HOW TO ENLIVEN YOUR DREAMS

Have you ever tried to start an exercise program on your own?

There are many private galleries of home exercise equipment displayed as modern art, like Duchamp's famous and ridiculous post-modern "sculpture," *Fountain* – which is just a urinal turned in a different orientation. Today we have masterpieces such as a treadmill transformed into "Clothes Tree," racks of dumbbells as "End Table," and rowing machine as "Hurdle."

The abundance of such a range of home art displays is not, sad to say, a phenomenon of mass creative genius. It is a function of the difficulty of focusing our will consistently in multiple directions.

It takes willpower to decide to establish a new habit, and without some kind of support for this new habit – in the form of a clearly defined commitment, some kind of accountability, and incorporation into a daily routine – our dynamic potential of a new, positive habit can become stuck in the regret of an unrealized vision.

There are also certainly many people who use their home gym consistently and effectively. There are people who do establish new habits of regular exercise that they stick to on their own. What is the difference?

Practice.

Once we decide on a new habit we want, we have to figure out the first action we need to take; and when, where and how we will take it. By committing to that action, and committing to the new habit, we're on our way. If we can build on this and maintain it over time, we will establish that new habit, and then there's much less need for willpower to maintain it – it becomes easy.

But getting there is the tricky part.

This is where coaching comes in. Maybe you want to establish an exercise program, or strengthen the habits that can counter depression, or create new neural pathways that remove obsessive thoughts and compulsive behavior, or rein in your distractibility. You may want to learn and strengthen your relationship skills, or create new habits for better parenting. You may need to retrain yourself for more effective work.

Regardless of the particular goal, the process of establishing new habits can be hard to maintain on your own.

This is not a weakness. It is not some flaw in our self-discipline. It is a fact of human existence.

We are creatures of habit, for better or worse – and whether they are good, effective habits or not,

they continue to guide our actions. This is important, because without them, we couldn't function. There's just too much going on, too many things to respond to, for us to think about each action we take with total conscious thought every single time.

So we tell our brain what we want it to do. We create neural pathways that lead our behavior in regular patterns, and this is what forms the foundation of our habits – each of which at one time or another seemed like the right thing to do.

The downside is that we may have established some of these habits as children in response to troubling circumstances, or on the basis of serious misunderstandings of what was going on. We also may have established them as young adults when we may have *thought* we knew what we were doing, but were mistaken.

We then end up with habits that are at best ineffective; at worst harmful or dangerous.

The good news is that we have the ability to retrain our brains, and to establish new, better habits. But this is a big job. You can't just wish it and make it so.

In fact the ability to consciously change our habits is a uniquely human ability. It's not something that's driven by instinct, or happens automatically in any way at all. Changing our behavior is a *big deal.* It takes a big commitment, and a darned good reason to do it.

To establish a new habit takes willpower, which takes energy and precious focus of our conscious mind. We don't have an unlimited capacity for this; we can't change everything all at once, and we can't change anything if we're not prepared to do what it takes to commit to that change.

People who change their habits effectively arrange things so they don't have to use their willpower continually. They arrange their schedules, their circumstances, and their influences so establishing and maintaining the new habit is easy to do. They don't place obstacles or temptations in their own way, and they enlist support from others to help them hold to their discipline.

As a life coach, this is my role. People hire me to – among other things – help them to establish new life habits. I listen carefully to what you're looking for in your life, and we figure out what needs to be done to get there. At times this involves teaching skills; other times it involves helping to design the external supports for the new habits. Sometimes the accountability I provide is the most important thing – knowing that you'll be reporting to me reminds you of your on commitment, and the tasks you need to do, and that makes it easier to get yourself to do them.

I started with the example of physical exercise, because it's a great example of the many elements that go into establishing a new habit. But the same dynamics apply to most anything you want to achieve.

A great marriage is based on great habits. If you want a great marriage, there are principles involved: a deep commitment and devotion to each other, a profound sense of being on each other's side, and a willingness to stay conscientious and aware of each other's experience, to name a few.

But this is all theoretical unless you're also acting consistently from these principles - and establishing those actions is no different in general than establishing an exercise routine.

Success in your work also requires fundamental principles: a commitment to excellence, an understanding that effective work requires the creation of value, a willingness to put in the mental effort and the hours to achieve your goals are some of these. But without acting from these principles consistently, you won't achieve what you set out to achieve.

Our capacity to form and establish new habits is one of the wondrous capacities we enjoy as human beings. It's what makes it possible to confront and overcome problems, rather than passively suffering with them.

Today I want to encourage you to think about your personal examples of unintentional modern art – what is your metaphorical equivalent to the treadmill as clothes tree? What unrealized goals do you have gathering dust in your gallery of potential?

You can do something about those, and turn potential regrets into something you can be proud of. But it takes some doing, and it sometimes takes some help.

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P.S. My new, in depth *Master's Course in Happiness* is designed to help you learn the skills and habits that will help you build a flourishing life now – with focused, practical lessons each month so you can build and sustain your mastery over time. For a limited time, I'm offering this to TTPers at a special one time, discounted payment for you or your loved ones. Just enter promo code **MH1PROMO** for $100 off the regular price.

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