



Mini Exercise #1

Have all students stand and hold the position of attention without visible movement for 5 to 10 minutes. Be sure to verbally warn cadets not to lock their knees. If cadre witness cadets fidgeting, looking around, talking, etc., verbally direct them, "Cadet Jones, attention means standing up straight!" or "Cadet Jones, attention means stop fidgeting!" (If a cadet is slipping from attention, be specific as to why he or she is slipping.) Time this exercise with a watch.

Mini Exercise #2

Provide a single Hershey's Kiss or wrapped piece of candy to everyone. Tell them you'd prefer they not eat it, but if their willpower is weak, they can give-in and eat it anytime during this class.

(At the end of the class, give an extra piece of candy to every cadet who has not eaten the first piece.)

OPENER

We want you to be disciplined. Over the next 20 minutes or so, we'll talk about practical things you can do to develop the discipline you need to succeed.

First, let's think about the exercise we just did in having you hold the position of attention.

- Was it easy? Was it hard?
- Did it get easier or harder over time? (Probably harder over time due to stamina)
- If someone near you slipped up, did that affect you? Why? (Probably distracted you)
- If cadre called you out by name and corrected you, what affect did that have on you? (Probably added further stress)
- What do you think about while at attention? Does it help to think of something in particular? (Probably your mind went in a million directions, unless you're experienced)



There's a famous psychological test of delayed gratification, that is the ability to wait an extra while to collect a bigger reward than you would if you acted impulsively. It's known as the marshmallow test and it's a great illustration of the importance of discipline.

Put some marshmallows in front of a toddler. Tell him or her, "You can have one marshmallow now, or if you wait ten minutes you can have two marshmallows."

Researchers have found that kids who can delay their gratification - kids who have a bit of self-control or discipline - are happier and stay out of trouble when they get older.

The message of the marshmallow test is obvious: discipline is a key to success.



When we use the word "discipline," what do we mean?

- self-control
- being a disciple / following a leader
- staying focused on your goals
- obedience to orders
- avoiding distractions
- not giving in to "appetites" or impulses
- possessing true freedom because you are free to accomplish what you want and not enslaved by your kneejerk instincts.

Regarding the last point on the list of what is discipline. We said that discipline is freedom, which may be surprising. Why?

- We think of discipline as the habit of saying "No." Don't move at attention. Don't watch TV. Don't eat cookies. But really, discipline is a matter of saying "Yes" to whatever meaningful goals you set for yourself.

(see next slide for the "book" definition)



Definition: "The ability to direct your thoughts, emotions, and actions toward a meaningful purpose."

- An ability --- a skill that can be learned, honed, perfected
- Direct your thoughts -- what you think about, what you put your mind toward, your mental focus
- Direct your emotions -- to control your emotions, instincts, and appetites, rather than to be mastered by them
- Direct your actions -- the final test of discipline is actual behavior. You prove you've mastered your thoughts and emotions by virtue of your actions. "Deeds, not words."
- Meaningful purpose -- discipline is not an end in itself, it's merely a tool for reaching your goals.

An Illustration:

A cadet competed for and was appointed as encampment cadet commander, but during the months leading up to encampment, she was nowhere to be found. On the big day for cadre training, she finally appeared, arriving a couple hours late. "Sir, I'm so sorry. I haven't completed any preparations for cadre training day, and I've not returned calls and emails from the many people who've tried to reach me. But," **and here's the unfortunate misconception about discipline**, "I am superbly disciplined, so you can put me at attention and scream at me for an hour, I deserve it." Why did this cadet show she did not understand what real discipline really is in this remark?

If she were disciplined, she would've followed through on her assignments. She would've directed her thoughts, emotions, and actions toward the goal of planning cadre training day. Her ability to withstand someone screaming in her face for an hour had absolutely nothing to do with self-discipline.

By the way, the story ended with the encampment commander informing her that the encampment had to move forward and her deputy has already been appointed to relieve her.



And speaking of what “discipline” really means, how many of you think the Marines are the most disciplined service? (Most cadets will probably agree) And when you think of basic training in the Marines, you probably think of images like this.

Marines have a proud tradition in many regards. America rightly loves its Marine Corps. But if you look at the rate that service members are convicted in court-martials, the Marines are dead last.

Training under a Marine D.I. is the right path if you want to be a Marine on the front lines, but the court-martial statistics suggest that there’s a lot more to discipline than being able to withstand this guy screaming in your face.

Marine D.I.’s overload the recruits with stress so that over time they develop the skill of staying calm in stressful situations. That’s not to say that there’s a direct link between this guy yelling at you and your becoming disciplined. So let’s talk about you developing your self-discipline.

Source: “Annual Report Submitted to the Committees on Armed Services, “ FY2011. Figures report court-martial convictions of any type by branch, per 1,000 service members



Let's get into the nitty gritty tactics you can use to increase your self-discipline. There are more than a dozen specific methods I have for your personal toolbox. To organize our thoughts, let's pretend that we're training for a marathon.

Starting out toward your goal, what are some things you can do or ways of channeling your thoughts that will promote self-discipline?

STARTING OUT

Visualize Success. Make a mental picture of you achieving your goal, whatever it might be. What's the "headline of the future" reporting your having achieved your goal?

Specific Plan. It's not enough to say, "I need an A in math, so I'll study more." You have to be specific. What does "study more" mean? Nothing. "I'm going to start my homework 30 minutes earlier than normal every day, at 6pm (or whatever) and use the first 30 minutes specifically to do refresher math exercises." That's a specific plan.

Mini Goals. What's the best way to eat an elephant? One bite at a time. If your goal is to cut 1 minute off your mile time, maybe you run 4 times a week and try to cut 15 seconds by week's end. Then 15 more seconds a week later., etc.

Role Model. During WWII, US troops and Filipino civilians were imprisoned by the Japanese, who forced the prisoners to march over unforgiving jungle, without water for days, without food for days, being beaten by their captors and the wounded run over by trucks. Many died in the real Bataan Death March, and the survivors are honored for their sacrifices during the war. Today, there's a Bataan Memorial Death March Marathon. Unlike a normal marathon, the modern Bataan marchers wear full military packs as they traverse brutal, high desert terrain. The point is that the activity calls to mind role models - WWII veterans who suffered and sacrificed for freedom. If a marcher feels tired and wants to give up, he or she need only think how "easy" they have it

As we're working toward a goal, you're apt to get discouraged. What are some specific things you can do or think about to maintain your self-discipline?

WORKING TOWARD

Margin of Error. In any endeavor, there's a margin of error allowed where you get credit for completing the goal even though you were not perfect. Your CAP chevrons are supposed to be 1" from the edge. A scientist with a micrometer will tell you no one can set those chevrons perfectly to 1.00000000 inches. If your goal has a pre-set margin of error, know it and follow it. If it doesn't, talk with others and adopt one that's reasonable. If you're trying to memorize the Cadet Oath or Gettysburg Address, perhaps a reasonable margin of error means reciting it from memory with no more than 2 words said in error. Chevrons off by 1/16" are within the margin of error by most people's standards. This makes your goals more accessible, more realistic.

Excellence vs. Perfection. Perfection is not a standard. Perfection is impossible. We can aim for perfection, but know that you'll never get there and no one ever has. High-achieving youth sometimes kick themselves for not being perfect and that, in turn, is counter-productive. Remind yourself that your Core Value is (merely) "Excellence," and that's tough enough!

Along those same lines, how can we use positive reinforcement as a tool for boosting our self-discipline and overall success?

STAYING ON TRACK

Wingman. Goals come quicker if you have help. Ask a friend to share the same individual goal and work it together. A wingman provides encouragement. And if you're feeling crummy and like you're failing in the goal, tell your wingman and talk it out.

Habits. Big goals seem insurmountable early on, so remind yourself about the power of good habits. As you discipline and focus yourself, you'll slowly develop the right habits. It's easy for an Air Force Honor Guard member to stand at attention without visible movement because they do it all the time. They've acquired good habits. So, as you start on a big goal, remind yourself that your good behaviors will become ever more habitual and therefore it'll become easier to do things that today seem hard to do.

Celebrate. Just as you set mini-goals, eating elephants one bite at a time, also set mini-markers where you celebrate your success. "If I score 85% or higher on the next math test, I'll celebrate by renting a new video game and playing it for an hour on Saturday." Rewards or mini-celebrations are ways to reinforce the good behaviors you've been demonstrating, and so they strengthen self-discipline. Daily honor flight awards at encampment are mini-rewards encouraging flights to keep doing good things and work toward the big goals and big awards at week's end. Even with positive reinforcement, we're apt to momentarily fail and have to get back up. How do we do that?

BOUNCING BACK

Avoid Temptation. There's a great cartoon showing two large, overweight old ladies daydreaming in front of a bakery window. They can see and probably smell the cookies and can almost taste them. One woman says to the other, "Oh, let's go inside and just see what happens." You know that if they go into the bakery, they're going to indulge their sweet tooth. To develop self-discipline, do your best to deliberately avoid scenarios where you'll be tempted. To stay on their diets, the cookie-loving ladies should have crossed the street and not let themselves pass by the bakery. Once

they got close to the bakery, it became almost impossible to avoid temptation. It's better to foresee potential distractions and take another path so that you stay on track.

Forgive Yourself. Everyone stumbles. The challenge is to get back up and keep on going toward your goal. So, when you stumble, it's helpful to forgive yourself or not be too hard on yourself. Again, discipline means focus, not punishment, so don't mentally punish yourself. Instead, forgive yourself, but the stumble behind you, and re-focus on what you can do right now to get back on track.

Tell Your Boss. If your boss has given you a task and you're somehow falling short in terms of quality or in meeting a deadline, speak up. It's better to admit you're struggling and then get help than to suffer in silence and fail to deliver.

Personal Best. Disciplined people succeed because they're pursuing goals for the long haul. Therefore, they know that if they perform a little better every day, they're succeeding. Instead of comparing themselves to people running beside them or other students who might have an extra advantage with schoolwork, self-disciplined people know that the real challenge is to surpass their own individual performance from yesterday or their all time best.

One challenge we'll encounter throughout the whole goal-striving / discipline-building process is stress. What are some specific ways to manage stress?

COPING WITH STRESS

Mental Vacation. (Scroll back to the Marine D.I.) . If the Marine who's getting the full force of this D.I. is good with his stress management and focus skills, maybe he's taking a mental vacation right now. He's thinking about sitting on the beach in Hawaii, bright sun above him, ocean waves crashing gently and rolling over his bare feet and wet sand. All the while, the crazy yelling is going in one ear and out the other. Mini mental vacations are a good way to stay focused when under stress. But if this Marine were to really focus on the D.I.'s antics, the yelling and in your face treatment would probably affect him. He'd slip up and lose self-control, self-discipline.

Mindfulness. This one sounds hokey but it works. Put yourself somewhere quiet, or maybe while riding the bus or standing at attention you can do this, too. Clear your head as best as you can and just focus on your breathing, the simple feeling of your belly rising and falling. If your mind drifts onto a subject, a worry, and you feel anxious, that's okay, but try to let go of that and come back to your breathing. This breathing exercise focuses you on this particular moment in itself. It's a great way to cope with stress. So when you feel the stress of wanting to stop your homework and grab the X-Box, or the stress of wanting to eat some cookies or any anxiety that holds you back from your goals, just try to clear your head and focus on your breathing for a few moments.

Exercise. Self-discipline is focus and perseverance. Self-discipline doesn't come easily for most people. Therefore, when you're working hard to stay focused on a goal, you're putting yourself under stress. What's the #1 way to manage stress? Exercise. Walk, run, ride a bike, shoot hoops, do whatever you want but get regular exercise to manage your stress. Experts say that teens need 60 minutes of activity that raises their heartbeat each day. If you don't exercise, your stress will catch up to you and in turn you'll slip in your self-discipline.



To Recap

And if you had the willpower not to indulge yourself with that first piece of candy, here's a second piece to remind you that self-discipline pays off. (give everyone a second piece of candy). Disciplined people are happier people because they're in control of their lives. They're free from impulses, knee-jerk reactions, distractions, and so have the power to choose to say yes to the behaviors that will lead them toward their goals.