Relentless: From Good To Great To Unstoppable
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Coolers vs Closers vs Cleaners

- Coolers can have an amazing game.
- Closers can have an amazing season.
- Cleaners have amazing careers.

- Coolers worry about the competition and how they measure up.
- Closers study the competition and plan their attack based on the opponent.
- Cleaners make the competition study them; they don't care whom they're facing, they know they can handle anyone.

- Coolers avoid taking the winning shot.
- Closers take the shot if they know they have a good chance of making it.
- Cleaners just trust their gut and shoot; they don't have to think about it.

- Coolers won't offer to take on a role they're not comfortable with.
- Closers will take the role if you ask them and they'll do it well, if they have enough time to prepare for and study the situation.
- Cleaners don't wait to be asked, they just do it.

- Coolers let others decide whether they're successful; they do the job and wait to see if you approve.
- Closers feel successful when they get the job done.
- Cleaners never feel as if they've achieved success because there's always more to do.

- Coolers don't want to carry the team, but they're the first to slap you on the back when you do a good job.
- Closers want the credit for getting the job done and love being congratulated for what they did.
- Cleaners rarely congratulate you for doing your job, they just expect you to do it.

- Coolers think they want the spotlight, but when they get it, they usually handle it badly.
- Closers stand in front because they need to show who's in charge.
- Cleaners don't have to show who's in charge—everyone already knows.

- Coolers will eat whatever you feed them.
- Closers will order what they want and be satisfied with a great meal.
- It doesn't matter what a Cleaner eats, he'll still be hungry again in an hour.

The 13 elements of a cleaner

1. You keep pushing yourself harder when everyone else has had enough.

Those who talk don't know, and those who know don't talk.

Physical dominance can make you great. Mental dominance is what ultimately makes you unstoppable.

Do. The. Work.

Every day, you have to do something you don't want to do.

Every day, challenge yourself to be uncomfortable, push past the apathy and laziness and fear. Otherwise, the next day you're going to have two things you don't want to do, then three and four and five, and pretty soon, you can't even get back to the first thing.

2. You get into the Zone, you shut out everything else, and control the uncontrollable.

For all the time we spend working on our careers and talents—going to school, building a business, making money, training the body—it's ultimately your mental focus and concentration, your ability to control your environment and the heartbeats of others, that determines whether you succeed or fail.

Anyone who has experienced the awesome power of the Zone will tell you it's deeply calm. It's not relaxing or peaceful—this isn't yoga—but intensely focused. And once you're there, you have no fear, no worry, no emotion. You do what you came to do, and nothing can touch you.

If one thing separated Michael from every other player, it was his stunning ability to block out everything and everyone else. Nothing got to him; he was ice. No matter what else was going on—the crowds, the media, the death of his father—when he stepped onto that basketball court, he was able to shut out everything except his mission to attack and conquer.

3. You know exactly who you are.

Born relentless, taught to relent.

Can you even remember a time when you weren't being taught limitations and compliance, watching what everyone else was doing, scrutinizing the options, worrying about what others would say? At some point you stopped doing what came naturally and started doing what you were told. You took all your crazy urges and ideas and desires, and you stuffed them down where no one could see.

Can you be reasonably successful by just following directions and staying within the lines? Sure. That's what most people do. But if we're talking about being elite, if you want to be unstoppable, you have to learn to put aside everything you've been taught, all the restrictions and limitations, the negativity and doubt.

Picture a lion running wild.

He stalks his prey, attacking and killing at will, and then goes in search of his next conquest. That's what his lion instincts tell him to do, he doesn't know anything else.

He's not misbehaving, he's not bad, he's being a lion. Now lock him up in the zoo. He lies there all day, quiet and lethargic and well fed.

What happened to those powerful instincts? They're still there, deep inside, waiting to be uncaged.

Let him out of the zoo and he goes lion again, preying and attacking. Put him back in the cage, he lies down.

Most people are the lion in the cage. Safe, tame, predictable, waiting for something to happen. But for humans, the cage isn't made of glass and steel bars; it's made of bad advice and low self-esteem and bullshit rules and tortured thinking about what you can't do or what you're supposed to do.

4. You have a dark side that refuses to be taught to be good.

Remember where we started the discussion on instinct?

Born bad, taught to be good? Welcome to your dark side.

Deep inside you, there's an undeniable force driving your actions, the part of you that refuses to be ordinary, the piece that stays raw and untamed.

Not just instinct, but killer instinct. The kind you keep in the dark, where you crave things you don't talk about. And you don't care how it comes across to others because you know this is who you are, and you wouldn't change if you could.

Control your dark side, don't let it control you

The ability to show up at the gym every day and do what no one else is willing to do, that comes from the dark side.

The drive to get to the top and stay up there, year after year? Dark side. A Cleaner with a strong dark side can succeed at whatever he chooses, and his path is usually determined at an early age, by his family or environment or culture.

5. You're not intimidated by pressure, you thrive on it.

For Cleaners, every moment is a pressure situation, and everything is always on the line.

Cleaners crave that height, along with the pressure of staying up there and going higher and higher.

As soon as they start relaxing for just a moment, they instantly feel as if they're slacking.

If you're a Cleaner, you know that intense rush of needing to control something, attack something, right now.

Never, ever, do you go through a day thinking, "That was relaxing." To a Cleaner, relaxing is something weaker people do because they can't handle pressure.

I tell my guys, "Pressure, pressure, pressure."

Most people run from stress. I run to it. Stress keeps you sharp, it challenges you in ways you never imagined and forces you to solve issues and manage situations that send weaker people running for cover. You can't succeed without it. Your level of success is defined by how well you embrace it and manage it.

6. When everyone is hitting the "In Case of Emergency" button, they're all looking for you.

Picture a military operation with a specific tactical strategy: go into that building, make sure it's empty, go out the red door and into the waiting truck in back before the building blows up. You do exactly as ordered, everything goes according to plan . . . until you get to the red door.

Locked. No other exit. Now what? Panic?

Those ten seconds you spend panicking might be your last. A Closer will feel fear first, then fumble for an option. But a Cleaner will instantly feel his survival instincts kick in, giving him a rush of options, and he knows one of them will work because he's already considered thirty variables before going into the building.

Few people have the ability to adapt on the fly and make quick adjustments that work.

I'm not saying you can't think about what you have to do, but do your thinking and planning in advance, building your reflexes, so you know when your back is against the wall, you've got the right move.

You don't accomplish that by obsessing and worrying until you're an emotional mess, unable to sleep or focus on anything else. You prepare yourself by knowing you're ready with the next bullet to fire.

7. You don't compete with anyone, you find your opponent's weakness and you attack.

When you're a Cleaner, there's no such thing as a meaningless game. Doesn't matter if it's the first preseason event or a midseason All-Star Game or the last game in a losing season, a Cleaner shows up to play.

When you're the guy at the top, it's on you to pull everyone else up there with you, or everything you've built comes crashing down.

Not so easy for a Cleaner who demands excellence of himself and has no tolerance for those who can't or won't rise to that level.

The only way you can light other people on fire is to be lit yourself, from the inside. Professional, cool, focused. If you had a bad night and you can't show up the next day ready to go, or you can't show up at all, that doesn't affect just you, it affects everyone around you.

8. You make decisions, not suggestions; you know the answer while everyone else is still asking questions.

Every minute, every hour, every day that you sit around trying to figure out what to do, someone else is already doing it.

While you're trying to choose whether to go left or right, this way or that way, someone else is already there.

While you're paralyzed from overthinking and overanalyzing your next move, someone else went with his gut and beat you to it.

Make a choice, or a choice will be made for you.

You can waste a lifetime sitting around overthinking possible ways to look at something.

Speaking of clichés, here's another tribute to indecision and apathy:

Good things come to those who wait. No, good things come to those who work. I understand the value of not rushing into things— you want to be quick, not careless—but you still have to work toward a result, not just sit back and wait for something to happen.

You can't wait. The decision you don't make on Monday will still be waiting for you on Tuesday, and by then two new decisions will have to be dealt with, and if you still don't make those decisions, you'll have three more on Wednesday. Pretty soon, you're so overwhelmed by everything you still haven't dealt with that you become completely paralyzed and can't do anything.

9. You don't have to love the work, but you're addicted to the results.

Making it to the top is not the same as making it at the top. True for any business; getting the job doesn't mean you're keeping the job; winning the client doesn't mean he's staying forever.

You cannot understand what it means to be relentless until you have struggled to possess something that's just out of your reach.

Over and over, as soon as you touch it, it moves farther away.

But something inside you—that killer instinct—makes you keep going, reaching, until you finally grab it and fight with all your might to keep holding on.

Anyone can take what's sitting right in front of him. Only when you're truly relentless can you understand the determination to keep pursuing a target that never stops moving.

People quit their workouts and diets because they're too hard.

They stop advancing in their careers and lives because it's too much work.

Guys make it to the pros and then don't want to play for coaches who are too tough.

They can't deal with being uncomfortable so they seek the shortcut, and when they can't find it, they quit.

Part of the commitment to hard work is knowing what you have to give up to do the work... learning to control whatever pulls you away from your mission.

You start having a little success, people notice you, it feels good ... and maybe you start feeling a little satisfied and privileged.

Trust me: privilege is a poison unless you know how to manage it.

10. You'd rather be feared than liked.

A Cleaner moves silently under the surface—he makes no waves, so you never know what he's doing. You can't see him or hear him. You may not even know who he is. But when he's ready for you to find out, he does it with a tsunami that comes with no warning.

Fear and respect: let them know you were there by your actions, not your words or emotions.

When people start broadcasting what they're going to do, and how great they're going to be when they do it, it's a sure sign they're still trying to convince themselves.

11. You trust very few people, and those you trust better never let you down.

Our relationship has to be based on trust, or we can't get anywhere.

In the world of Cleaners, if you can't be trusted, you're gone.

A Cleaner never just hands over responsibility and says, "There, do this." Too much risk. He'll test you first, maybe for fifteen minutes or fifteen years, whatever it takes, watching how you respond, observing how you work, how you carry yourself, deciding whether your motives and methods are up to his standards.

12. You don't recognize failure; you know there's more than one way to get what you want.

What most people think of as failure, a Cleaner sees as an opportunity to manage and control a situation, pulling it around to his advantage, doing something everyone else says is impossible.

When someone else says you've failed, what they really mean is "If that were me, I would feel like a failure." Well, that guy's not you, and he's obviously not a Cleaner, because Cleaners don't recognize failure.

Admitting defeat has no place in this discussion, or in this book, because the words quit and relentless just don't work together in any productive way.

People who admit defeat and say they had no choice just aren't serious about success, excellence, or themselves.

13. You don't celebrate your achievements because you always want more.

Everything you accomplished, everything you worked for, you didn't do any of it for the celebration, and you didn't do it for anyone else.

You did it for that exquisite moment, that electrifying, powerful surge of satisfaction that everyone dreams about but few ever get to experience.

Yet the minute you experience it, it's already fading. And all you can think about is doing whatever it takes to get it back.

Everyone else will tell him he did a great job, and he knows it's true.

But their approval means nothing to him because the standards he sets for himself are so much higher than anyone else can possibly set for him.

A Cleaner performs for himself, and everyone else wins.

Whatever he does to satisfy his goals internally transfers to them externally. When he achieves what he desires, everyone else around him benefits.

If he's the boss and his company makes a massive profit because he worked around the clock maneuvering a huge deal, his employees win.