHAPTER 6

REMOVE EVERYTHING THAT CONFLICTS WITH YOUR DECISIONS

SUBTRACTION IS PRODUCTIVITY

ELIMINATE OPTIONS

Success isn't that difficult; it merely involves taking twenty steps in a singular direction. Most people take one step in twenty directions. Let go of vain and distracting pursuits you're not truly committed to.

CHAPTER 7

CHANGE YOUR DEFAULT OPTIONS

DESIGN YOUR DEFAULTS

PRINCIPLE #1; DON'T BE A SLAVE TO YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Put the phone in your glove box.

CHAPTER 8

CREATE TRIGGERS TO PREVENT SELF-SABOTAGE

IMPLEMENTATION INTENTIONS

Implementation intentions come down to knowing ahead of time exactly what you'll do if you veer off course, as well as defining precisely what veering off course means for you. It's planning to fail so you can proactively respond.

- If I'm tempted to check my email while working, then I'll get out of my set and do twenty push-ups.
- If I enter the kitchen and am tempted to eat a Costco uncooked tortilla (so good), then I'll drink a big glass of water.

Research among children has found that imagining both the obstacles to their goals and their "if-then responses" improve students' grades, attendance, and in-class conduct.

CONCLUSION: HOW TO USE IMPLEMENTATION INTENTIONS

I've found that when a craving comes, there are a few tortuous moments that will make or break you. If you can distract yourself for those few moments, the craving usually goes away. And because addiction is the opposite of connection, it's best to have someone you can immediately call when you get a craving. The worst thing you can do is rely on yourself. Being "independent" hasn't worked in the past. Rely on those you love. Your bonds and connections will save you.

PART 3

OUTSOURCE HIGH PERFORMANCE AND SUCCESS TO YOUR ENVIRONMENT

CHAPTER 9

EMBED "FORCING FUNCTIONS" INTO YOUR ENVIRONMENT

THE POWER OF SITUATIONS

According to Dr. Martin Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association, there are several psychological differences between pessimists and optimists. Most notably, pessimists are very quick to explain negative events as a permanent fixture of their identity. They (or life in general) are the problem, and there's nothing that can be done about it. Conversely, an optimist tends to explain negative events to themselves as *situational*, short lived, and specific. When something goes wrong for an optimist, they focus on situational factors and strategize how they can change those factors in the future.

INTRODUCING FORCING FUNCTIONS

An effective way to optimize your environment is by structuring it with *forcing functions*, which are self-imposed situational factors that literally force you to act and achieve what you intend. For instance, when you intentionally leave your cell phone in your car when you get home from work, being present with your loved ones is outsourced by an enriched environment of rest and recovery. The act of leaving your cell phone outside your immediate proximity forces you to act as you intended. Besides which, it's simple: The phone isn't around. You can't use it if it's not there.

Forcing functions have this combination of usefulness and simplicity: You turn a behavior you'd like to do into something *you have to do*. It becomes your antidote to self-sabotage.

Forcing functions are amazing because they are another way of freeing up your working memory, rather than agonizing over what you should do or having to continually and consciously manage your behavior, you've created an environment that outsources desired behaviors.

Keeping your options open often sets you up for paralysis and failure. It's better to purposefully remove options you already know may be pleasurable but ultimately distracting or even destructive. You can set up your whole life this way. And you'll have moments when you thank your prior self for making a powerful decision that is now influencing present experiences.

EXTERNAL DEFENSES FROM YOURSELF AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

If you're serious about your goals, you won't leave it up to chance. Instead, you'll build several *external defense systems around your goal*. It's not about mind-set, willpower, attitudes, self-esteem, or even discipline. On the contrary, true commitment is about outsourcing these inner strengths to an environment that makes them subconscious and instinctive.

One of my favorite examples comes from the entrepreneur Dan Martell. A few times per week, he takes his laptop to a coworking space or coffee shop and purposefully leaves his power cable at home, this gives him a few hours of battery life to get stuff done, which motivates him to work hard during those few hours.

PUTTING FORCING FUNCTION TO WORK IN ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE

The typical office job has very low expectations of its employees (even though it feels demanding). People are asked to work -- but they are rarely required to do things they've never done before. They aren't being forced into a role requiring a high level of responsibility and ownership. They aren't required to track and report their daily progress. If they fail to produce, the consequences are minor or nonexistent. The result is that people work with their cell phone next to their desk and with multiple tabs of distraction open on their internet browser. Focus and deep engagement rarely, if ever occur. They're distracted for most of their workday.

The most potent forcing functions include:

- High investment;
- Social pressure;
- High consequence for poor performance;
- High difficulty; and
- Novelty.

SOCIAL PRESSURE

What ways can you create social pressure to your current goals and projects

HIGH CONSEQUENCE FOR POOR PERFORMANCE

In order to perform at your highest level, your daily, hourly, and even minute-by-minute performance must mean something. Create consequences for failure-- big ones. Not just social consequences, but consequences to the bottom line.

HIGH DIFFICULTY

In a story told by educator and religious leader Dr. David Bednar, a young man had recently purchased a pickup truck. Needing some firewood, he thought it a great opportunity to test his new truck. After driving up to the snowy mountains and out of cell phone range, he found a spot to park near some trees. He pulled off the road to park and got stuck in deep snow. Desperate, he tried everything he could to get out. When he switched from reverse to drive and spun out his tires, his truck got stuck deeper and deeper. He put twigs under the stuck tire in hopes they would provide traction, but to no avail. He used a shovel and tried digging around the tire, but he was stuck too deep.

Eventually, he became incredibly discouraged. The sun was hastily descending and the weather getting bitterly cold. He wasn't sure what to do. He offered a simple prayer and got the urge to start cutting wood. He worked for a few hours. Chopping down trees and putting large pieces into the back of his truck. Once the truck was full he hopped in and turned it on. After a moment of umbe silence, he tried reversing out. The heavy load of wood provided the needed traction to get out of the snow, to get back onto the road, and to move forward. Without the load of wood in his truck, he would have remained stuck.

Most people mistakenly believe that happiness is the absence of a load. We want life to be easy, without challenge or difficulty. However, it is by having a load that we can have the traction needed to move forward in our lives. Our shoulders grow to bear the weight on them. When we don't carry a substantial weight of personal responsibility, we can quickly become stuck like the man's truck in the snow.

CHAPTER 10

MORE THAN GOOD INTENTIONS

A young student once asked the philosopher Epictetus how he should act in every situation. Epictetus responded, 'Make my mind adaptable to any circumstances.'" In our world of quick

fixes and hacks, people are becoming increasingly conditioned to need very specific instructions to do just about everything. In a continually changing world, people need to become more adaptive, yet most are becoming less so.

Being adaptive is all about how you learn. It's about being mindful of your environment and about how to mine your environment of its best information and resources. Moreover, being adaptive is about controlling your environment, rather than having it control you. If you're a truly adaptive learner, you won't get stuck in one environment for long. You'll quickly learn what your environment has to offer and then transcend to a new and more difficult environment.

Just like in a video game, you don't advance to the next level until you beat the level you're currently on. In a game, you may have to start over several times until you learn the lessons, overcome the obstacles, and beat the level. So, too, in life, lessons are repeated until they are learned. If you haven't successfully adapted to your current environment, you'll have a hard time adapting to more challenging ones.

BECOMING A FLEXIBLE LEARNER

If you want to achieve something, you must first conceive and believe you can have that thing.

BECOMING VERY COMFORTABLE IN NEW AND UNCERTAIN SITUATIONS

Psychological research has found that the anticipation of an event is almost always a more charged emotional experience than the event itself. Almost always, you imagine it will be far worse than it ever really is.

CHAPTER 11

GROW INTO YOUR GOALS

COMPETE ABOVE YOUR SKILL LEVEL

Rather than "competing," with people at your perceived skill level, compete with those who are where you want to be. In other words, always punch above your weight. Herein lies a fundamental difference between those who become successful and those who don't. Unsuccessful people make decisions based on current circumstances while successful people make decisions based on where they desire to be.

Your talent doesn't exist in a bubble. What you can accomplish is the product of the situation in which you find yourself. Hence, who you decide to compete with is incredibly important.

HIRE A MENTOR WHO IS BRILLIANT AT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

The greatest benefit you'll get by hiring a mentor is that you'll be left with a feeling of *dissatisfaction* with your work.

CHAPTER 12

ROTATE YOUR ENVIRONMENTS

THE MYTH OF THE EIGHT-HOUR WORKDAY

In one study, only 16 percent of respondents reported getting creative insight while at work. Ideas generally came while the person was at home, in transportation, or during recreational activity. “The most creative ideas aren’t going to come while sitting in front of your monitor,” says Scott Birnbaum, former president of Samsung Semiconductor.

“Never go to sleep without a request to your subconscious.”

NEVER WORK IN THE SAME PLACE TWO DAYS IN A ROW

He generally listens to electro swing music, specifically the “Caravan Palace” Pandora station

HOME ENVIRONMENT

For Meisel, his entire process can be broken down into three key strategies: optimization, automation, and outsourcing. His first goal is to make things function well and to remove anything in his environment or life that lags. Once everything is optimized, he automates everything he can with the use of technology.

After everything in his life has been automated, he outsources whatever is left.

CHAPTER 13

FIND UNIQUE COLLABORATIONS

UNIQUE CONNECTIONS SHATTER NORMS

As Pablo Picasso once said, “learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.”

As will often be the case, people will initially be repelled by your forward thinking, they won't understand the connections you're trying to make. However, if you can persuasively bring a number of ideas together and distill them into a simple concept, eventually the new idea will catch hold.

THE POWER OF UNIQUE COLLABORATIONS

You never change things by fighting the existing reality, to change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

-R. Buckminster Fuller

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN UNIQUE COLLABORATIONS

You can't get much work done if you have the lone ranger mentality. Independence shouldn't be the goal. Interdependence and synergy should be what you're after. The ideas you come up with on your own may be interesting, perhaps even brilliant. But the ideas you could come up with when collaborating with people from very diverse backgrounds and industries have the potential to completely alter the rules of what you're doing. When you develop unique collaborations, especially with people who have already succeeded big in their industry, you can go ten times or even a hundred times with your goals.

CHAPTER 14

NEVER FORGET WHERE YOU CAME FROM

According to a fascinating 2013 *New York Times* article by Bruce Feiler, feeling connected to a family history can have a significant impact.

This single insight led Dr. Duke and Dr. Fivush to explore familial remembering. They ultimately created a psychological measure called the Do You Know? Scale that asks twenty questions.

According to Dr. Duke, knowing where you came from can give you a "sense of being a part of a larger family." children have the most self confidence when they have a strong "intergenerational self," which is knowing you are a part of something bigger than yourself.

According to management expert Jim Collins, human organizations of any form, whether families or companies, fare best when they are connected to their story of origin.

HANDWRITTEN NOTES

?app - Pat tax headphone

Goal 24 commas update wah

-ev 2 weeks

Electro swing music

How are we doing "ecosystem" w/our training ??

Paris christmas

Make the backyard slot house from video

The outsider youtube

Do you know scale