

Commitment

The men who have succeeded are men who have chosen one line and stuck to it.

—ANDREW CARNEGIE

Commitment has a lot to do with perspective. When you consider your personal perspective, do you see the big picture, or are you swept up by the whims of the moment? You have to make sure your perspective is rock solid; otherwise, your commitments will be flimsy. We all know that when someone says, “I’ll try,” it will never happen. “I’ll *try*” versus “I *will*” are two different attitudes. With one, you are committing. With the other, you’re leaving yourself room for a way out. Make sure the commitments you make in a moment of excitement have the sustaining motivation to take you to the next level. Great persuaders make their commitments stronger than their moods.

One of the key ways to make sure our commitment remains strong is to develop willpower and the ability to delay gratification. Walter Mischel, a psychologist at Stanford University, performed a study that has come to be called the “marshmallow test.” He invited groups of four-year-olds into a room and gave each of them a marshmallow. He told them they could eat their marshmallow now or they could wait fifteen to twenty minutes and be rewarded with a second marshmallow when he came back. Many of the children were able to hold out, but there were some who couldn’t wait. After the study was over, Mischel followed all the children to see how they performed in life. The results were startling. He found that the kids who were able to delay gratification were twice as likely to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally than those who could not wait. While in high school, the kids who had exhibited willpower had better grades and scored 210 points higher on their SATs than those who had not.

Even for the strongest individuals, their commitment level or willpower is not always constant. Willpower is like a battery. As you exercise your willpower throughout the day, the battery power starts to decline. What drains your battery? Fatigue, negative emotions, low blood sugar, suppression of emotions, and even peer pressure will drain your willpower battery faster than anything else.

An interesting study gives more credibility to this idea that willpower may actually be made stronger if given periods of recess. Researchers had college students arrive to participate in an experiment regarding taste perception (or so the students thought). The students were instructed to come to the study hungry by abstaining from foods for three hours prior to their arrival. When they entered the room, they were greeted by the scent of freshly baked chocolate cookies, which were piled high on a side table, next to a bowl of freshly washed and trimmed radishes. As they entered the room, they were divided into two groups. One group was told they could only eat the chocolate chip cookies and the other only eat the radishes. They were then left alone to walk around the room as they waited for the researchers. Obviously, the radish group of students had to exercise their willpower to refrain from eating the chocolate chip cookies and only eat the plain radishes. After five minutes, the students were told that they needed to wait for their sensory perception of the food to fade before performing a new task. This next, unrelated assignment (or so they thought) was to solve a puzzle. Unbeknownst to the students, the puzzles were unsolvable. The researchers just wanted to see how fast the subjects would give up on the puzzles.

Remember that the researchers were suggesting that willpower and self-discipline would weaken after doing sequential tasks, much like an overused muscle that has been strained to fatigue or a battery that has lost its charge. In looking at the two groups—one that ate cookies (requiring no willpower) and one that ate radishes (exercising their willpower against the tantalizing cookie smell)—the results proved interesting. The cookie-eating group worked on the puzzles for 18.54 minutes before they gave up while the radish-eating group worked on the puzzles for only 8.21 minutes before giving up. In other words, the radish group, the one that had exercised willpower, gave up 2.25 times faster than the group that did not exercise any willpower at all. The bottom line is the more we sequentially exercise our willpower, the more we have drained our battery.

You need to be able to know when your willpower battery is low. Here are some things you can do to recharge:

- Take a nap.
- Have a snack.
- Talk to a positive person.
- Review your goals.
- Do some exercise.
- Replay your vision.
- Employ humor.
- Meditate.
- Engage in service.

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