

KNOWLEDGE that STICKS!

the skinny on™

# willpower

how to develop  
self-discipline



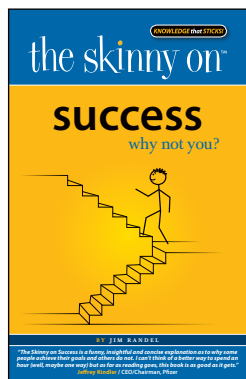
BY JIM RANDEL

*"I loved this book!"*

Dr. Barbara Nemko / Napa Valley Schools Superintendent

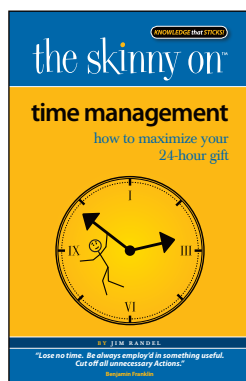
## 15 POINTS FOR IMPROVING WILLPOWER AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

1. Be sure you are totally committed.
2. Prepare yourself for a difficult journey.
3. Prepare for your challenge by reducing the instances in which you will need to exert willpower.
4. Identify your goal and the process to get there in as concrete, specific, and finite terms as possible.
5. Divide your challenge into small, manageable pieces.
6. Maintain vigilance over your thoughts.
7. Control your dominant thoughts.
8. Frame your challenges in a pleasurable, not painful, manner.
9. Pick your spots.
10. Force yourself to visualize the end of a succession of "either/or" choices.



"The Skinny on Success is a funny, insightful and concise explanation as to why some people achieve ... this book is as good as it gets."

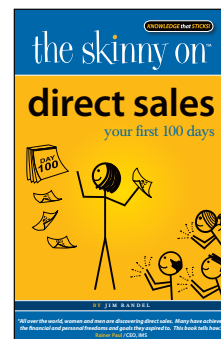
Jeffrey Kindler, CEO/Chmn, Pfizer



"A friend gave me this book ... perhaps because he thinks I'm time-challenged. In any event, I loved it ... substantive, fun, and funny. I give it my highest recommendation."

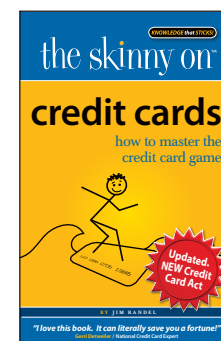
Steve Pagliuca, Managing Partner, The Boston Celtics

[www.theskinnyon.com](http://www.theskinnyon.com)



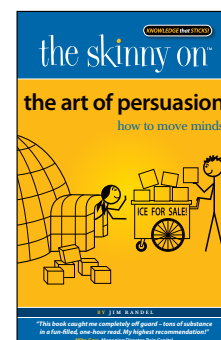
"A motivational quick read and a great little primer for a more detailed consideration of the topics covered."

Aaron White, VP, Touchstone Crystal



"I love this book. It can literally save you a fortune!"

Gerri Detweiler, National Credit Card Expert



"This book caught me completely off guard – tons of substance. My highest recommendation!"

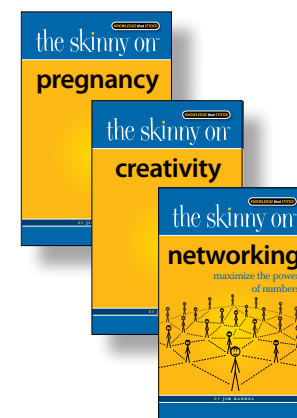
Mike Goss, Managing Director, Bain Capital

11. You already have more willpower than you realize.
12. The more you use your willpower, the more confidence and strength you have for new challenges.
13. Turn positive activity into habits.
14. Self-discipline is not self-deprivation.
15. Strong willpower can take you to new heights in life.

**"Willpower isn't something that gets handed out to some and not to others... it's a skill you can develop through understanding and practice."**

Gillian Riley

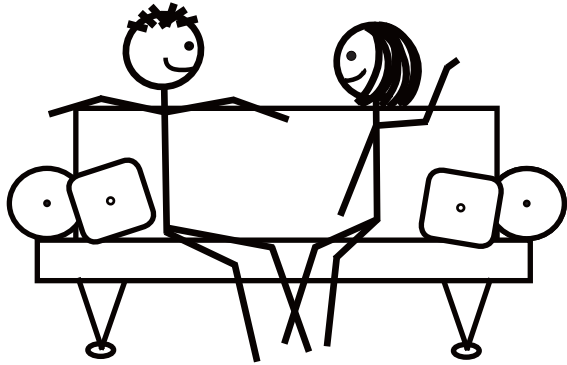
**COMING SOON!**



[www.theskinnyon.com](http://www.theskinnyon.com)

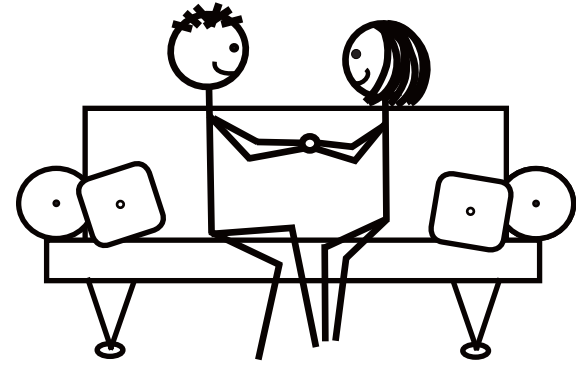
THAT EVENING

"Billy, you've inspired me ... I've made a New Year's resolution too."



27

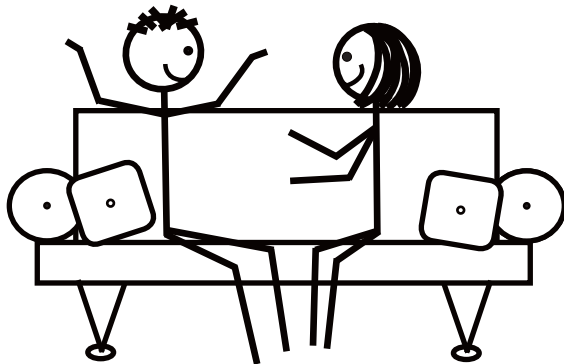
"That's wonderful, Beth. I'm sure you will be a huge success."



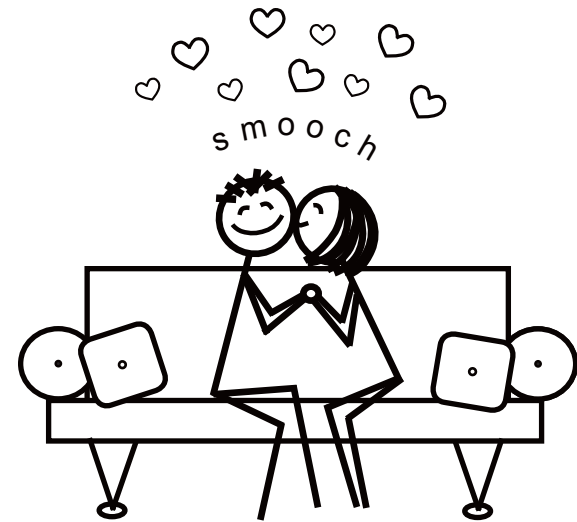
29

"Great, Beth. What is it?"

"Well, you know I've always dreamed of opening my own clothing store. I'm finally going to do it!"

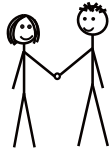


28



30

It's cute that Billy and Beth are so supportive of each other's New Year's resolutions. They can turn to each other if and when their resolve weakens.



On the other hand, some writers suggest keeping our resolutions to ourselves. Except for very dear friends, there will always be naysayers whose comments may diminish your willpower.

Can you hear the laughter of Jim Carrey's buddies if, when he arrived in Hollywood, he shared with them the existence of the \$10,000,000 check he wrote to himself?

31

What's best for one person may not be best for another.

Billy and Beth chose to share their resolutions with each other and gained strength from the other's support.

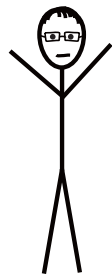
I tend to keep my goals to myself.

**HOW ABOUT YOU?**

33

Perhaps now is the time to make one other point about willpower and achievement:

**NO ONE SIZE  
FITS ALL!!**



32

If you like to keep goals to yourself, write your goal here:

---

Why?

Because then you won't give this book to anyone, and I'll sell more books.



34

Enough great humor for now.

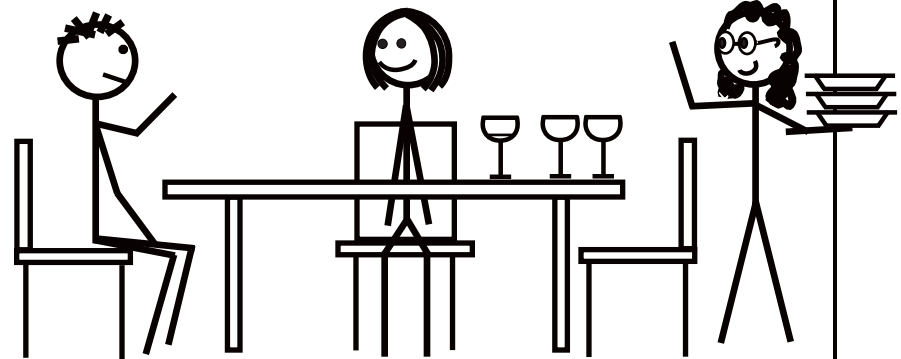
**Billy and Beth are having dinner at Billy's mother's house.**

**Let's check in.**

35

"Oh, no thanks, Mom. I just started a diet and I'm not eating desserts."

"Don't be silly. Just have a small piece."



37

"Gee, Mom, that was a great dinner."

"Oh, we're not done yet. I've baked your favorite chocolate cake for dessert."



36

*What should I do?*

"Moderation in all things, Billy."



38

Is Billy's mom right?

"Moderation in all things."

Well, many willpower thinkers would argue the reverse: that there are times when one needs to go "cold turkey" – an all-or-nothing approach – for example, no desserts at all until one's weight goal is reached.

The problem with moderation is that it requires **ad hoc decisions**, which in turn require energy.

For example, if every time Billy is tempted to eat sweets, he has to make a decision whether to indulge or not, **he will expend energy in the process of deliberation** – energy that he needs to preserve for acts of willpower.

And, as we will discuss again and again in this book, **the proper application of energy** is a BIG DEAL when it comes to having self-discipline when you need it.



## HERE ARE THREE EXPERTS WHO SPEAK TO THE ALL-OR-NOTHING APPROACH:

### 1. Jack Canfield

Canfield is the highly successful author of the *Chicken Soup* series. Canfield has also written a comprehensive book on the subject of success, *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (Harper Collins, 2005).

In this book, Canfield speaks to his "No Exceptions Rule."

"Successful people adhere to the 'no exceptions rule' when it comes to their daily disciplines. Once you make a 100% commitment to something, there are no exceptions. It's a done deal. Nonnegotiable. Case closed!

"(Once a decision has been made), I don't have to wrestle with that decision every day. It's already been made. The die has been cast. All the bridges are burned. It makes life easier and simpler and keeps me on focus. It frees up tons of energy that would otherwise be spent internally debating the topic over and over and over ... and all the energy I expend on internal conflict is unavailable to use for creating outer achievement."

## 2. Dr. William James

And then there is perhaps our greatest American psychologist, William James.

James was a Harvard-trained MD who completed his 2,900-page masterpiece, *The Principles of Psychology*, in 1890.

James' view, as paraphrased by his biographer, Robert Richardson, was that when confronted with the need to act (or forbear from negative action), the less deliberation, the better.

“The more we struggle and debate, the more we reconsider and delay, the less likely we are to act (appropriately). Don't wait until you feel better to go to the gym; go to the gym and you will feel better.”

*William James* (Houghton Mifflin, 2007)

---

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

As you know, we at **The Skinny On™** believe that “less is more” – that an author should endeavor to use as few words as possible to convey his or her thoughts. That requires editing and more editing – showing respect for a reader's time and attention.

And William James made the same point upon delivering his 2,900-page treatise on psychology to his publisher:

**“Had I ten years more, I could rewrite it in 500 (pages), but as it stands it is ... a loathsome, distended, tumefied, bloated, dropsical mass....”**

To be contrasted with Canfield and James, here is an expert who does not believe in the all-or-nothing approach:

## 3. Dr. Howard Rankin

Rankin is a psychologist who studied self-control in England working at the University of London's Addiction Research Unit. His studies taught him that **willpower should be developed incrementally**.

Rankin does not believe in the all-or-nothing approach because he feels that “deprivation is the mother of failure;” in other words, if we are too strict with ourselves, we are most likely going to weaken.

Rankin's approach to self-control is what he calls **graded exposure**, essentially the process of building willpower in small, progressive steps.

For example, he would suggest that a person like Billy, whose willpower is weakened by sweets, do the following:

1. Stand in front of a candy store, look in the window, but do not go in.
2. A few days later, actually walk into the candy store and then immediately walk out.
3. A few days later, go into the candy store and stay for ten minutes, but do not buy anything.
4. A few days later, go into the candy store and buy just one small piece of candy.

**The point is that with each step, one develops the ability to resist temptation when and as he or she wants to.**

“As your confidence develops and you learn what it feels like to exercise self-control, more difficult situations can be confronted.”

Howard Rankin

## THERE IS NO RIGHT ANSWER TO THE “ALL-OR-NOTHING” VERSUS “ALL THINGS IN MODERATION” DEBATE.

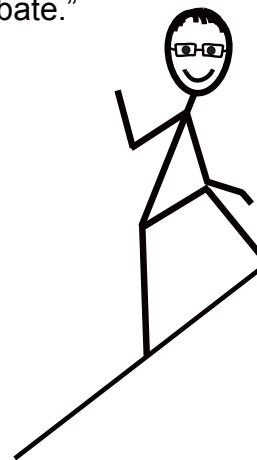
### EVERYONE NEEDS TO DO WHAT WORKS BEST FOR HIM OR HER.

For me, all-or-nothing works best because I find that I am more likely to stick with a goal if I am inflexible with myself. For example, if I commit to go for a run three times a week, I find that if I set in advance the days I will run, no matter what else is happening (including the weather), then I will run on those days.

My wife, on the other hand, thinks that I am wacky. If she sets a goal that is inflexible, she feels that she has put herself into a box that is uncomfortable right from the start. As a result, she finds that she looks for every opportunity to leave the box – and therefore, an all-or-nothing approach does not work for her.

My wife likes to tell the story of a time I went on a diet and refused her offer of one M & M candy. I told her that if I ate one, I might then eat two and eventually the whole bag. This event caused my wife (able to stop after one M & M) to wonder about me.

“Well, that’s enough about the moderation versus all-or-nothing debate.”



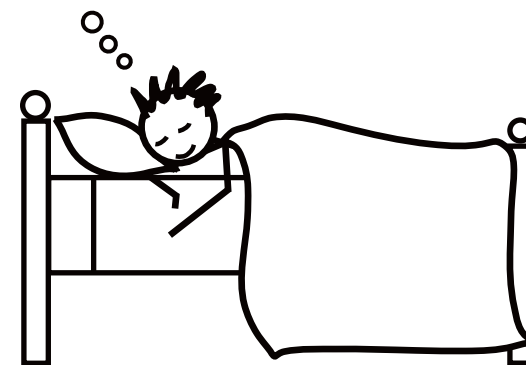
“Come on, let’s go wake this guy up!”



### A RAINY MORNING SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA

*I’ll run tomorrow.*

Ding, Ding, Ding!



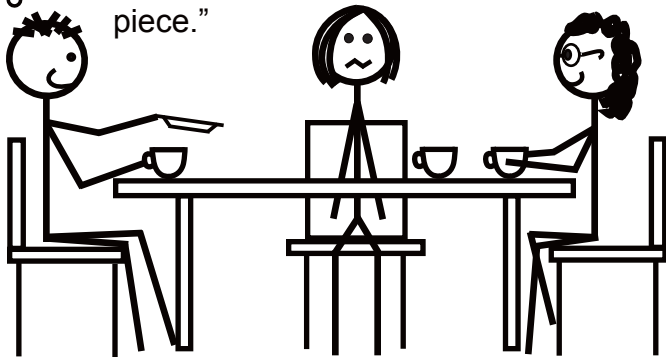
## Let's check back with Billy and Beth.

The last time we saw Billy  
he was trying to decide whether  
to eat a piece of his mom's  
chocolate cake.

46

*I'll start  
my diet  
tomorrow.*

"That is a great  
cake, Mom ...  
I'll have another  
piece."



47

# OUCH!

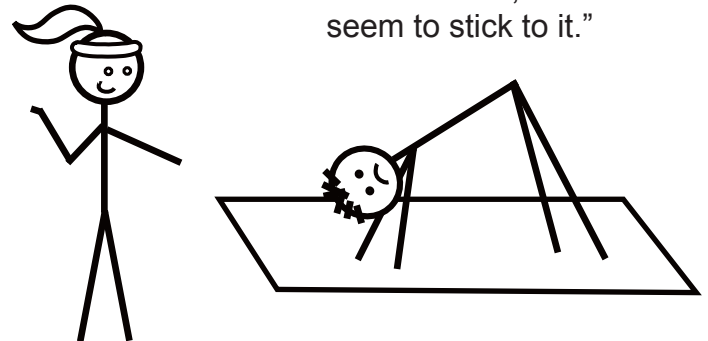
**P.S. "Desserts" spelled  
backwards is:  
"stressed."**

48

## THE NEXT DAY BILLY ATTENDS A YOGA CLASS

"Nice downward dog,  
Billy, but you seem a  
little distracted today."

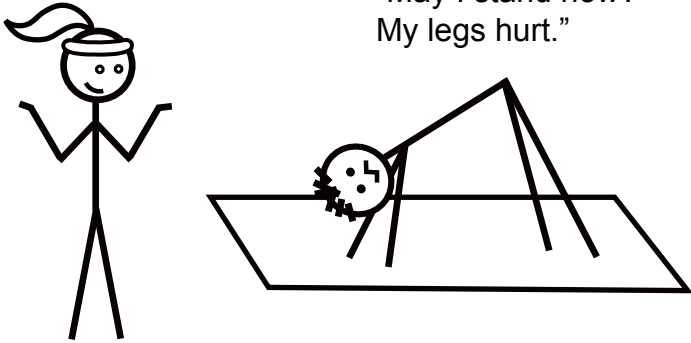
"I'm on a diet, but I can't  
seem to stick to it."



49

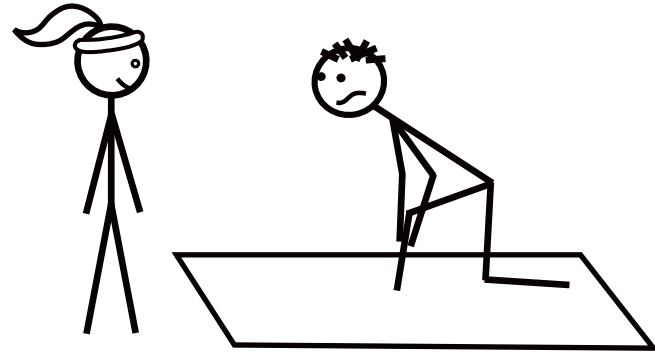
"How badly do you want to lose weight, Billy?"

"May I stand now? My legs hurt."



50

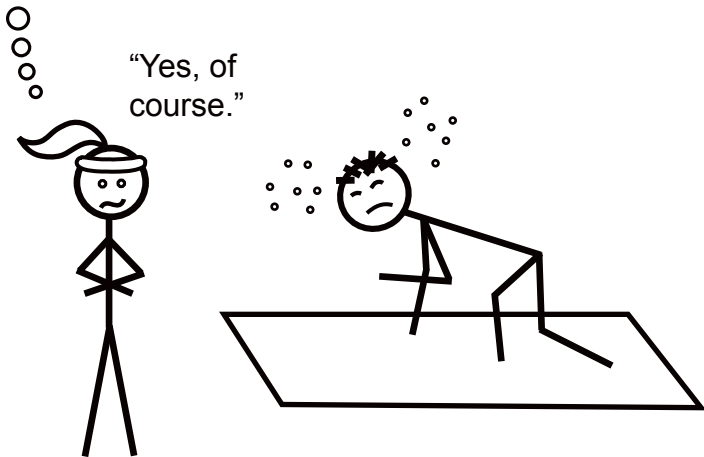
"I feel better now ... my hammys were really aching ... I want to lose weight a lot ... don't you think I need to?"



52

*Another wimpy yogi boy.*

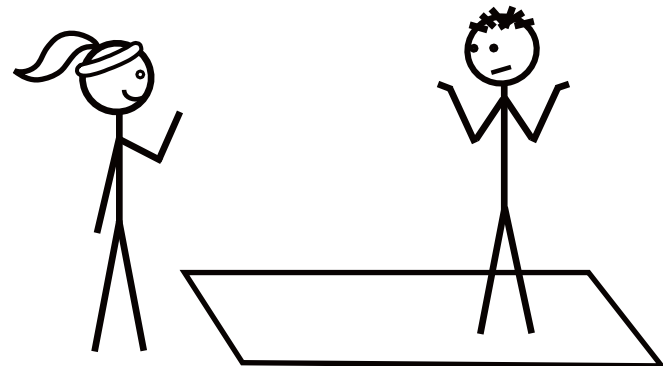
"Yes, of course."



51

"Yoga instructors don't believe in making judgments, Billy."

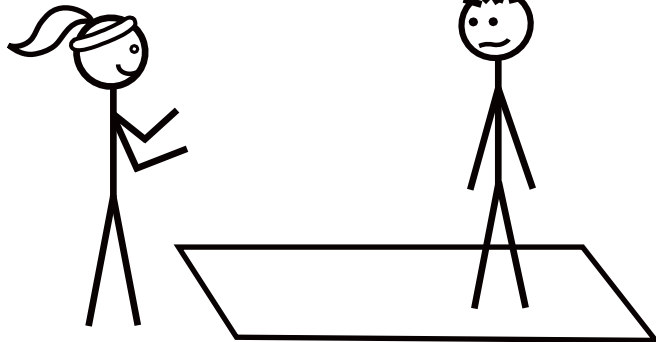
"OK ... OK ... but I think I need to slim down."



53

“Billy, there’s an old Buddhist saying ...

‘WHERE THE HEART WISHES TO GO, THE BODY WILL FOLLOW.’ ”



“That’s a Buddhist saying?”

54

Made-up saying or not, Billy’s yoga instructor has asked Billy an important question.

**Does he *really* want to lose weight?**

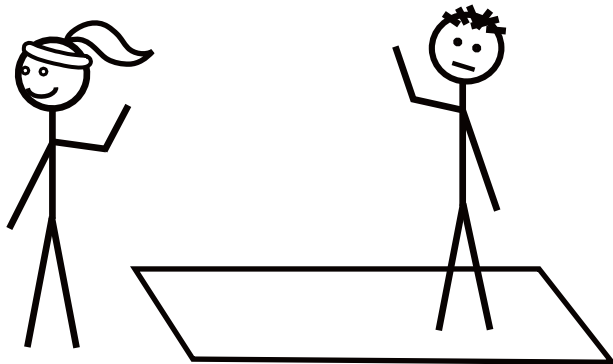
Or was his commitment to lose weight just a wishful thought on the biggest day of the year for hoped-for change: New Year’s Day? In fact, maybe Billy in his heart of hearts is OK with his extra poundage.

Here is the point: before you undertake any challenge, be sure that you really, really want what you set out for.

**One of the most important lessons I have learned in researching willpower is that its availability to you is directly proportional to the intensity you have for your objective.**

56

“Actually, I have no idea. I just like to make things up. I find it cleansing. Namaste, Billy.”



55

In fact, one might argue that the subject of self-discipline is really a measure of how one answers the question:

“How Badly Do You Want It?”

As Professor Reeve has written, people whose motivation is internally activated by a deeply-felt personal belief are much more likely to achieve their objective than those people who are driven by external reward (e.g. money).

“People experience optimal function and positive well-being when they pursue goals that reflect intrinsic motivation ... those who pursue intrinsic motivation in life show greater self-actualization and subjective vitality....”

*Human Motivation and Emotion* (Wiley, 2008)

57

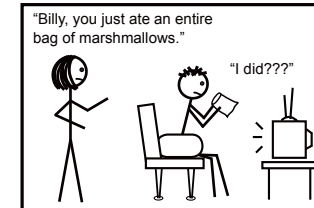
**“Success with willpower simply depends upon what you choose to value.”**

***Willpower*, Gillian Riley  
(Vermillion, 2003)**

58

**In many respects willpower boils down to:**

(1) Consciousness – maintaining an awareness of your actions and inactions.

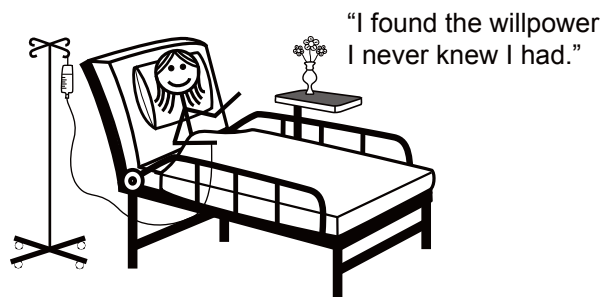


(2) Taking ownership of your choices – acknowledging that your action (or inactions) are within your control.

(3) Making the right choices – so much easier to do when you are driven by deeply-seated values.

60

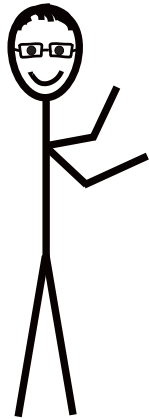
Gillian Riley, in her book, *Willpower*, relates the story of an obese woman who after struggling unsuccessfully with her weight for 20 years, finally lost 70 pounds in a matter of months. Her motivation? She discovered that her son needed a kidney-transplant and whereas she was an acceptable donor, the doctors would not operate on her until she lost weight.



59

**Once you identify your goal and assess its value to you, the challenge of course is to resist negative pressures and take appropriate actions day in and day out.**

61



“It wasn’t a coincidence that I started the story of Billy and Beth on January 1, as that is the one day of the year when so many people make resolutions and set goals. The problem is that most people do not sustain their commitment. What seems so achievable on January 1 often falls by the wayside by January 10.”

“Self-improvement in any significant way is a tough challenge. Most people who embark upon a program of self-improvement start with a burst of enthusiasm ... however, something goes wrong ... and progress (often) hits a wall early.”

*Getting It Done*, Andrew DuBrin, PhD  
(*Pacesetter*, 1995)



## DOES IT SURPRISE YOU THAT MORE PEOPLE JOIN HEALTH CLUBS IN JANUARY THAN IN ANY OTHER MONTH?

**But by March, most new members have quit.**

If you don’t believe me, see the report below that concludes (after 28 pages of mathematical analysis) that every New Year’s Day many people overestimate their willpower:

“Contractual choice. At time 0, consumers who sign a contract  $(T', L, p)$  expect to attain the net benefit

$$\beta\delta \left[ -L + \frac{1-\delta^{T'}}{1-\delta} \int_{-\infty}^{\beta\delta-p'} (\delta b - p' - c) dG(c) \right]$$

Our results are difficult to reconcile with the standard assumptions of time-consistent preferences and rational expectations. **A model ... with overconfidence about self-control explains the findings.**”

*Overestimating Self-Control: Evidence from the Health Club Industry*, Della Vigna and Malmendier

“Geez, who thinks up these studies? They could’ve just asked me!”



**The challenge is not how to burst out of the gate ... whether on January 1 or any other day of the year ... the challenge is HOW TO SUSTAIN the willpower you will need to achieve your goal!**

SUSTAIN comes from the Latin *sustinere*, which means TO HOLD UP.

So, the question really is:

When you make a contract with yourself, can you HOLD UP your end of the bargain?

65

OUR RESEARCH IDENTIFIES THREE KEY STEPS TO TAKE TO PREPARE YOURSELF TO **SUSTAIN** THE RESOLVE YOU WILL NEED TO ACCOMPLISH YOUR GOAL:

- 1. TAKE YOUR TEMPERATURE.**
- 2. SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.**
- 3. DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS.**

66

## 1. TAKE YOUR TEMPERATURE



No, not that kind of temperature. What we mean is, ask yourself (as Billy's yoga teacher asked him) how badly you want to achieve your goal. One of the most famous self-improvement authors (Napoleon Hill) speaks to the need for "a desire of white-hot intensity." In other words, do you *really, really* want to achieve your goal? The good news is that if you do, you can almost stop reading.

I'm sure you've heard the expression "Where there's a will, there's a way." Well, many achievement authors would say the same thing a little differently:

**"Where there's a will, there's willpower."**

In other words, if you want something badly enough, your internal programming (for survival) will kick in and help you find the self-discipline you need along the path to your goal.

**But don't kid yourself. If your temperature is not high enough – if you do not want something badly enough – why bother? Your willpower will fade when the going gets tough – and whenever you seek something of value, the going will always get tough.**

67

## 2. SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

One of the reasons so many people fall by the way-side – in other words, lose the willpower they need when the going gets tough – is that they have not set their expectations properly.

Here is something to remember for the rest of your life:

**Nothing good comes easy.**

Before you undertake the passage from where you are to where you want to be, tell yourself over and over that **there will be tough times**. Visualize the difficulties if you want to. Ask yourself whether you are ready for the journey.

If you set your expectations correctly – expecting difficulties – your willpower will not wane when the inevitable difficulties appear.

One of my favorite quotes comes from *The Road Less Traveled* (Bantam, 1980), written by Dr. Scott Peck:

“Life is difficult.

“This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – **then life is no longer difficult.**”



Dr. Scott Peck

## 3. DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS

One reason people lose the will to achieve their goals is that they don't understand that achievement is **tough for everyone**.

They look around them, perhaps at people who seem to get what they want so easily, and conclude that achievers are somehow different. This then causes them to give up, to lose their willpower when confronted with difficulty.

But here is the truth: **every single person** who achieves something of value struggles and at times thinks about quitting. The succeder is most often simply the person who won't quit.

In doing my research for this book, I spoke with lots of celebrity types – Olympic athletes, famous TV personalities, CEOs of some of our largest corporations, and well-known political figures. They all struggled to achieve their goals.

One year ago one of my neighbors died. His name was Paul Newman, and I really admired him – he was not only a great actor, he was successful at whatever he did. I used to assume that everything just came easily to him, and that would frustrate me. That made my challenges seem harder.

Just before he passed away, Paul Newman had this to say:

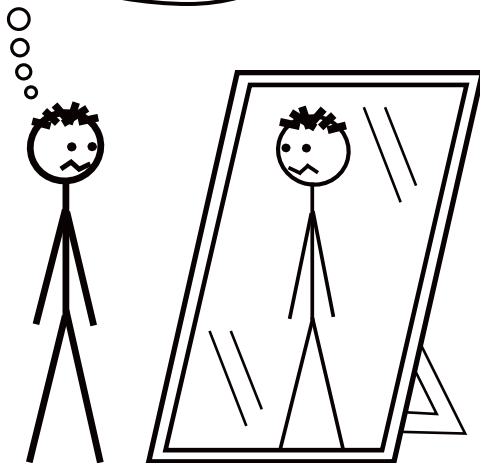
**“Nothing in life ever came easy to me.”**

## Back to Billy

As it happens, he is just now measuring the intensity of his commitment to losing weight.

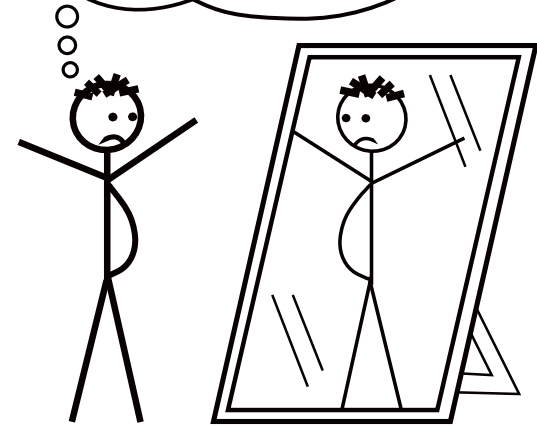
70

*My yoga instructor is right ... I need to be sure my heart is 100% into dieting.*



71

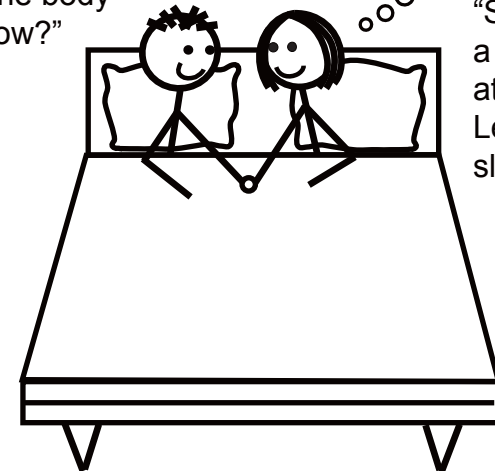
*Look at that belly! I don't look good. I don't feel good. That's it!!! I've made up my mind. No more excuses. I'm going to lose weight!*



72

"Beth, do you realize that where the heart wishes to go, the body will follow?"

*I wish he'd take up karate like his brother.*



"Sounds like a good day at yoga, Billy. Let's go to sleep."

73

**WHILE BILLY AND  
BETH ARE SLEEPING,  
LET'S RECAP BY  
CONSIDERING THESE  
QUESTIONS:**

74

With your own goals and dreams, are you **very specific** as to what you want to achieve?

Have you made a **commitment to yourself**?

Have you taken a **measure of your intensity** – is your desire strong? The **valuation** of your goal deeply-seated?

Have you set your **expectations** correctly – are you ready for difficulties?

Can you **avoid comparing** yourself to others?

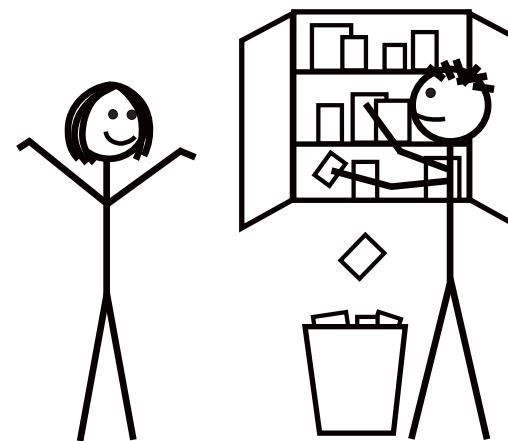
If your answers to these questions are all “yes,” then you are closer to achieving your goals than you think – **and your innate willpower is in READY MODE** to help in the process!

75

**The next morning**

76

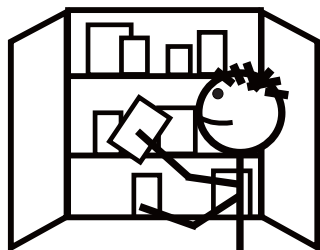
“Good morning, Billy ... what are you doing?”



“I’m throwing away all the sweets in the house.”

77

"Wow, you are serious? Marshmallows, too?"

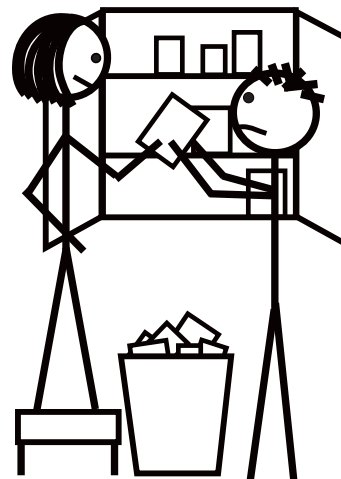


"Yes, Beth, of course."



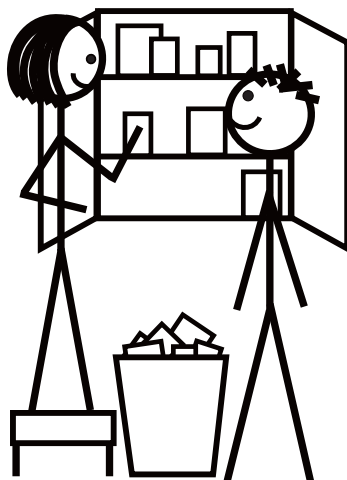
78

"Wait, Beth – stop! That's my Fruity Hoops cereal. Fruit is good for me."



80

"Here, let me help ... move over."



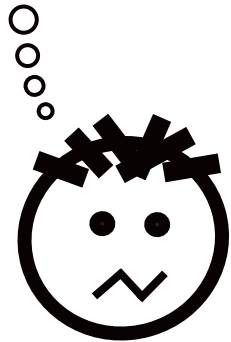
79

"Out of the way, silly man! Fruity Hoops are sweetened with sugar."



81

*This is going to be really hard!!!*



82

**BETH, TOO, HAS BEEN WORKING ON HER RESOLUTION – TO OPEN A CLOTHING STORE.**

**SHE HAS BEEN TO A BANK FOR A LOAN.**

**BUT THEY WANT TO SEE A BUSINESS PLAN.**

84

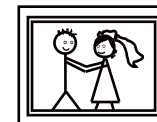
Of course, Beth is right about Fruity Hoops ... but this book is not about cereals.

What it is about is willpower, and the point I want to make here is that **marketers are brilliant** at subverting your resolve.

Whatever they want to sell you, marketers are good at getting into your head and trying to break down your self-discipline.

Whether their goal is to get you to buy their cereals, smoke their cigarettes, or use their credit cards (beyond a reasonable limit), marketers are good at playing with your will.

83

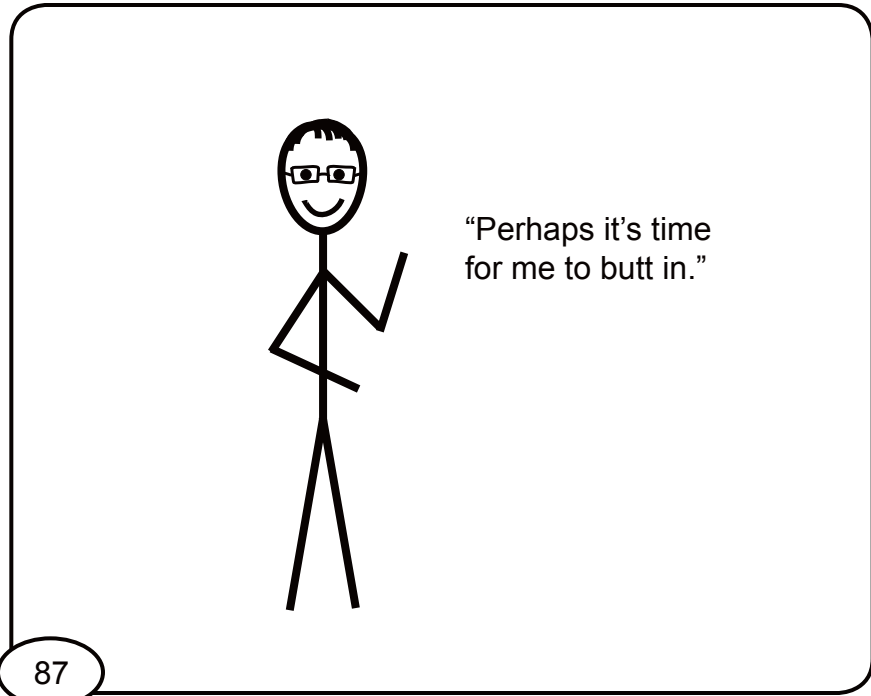
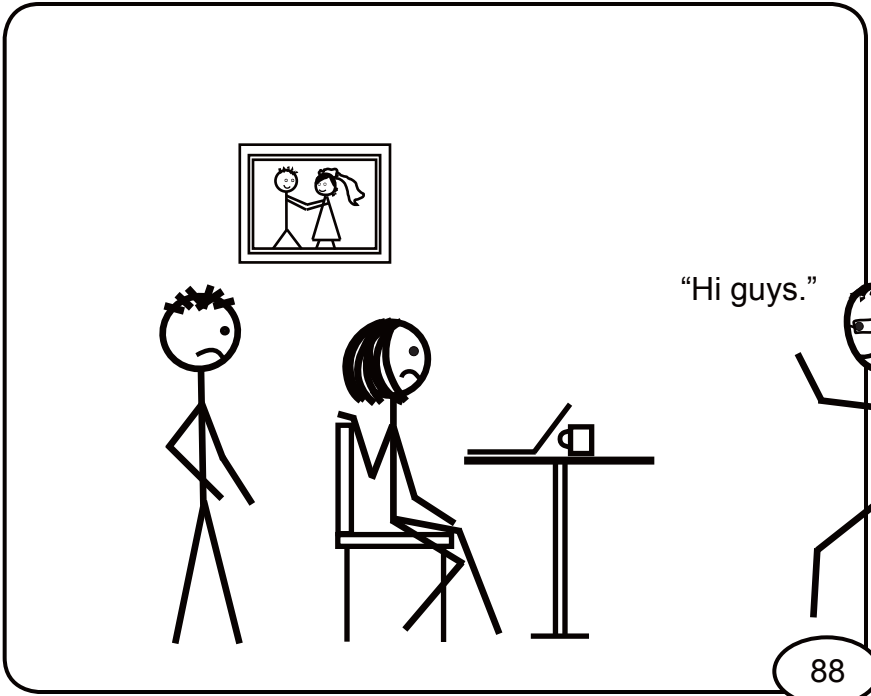
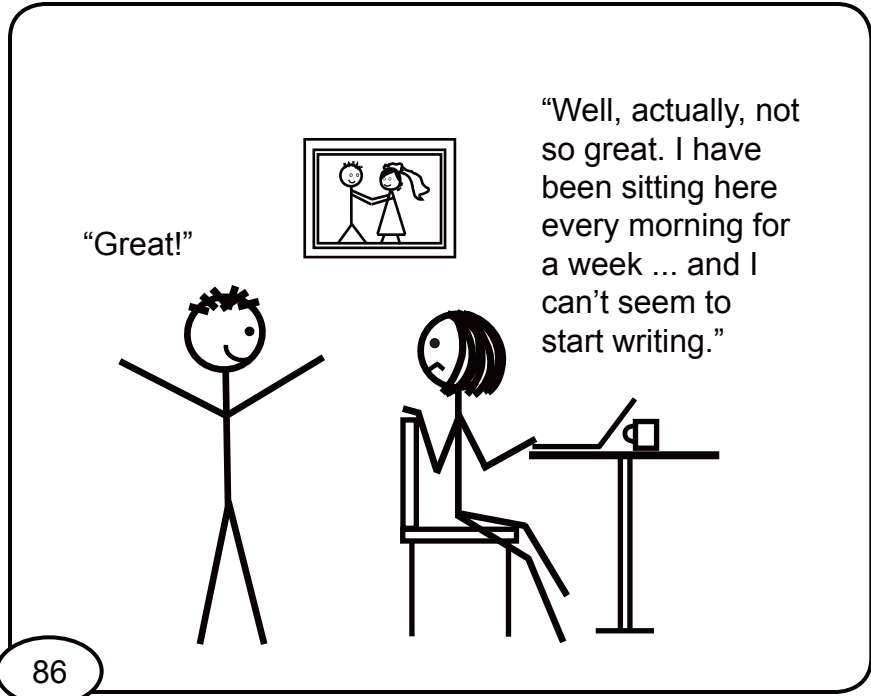


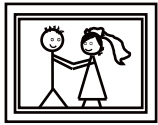
“Good morning, Beth. You were up early. What are you doing?”



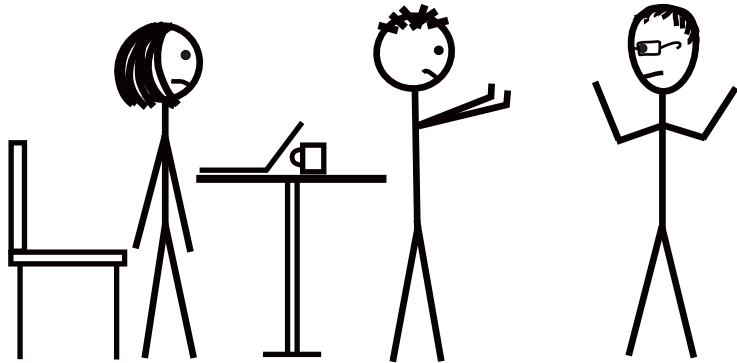
“I’m trying to write a business plan.”

85

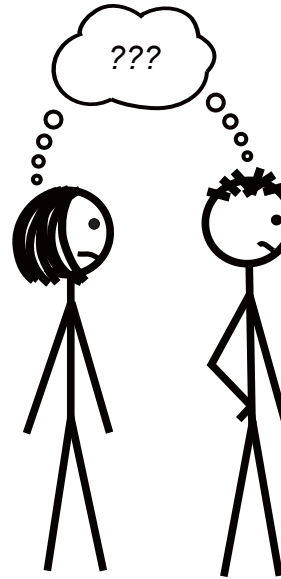




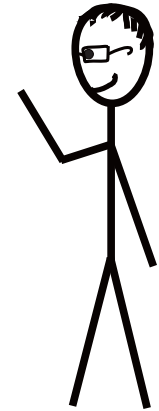
"My name is Jim  
Randel and I'm  
here to help."



90



"Beth, so many people  
have great ideas but  
then never act on them.  
The problem is inertia."

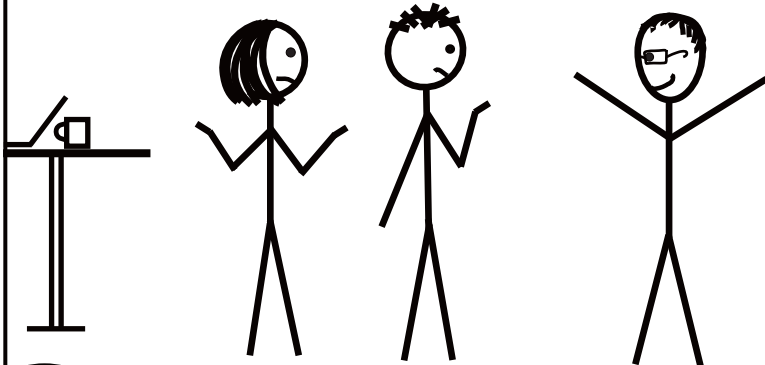


92

"Help who?"

"Help who?"

"Both of you ...  
but Beth first.  
It's obvious  
you're stuck,  
Beth."



91

**WHAT IS  
INERTIA?**

93

**Inertia is a law of physics.  
Actually, inertia is two laws,  
the first of which says that:**

**#1: A property of matter remains  
at rest unless acted upon  
by an external force.**

94

Willpower is the effort needed to **get going** in a forward motion.

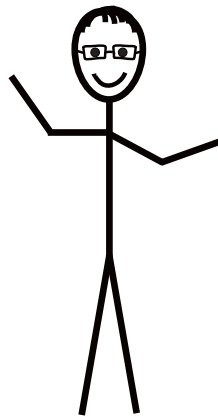
Sometimes it is finding the strength to get out of bed on a cold morning when lying under the covers is so much more appealing. Sometimes it is finding the resolve to type the first sentence of a term paper, a book ... or a business plan. Sometimes it is that first visit to a gym when you haven't been in a long time.

Inertia is defeated when you steel yourself, focus all your energy, push back on any competing pressures and **move forward**.

96

"Inertia is a very powerful force that keeps people from moving forward toward their goals and dreams.

Often, the biggest challenge is just the first step."



95

**And the second part of  
inertia says that:**

**#2: A property of matter remains in  
motion unless acted upon by  
an external force.**

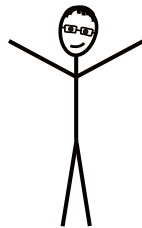
97

Inertia can be a great friend once a person marshals the willpower to move forward in the pursuit of a goal or dream.

That is because the law of inertia also says that once a body is in motion, it will continue to stay in motion unless stopped by an outside force.

So, once you start moving in the right direction, nature will be working for you. The wind starts to blow at your back, carrying you forward.

“This is a very important point and I want to elaborate.”



Once inertia is working in your favor, activities that once required self-discipline start to become habits. When activities become habits, less and less self-discipline is necessary to accomplish them.

By way of example, when you were a youngster, your parents may have had to remind you to brush your teeth. Then this activity became a habit.

Now brushing your teeth does not require willpower. You are on “automatic pilot.”

### HERE ARE THREE BOOKS THAT AMPLIFY THE POINT:

1. In *The Creative Habit* (Simon & Schuster, 2006) choreographer Twyla Tharp describes how important habits are to her success:

“My morning workout ritual is the most basic form of self-reliance; rituals ... arm us with confidence and self-reliance.”

2. In *The Power of Full Engagement* (Free Press, 2003) authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz make the point that habits actually replace the need for self-discipline:

“We can offset our limited will and discipline by building rituals that become automatic....”

3. In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Simon & Schuster, 1989) Stephen Covey proclaims the power of habit:

“Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express our character and produce our effectiveness....”

**ONCE YOU USE YOUR WILLPOWER TO BEGIN A POSITIVE ACTIVITY (OR BREAK A NEGATIVE ONE), INERTIA HELPS YOU CREATE HABITS.**

“Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.”



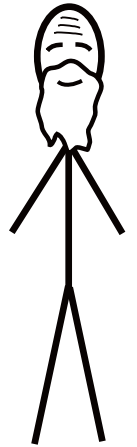
Jim Rohn  
Author, *Twelve Pillars*  
(Widener, 2005)

101

“Lao-Tzu was a great Chinese philosopher who is perhaps best known for his advice:

‘The journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step.’

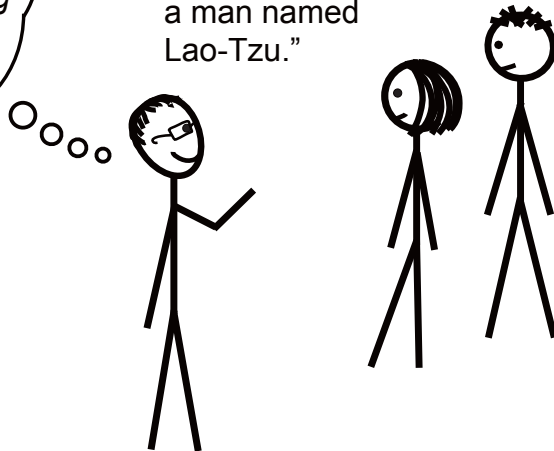
“In other words, no matter what the size of the challenge, you just have to start moving. Take one step, then another and another and, before you know it, you are making real progress toward your goal.”



103

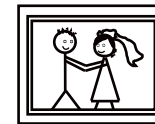
*I just need to figure out a way to get Beth to start moving in the right direction.*

“Beth, I’d like to tell you about a man named Lao-Tzu.”



102

“I don’t get this guy, Beth.”



“Shh ... I’m typing.”

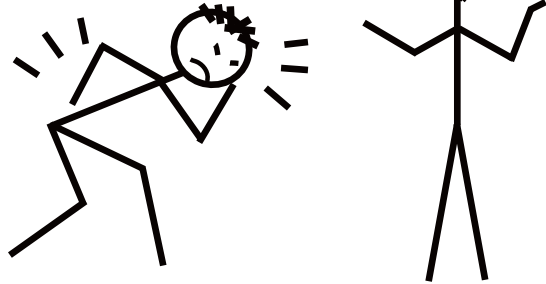


“Bye, now.”

104

THE NEXT DAY

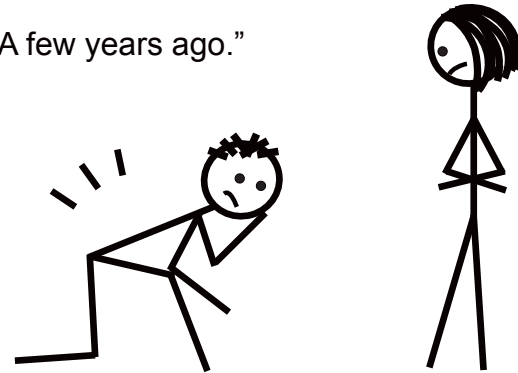
"Billy, what's the matter?  
You're all bent up!"



105

"So you overdid it?"

"A few years ago."



107

"I thought I'd help my diet and go to the gym."

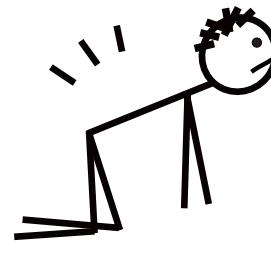
"And when was the last time you were there?"



106

"Is there another way to put it?"

"Well, when you put it that way ..."



108

# BIG MISTAKE, BILLY.

109

Billy has made the classic mistake that so many make when in pursuit of a goal. He binged, looking for results too quickly.

Billy's determination is admirable. But if he tries to do too much too soon, he is likely to slip backwards. (In fact, Billy won't be going back to the gym for several weeks.)

Every researcher on the subject of achievement and willpower speaks to the accomplishment of small, incremental goals on the way to a larger objective.

110

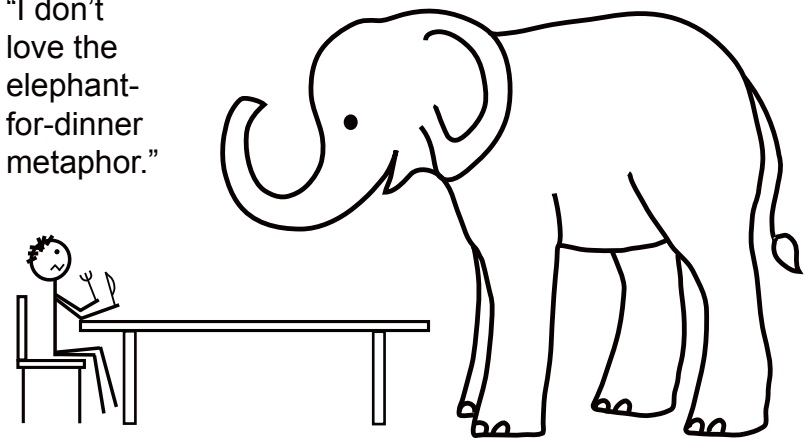
**“Break the task into manageable chunks.** A major contributor to (inaction) is a task that seems overwhelming. The solution is to divide the project into **small projects that seem less formidable.**

“You may have heard (of an) approach called the elephant technique. This technique is based on the ... idea that eating an entire elephant in one sitting would be more than anyone could handle. A more sensible approach would be to eat the elephant one bite at a time.”

Andrew DuBrin, PhD, *Getting It Done*  
(Pacesetter Books, 1995)

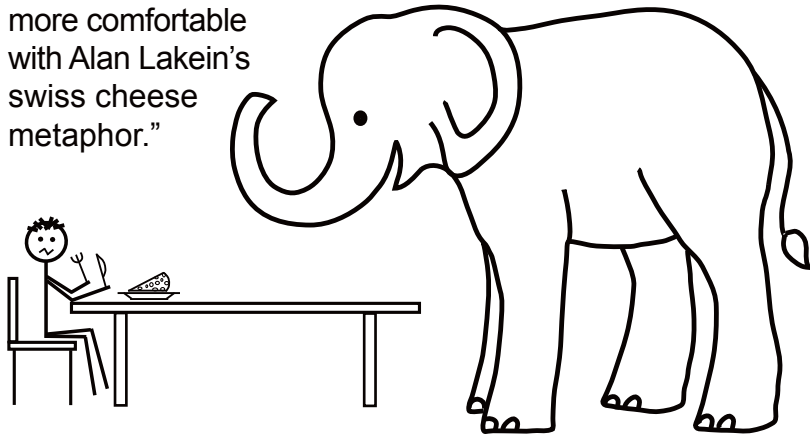
111

“I don't  
love the  
elephant-  
for-dinner  
metaphor.”



112

“I’m much more comfortable with Alan Lakein’s swiss cheese metaphor.”



113

“An excellent way to get moving is to turn (an overwhelming task) into ‘swiss cheese’ by poking some holes in it (little bites) ... And once you’ve started, you’ve given yourself the opportunity to keep going. ... Maybe all that was required was **to break up the task into manageable bites....**”

“If you must confront a difficult task, don’t be concerned with conquering it (all at once). Be satisfied if you put up a better fight than you might have (in the past). **When you develop willpower, time is on your side if you improve just a little every day.**”

Alan Lakein, *How to Get Control of Your Time and Life* (Signet, 1973)

114

## HERE IS THE MESSAGE:

**THE PATH FROM WHERE YOU ARE TO WHERE YOU WANT TO BE IS MANY SMALL, MANAGEABLE STEPS. DON’T TRY TO RUN THE ENTIRE RACE IN ONE BURST. SLOW AND STEADY. THE KEY IS EASY-TO-DIGEST, INCREMENTAL BITES.**

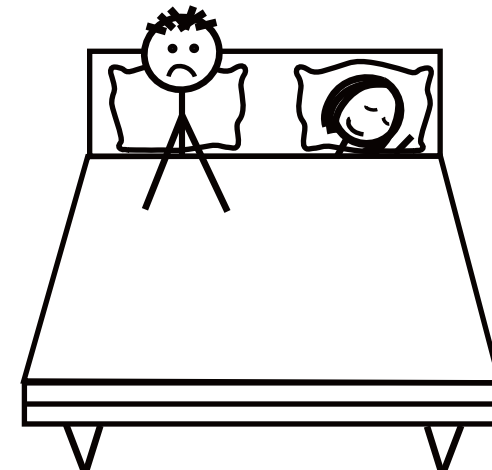
**AS BILLY HAS PAINFULLY LEARNED, SOMETIMES YOU NEED SELF-DISCIPLINE TO KEEP YOUR IMPATIENCE IN CHECK AND MOVE FORWARD IN A REASONABLE FASHION.**

115

## THAT NIGHT

“Ow ... ow ... ow.”

“Z z z z”



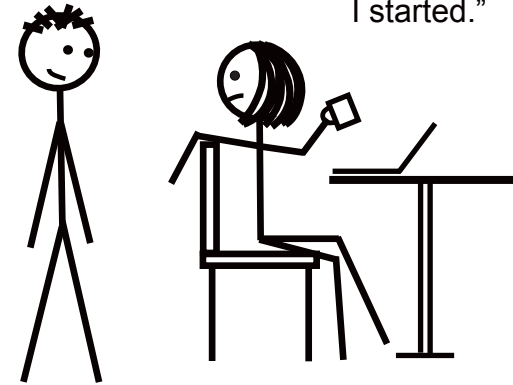
116

**A few days later ...**

117

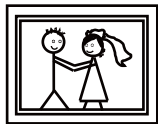


"I just wish I had made a willpower plan before I started."



119

"Good morning, Beth. How's the business plan coming?"



"Slowly ... but I am making progress."



118

"I've never heard of a willpower plan ... what's that?"



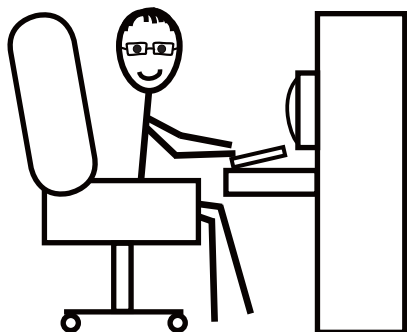
"Well, you know that talky guy, Randel. He has a website that says **the more you plan**, the less willpower you will need to accomplish your goal."



120

**“Let me tell you exactly what my website says about creating a willpower plan ...**

**and by the way, Beth, I’m only talky because I get really excited about trying to help!”**



121

Although most people think of willpower as what you will need in the face of competing demands – and that is, of course, part of it – you can reduce both **the instances** when you need to utilize your will, and **the stress** involved when your will is tested, **by preparing yourself** for the challenge ahead.

Here is the preparation you need to do:

1. Identify **crisis points** and try to minimize them.
2. Create **preset mental responses** to crisis points.
3. Establish a **reinforcing mantra**.
4. Create an **anchor** – just in case you slip.

122

1. **Crisis Points** – These are those instances when you know that your willpower will be **especially tested**. In Billy’s case, it is the presence of sweets. In Beth’s case, she has trouble ignoring phone calls and emails when she is writing. So, she has learned to turn off her BlackBerry when she is working on her business plan.

2. **Preset responses** – Plan **exactly how you will react** when a crisis point arises. If Billy creates a willpower plan, he should prepare for instances when he is out to dinner and others are having dessert; e.g., he might have a rule to always ask for fruit every time he is with others having dessert.

3. **Reinforcing mantra** – This is a **word or phrase to use** when you are at a crisis point, you have tried your preset response technique and you still feel your willpower waning. For example, when Beth forgets to turn off her BlackBerry and she gets a call from a friend, she is really tempted to stop writing and talk. So she remembers her mantra, “Beth’s Boutique,” says it over and over, and ignores the phone.

4. **Anchor** – There may well be times when all else fails and we give in to temptations. But **that does not mean “game over.”** The sooner we get back on course, the better. Since it is possible that you will slip, prepare a speech to yourself in advance: “OK, Billy, you messed up ... no big deal ... now just jump right back into your diet and exercise program.”

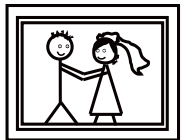
123

The point is that by creating preset responses to use when you are stressed, you **reduce the amount of willpower** you need to succeed in the achievement of your goal!

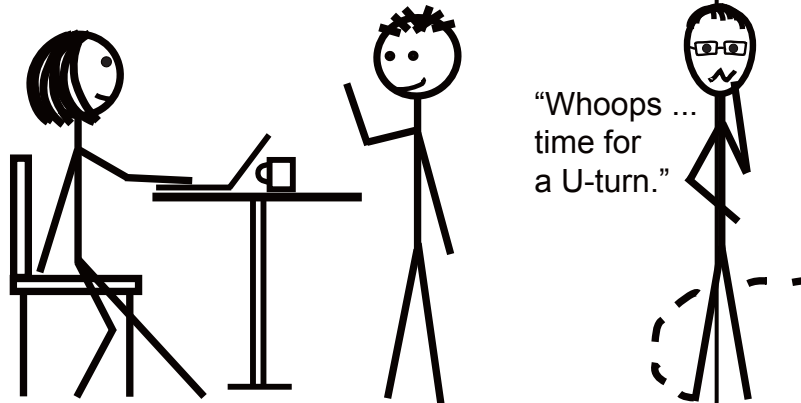
124

## That evening

126



"Well, I must admit that a willpower plan does make sense ... I just don't want that Randel guy dropping in on us again."

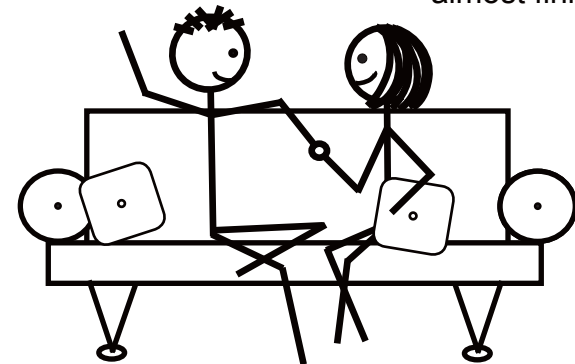


"Whoops ...  
time for  
a U-turn."

125

"Beth, you seem to be making good progress on your business plan."

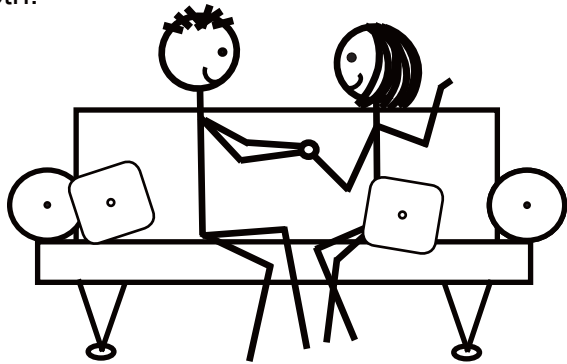
"Yes, I'm actually almost finished."



127

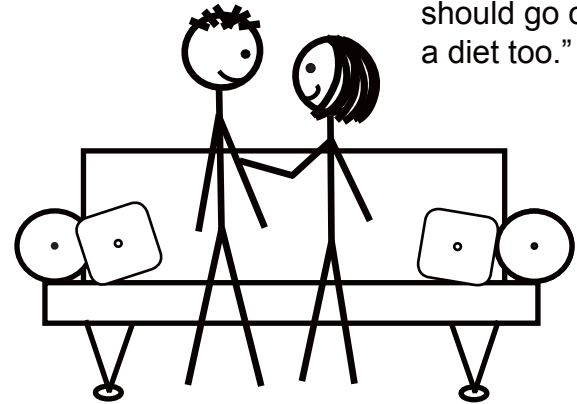
"That's wonderful, Beth."

"Thanks, Billy, but I've been so focused on me that I haven't even asked how your diet is going."



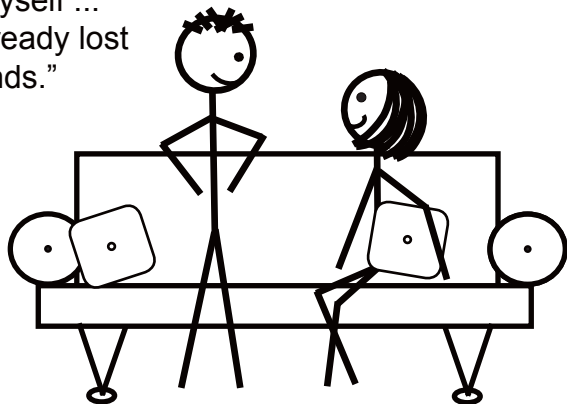
128

"That's fantastic! You're doing so well, maybe I should go on a diet too."



130

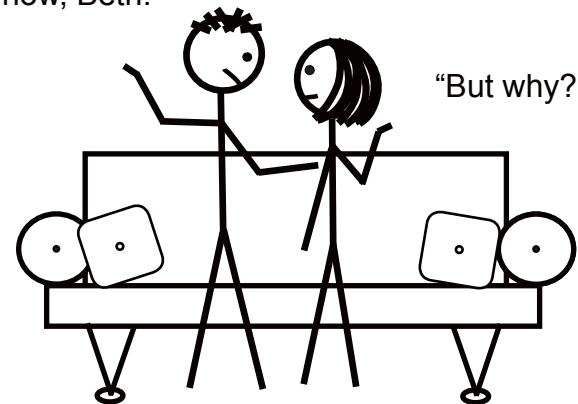
"Well, actually, I'm pretty happy with myself ... I've already lost 5 pounds."



129

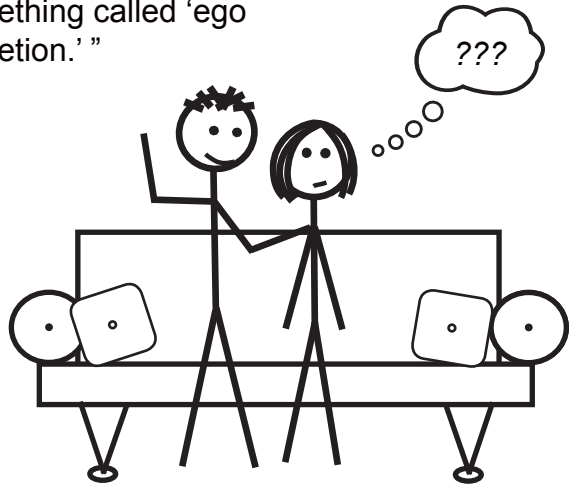
"That might not be such a good idea right now, Beth."

"But why?"



131

“Well, I also went on Randel’s website, and I learned about something called ‘ego depletion.’”



132

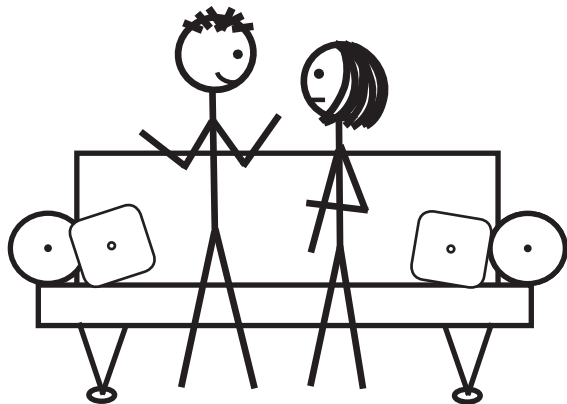
“Hey, Billy, I’m happy that you visited my website. And you are right about Beth – it’s probably not a great idea for her to start on a diet while she is using so much willpower writing her business plan.”



“Let me tell you a bit more of the history and thinking on willpower being just like a muscle.”

134

“You see, willpower is like a muscle that can get fatigued. So, it’s usually not a good idea to take on too many challenges at once.”



133

The idea that willpower is muscle-like was first proposed by psychologists about 30 years ago.

Test subjects were put into situations in which they needed willpower, and then immediately thereafter placed in new situations requiring additional self-discipline. What psychologists found was that in a succession of challenges, one’s willpower is depleted (“ego depletion”). In other words, like a muscle, willpower use was fatiguing.

I’d like to tell you about one famous study you may find interesting.

135



# the skinny on™

After years of studying how people learn, RAND Publishing has created The Skinny On™ series of books to provide a plain-English explanation of today's most important topics. Information is presented in an entertaining story format.

*“Don't let the stick figures fool you - The Skinny on Willpower is a funny book that offers up some seriously good information on how to declutter your brain and discipline yourself to achieve your personal and professional goals. Jim Randel will have you laughing and thinking at the same time. A very enjoyable read!”*

**Ken Blanchard, author of The One Minute Manager®**

*“Jim not only has amazing mental fortitude and lives the life he preaches, he also has an in-depth knowledge of this subject and plenty of credibility to write this book.”*

**Dwight Stones, 3-time Olympian,  
10-time world record holder, broadcaster**

## learn how to:

- increase your self-discipline
- stick to your commitments
- block out negative thoughts
- use the power of inertia
- be prepared for difficult times
- maximize your effectiveness
- turn your dreams into realities
- achieve your goals



**about the author:** Jim Randel is an attorney and entrepreneur who has studied topics of financial literacy and personal achievement for thirty years.

**learn more at:**  
[theskinnyon.com](http://theskinnyon.com)

