

THE VALUE OF DISCIPLINE

When you think of the word “discipline,” what comes to mind? Do you get a picture of correcting employee behavior? “Adam did something wrong so I need to discipline him.” Or maybe you get a vision of a tedious, non-motivating, static environment that’s opposed to change.

Somehow along the way, discipline has become more closely aligned with punishment than the original definition, which was to teach or instruct.

The fact is that discipline can be a good thing. All you have to do is think about it differently. For instance, think of a disciplined soldier. Or maybe a disciplined runner. This changes the meaning of the word to a positive image. A person who institutes a plan designed to systematically achieve a goal. This series of actions can drive behavior, become a habit and before long, begin shifting dreams into reality.

An example of disciplined action comes from planning and scheduling work. Creating long and short term goals with individual objectives helps to maintain productivity. Working from a daily plan with prioritized steps can also help with a person’s sense of accomplishment. Some days it might feel like nothing is getting done, but keeping a record can demonstrate that you are incrementally making slight progress.

Following a disciplined plan is also helpful when you get interrupted or during times of crisis. Working from a list allows you to pick up where you left off; shortening the time needed to refocus. It may also give you the option of delegating specific tasks because the plan is already created. It just needs to be implemented.

If there are so many benefits, then why would people not behave in a disciplined way?

For one, it’s difficult. It requires thought. And sometimes making tough choices. If you have something you *need* to do, it may battle with something you *want* to do. And this can be uncomfortable. Sometimes people may feel this type of system just isn’t flexible enough, or that scheduled planning doesn’t allow a person to be creative.

The lack of discipline also drives procrastination. This sometimes comes out as, “I do my best work under pressure,” or “I am a last minute kind of person.” That may feel like the case, but it rarely is. Getting a lot of work done in a short period of time can make you look and feel like a hero. You are rushing around, out of breath, and working at a feverish pace. You get the project done just as the last chime rings. You hand the paperwork in with outstretched arms, breaking the tape at the finish line.

Contrast this with a well planned and executed strategy with dated objectives, met with detailed precision. First drafts are reviewed, refined, and are mistake-free. The whole project is completed four hours before it’s due...and you had time to include a summary report. The task is submitted, approved, and handed off in a seamless fashion, almost unnoticed by others. It sounds pretty boring, doesn’t it?

But ask yourself this. Which scenario would you choose if it were being performed for your benefit? Which would you think has the best chance of success? There are times when rapid action and hurried results are necessary, but they are born of crisis and should be considered as emergency events, outside of your ability to plan.

A person’s behavior is made of a combination of his/her habits. Hurried action can be rewarding because the body produces endorphins during the process. Planned events do not necessarily cause the same reaction. Once hooked on the endorphin rush, a person can become a “stress junkie” and purposely procrastinate, choosing instead to justify his/her behavior with the “best work under stress” quote.

Break the cycle and choose small, disciplined steps. Even five minutes of planning per day can be a place to start. No one wants to be an automaton. But acting in a disciplined fashion can lower stress, improve results, and allow time for the unavoidable catastrophe.



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