

Raise Your Game (Stein, Alan)

I've worked with the likes of Kevin Durant and Victor Oladipo and watched superstars like Kobe Bryant and Steph Curry in their private practice routines—and two things stick out. One, they stick to the basics. They study and practice the basics to the point that they're automatic, as if the actions are doing them. Two, they work harder than anyone else. They might lose, but they simply will not be outworked.

I believe in the fundamentals, and I preach the fundamentals. I've seen people fail or succeed based on their commitment to the unsexy, the unpopular, and the unglamorous.

Making “you” your business. Self-awareness means having and developing an understanding of who you are, and what you can and can't do.

Embrace the people who tell you you're full of crap.

Here's a foundational argument for the rest of this book: the single most important thing a person needs for success is self-awareness. This includes who you are, what you can do, what you can't do, where your value comes from, and where you need improvement.

It's a habit that you have to cultivate and sharpen every single day. Remember that: Practicing self-awareness is a habit.

and I would argue that most people are sleepwalking through their work routine or, at the very least, comfortably on autopilot. Be honest: How often do you take this kind of inventory of yourself? Is it a daily habit?

Self-Test 1. What do you do really well? 2. What do you need to improve on? 3. What is your plan for addressing No. 2?

I think the everyone-should-get-a-trophy mind-set damages self-awareness.)

Figure out what separates you from everyone else. If you don't know who you are and what you do, how is anyone else going to know?

self-awareness requires that you avoid the pitfall of arrogance.

Arrogance prevents us from seeing our flaws. Humility gives us 20/20 vision and allows us to stay open.

No one ever seems to complain about their own attitude or effort. It's always someone else's that they find fault with.

Well rounded is overrated. Use your self-awareness to double down on what you do best. Find the one thing you do better than anyone else and continue to pour into that.

Own your space.

Turn yourself into someone invaluable: make it so no one else can do what you do.

Close the holes in your

Close the holes in your game, whatever your game is.

Some people don't like to look at their weaknesses—either because they're so focused on self-esteem or because they don't want to admit that their weaknesses exist.

Remember: if you don't know what you do well, no one else will either.

When I met Jesse Itzler, entrepreneur and co-owner of the Atlanta Hawks, he told me that every single one of us has this little voice inside of us that's full of self-doubt. When things start getting tough in our lives—physically, mentally, emotionally—that voice gets louder and louder and the negative self-talk begins. It's a self-preservation mechanism; if you're putting yourself through grueling physical pain, your mind is trying to get you to stop. That's what it's there for. Its job is to save you.

Self-awareness almost always leads directly to humility; when you know the things you don't do well, you become humble and driven.

We can't change what we don't notice.

There is a phenomenon called the Dunning-Kruger effect, which put simply is: we can't know everything that we don't know. (Dunning and Kruger were two Stanford researchers who found that the subjects who did the worst on their tests were regularly the most confident.)

Learn your strengths and weaknesses, inside and out, because self-awareness makes everything else possible.

But viewing work as a grind will not just make you miserable, it'll lead to poor performance. An effective mind shift that I use is turning a "have to" into a "get to." I don't have to go work out, I get to.

"Money just amplifies who you are," they both like to say. If you're an a-hole, money makes you a giant a-hole. If you're a generous person, then money allows you to do more good in the world.

His daily mantra? I didn't come this far to only come this far.

We spend far too much time at work for it not to have meaning.

Ego Is the Enemy.

“Find what nobody else wants to do and do it.”¹¹

Psychologist Adam Galinsky and business professor Maurice Schweitzer wrote in *Friend and Foe* about the value of competitiveness in work and life.

But no one really defines what hard work is or what it means to work hard. Here is my personal definition: Hard work is intentionally leaving your comfort zone with purpose. That’s how you grow.

Computer science professor Cal Newport, who wrote an entire book called *Deep Work*, thinks it’s a dying skill.

Note: If you aren’t investing at least 80 to 90 percent of your time on your primary three responsibilities—then you are not being as efficient and as productive as you are capable of. Shift your energy and time so your priorities are treated like priorities.

Most kids only see ESPN highlights and YouTube clips. Steph saw the boring early mornings and exhaustive practice routines. He saw what it took and decided it was worth it.

He was going through an intense warm-up before the real workout started. I grabbed a seat, didn’t say a word to him or his trainer, and just watched. For forty-five minutes I was shocked. For forty-five minutes I watched the best player in the world do the most basic drills. I watched the best player on the planet do basic ball-handling drills. I watched the best player on the planet do basic footwork. I watched the best player on the planet do basic offensive moves. Granted, he did everything with surgical precision and superhero intensity, but the stuff he was doing was so simple. I couldn’t believe it. Later that day I went over to him. “Thanks again,” I said, “I really enjoyed watching your workout this morning.” “No problem,” Kobe replied. Then I hesitated, not wanting to sound rude—or worse—condescending. “You’re the best player in the world. Why do such basic stuff?” He flashed that gleaming smile of his. “Why do you think I’m the best player in the game?” he asked. “Because I never get bored with the basics.”

The basics are simple, but not easy. If they were easy, everyone would do them.

down, I believe the most basic component of my business, or any business for that matter, is active listening. Active listening is listening to learn, not listening to respond. It’s listening to connect, not listening to reply. It’s listening empathetically—which is the ability to try to see the world through another person’s eyes and trying to respect, appreciate, and understand their perspective. Regardless of a company’s size or industry, if they want to be elite, they must learn

to master the fundamentals of active listening (to both their employees and their customers/clients). Active listening is the “footwork” of business. Against the Hack We

We live in an instantly downloadable world that encourages us to skip steps and circumvent the process. We are taught to chase what’s hot, flashy, and sexy, and ignore the fundamentals. We are lured into “hacking” this or that, finding a way to skip the line. But the basics work. They always have and they always will.

Do the work. Earn your success.

Discipline is easy. Sustained, consistent discipline is hard.

The reason? There’s too much attention to the initial promise and not enough to laying the groundwork in order to actually execute and sustain it.

Unsuccessful people find it easy not to do these things.¹⁰

Think about it: If a basketball player does a thirty-minute ball-handling workout and never loses the ball, then he did not get any better! All he did was replicate what he was already capable of doing. In order to progress, he has to push past his current limits. If you’re not losing the ball, then you’re not getting any better.

Adam Bryant interviews successful CEOs for a living and studies them across all industries. The common denominator? “Passionate curiosity,”⁶ he wrote.

According to a recent study, 40 percent of millennials carry a fear of failure, more than any other age group.¹⁵ If I had to guess, I imagine that growing up in a social media culture, a world where every little thing is shared, has created this side effect. No one wants to mess up because it’s so public and embarrassing. But failure is a built-in motivation and teaching system—if you’re smart enough to embrace it. “Failure is so valuable,” says researcher James Prochaska, because “it forces us to learn, even if we don’t want to.”¹⁶

“Everything works, but nothing works forever,” he told me.

When I asked him his definition of success, he answered immediately: “Waking up every morning with a smile on my face knowing I’m going to make this a great day.” It was only when I was relistening to our interview that I realized how profound this was. Not that it was going to be a great day, but that he was going to make it one—that’s the key. It’s in his hands. That’s the power and reach of confidence.

Comparison is the thief of joy.

We get so hyperfocused on what everyone else has and what everyone else is doing that we lose sight of ourselves.

“You will always lose the Comparison Game.” Why is that? Because it’s rigged. It has no function besides enlarging self-doubt.

I can quickly find someone better looking, funnier, more successful, taller, more muscular, smarter. It won’t take long to find someone who scores higher than me on almost any metric. If I use these people as my measuring stick—to determine my self-worth and value—I will always lose. I will never measure up.

In *Psyched Up: How the Science of Mental Preparation Can Help You Succeed*, Dan McGinn

Physical discomfort creates emotional connection. You will make your best friends outside of your comfort zone.

In *How Champions Think: In Sports and In Life*, Rotella

the first essential quality of champions is optimism.⁷ Think about that: Rotella is working with people at the absolute highest level of their craft, some who are the best in the world at what they do. Yet he still thinks the positive mind-set—more than anything else—is what makes them champions.

Pete Philo is a former NBA director of scouting and the owner/president of TPG Sports Group, a renowned basketball talent evaluator. TPG runs Sports Tank, a sports business version of the popular TV show Shark Tank, as well as Pro Scout School, which teaches the tools, concepts, and principles of what it takes to be an NBA executive, scout, and general manager

interviewing 110 different ones. His conclusion? “The number 1 teams knew their why,” he told me when I interviewed him for my podcast. “They had a sense

interviewing 110 different ones. His conclusion? “The number 1 teams knew their why,” he told me when I interviewed him for my podcast. “They had a sense of purpose.”

“Great ideas start out as polarizing.” People should either love or hate your idea—that means it matters. It moves people in some way.

According to the Carnegie Institute of Technology, “85% of your financial success is due to your personality and ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead. Only 15% is due to technical knowledge.”¹⁹

Charles Duhigg in *Smarter Faster Better*,

Maury Klein wrote in *The Change Makers*,

Stevens understands motivation, what works and what doesn't. I attended a talk he gave where he explained that the key to confidence is not just getting better, but rather knowing you got better. A leader has to find ways to show his players they are improving, through communication, feedback, and rewards. You have to care enough, be committed enough to building a culture, to give those things to your people.

In his book *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Simon Sinek

If an outsider were to wander into your office and observe fifteen minutes of your company's workday, would the organization's identity be clear? What about its standards? Its culture?

It's very hard to copy culture,

They look for reasons why things won't work, rather than exploring why they could work.

In his book *The No Asshole Rule*,

Michael Bungay Stanier, author of *The Coaching Habit*,

Zappos as a "business that combined profits, passion, and purpose."¹⁸

He was extremely demanding, but never demeaning, and he held his players accountable for everything they did. He didn't let up once.

The 5 Love Languages by Gary Chapman is one of the most influential and impactful books I've ever read.

Remember that people respond to things they can do something about. If they want to improve, they will take it to heart. If they just feel like they're being told what they did wrong, they will tune out.

If someone feels that his mistake is internal—part of who he is—he will be less likely to solve the problem.

Don't forget that a big part of serving people is building their confidence.

"They fail to establish credibility because they expect people to do what they say simply because they're the boss."¹³ It hasn't been political correctness or workplace sensitivity that has phased out the authoritarian boss. It's about ineffectiveness.

"Leaders show respect for people by giving them time,"³

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“The difference between how a person treats the powerless versus the powerful is as good a measure of human character as I know.”

Galinsky and Schweitzer retell it in *Friend and Foe*, Lexus turned an absolute nightmare

In his book *Give and Take*,

Empowerment is the natural extension

In his book *Extreme Teams: Why Pixar, Netflix, Airbnb and Other Cutting-Edge Companies Succeed Where Most Fail*, Robert Bruce Shaw

As the saying goes: if everyone on your team is thinking alike, then someone isn't thinking.

Many businesses spend way too much time in meetings. There are people holding meetings to plan other meetings! And too many of them start late, run long, quickly go off topic, offer no value, or have no agenda. One way to empower your employees is to respect their time. Cut down on the meetings and limit them to who needs to be there.

Every minute spent in an unproductive meeting is a minute not being invested in purposeful work. With so much time being drained by meetings, most executives and employees feel they have to come to work early, stay late, and use weekends to get things done.

According to *Superbosses* author Sydney Finkelstein

Belief is so powerful that it regularly trumps skill, knowledge, and pedigree.

“You don't have to remind me each morning to look out for myself and to 'do me.' I do that naturally. We all do. What we all need to be reminded of is that we are a part of something bigger and it's not about us.”

In his book *The Ideal Team Player*, management expert Patrick Lencioni explains that team players need to be “humble, hungry, and smart”

In his book *Give and Take*, researcher Adam Grant demonstrates how the highest performers—across the board—are actually givers.

Grant also noted that, on a practical level, givers keep themselves out of the rat race: fewer people are gunning for them. Because of this, colleagues are more likely buy into the giver's ideas because he has been established as not being motivated by self-interest. People are attracted to the giver; they trust the giver; they want to assist the giver and work with the giver. The giver is the one who endures.

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The givers fill and feed the culture instead of detracting from it. The “negative impact of a taker is double or triple the positive impact of a giver,” Grant calculated. “With one taker on a team, you begin to notice that paranoia spreads and people hold back out of fear that they’ll be exploited.”¹³

Unselfishness is not about charity or just basic kindness; it has been proven as an effective approach to achieving and succeeding.

Friend and Foe authors Adam Galinsky and Maurice Schweitzer.

pinpoint the three characteristics that help a group cohere. He found them to be: a feeling of safety, a sharing of vulnerability, and a clear understanding of a larger goal.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, all three of these traits share a common denominator: they require communication.

Listen to learn. Don’t listen to reply.

He told author Geoff Colvin that, “practicing without feedback is like bowling through a curtain that hangs down to knee level. You can work on technique all you like, but if you can’t see the effect, two things will happen: You won’t get any better, and you’ll stop caring.”¹⁸

“Ten Assists.” Every morning, start by putting ten pennies in your left pocket. And every time you throw a teammate “an assist,” you transfer one penny from your left pocket to your right pocket. An assist can be anything you do to serve a colleague, from bringing them coffee to rescheduling a conference call to helping them meet a deadline. Here’s the catch: you cannot leave the office until you’ve dished out ten assists.

Four Cohesion Killers 1. Entitlement—those who think they deserve more 2. Arrogance—those who act as though they are better 3. Selfishness—those who are out for themselves 4. Complacency—those who simply don’t care

Of course, teams can’t always agree on everything, but they have to believe the others are all in. Teams at Amazon use the phrase “disagree and commit.”

“If you’re excited, you have a lot of energy; turn and give that energy to your teammates,” Wright has said.¹³ It’s a good rule of thumb: if you are the only one cheering, then there’s nothing to cheer about.

Pink simplifies it this way: “Start right. Start again. Start together.”²

Jenny Blake is a career strategist (formerly with Google) and the author of *Pivot: The Only Move That Matters Is Your Next One*.

“change without starting from scratch,”

Among the people participating in Hell on the Hill was Steve Wojciechowski, former Defensive Player of the Year at Duke and currently the men's head basketball coach at Marquette

FOMO (fear of missing out). It has reached levels of epic proportions with the rise of social media. It's an anxiety caused from the feeling that somewhere, something amazing is happening and you are missing it.

The first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool. —
RICHARD FEYNMAN

When, as the football coach Bill Walsh explained, “self-confidence becomes arrogance, assertiveness becomes obstinacy, and self-assurance becomes reckless abandon.”

If ego is the voice that tells us we're better than we really are, we can say ego inhibits true success by preventing a direct and honest connection to the world around us.

Without an accurate accounting of our own abilities compared to others, what we have is not confidence but delusion.

“If you start believing in your greatness, it is the death of your creativity.”

One must ask: if your belief in yourself is not dependent on actual achievement, then what is it dependent on? The answer, too often when we are just setting out, is nothing.

One might say that the ability to evaluate one's own ability is the most important skill of all. Without it, improvement is impossible. And certainly ego makes it difficult every step of the way. It is certainly more pleasurable to focus on our talents and strengths, but where does that get us? Arrogance and self-absorption inhibit growth. So does fantasy and “vision.”

We will learn that though we think big, we must act and live small in order to accomplish what we seek. Because we will be action and education focused, and forgo validation and status, our ambition will not be grandiose but iterative—one foot in front of the other, learning and growing and putting in the time.

Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know.

but at the end of the day still wants to get as much public credit and attention as it can for doing the least.

We seem to think that silence is a sign of weakness. That being ignored is tantamount to death (and for the ego, this is true). So we talk, talk, talk as though our life depends on it.

Silence. The ability to deliberately keep yourself out of the conversation and subsist without its validation. Silence is the respite of the confident and the strong.

Which is so damaging for one reason: the greatest work and art comes from wrestling with the void, facing it instead of scrambling to make it go away.

do you seek the respite of talk or do you face the struggle head-on?

In every case, they can quickly redirect us from doing to being. From earning to pretending. Ego aids in that deception every step of the way.

often we fall in love with an image of what success looks like.

This is what the ego does. It crosses out what matters and replaces it with what doesn't.

They're distractions. It's about the doing, not the recognition

Do I want to be like everyone else or do I want to do something different?

Let No Man's Ghost Come Back to Say My Training Let Me Down. —SIGN IN THE NEW YORK FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING ACADEMY

You cannot fake or bullshit them. An education can't be "hacked"; there are no shortcuts besides hacking it every single day. If you don't, they drop you.

The pretense of knowledge is our most dangerous vice, because it prevents us from getting any better. Studious self-assessment is the antidote.

They must internalize the fundamentals of their domain and what surrounds them, without ossifying or becoming stuck in time. They must be always learning. We must all become our own teachers, tutors, and critics.

A student is self-critical and self-motivated, always trying to improve his understanding so that he can move on to the next topic, the next challenge. A real student is also his own teacher and his own critic. There is no room for ego there.

The art of taking feedback is such a crucial skill in life, particularly harsh and critical feedback. We not only need to take this harsh feedback, but actively solicit it, labor to seek out the negative precisely when our friends and family and brain are telling us that we're doing great.

Ego rushes to the end, rationalizes that patience is for losers (wrongly seeing it as a weakness), and assumes that we're good enough to give our talents a go in the world.

It blocks us from improving by telling us that we don't need to improve. Then we wonder why we don't get the results we want, why others are better and why their success is more lasting.

Because we only seem to hear about the passion of successful people, we forget that failures shared the same trait.

Purpose is about pursuing something outside yourself as opposed to pleasuring yourself. More than purpose, we also need realism.

Usually they get started with small steps, complete them, and look for feedback on how the next set can be better. They lock in gains, and then get better as they go, often leveraging those gains to grow exponentially rather than arithmetically.

Because in reality, not only is the apprentice model responsible for some of the greatest art in the history of the world—everyone from Michelangelo to Leonardo da Vinci to Benjamin Franklin has been forced to navigate such a system—but if you're going to be the big deal you think you are going to be, isn't this a rather trivial temporary imposition?

Because in reality, not only is the apprentice model responsible for some of the greatest art in the history of the world—everyone from Michelangelo to Leonardo da Vinci to Benjamin Franklin has been forced to navigate such a system

Greatness comes from humble beginnings; it comes from grunt work. It means you're the least important person in the room—until you change that with results.

Those who have subdued their ego understand that it doesn't degrade you when others treat you poorly; it degrades them.

Instead, you must do nothing. Take it. Eat it until you're sick. Endure it. Quietly brush it off and work harder.

It is a timeless fact of life that the up-and-coming must endure the abuses of the entrenched.

Especially in a world that tells us to keep and promote a "personal brand." We're required to tell stories in order to sell our work and our talents, and after enough time, forget where the line is that separates our fictions from reality.

There's no one to perform for. There is just work to be done and lessons to be learned, in all that is around us.

We can't keep learning if we think we already know everything.

"Humility engenders learning because it beats back the arrogance that puts blinders on. It leaves you open for truths to reveal themselves. You don't stand in your own way. . . . Do you know how you can tell when someone is truly humble? I believe there's one simple test: because they consistently observe and listen, the humble improve. They don't assume, 'I know the way.'"

It would be a mistake to think this was about control. The Standard of Performance was about instilling excellence. These seemingly simple but exacting standards mattered more than some grand vision or power trip. In his eyes, if the players take care of the details, “the score takes care of itself.” The winning would happen.

“The way to do really big things seems to be to start with deceptively small things.”

There is a real danger in believing it when people use the word “genius”—and it’s even more dangerous when we let hubris tell ourselves we are one.

One of the symptoms of approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one’s work is terribly important.

Let’s make one thing clear: we never earn the right to be greedy or to pursue our interests at the expense of everyone else. To think otherwise is not only egotistical, it’s counterproductive.

“You’re becoming who you are going to be and so you might as well not be an asshole.”

Play for the name on the front of the jersey, he says, and they’ll remember the name on the back.

When we lack a connection to anything larger or bigger than us, it’s like a piece of our soul is gone. Like we’ve detached ourselves from the traditions we hail from, whatever that happens to be (a craft, a sport, a brotherhood or sisterhood, a family).

Creativity is a matter of receptiveness and recognition. This cannot happen if you’re convinced the world revolves

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Creativity is a matter of receptiveness and recognition. This cannot happen if you’re convinced the world revolves around you.

The height of cultivation runs to simplicity.

What you found is that you must manage yourself in order to maintain your success.

Vivre sans temps mort. (Live without wasted time.)

According to Greene, there are two types of time in our lives: dead time, when people are passive and waiting, and alive time, when people are learning and acting and utilizing every second.

As they say, this moment is not your life. But it is a moment in your life. How will you use it?

That's what so many of us do when we fail or get ourselves into trouble. Lacking the ability to examine ourselves, we reinvest our energy into exactly the patterns of behavior that caused our problems to begin with.

In life, there will be times when we do everything right, perhaps even perfectly. Yet the results will somehow be negative: failure, disrespect, jealousy, or even a resounding yawn from the world.

Robert Louis Stevenson later observed about this meeting, "It is a sore thing to have labored along and scaled arduous hilltops, and when all is done, find humanity indifferent to your achievement."

John Kennedy Toole's great book *A Confederacy of Dunces* was universally turned down by publishers, news that so broke his heart that he later committed suicide in his car on an empty road in Biloxi, Mississippi. After his death, his mother discovered the book, advocated on its behalf until it was published, and it eventually won the Pulitzer Prize.

"Everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed," reads John 3:20.

It can ruin your life only if it ruins your character.

At any given time in the circle of life, we may be aspiring, succeeding, or failing—though right now we're failing. With wisdom, we understand that these positions are transitory, not statements about your value as a human being.

He replied with great fervor: "They cannot degrade Frederick Douglass. The soul that is within me no man can degrade. I am not the one that is being degraded on account of this treatment, but those who are inflicting it upon me."

Think of Martin Luther King Jr., over and over again, preaching that hate was a burden and love was freedom.

Especially because almost universally, the traits or behaviors that have pissed us off in other people—their dishonesty, their selfishness, their laziness—are hardly going to work out well for them in the end. Their ego and shortsightedness contains its own punishment.

"People learn from their failures. Seldom do they learn anything from success." It's why the old Celtic saying tells us, "See much, study much, suffer much, that is the path to wisdom."

But for the grace of God go I. But for the grace of God, that could be any of us.

Many of the people in your life—and in our world—who have given over to their ego will not “get what they deserve” in the sense of karmic justice that we were taught to believe in as kids.

of legal principles are based on

The No Asshole Rule (Sutton, Robert I.)

Winning is a wonderful thing if you can help and respect others along the way.

The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

As Walt Whitman said, “Dismiss whatever insults your soul.”

aiming for “small wins” is often a more comforting and ultimately effective strategy than aiming for “big wins.” Weick shows that trying to solve a big problem all at once can be so daunting and upsetting that it causes people to feel anxious and powerless in the face of an impossible challenge.