



# **SPARTAN** **DISCIPLINE**

**How to Develop Spartan Discipline,  
Unbreakable Mental Toughness,  
and Relentless Willpower**

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**DOMINIC MANN**

# **Self-Discipline: How to Develop Spartan Discipline, Unbreakable Mental Toughness, and Relentless Willpower**

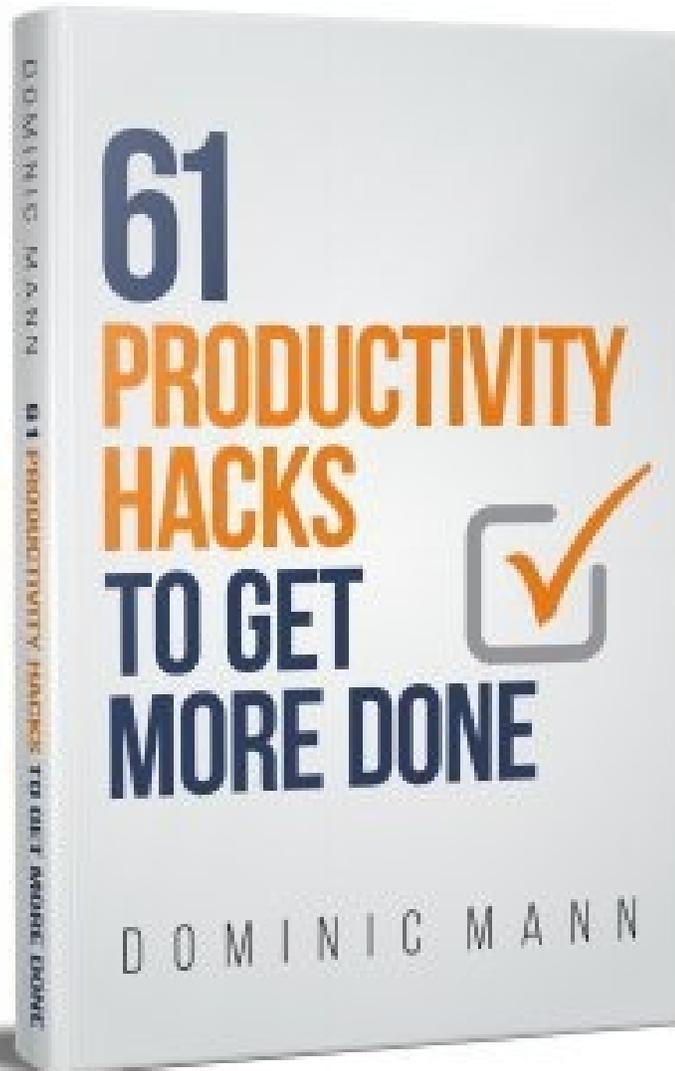
By Dominic Mann

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# Introduction

“No man is free, who cannot command himself.”

— Pythagoras

“Through discipline comes freedom.”

— Aristotle

In ancient Greece, it was widely accepted that a single Spartan warrior was worth at least three or four non-Spartan soldiers. In fact, the discipline of the Spartans was so legendary that they evoked the admiration of even their enemies.

The famous Greek philosopher Diogenes, when returning from a trip to Sparta, was asked where he was going. Diogenes responded, “From the men’s quarters to the women’s.”

Similarly, the great Stoic teacher Musonius Rufus noted that the austere Spartan lifestyle, “made their very poverty more enviable than the king of Persia’s wealth.”

Likewise, the prominent Greek biographer Plutarch wrote, “All Greeks *know* what is right, but only the Spartans *do* it.”

Today, the need for self-discipline is as important as ever, if not more so. You see, although counterintuitive, discipline is liberating. Self-discipline empowers us to pursue that which we truly desire: The achievement of our goals and the attainment of an exciting and invigorating life.

A lack of self-discipline, on the other hand, leaves us succumbing to counterproductive and unhealthy urges that toss our lives in a direction we don’t *truly* want. As Jim Rohn said, “We must all suffer one of two things: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret.”

Contrary to Rohn’s classification of discipline as a pain, I would argue that discipline is a delight—once you get the ball rolling and build momentum, that is. As you develop discipline and progress ever more rapidly toward your goals, you will sense a growing tinge of euphoria flood your every moment. You will begin to *feel* like a Spartan warrior as you go about dominating your life and conquering your biggest goals.

But the hardest thing is getting started and building that momentum. Unlike the Spartan warriors, we have not been raised in a society that makes a deliberate effort to develop our self-discipline. If we want to be self-disciplined, we have to develop and

cultivate it within ourselves. Nobody else is going to do that for us.

And so that is what this book is for: Giving you the Spartan upbringing you never had.

So dive right in and kickstart your development of Spartan self-discipline.

# Spartan Minimalism

*“The purposeful destruction of information is the essence of intelligent work.”*  
— Ray Kurzweil

*“Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify.”*  
— Henry David Thoreau

*“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”*  
— Leonardo da Vinci

Self-discipline is not hard. It is only *perceived* to be hard. It’s all an illusion—a matter of perspective.

Having a cold shower requires no discipline for he who has no hot water system. Eating healthy requires no discipline for he who has no junk food in the kitchen. Being frugal requires no discipline for he who has no money. Obeying the speed limit requires no discipline for he who drives a Prius.

One of the foundations upon which the discipline of the Spartans rest is their philosophy of simplicity over decoration and precision over expansiveness. The Spartan’s achieved discipline not through the exertion of willpower but through the development of laser-like focus.

As Bruce Lee said, “The successful warrior is the average man, with laser-like focus.”

Victor Hugo wrote *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* butt-naked. Hugo would have his servant hide his clothes for a specified period of time in order to force himself to stop distracting himself and instead **focus** on his work.

Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick* while chained to his desk. Melville would have his wife chain him to his desk in order to force himself to buckle down and **focus** on his work.

Carl Jung revolutionized the field of psychology by spending days of solitude in a small stone tower in the woods. No electricity. No running water. Not even any carpet or floorboards. One might even say it was rather... spartan. During his periods at the stone tower, Jung had no choice but to **focus** on his work.

Similarly, the Spartans streamlined and simplified their society to **focus** exclusively on their main goal: To produce the greatest warriors to ever walk the earth.

Imagine how much you could achieve if you approached your life with this kind of Spartan minimalism. If you eliminated all but that which propels you toward your goals. One thing's for sure: You'd be a heck of a lot closer to your goal(s) than you currently are—if not already successful.

I have begun applying Spartan minimalism to my own life and have found that, as a result, my focus and productivity has soared.

I wear the same simple clothes every day (dark shirt, jeans, and boots). I eat similarly simple foods (just meat, vegetables, and eggs). I have also completely eliminated unproductive habits from my life (such as YouTube, TV shows, and the mindless browsing of the internet, news, and social media).

A visitor, visiting Sparta for the very first time, once expressed great surprise at the incredibly plain clothing of King Agesilaus II and other Spartans. Agesilaus remarked, "From this mode of life we reap a harvest of liberty."

Simplicity breeds success. Keeping things minimal in nonessential areas of life makes room for massive achievement in the areas of life that you have decided are most important.

Many of the world's most successful people have stumbled upon the value of focus through elimination—of simplicity and Spartan minimalism.

Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, and Christopher Nolan all wear the same clothes every day. Just as the Spartans discovered over 2,000 years ago, these ultra-successful trailblazers have found that by simplifying their lives as much as possible, they make more room for the attainment of excellence.

When questioned, Zuckerberg explained that wearing the same clothes every day frees him—or as Agesilaus would have said, "reap[s] a harvest of liberty"—to focus exclusively on "how to best serve this community [Facebook]."

Likewise, Christopher Nolan explained that his spartan approach to life—such as wearing the same thing every day—enables him to direct increased focus and creativity toward his craft: Creating mind-blowing films such as *Interstellar*, *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, and *Inception*.

Although the Spartans didn't direct *Inception*, create Facebook, or invent the iPhone like the pioneers of today (who have nonetheless adopted remarkably spartan approaches to their lives), the Spartans used this disciplined and minimalist approach to life to allow them to focus exclusively on becoming the best warriors in the world.

# Toughen Up

*“Luxury dilutes hunger.”*

— Robin Sharma

*“Luxury comes at the cost of killing your hopes, your dreams, your ambitions. So toughen up.”*

— Tai Lopez

The Spartans knew that full bellies don't plow fields.

This fact of life is just as true today as it was during Sparta's heyday. In fact, in the technology industry—such as that of Silicon Valley—you come to quickly realize that the big companies aren't all that scared of each other. They don't feel truly threatened by other big companies.

Sure, the so-called “competition” might take some market share from them, but nothing truly life-threatening to the company will come from that direction. Instead, the big players lose sleep over barefoot college dropouts working 18 hours a day, seven days a week in a garage somewhere, eating nothing but ramen noodles.

These ramen-eating, sleep-under-the-desk dropouts have the potential to put the big players out of business.

Consider Apple, for example (although you see this trend with most big companies that originally started from scratch). In the late 1990s, Apple was on the verge of bankruptcy, so they brought Steve Jobs back. Facing imminent financial death, Apple had to take some serious action.

They were in a situation not too dissimilar to that described by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*:

“When you surround the enemy  
Always allow them an escape route.  
They must see that there is  
An alternative to death.”

In other words, be fearful of an enemy with no way out. Do not push too hard on enemies who are desperate. If you back them into a corner, they will lash out with all their strength, taking violent and unpredictable action. After all, they have nothing to lose.

Back in the late 1990s, Apple was in the exact same situation—financially

speaking. They were backed into a corner with no way out.

So what they did was discontinue the majority of their products and pretty much start from scratch. They also tried some wacky things, such as making transparent computers that came in bold, bright colors. Heck, they even ventured outside of their own industry to start selling songs for \$0.99 and make a music player that couldn't play CDs.

As Apple started succeeding again, however, they became increasingly cautious. Nowadays they do little more than give their existing products minor facelifts every year or two.

Remember: *Full bellies don't plough fields.*

Likewise, F. Scott Fitzgerald started his writing career with great hunger for success. In the military, he managed to write a 120,000 word novel—*This Side of Paradise*—in three months. He accomplished this awesome feat by working around his strict military schedule, writing through the night on a notebook he hid behind an infantry textbook.

Fueling his hunger for success to even greater heights was the fact that the father of his would-be bride stipulated that he needed to have enough money to support her lifestyle before marrying.

Upon becoming a literary success and striking fame and fortune, he wrote less, spent more time at parties, wasted most of his nights in town at the clubs, and lost all the hunger and self-discipline that had got him there in the first place.

Unfortunately—but perhaps predictably—Fitzgerald's very success triggered a dramatic decline that took him all the way from being a hugely successful American icon to being a broke alcoholic who died in obscurity.

Remember: *Full bellies don't plough fields.*

In Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, the following exchange takes place:

“CAESAR:  
*Antonius!*

ANTONY:  
*Caesar?*

CAESAR:  
*Let me have men about me that are fat;  
Sleek-headed [healthy-looking] men and such as sleep o' nights [that sleep at night]:  
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;*

*He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.”*

In other words, Julius Caesar—a man of extraordinary ambition himself—didn’t trust Cassius because of his “lean and hungry look.” Caesar would feel less threatened were Cassius fat, lazy, and content. In fact, in Shakespeare’s play, Caesar even goes on to say, “Would he were fatter!” (“I wish he were fatter!”). Like the Spartans, Caesar knew that full bellies don’t plow fields and wouldn’t so much as dare to bite the hand that feeds them.

The Spartans, unlike most people, knew better than to become fat, lazy, and content. Their disciplined way of life ensured, no matter how great their successes, they would always be “lean and hungry”—always performing at their best and wanting to better themselves. Never satisfied—constructively dissatisfied. Never *ever* fat, lazy, and content.

After all, the Spartans knew that full bellies don’t plow fields. They knew that luxury softens the soul. That luxury deadens one’s energy and intensity.

In fact, when King Agesilaus was asked what the greatest benefit Lycurgus—the creator of Sparta’s constitution—conferred on his countrymen, he replied, “Contempt of pleasure.”

That said, this doesn’t mean you should become a masochist. It means you need to form the habit of choosing delayed gratification over instant gratification. In the case of the Spartans, this meant choosing to become the greatest warriors to have ever lived over meaningless orgies and feasts.

So toughen up. Be like a Spartan. Block social media. Throw out the batteries in your TV remote. Tip your couch upside down. Well, that last one might not be necessary, but you get the point.

Take a freezing cold shower. Hit the gym. Read books that will arm you with the knowledge you need to achieve your goals—books such as *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill.

To conclude this section on toughening up, here is an excerpt from *Lectures* by Musonius Rufus (the most respected Stoic teacher of the Roman imperial period):

*“Consider the greatest of the law-givers. Lycurgus, one of the foremost among them, drove extravagance out of Sparta and introduced thriftiness. In order to make Spartans brave, he promoted scarcity rather than excess in their lifestyle. He rejected luxurious living as a scourge and promoted a willingness to endure pain as a blessing. That Lycurgus was right is shown by the toughness of the young Spartan boys who were trained to endure hunger, thirst, cold, beatings, and other hardships. Raised in a strict environment, the ancient Spartans were thought to be and in fact were the*

*best of the Greeks, and they made their very poverty more enviable than the king of Persia's wealth."*

# Mind over Matter

*“Rule your mind or it will rule you.”*

— *Buddha*

*“Whether you think you can, or you can’t—either way you’re right.”*

— *Henry Ford*

Your body can stand almost anything. It’s your mind that you have to convince.

Young Spartans started military training at age seven. They were taught to endure immense pain and came to learn that, as modern day Navy SEAL instructors say, one’s strength isn’t in the size of their biceps. Rather, strength is—according to Navy SEAL instructors—90 percent mental and only 10 percent physical.

As such, one of the most important traits developed by young Spartans was mental strength. The ability to push through pain, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and all the excuses for laziness tossed their way by the voice in the back of their heads. In other words, mind over matter.

In his book, *Living with a SEAL*, Jesse Itzler writes about “the 40 percent rule.” The idea behind this rule is that when you feel dead exhausted and feel like you’ve reached your physical limits, you’re really only at 40 percent. You still have another 60 percent left in the tank. It’s just that your mind has evolved to be lazy and try conserve as much energy as possible.

However, as we no longer need to worry about sabertooth tigers or not having any food for a week, we can learn to push ourselves beyond our so-called “limits.” It’s all in the mind.

For example, imagine that a bodybuilder has just done an intense workout in the gym. He’s exhausted. He has worked as hard as he believes he possibly could. However, just as he’s leaving the gym, he realizes that a tiger has escaped from the local zoo and was waiting for him just outside the gym. All of a sudden, that exhausted bodybuilder is going to find that other 60 percent and is going to run for his life.

It’s all in the mind. Mind over matter.

So toughen up. Develop the ability to continue, even when you feel like you can do no more.

Every day, like the Spartans, work to develop your self-discipline. In fact, studies

have found that willpower is like a muscle. One's willpower strengthens with use.

So, for example, a Navy SEAL or Spartan that has spent years breaking through their physical and mental limits and exerting massive amounts of willpower will have a far, far, far easier time sticking to a diet, not watching TV, or exercising discipline in any other areas of life than someone who has spent their entire life having warm showers, slacking off at a comfortable 9 to 5 job, and going on Netflix binges each evening.

As such, a great way to develop Spartan-like self-discipline and willpower is to, well, start living more like a Spartan. As we discussed earlier, becoming disciplined in one area of life (i.e. keystone habits) leads to you becoming more disciplined in all areas of life.

So have cold showers, eat simple foods (e.g. just meat and veggies), and have set periods of time each day where you unplug (i.e. no TV, internet, social media, etc.).

In addition to all that, get into shape. As the ancient Greeks and Spartans used to say, "a healthy mind in a healthy body." These days, this sentiment has proven to be correct. It has been scientifically proven time and time again that physical fitness and health are directly correlated with the capacity for dynamic and creative intellectual activity, as well as the ability for self-discipline.

Furthermore, exercise (especially lifting weights) increases testosterone. Cold showers have also been found to boost one's testosterone. And this is key, as testosterone is the hormone that fueled such warriors as the Spartans. It's the masculine hormone associated with strength, muscle mass, sex drive, confidence, aggression (in a good way), and the overall masculine drive that leads to victory in all areas of life.

In fact, scientists have actually found a miracle hormone that makes heaps of money and beds lots of women. That's right, you guessed it: Testosterone.

# Stoic Self-Discipline

*“Nothing happens to anybody which he is not fitted by nature to bear.”*  
— Marcus Aurelius

Stoicism is an ancient philosophy developed by the ancient Greeks, inspired in large part by the disciplined and, well, stoic lifestyle lived by the Spartans. Or, in the words of the scholar P. A. Brunt in his *Studies in Stoicism*, “Old Sparta apparently evoked Stoic admiration, because of the strict and simple life prescribed by Lycurgus [the Spartan lawmaker].”

Similarly, when returning from a trip to Sparta, the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes was asked where he was going. Diogenes replied, “From the men’s quarters to the women’s.” In other words, Diogenes viewed an absence of self-discipline and a lack of control over one’s self to be weak and womanly.

So how did the Stoics suggest we go about our lives?

Well, first of all, the Stoics believed in the power of the mind. Consider some of the following thoughts jotted down in the journal of Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius:

*“Reject your sense of injury and the injury itself disappears.”*

*“You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.”*

*“The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts.”*

*“Today I escaped anxiety. Or no, I discarded it, because it was within me, in my own perceptions—not outside.”*

Aurelius’ personal notes to himself demonstrate his acknowledgement that all emotions come from within. His state of mind is not the result of external events, but of his own perceptions and thoughts.

So next time you find yourself faced with an obstacle and feel resistance, don’t place the blame and responsibility on external events, forces, people, or objects. Instead, look within.

It is not external forces that make us feel how we feel. Rather, it is what we tell ourselves—our thoughts—that determine how we feel.

The Stoics also placed death at the forefront of their thinking. They would

remind themselves that everything is temporary. Everything comes and goes. Nothing lasts forever. Including one's own life.

This way of thinking provides a sense of urgency, making the thought of wasting time all that less tempting. In his journal, Aurelius also reminds himself that time is one's most precious resource:

*“Not to live as if you had endless years ahead of you. Death overshadows you. While you're alive and able—be good.”*

Thinking in this way is essential to developing empowering self-discipline. When you're on your deathbed, will you wish you spent more time watching TV and mindlessly surfing the web? Of course not!

The late Steve Jobs similarly realized the value of approaching life from this perspective:

*“Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure — these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose.”*

Likewise, in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey lists “Habit Two” as “beginning with the end in mind.” In other words, what do you want people to say about you at your 80th birthday party? What about your funeral?

Will it be that you were always up with the latest gossip and great to talk to about the latest episode of the *The Bachelor*? Or will it be that you did something meaningful with your life? Things that might not have been easy in the moment, but brought you more satisfaction than an undisciplined life could ever hope to experience. That you lived rather than compared, learned rather than criticized, and—most importantly—created rather than consumed.

Finally, let's finish this section with something said by Muhammad Ali, the greatest boxer of all time, when it comes to self-discipline and mind over matter:

*“I hated every minute of training, but I said, 'Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.'”*

And he did. He lived the rest of his life as a champion. As the “greatest of all time.” And, speaking of Stephen Covey's “begin with the end in mind,” Ali's funeral drew U.S. presidents, incumbent Turkish president, and over 14,000 others.

# Conquer Yourself

*“Through every generation of the human race there has been a constant war, a war with fear. Those who have the courage to conquer it are made free and those who are conquered by it are made to suffer until they have the courage to defeat it, or death takes them.”*

— Alexander the Great

*“In reading the lives of great men, I found that the first victory they won was over themselves... self-discipline with all of them came first.”*

— Harry S. Truman

The Spartans knew that to conquer the world you must first conquer yourself. They understood that power comes from within.

One of the most unusual things about the city of Sparta was that it had many temples and statues of gods from ancient Greek mythology. But that’s not the unusual part. The unusual part is that the Spartans put two of these statues in chains, as if prisoners.

The two statues in chains were Ares, the violent god of war, and his wife Aphrodite, the goddess of love and desire.

At first glance, one might be confused by this. Why did they put these two specific gods in chains? Furthermore, didn’t the Spartans love violence and war?

Here’s why: Ares and Aphrodite represent unrestrained emotion. Bloodlust and desire. Obviously, uncontrolled emotion and indiscriminate action represent the antithesis of self-control and discipline. As such, the fact that the Spartans put these statues in chains demonstrates their commitment to controlling the energy of both the desire of Aphrodite and blind violence of Ares.

Fear, sex, and money are ever-present. Recognizing the inherent problems in these basic human driving forces, the Spartans wisely resolved not to deny these issues, but to use them to empower themselves.

Almost two and half thousand years later, Napoleon Hill—in his book, *Think and Grow Rich*—discussed the “super power” of transmuting emotions. He advocated transmuting emotions such as desire, love, and sex into powerful positive action, while avoiding emotions such as fear, hatred, revenge, and anger.

Just like the Spartans.

Hill says that powerful emotions—such as those represented by Ares and Aphrodite—“cannot, and should not be submerged or eliminated,” but should instead, “be given an outlet through forms of expression which enrich the body, mind and spirit.” Hill also advised, “If not given this form of outlet, through transmutation,” these powerful emotions will seek outlet in an uncontrolled, non-beneficial (even harmful), undisciplined manner.

So transmute powerful emotions into positive, powerful action. Turn your nervousness into excitement. Turn your sexual energies into an intense workout or creative effort.

Like the Spartans, don't allow your emotions to conquer you. Instead, conquer your emotions. Use your emotions as a tool rather than becoming the tool of your emotions. Chain your emotions like the Spartans and use them to make you all the more powerful.

# The Two Types of Wants

## Go All the Way

*“Everyone must choose one of the two pains: The pain of discipline or the pain of regret.”*

— Jim Rohn

*“There are two kinds of pain. The sort of pain that makes you strong, or useless pain. The sort of pain that’s only suffering. I have no patience for useless things.”*

— Frank Underwood

*“Through discipline comes freedom.”*

— Aristotle

There are two types of wants in this world. There are the wants of the body and the wants of the mind.

The wants of the body are the things that—in the heat of the moment—we *feel* we want. The wants of the mind, on the other hand, are the things we *truly* want.

For example, we often *feel* like doing little more than sitting on the couch and watching Netflix while eating straight out of a bucket of ice cream. But is this what we *truly* want? No, of course not!

What we *truly* want is likely some variation of achieving success in the financial, physical, and social areas of our lives. We want the financial freedom to travel, live the lifestyle we want, and give our loved ones a great life. We want to be physically fit and attractive. We want to have a great social life. These are the things that most people *truly* want.

Unfortunately, these two different types of wants are incompatible. You either have it one way or the other, but you can’t have it both ways.

You either eat ice cream or steak and veggies.

You either watch TV or hit the gym.

You either mindlessly scroll through your Facebook feed or go work on generating a second source of income.

The Spartans understood this. They knew that you either do one or the other. As Yoda famously said, “Do or do not. There is no try.”

In my own life, I have found this to be so true you wouldn't believe it. If you want to accomplish something, you need to either go all in or all out. Take it to the extreme. Be hardcore. Be unrelenting.

By failing to be 100 percent committed—extreme, hardcore, relentless—exceptions get made. The occasional bit of junk food. The occasional skipped gym session. And before we know it, these exceptions become the norm. They become increasingly regular until the point is reached where progress ceases. Things go back to how they were. Goals remain unfulfilled.

The highly counterintuitive secret to god-like self-discipline is to take things to the absolute extreme. It's easier to do something 100 percent of the time than it is to do something 98 percent of the time. Serious.

This mindset was one of the hallmarks of Spartan society. They were unrelenting. They were hardcore. They took things to the absolute extreme and allowed themselves no exceptions. They had the self-respect to not make excuses for themselves.

If the Spartans would have allowed the occasional exception here and there, they would have very quickly found themselves descending all the way back down to the largely undisciplined lifestyles lived by those in neighbouring city-states. Perhaps they would have allowed themselves the occasional massive orgy and some several-dozen course feasts (requiring self-induced vomiting to continue eating) like the Romans. Before realizing it, Sparta's dreams of producing the world's greatest warriors would be little more than a distant memory. A painful regret.

As Charles Bukowski, the American poet, wrote in his poem *Roll the Dice*, "If you're going to try, go all the way. Otherwise, don't even start."

And it's not just the Spartans that discovered the value of being unrelenting and allowing themselves zero exceptions. One of my favorite modern-day examples is a personal anecdote famous motivational speaker Zig Ziglar shared in his book *Over the Top*.

Ziglar recounts having made an unbreakable commitment to himself to go for a run early each morning and get in shape. However, one day, after having flown out to Seattle to give a talk and then flying back home on the same day, he found himself going to bed at 4:00 A.M.

So obviously he just skipped that day, right?

Wrong. In his own words, he said he knew, "that if I made an exception and slept in because I was tired and sleepy, it would be easier to make an exception the next time, and I knew that the exception often becomes the rule. The commitment goes out

the window.”

Ziglar later goes so far as to say, “exceptions are the most dangerous things that we have to deal with in our lives,” and even refers to smokers and alcoholics who make an exception and have “just one drink” with tragic results.

### Inverse Self-Discipline

*“The good is mostly in the absence of bad.”*

— *Ennius*

Self-discipline is almost universally viewed as an act. This view is largely incorrect. Self-discipline is less about *doing* and more about *not* doing. More often than not, as Ennius said, good is in the absence of bad.

You see, there are two routes to improvement: You can either do more good or do less bad. You can do something better or you can make less mistakes.

For example, in his book *Antifragile*, Nassim Taleb mentions that Warren Buffett’s investment strategy is more about avoiding bad investments than it is about trying to somehow magically predict the future to see what companies will do well.

You can apply this Spartan principle in your own life by realizing that self-discipline is more about what you *don’t* do than it is what you *do* do.

Instead of searching for a miracle workout, focus on never missing a gym session.

Instead of sporadically attempting the latest fad diet, focus on not eating unhealthy foods.

Put simply, to make big gains, avoid tiny losses.

This Spartan approach to discipline—improvement by subtraction—was perhaps best exemplified when a visitor to Sparta, unfamiliar with their philosophy of excellence through discipline, questioned why they put their fields in the hands of the non-citizen peasantry (basically slaves).

After all, wouldn’t it be better to cultivate the fields themselves?

Anaxandridas, one of the kings of Sparta at that time (Sparta had two kings with equal power in order to avoid tyranny), explained, “It was by no taking care of the fields, but of ourselves, that we acquired those fields.”

This quote is so powerful because not only does it show the Spartan culture of self-cultivation (self-help before it was cool!), but it also shows just how serious the Spartans were about focus.

Too often we get caught up in trying to do everything ourselves. I often hear of

people spending an hour walking home in order to save a \$5 cab fare. Or of someone spending their entire Saturday mowing the lawn to save \$20. Unless you only earn a couple of bucks an hour, it just doesn't make sense—and this was something the Spartans realized. There were better things they could be doing with their time. They could spend that time, energy, and effort perfecting their skills.

The key to their excellence was that they did one thing and did it terribly, terribly well. This disciplined and focused approach to excellence led to the Spartans becoming one of history's most efficient and feared military forces. Indeed, in the ancient world, it was commonly accepted that, "one Spartan was worth several men of any other state."

### Delayed Gratification

*"The ability to discipline yourself to delay gratification in the short term in order to enjoy greater rewards in the long term, is the indispensable prerequisite for success."*

— Brian Tracy

The Spartans were very familiar with the distinction between instant gratification and delayed gratification. They understood that short-term pain leads to long-term gain—and glory. That difficulty and hardship leads to growth (both physically and mentally) while luxury and comfort leads to stagnation and atrophy.

Growth, improvement, and long-term happiness are found outside of one's comfort zone.

Just as a sapling repeatedly exposed to harsh storms grows to be made of stronger and tougher wood than a sheltered tree, so do humans grow through great struggle and adversity.

So follow the example set by the Spartans. Love challenges. Embrace hardship. Welcome difficulty with open arms. This is how we grow. Just as one must repeatedly and mercilessly tear down their muscle fibres to grow strong.

# The Discipline Infection

Now, let's take a look at one of the most effective ways we we can develop spartan discipline in our own lives.

One of the most readily apparent aspects of Sparta is that discipline filled all aspects of Spartan life. Kids would make beds out of reeds with their own bare hands. By law, Spartans were only allowed to build their homes using an axe and saw—no other tools were allowed. Food was simple and clothing basic. Then, of course, they had their intense military training.

For the Spartans, self-discipline wasn't just a means to an end—a way to achieve their goal—it *was* the end. It was a lifestyle. A way of life.

In recent times, science has found the reason *why* the Spartan's all-encompassing approach to self-discipline was just so damn effective.

You see, self-discipline is contagious. It starts a domino-like effect. It conforms to Newton's first law of motion, that objects in motion stay in motion and objects at rest stay at rest. That's why you see many people that live very disciplined lives and many people that live very undisciplined lives, but few in between.

Recently, studies have found that starting an exercise routine leads to people becoming more disciplined in all areas of life—even the areas of life that have absolutely nothing to do with the exercise routine. The study participants started, of their own accord, saving more money, smoking less, and studying more,.

In his book, *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg refers to this phenomenon as a “keystone habit.” According to Duhigg, forming one positive habit, such as exercising, making your bed, or getting up early, leads to everything else falling into place. One good “keystone habit” leads to many good habits without all those positive habits needing to be formed individually.

Additional studies have also found that it's not just exercise that leads to increased discipline across the board. Other studies have found that participants who started doing something as simple as writing down the foods they ate, record their spending, or join a study group leads to increased discipline and positive life changes across the board. Less alcohol, less smoking, healthier eating, more exercise, increased saving, more studying, and the list goes on.

ALthough science has only confirmed this recently, the Spartans knew—or at least greatly benefited from—this effect. For the Spartans, intense self-discipline in

one area of life led to intense self-discipline in all areas of life.

Likewise, you will notice this very same Spartan phenomenon readily apparent in the lives of today's ultra-successful.

Many of the world's top entrepreneurs, CEOs, and world leaders exercise regularly, eat healthy, educate themselves, and so on.

Consider this: Two out of every three Americans are considered to be overweight or obese. And yet, somehow, I can't think of any fat U.S. Presidents, tech entrepreneurs, politicians, or top CEOs. I'm sure that somewhere there might be one or two, but it is certainly not two thirds of them as it is in the general population.

This dramatic and statistically impossible asymmetry between obesity in the general population and amongst the ultra-successful and powerful is due to this one fact of life that the Spartans realized all those thousands of years ago: Being disciplined in one area of life leads to discipline in all areas of life.

When you were starting this book, you were probably bracing yourself for all the pain and willpower exertion you thought would be necessary to develop Spartan-like self-discipline. Fortunately, this is not the case, as the Spartans themselves demonstrated.

The more effective approach is to develop discipline in one key area of life. I would suggest developing a powerful exercise routine. Perhaps hit the gym three times a week (to allow muscle recovery and growth on rest days) or do high-intensity interval training each morning (i.e. hard sprinting for 40 seconds followed by 20 seconds of jogging or walking, repeated for a period of between four and thirty minutes).

However, as other studies have shown, your keystone habit does not necessarily have to be exercise-related.

# No Excuses

## Whenever, Wherever, However

The Spartans never made excuses for themselves. They fought just as well in pouring rain as they did in scorching heat. This is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that, when facing an enemy, the Spartans used to ask, “Not how many, but where.” The ancient Greek historian, Plutarch, wrote the following about this particularly Spartan attitude:

*“[When] the Spartans used to ask about the enemy, it was not important how many there are, but where the enemy was.”*

The Spartans weren’t concerned about how large the opposing force was. After all, they can’t change that. They instead have the attitude of “let’s go get ‘em, boys!”

Imagine how much better one’s life would be with this sort of attitude. Rather than skipping a workout because, “Oh it’s raining,” or “I had a bad day at work,” or “I’m tired, I’ll do it tomorrow,” a Spartan would just buckle down and do it anyway with his “Not how many, but where” attitude.

Instead of listing excuses and finding reasons you *can’t* do something (i.e. “How many” soldiers does the enemy army have), just buckle down and figure out a way to do it (i.e. “where” are they? Let’s go get ‘em, boys!).

There is always a way to do something if you truly want to do it.

If you want to get fit but don’t have a gym, you can do pull ups on the swing (or even a tree!) in the park and do some push ups in your bedroom.

If you don’t have time to work on a side business or write that novel you’ve always been meaning to write, take your laptop on the bus or train ride to work and type away.

If you don’t have time to read books that will help you achieve your goals, listen to audiobooks in the car.

If you don’t have time to learn a new language or study and become an expert in your industry, wake up an hour earlier.

Be a Spartan. Ask, “not how many, but where.”

## Quitting Isn't an Option

*“[Spartans were] Taught never to retreat, never to surrender. Taught that death on the battlefield in service to Sparta was the greatest glory he could achieve in his life.”*

— Diliros, 300

How many times have you given up on something because it was “too hard”? Probably more times than you can count.

In his book, *The Warrior Ethos*, Steven Pressfield writes the following:

*“Warrior cultures (and warrior leaders) enlist shame, not only as a counter to fear but as a goad to honor. The warrior advancing into battle (or simply resolving to keep up the fight) is more afraid of disgrace in the eyes of his brothers than he is of the spears and lances of the enemy.”*

Although brutal, this pushed soldiers to achieve what they didn’t think possible. Imagine how much you could achieve if anything less than leading the life you know you *should* be and living at the apex of your abilities were intensely shameful?

Spartan up! Eliminate giving up from your list of options.

Go Hard or Go Home

*“I firmly believe that any man's finest hour, the greatest fulfillment of all that he holds dear, is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle—victorious.”*

— Vince Lombardi

Spartans left it all on the battlefield. They had a saying, “Come back with your shield, or upon it.” In other words, either come back with your shield in hand, victorious, or come back with your dead body upon your shield.

Victory or death. They would either come home victorious or die trying.

Whatever it is you are doing, push yourself to the limit. Give it your absolute all.

Fight Like Your Life Depends on It

In ancient Greece, it was widely accepted that one Spartan soldier was worth at least 3–4 men from any other city-state. This wasn’t due to magic, genetics, or any other such typical excuses made by the inferior.

The reason that the Spartans were so superior to men from other ancient city-states was due to the fact that the Spartans trained and fought like their lives depended on it.

In Sparta, men did nothing but train to be the best warriors on earth. Remember, as Bruce Lee said, “The successful warrior is the average man with laser-like focus.”

On that same note, Bruce Lee also said, “I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.” And that’s just what the Spartans did.

Meanwhile, the so-called “soldiers” from outside Sparta did all sorts of things. They had day jobs, so to speak. They would be a potter, sculptor, blacksmith, or any other similar profession for most of the time, and then if a war began, they would go off and fight, suddenly becoming a “soldier.”

The Spartans, on the other hand, focused very intensely on only one thing: Being the best possible soldier. As a result, they were far superior in every way.

So how can you apply this in your own life?

Firstly, narrow your focus. Choose mastery over being a jack of all trades (and master of none, as they say).

One example (albeit a tiny one) is putting your phone away when you hit the gym (same goes for watching TV when exercising). Seriously. Leave it in your bag. You reckon a Spartan would have been gaping at his phone between sets? No, of course not! Because the Spartans knew that you need laser-like focus, and that you can’t give it your all and dominate whatever it is you’re doing if your mind is elsewhere. Otherwise, you’re just like the potter who calls himself a soldier.

Focus with the raw, undiluted intensity of an iron-cutting laser. Do one thing at a time, and give it your all. As shown by the Spartans, intensity defeats extensity.

### Strength Through Humor

Self-discipline can be hard, especially when starting out. However, there’s a cure—well, maybe not a cure, but at least a partial painkiller—for hardship: Comedy. Humor. It’s the best way to confront reality as it is.

My favorite example of the Spartans finding strength is comedy occurred just before the Battle of Thermopylae. The Spartans were told that the Persian archers were so numerous that when they fired their volleys, their arrows would blot out of the sun. In response Dienekes quipped, “So much the better, we’ll fight in the shade.”

The Spartans didn’t try to offer themselves hope or be inspirational. They didn’t seek to allay the anxiety of their comrades by wishing for a rosy outcome. The Spartans simply confronted reality as it was, taking the mindset of, “Brothers, some heavy sh\*t is coming down and we’re going to go through it.”

They didn’t need any coddling, hope, or inspiration. They weren’t soft, they were warriors.

# Spartan Habits

*“The great master key to riches is nothing more or less than the self-discipline necessary to help you take full and complete possession of your own mind.”*

— Napoleon Hill

You don't need unlimited willpower. You just need enough to form a habit. Once habit kicks in, no willpower is needed.

We discussed earlier the importance of—like the Spartans—allowing yourself no exceptions. That the exception becomes the rule and that it is far easier to do something 100 percent of the time than it is to do something 98 percent of the time.

Now we are going to explore another facet of this Spartan trait: Habit and routine.

When I first set about reforming my life, such as waking up early, not watching TV shows and YouTube, nor mindlessly browsing the web, eating healthy foods, exercising regularly reading more, and so on, it was hard. The food tasted bad (I didn't like eating lots of vegetables—preferred chocolate chip cookies to almonds and sugary drinks to water or tea). I felt a massive urge to just listen to music rather than audiobooks. I wanted to watch YouTube and TV shows rather than workout or put in the effort necessary to generate another source of income.

But guess what? Overtime, these urges and desires disappeared. Now, I love listening to audiobooks—far more interesting and intellectually stimulating than some pop song. Now, I love working on my side business. Now, I wake up *before* my alarm and enthusiastically leap out of bed rather than lament the cold, dark outside world beyond the comfort of my warm blankets. Now, I actually love eating broccoli and spinach. I love hitting the gym. All of it has become habit, with no willpower required.

So while someone might look at me and think to themselves, “Well, I just don't have that much willpower, I can't do that all the time!” the reality is that you only need enough willpower to build a little momentum and get the right habits going and get into the groove of an ultra-productive routine.

Here's a secret: The Spartan's didn't have abnormally high levels of willpower. It wasn't their genetics. In fact, plenty of them would have had *less* willpower than you. It is just that they got into the Spartan routine and developed Spartan habits.

For the Spartans, although their life looks like one of intense self-discipline to

outsiders, for them, it was just habit. It was normal. Just another day in a little Greek city called Sparta.

### The Hedonic Treadmill

In psychology, there is something that is known as the hedonic treadmill. The hedonic treadmill describes the fact that us humans have a baseline happiness we return to. For example, buying a groovy new smartphone makes you happy for a short period of time, but after a while—as I’m you’re you’ve experienced in your own life—you get used to it. Your happiness goes back to whatever it was before you got the new phone. Just as ordinary folk long for a new car, so too does the rich man long for a new private jet. We adjust to whatever our situation is.

This phenomenon is so extreme, in fact, that a 1978 study found that after one year had passed, new lottery winners were just as happy as they had been before winning the lottery, and new paraplegics were just as happy as they were before the accident that paralyzed them. In other words, after one year, the lottery winners were no happier than the paraplegics.

So as counterintuitive as it may seem, after one year, you’d be just as happy regardless of whether you won the lottery or became a paraplegic.

Now, what does any of this have to do with self-discipline?

Well, the Spartans, despite their intense training and harsh lifestyle, would have been just as happy (if not happier) than the king of Persia, with all his wealth and luxury.

So what does this mean for you?

### Conclusion

*“The only difference between Buddhas and ordinary beings is discipline.”*  
— *Tulku Urygen Rinpoche*

As discussed earlier, you will be happy regardless of the lifestyle you choose for yourself. Science shows us that we adjust, and that eventually, we derive as much happiness from a life of strict discipline as we would a life of lazy comfort.

With this knowledge in mind, how would you choose to live your life?

I don’t know about you, but I would create a routine—no matter how unpleasant at first—that dramatically improves my quality of life in the long run. In other words, delayed gratification.

But—and this is a big *but*—we now know that it isn’t really “delayed” gratification. After all, once you get into the groove of your new routine, no matter

how harsh and disciplined, you end up just as happy as you would be were you living a lazy and undisciplined life.

In fact, I would go so far as to argue that one would actually derive more joy from a life of discipline. A life free of the regret, guilt, and misery of laziness, knowing that you are squandering your potential and wasting your life. Personally, I find myself much happier living a life of rigorous Spartan-like discipline than I would be were I to spend my days sitting on the couch eating buckets of ice cream while mindlessly watching Netflix.

All in all, rest assured in the knowledge that living a productive, meaningful, and disciplined life does *not* mean being miserable and constantly exerting ungodly quantities of willpower. Just the opposite is true. Once you get into the swing of things, you actually become happier and more satisfied. You will derive immeasurable joy from the knowledge that you are getting better every day, are performing at your peak, and are ceaselessly getting closer to your goals.

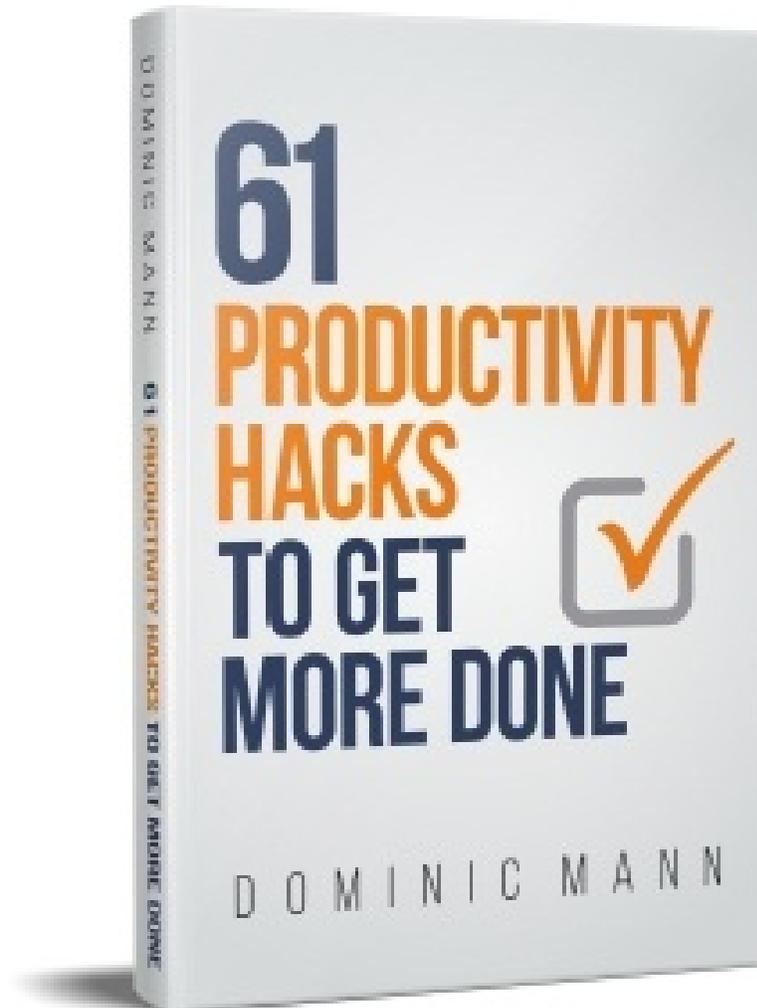
## Before you go...

Nice work on finishing the book! I sincerely hope you found value in all the strategies, tips, tricks, and techniques discussed.

You should be proud of yourself for taking this step toward living a more productive life and achieving your goals. By taking action and arming yourself with actionable knowledge, you've already put yourself ahead of the majority of population.

Before you put this book down and go out to start putting what you've learned to use, I have just one more thing for you.

I want to give you the opportunity to grab a free copy my exclusive productivity cheat sheet, [61 Productivity Hacks to Get More Done](#).



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