

Take the Stairs: 7 Steps to Achieving True Success (Vaden, Rory)

We are conditioned to believe that it is moral to pursue immediate satisfaction and that difficulties can always be circumvented. We don't want to make any sacrifices, and for many of us we have never had to. Instead, the vast majority of Western societies have adopted an "escalator mentality"—one that says getting what we want shouldn't require much work, and that there are always shortcuts in business and in life.

At least not cover to cover. If you're like most people in the world today, then you have read fewer than five books cover to cover in your lifetime. According to one major American publisher, 95% of all books that are purchased are never completely read. And congratulations if you've made it this far, because 70% of all books ever purchased are never even opened!

Every one of us is searching for shortcuts. In most everything we do. We're basically programmed that way because the idea of shortcuts is being sold to us through almost every major medium in the world. We see magazine ads that tell us "how to lose weight in 4 minutes a day," and we buy books that promise us the chance to think and attract success to come to us without us having to do a darn thing.

There are game shows that test our own greed through our willingness to backstab other human beings for the chance to make millions or become a reality TV star. There are pills, books, magazines, speakers, contraptions, and jigamaroos sold to us to make our lives easier in all areas, because—let's face it—it's easy to be just one more guy out there who is looking for "the secret." We're looking for the easy way—the way where things will come to us so we don't have to go out and work.

Successful people have all had to do things they didn't feel like doing in order to get where they are.

Often we don't even pay attention to them because we're too consumed with our iPod, our email, or our text messages. These distractions soothe us in the moment, but in the bigger picture they only compound the problem. As it turns out, distraction is a dangerously deceptive saboteur of our goals.

Are TV shows celebrating commitment, discipline, and hard work, or are they touting temptation, drama, and greed?

While it was a difficult job and I never liked going door-to-door, I loved the philosophies the company was teaching me. I loved the people I was working with. Most of all, I loved the person that I was becoming in the process. It was making me stronger, smarter, and more self-aware

Success is often not the result of our major decisions, but more deceptively it is the aggregate sum total of all our small and seemingly insignificant ones.

Success comes down to choosing the hard right over the easy wrong. Consistently.

Learn how to fall in love with the daily grind.

The Rent Axiom, which states that success is never owned, it is only rented—and the rent is due every day.

Which brings us to the Pain Paradox of decision making that states the short-term easy leads to the long-term difficult, while the short-term difficult leads to the long-term easy.

Successful people know that feelings and impulses don't tend to last long; they are short term.

So while most people make decisions based on the short-term emotion, successful people can make sacrifices because they base their decisions on long-term logic.

Rather, success is the aggregate sum total of small, seemingly insignificant choices that when compounded over time create the trajectory of our lives.

It's a surprising revelation that what started as a disciplined sacrifice later becomes a deep source of satisfaction.

Principle of Commitment, and it simply states that the more we have invested in something, the less likely we are to let it fail.

As the chart below illustrates, emotional commitment intensifies as we pursue any activity. It starts out easy, and gets more challenging, culminating in a peak, or a "pivot point."

We are all going to face that pivot point hundreds, if not thousands, of times in various areas of our lives. Some people never seem to push through those points, while others do.

It's interesting to note that very often the emotional energy of making a decision is greater than the physical energy of executing that decision. In other words, it's not working out once we get to the gym that is hard; it's sitting on the couch deciding whether or not we're going to go that is more difficult and therefore more important.

That seemingly harmless mind-set of "I'm not sure" and "Should I?" is just enough at the critical pivot point to swing our commitment back in the opposite direction

The problem with this approach is that the perfect situation never comes! There will never be a perfect time, there will never be a perfect person, there will never be a perfect situation to start doing the things we need to get us where we want to go. We need to stop spending so much of our time trying to make the right decisions and instead start spending our time making decisions and then making them right.

"but"—instead of saying, "I'm not sure yet," they say, "I'm in for good." That difference means that instead of being plagued by "Should I?" they have empowered themselves to ask, "How will I?"—"How will I make this relationship work?" "How will I get this done?"

One brilliant aspect of the human mind is that once we start asking the question “how,” our creativity engages.

As the second-century BC philosopher Patanjali said, “Your mind transcends limitations; your consciousness expands in every direction... Dormant forces, faculties, and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”

In other words, when we intentionally ask “how” instead of settling for the default question of “should,” our subconscious mind goes into overdrive, and we find ourselves answering those “how” questions—and achieving more than we ever thought possible.

And realize that indecision often costs you more than the wrong decision does. Or as my friend and pastor at Cross Point Church in Nashville, Pete Wilson, says, “The cost of missing out is more than the cost of messing up.”

I wouldn’t pretend to know which of these “outs” are okay and which aren’t. My point is simply that most of us have these clauses or “conditions” in our commitments. They are unwritten and unspoken, but nevertheless they are almost always there. The evidence is in the excuses we make when we break our commitments. The excuses we give after the fact are the unverballed “conditions” that have been there all along.

Creative avoidance is unconsciously filling the day with menial work to where we end up getting busy just being busy! When I discovered this problem for myself, I realized that all day long I would be answering emails, pushing paper, chitchatting with coworkers, spacing out, running personal errands, and so on. At the end of the day I had “worked” all day long, but didn’t have much to show for it.

I was engaged in activities all day, but I wasn’t making progress. I was being efficient, but I wasn’t being effective. I was doing things right, but I wasn’t doing the right things. As the old anonymous quote goes, “In the

absence of disciplined focus, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.”

“The amount of busy work will always expand to fulfill the amount of free time available.”

Twain said, “Brevity is the essence of wisdom.”

The simple Take the Stairs solution to the problem is not doing everything that we can do in a day, but rather to do everything we should do in a day.

Balance should mean appropriate time spent on critical priorities.

Instead of asking, “Am I spending enough time on this activity?” we should really be asking, “When is the best time to be focused on this activity?”

Instead of asking, “How much can I get done today?” we should be asking, “What is the most effective thing I can be doing right now with the time I have available?” This small shift can yield massive results.

One of the key reasons for having a schedule is to make sure we’re satisfying all of our commitments while creating a life we love that is free of stress and full of fun.

One of the biggest ways we lose time is by not knowing where we’re going next. Having a schedule allows you to take the thought process out of much of which activities you should or shouldn’t spend time on, because you’ve thought through them all at once in a logical state, rather than waiting until you’re in the moment, emotionally deciding whether or not you feel like taking certain actions. The payoff here is that you can

That delay in seeing results explains why people often have a hard time sticking to their schedule. Our natural instinct is to want to see the fruits of our labor right away and to see the return on our investment immediately. But that’s not how discipline works, and it’s not how your schedule works.

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According to Eric's tape measure timeline, a "bad day" wasn't even visible. It was approximately one-thirtieth of one inch. With enough perspective, all of our failures—and successes—are reduced to their appropriate size. Every day our frustrations are so big, our losses are so big, and our problems are so big; if we view them only with the limited perspective of how it affected our day. But when you look at your life with the perspective of the entire 80 feet, the challenges of today are often a speck of unnoticeable dust on the timeline of our life.

A challenge in respect to today is a big problem. A challenge in respect to our life span is a small problem. A challenge in respect to eternity is no problem.

Therein lies the gargantuan payoff of self-discipline and faith. When you do everything that you can, and all that is in your power, and things still don't work out the way you had hoped or planned, then you can be absolutely sure that they were definitely supposed to go the way they did. There is nothing more you could have done.

People without discipline and without faith don't get that same payoff of peace. If you didn't have enough faith that things would work out for the better to even get started, or if you didn't have the discipline to do everything in your power to make them happen, then you know, deep down, why the results turned out the way they did.

You didn't do everything you could have. You can't be sure if you are living the life you are destined for unless you are doing every single thing in your power to make your life better.

The payoff of fear is that we don't have to try, we don't have to work, and we don't have to challenge ourselves to test our limits.

"That's okay, do it scared."

So many of us are frustrated because somehow we believe that we are entitled to a life that is supposed to be easier.

Entitlement is a disgusting disease that destroys our ability to reach our dreams—because the exact moment entitlement engages is the same moment our self-discipline disengages.

You've surely experienced this yourself—on both sides of the dynamic. We try harder, endure longer, and bounce back from disappointments faster when the people we care about take an interest in what we're doing. It's strange how easy it can be to let ourselves down, but how unbearable it can feel to let down others.

Our problem isn't time management; it is self-management.

And we're not losing to poor circumstances as much as we're losing to a lack of self-discipline.