

GET SOME
VICTORY

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Get Some Victory is a companion to [Ikigai](#)

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WARREN BUFFET'S CHARACTER REFINEMENT STRATEGY

Modeled From Ben Franklin & Ben Graham

I'm just finishing the excellent book "Seeking Wisdom: From Darwin to Munger" - tons of great insights in this book. Highly recommended.

One that stood out to me is a strategy to refine and develop your own character, that Warren Buffet described at the Berkshire Hathaway annual meeting in 2000. It's very straightforward to do, with a potential for big gains. So let's get into it.

An Excerpt from Seeking Wisdom

"I tell students in my classes, "Just pick out the person you admire most in the class, and sit down and write the reasons why you admire him and then try and figure out why you can't have the same qualities." After all, [the qualities won't be] like the ability to throw a football 60 yards or run the 100 in ten seconds flat or something like that. They're qualities of personality, character, and temperament that can be emulated.

And you can apply the reverse of it following Charlie's

theory: You can find the people you don't like and say, "What don't I like about these people?" It takes a little strength of character, but you can look inwards and say, "Have I got some of that in me?"

It's not complicated. Ben Graham did it, Ben Franklin did it. And nothing could be more simple than to try and figure out what you find admirable and then decide that the person you really would like to admire is yourself. And the only way you're going to do it is to take the the qualities of other people you admire."

That's Pretty Straightforward - Step 1, Then, is to Pick Someone You Admire

Pick someone you admire that you'd like to be more like.

Think on this for a moment, or pick right away. Probably better if you pick someone whose habits/life you understand fairly well.

Step 2 - What Qualities Do They Have?

Now you make a little list of their key qualities that you admire about them. What are they like?

You can do this on a piece of paper or in a word processor or text file. Perhaps open one right now? This exercise only takes a couple minutes and there's potential big gains to be had from it.

Step 3 - How Can You Develop Those Qualities?

Have a little brainstorm on how to develop a similar quality you'd like more of.

If you can't think of any practical ways, email me and we'll think about it together.

(I've gotten really high email volume lately, so I'm a tiny bit behind - but I'll be back to zero in the next 1-2 days, so go ahead and shoot me a line if I can help with this.)

Extra Credit - Do the Same for Someone You Don't Like

1. Write down or just think of someone you dislike.
2. List why.
3. Ask, "Do I have any of that in me?"
4. If so, then brainstorm how you can reduce/eliminate that.

Get Started, and More on Seeking Wisdom

Definitely get started on this exercise right away if it appeals to you - it only takes a couple minutes, you'll learn something, and it's enjoyable. It could produce huge gains.

Email me if I can help with the brainstorming process.

I really enjoyed Seeking Wisdom a lot. Great book. Here's more links for the curious:

Official Website for the Book:

<http://www.poorcharliesalmanack.com/seekingwisdom.html>

Amazon - for third party sellers and reviews:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1578644283/sebastianmcom20>

Derek Sivers's excellent review/excerpts of the book:

<http://sivers.org/book/SeekingWisdom>

A 20 MINUTE CURE FOR OVERWHELM

Procrastination and Overwhelm: Partners in Crime

One of the biggest warning signs of "overwhelm" is procrastination.

And procrastination feeds the overwhelm cycle - then you feel like you've got even more to do.

I discovered a wonderful piece in the New Yorker recently that gave some useful loose guidelines for beating this phenomenon. I'll introduce that to you, and then break down a simple, 20-minute tactical process you can use to get everything under control.

Too Much To Do, Hence No Single Aspect Worth Doing..

My recent post "[3 Notes on Beating Procrastination](#)" was well-received. I quoted from a good recent New Yorker article:

"Procrastination most often arises from a sense that there is too much to do, and hence no single aspect of the to-do worth doing... Underneath this rather antic form of action-as-inaction is the much more unsettling question whether anything is worth doing at all."

That gets at the core of the overwhelmed feeling - that no matter how much you do, there'll still be an infinitely big, unbeatable pile of stuff to do afterwards.

Beating the Unbeatable Pile of Stuff

Deriving from the New Yorker piece, I put together three loose guidelines:

1. Cut things that are fundamentally stupid that you don't think are meaningful in any way, that somehow wound up on your plate for no good reason.
2. Figure out everything you've got to do, write it down, estimate times, prioritize it, and cut things off the back of the list that are low priority.
3. If your top tasks put you in panic mode, try scaling them back a little so it's just a stretch instead of full-blown panic. Then accomplish some more and your capabilities will grow.

If you can do that, the unbeatable pile of stuff becomes a beatable pile of stuff.

But those are loose guidelines. Can we do better by systematizing into a very clear, tactical way of doing this?

A 20 Minute Process For Getting Things Under Control

You're going to need: A piece of paper and a pen, or a word processor open on your computer.

Got it?

I can wait for you to grab it if you don't. No rush...

...okay, got it?

Here's the process:

Write down (or type) at the top of the page:

TOP PRIORITIES

Under that you're going to create 3 categories:

Current Active Projects

Current Passive Projects

Consolidation

Write those down now.

Start Writing. Feel Free to Re-Write

Right now you've got a piece of paper. At the top it reads, "TOP PRIORITIES"

After that you've got three categories: "Current Active Projects," "Current Passive Projects," and "Consolidation."

Now, everything that's important during the next week only you're going to put down in one of those categories. Feel free to move stuff around and re-write accordingly.

"Current Active Projects" are the most important things you must make progress on. "Current Passive Projects" are things you're sort of casually doing, or things that are in a holding pattern. "Consolidation" is cleanup, maintenance, laundry, grocery shopping, things like that.

After you list everything down, write one or two "next key actions" for each step. It should be something very concrete that you'll know if it's done or not. "Get in touch with Tom" isn't concrete. "Email Tom progress details, adapt from last Thursday's notes" is concrete.

You can maybe list 3 things. Don't go more than that. You just want to capture what you have to do next.

How To Make This Work For You

When you do this, you're going to find that all the stuff that looks unmanageable is actually pretty straightforward when written down.

Here's what I recommend - don't even look at your passive projects or consolidation until after you've done the most critical actions for your Current Active Projects.

Once you finish all your Active steps, then look at Passive

Projects (or if you're feeling particularly inspired to do one of them). Only look at Consolidation after you've put in time on Active Projects, since Active Projects tend to go best when you're at full energy, but consolidation can be done whenever.

Try it out. It takes 20 minutes max if you're totally disorganized. If you're already following a solid plan, it might only take 3-7 minutes to do. You'll get immense clarity from it.

You'll look at the list, say "This was overwhelming? It's just a bunch of stuff I can do" - and you'll be able to dive right in.

MAKE LIST, WORK FROM IT

Trying to remember everything?

You'll have a much less stressful time if you work from a list.

You've probably already experienced this - so I won't wax poetic about it. But I will explain the reasoning quickly, and then make a software recommendation.

Lists - Freeing up your mental horsepower

The biggest advantage to lists is that you don't have to try to remember everything - which is stressful.

If you've read David Allen's book [Getting Things Done](#), then you already know a lot of the theory.

If you haven't read it - get a copy. It's really good.

The core idea is that if you're not sure what you need to do, you get a huge mental overhead in trying to remember things. It burns mental energy, stresses you out, and you still wind up forgetting things.

So, make lists. I recommend this piece of free software:

[Wunderlist](#) is a nice piece of free software that runs in all environments - Windows, Mac, Linux, iPhone, Android, etc.

A lot of the "best practices" of list making and project management in general varies based on how much you've got going on, how you've got to prioritize, how you've got to collaborate. But Wunderlist is a great jumping off point at making lists for each project and being able to share them easily.

Try it out for a week - work with lists, be amazed at how much you get done. Wunderlist absolutely not required, but it's an elegant way of keeping track of everything.

THE UTTER SENSIBILITY OF ABANDONING CAMPAIGNS

How many potential-to-do's you got right now?

A lot?

If so, I know how you feel. I'm always brainstorming and coming up with new things to do.

Inevitably, my to-do list gets really long. Then it becomes almost useless. And so...

It can be very sensible to abandon campaigns

I hate quitting. Yet, there's far more good ideas than there is potential time to implement them.

Being pragmatic and saying, "I don't have time for this and I'm not going to get around to it" can be quite sensible and take a load of your mind.

Cleaning up the projects list

My projects list grows and grows and grows.

Nowadays, I try to clean it up and every couple months. I

go through the unstarted and partially completed campaigns and projects and ideas on there.

Some of them, I realize, I'm just not going to do. For whatever reason, there isn't enough time for that one, or it doesn't make sense, or whatever.

Now, a lot of times I don't want to cross it off. You probably don't either. It's like, "Hey! This could really be something."

Sure, but there's only 24 hours in a day.

And having a shorter projects list isn't the sign of laziness or short-sightedness - it's actually the sign of focus.

How to cut it down

Pretty simple - you look at everything you haven't taken action on in the last month.

You then either (1) figure out the next action, or (2) cross it off the list.

That's pretty much it. It's a largely non-negotiable standard, and it feels great. Cross everything off that hasn't been worked on in a month, unless...

You can't/don't need to do it right now

In which case, I recommend you send it into the future.

There's a lot of applications and services that'll email you or remind you. You could just write "Look at ABC" on your calendar, or you could send yourself a message in the future. (I like Boomerang for Gmail after having it recommended to me by a thoughtful reader of this very newsletter)

And don't forget - more dreams will come

If you've had a lot of good ideas in the past, you'll have going forwards. Crossing off stuff you're realistically, pragmatically not going to do?

It's not a loss. It's a gain. It makes your to-do and projects lists actually useful again. And you'll have more ideas. Try it out - I bet you'll feel relief and more clarity as you wax stuff off the list.

TRY A SPRINT. THEY'RE PRETTY COOL

A simple, pleasurable way to get A LOT done of your most important project

Since I started doing sprints on projects, I've really enjoyed it. It helps break through procrastination by making things easier, and it's astounding how much you can do during a sprint.

It's pretty easy to do, and if you've never tried one before, I think you're going to be surprised and pleased at the results you get from it.

A sprint, defined

What you're going to do is -

1. Prepare your work area to get started. If you're going to write, you've got your outline and your writing stuff. If you're going to paint, you've got your paints and water and canvas. If you're going to make sales calls, you've got your phone and the list of people to call.

2. Then you set an alarm for a short period of time. How long? Depends on the task. I like 40 minutes, 60, or 90. Sometimes I do 20. You've already got an idea of how long a unit of time takes on your task, and you want to set your sprint time to be only enough to a short few of these

cycles. Paradoxically, shorter sprints can be conducive to more work. So, try setting your alarm for 40 minutes for the first time.

3. Then you just work, no stopping, until the alarm goes off. Once the alarm goes off, you can do whatever you want. Keep going or cut with it.

This is really quite astoundingly useful

It's another one of those things I don't get, but it's very easy to not procrastinate for a short period of time. It's like, "Okay, I've got to jam on this for 40 minutes, then I can do whatever I want." It's really easy to not let your mind wander for 40 minutes.

This builds a heck of a lot of momentum, so sometimes you'll want to keep going after 40. Sometimes you'll want to do another sprint. Sometimes you'll be exhausted and want to take a break.

Any of those are cool. The big thing this does is it makes you work quickly on something important.

Ready...

I'd like you to prepare to do a sprint, because I think you're going to enjoy it.

What you need to do is figure out what your target project requires. Do you need a text editor, do you need internet

access, do you need raw materials, do you need...? Gather all those together before you start.

Then set the alarm.

Then you're off to the races.

Okay, get set and...

Alright, now is when you switch from passive reading mode to active doing mode. Take a little break from reading this GSV and figure out what materials you need to do a 40 minute run through your most key project.

Go ahead, go do that now. You probably already know, so this should only take a couple minutes.

And then, GO!

Whatever else needs to be done - errands, calls, email, checking something online - they can all wait for 40 minutes. I'd say try this out right now - you've got nothing to lose, eh?

You might want to refine the exact details of the process over time. More time, less time, whatever. But sprinting is pretty powerful to making progress on creative work. I'm getting to the point where I'm starting to do it once a day, and it's fantastic for making a lot of progress and building a lot of momentum.

Again, it's really easy.

1. Gather your raw materials and figure out what, roughly, needs to be done. (You probably already know)
2. Set an alarm or timer for 40 minutes from now.
3. Do nothing else for that time period.

I'd encourage you to give this a shot very quickly while it's still in your memory. If you've only got 20 minutes before you've got some appointment, do a 20 minute sprint on something. Those work pretty well to.

REACH OUT TO 7 PEOPLE

What've you got to lose?

Not much!

Lately one of the biggest things I think about is "High Upside No Downside" - I use "no downside" instead of "low downside", because the very act of even trying to do something cool brings some satisfaction and enjoyment.

Probably the easiest high upside/low-to-no downside task is reaching out to people you respect and looking to connect with them. We're going to do that this week.

Step 1: Get a Pen

Or open your word processor. Something to write in.

Step 2: Actually go get that frigging pen now

I'm serious dude. Stop reading this email for a minute and open your word processor or get a pen and paper.

Interlude: Strategy (While You Get That Pen)

You are getting it, right?

Okay. Here's what you're going to do. You're going to, in a moment, write down people you're going to reach out to. You're going to do it super fast. But before you do, let me give you a few things I've found.

1. I've had closer to a zero reply rate when I've written to people as busy as Steve Jobs. Maybe 1 or 2 replies, depending on you calculate it.
2. Paradoxically, I've also seen a fairly low reply rate from medium-fame people... lower than high-but-not-celebrity.
3. Thus, I'd recommend you go for people who are fairly well known and successful, or aren't well-known.
4. If someone very recently had a massive external success, they're probably coping with an increased volume of attention and correspondance. Probably better not to choose them.
5. Anyone who writes about how easy it is to get in touch with people eventually becomes impossible to reach. Tim Ferriss. Keith Ferrazzi. Me, probably, someday. It's a bit of a catch-22: You advocate reaching out to people, your volume of correspondance goes up, you become harder to reach.

Step 3: Write your list of 7

I was going to pick 10, but 7 is easy. You're going to reach out to one person per day for a week. (Or do them all at

once if you get into a groove, but look to do at least one)

Don't know who should be on your list?

*Your favorite podcaster

*Anyone mentioned on your favorite podcast - the sponsors, for instance?

*Anyone at a company you really love - send them a note to say hi

*Your favorite bloggers

*A great contributor to a forum you visit regularly

*Any professors, teachers, or old friends you've had that you've lost track of

*The head of local organizations you like

*Any organizations you belong to but don't know the person well - could you invite your martial arts instructor out for a drink?

...and many, many more.

Step 4: Reaching Out

Use whatever medium you want. Email, phone, in person, whatever.

In general:

*Keep it short

*Start your message by being complimentary

*If you have a specific question or action, make your desired action as clear as possible

*If you do ask for something, give as detailed of a context as possible while still keeping it very short

*If you don't have anything in specific to say, just saying you like their work is cool. Trust me, anyone doing creative work likes that a lot. And you never know, sometimes you catch a person on a bad day and just being cool goes over *really* well and is *really* appreciated.

Feel free to drop me a line if we haven't connected yet - I'm friendly. Also, I'd be curious to hear your results in terms of reply rate. Again, the shorter and more specific you are, the higher the reply rate. But the cool thing is, you don't lose anything even if you don't get a reply. You're taking action to improve your life with no downside. That's really cool.

There's tangible upside to this, but no real downside. You can celebrate taking the action - so you've already won by doing it. The upside is just gravy...

OH MY GOD, YOU'VE GOT TO TRY THIS

Spotting and Seizing Opportunities

Many times in my life, I've ignored a recommendation from someone that they were really excited about...

...that later turned out to be hugely important to me.

I still kick myself over missing time on a couple of those. This week, let's talk about a specific way to spot and seize opportunities.

The War of Art

I finally bought a copy. After having Steven Pressfield's "The War of Art" recommended to me for the sixth time by someone I respected, I bought a copy on my Kindle.

Jeez. Why didn't I do this earlier?

There's some incredible insights in there.

The thing is, I should have done this earlier, since a number of people I respect recommended it to me.

Spotting BIG Easy Gains

Look for this -

"Oh my God, this is so amazing! You've got to try it!"

I bet you get someone saying something like that to you at least once a month. And you know what? I bet you ignore it too often.

I've had a ton of great recommendations. One of the biggest easy game-changers for me was listening to audio during deadtime. Hell, I had an iPhone for a year and a half before I ever loaded up any audiobooks or podcasts onto it... and after I'd had it recommended to me multiple times.

I'm still kicking myself. I go through about two audiobooks per month, so that's a lot of book-listening time I missed by not taking this recommendation. And it had always been strongly worded - "Sebastian, you've got to get the audio going man! It's amazing, you'll love it."

And then... whatever, I got busy. Or something. And I didn't do it.

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It happens even with really significant things, like money.

I've spent a lot of time with finance and personal finance, so I've learned some interesting stuff. One is that you can borrow against your 401K retirement plan if you're an American.

It's not something you want to do haphazardly - you've got to do it intelligently and carefully if you do it.

But in this particular case I recommended, a friend of mine had a high interest rate on a credit card he was slowly paying off. He could've borrowed against his 401K, paid the card off, and then paid back the loan to the 401k. So, he'd be paying less money in interest, and the interest money would be going to himself instead of the credit card company. Win/win stuff right there.

But he didn't do it.

Why?

I don't know. I know others who have done it, and it works. You've got to pay it back or there's penalties, so do careful research and don't do it unless you've got stable cashflow and you're disciplined on spending. But if both of the above are true, it's an excellent way to kill off high interest loans.

And tons of other things

ITA Software (recently bought by Google) has an amazingly useful flight-search and flight-planning tool called "Matrix." It's complicated to learn how to use to its full potential, but any serious globetrotter should spend the time.

I'd had it strongly recommended to me numerous times before I finally spent the time to get on it... and yeah, it's

incredible. This would have saved me tons of time and money if I'd spent the time learning it when I first heard of it.

Look for the excitement in recommendations; act immediately

I've got two recommended guidelines for you to make your life better.

1. Look for when someone is really excited about something and strongly recommends it.

I mean, feel free to ignore them if they're the kind of person that buys into crazy nonsense and vibrating healing crystals or whatever. But when one of your smart friends with similar tastes and goals to you strongly recommends something, then...

2. Act immediately on it.

When you get a very strong recommendation from someone you respect, act immediately. The biggest killer of action seems to be "I'll do it later."

No, you probably won't.

So - for the next month, keep an eye out for people making strong recommendations to you. If they're smart and very excited, it's probably really worth checking out.

And have a think now - is there anything like this that someone has strongly recommended to you? A particular book or discussion forum or software or marketing strategy to try?

If so, jump on it right now. Memory is fleeting, so acting quickly is important on these sorts of things. If you get the benefit right away and it benefits you, you won't forget after that. Oh - and, do you listen to audio during your deadtime? If not, dude, c'mon, seriously now... it might change your life...

'UNDERSTAND' - ONE OF MY FAVORITE SHORT STORIES

"Understand" by Ted Chiang

Here you go, one of my favorite short stories and highly recommended -

<http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/stories/under.htm>

Feedback Welcome

What do you think of GSV? How would that be similar or different from what's on the blog?

I'm looking to bring something really excellent and useful to the table for you - I hope you enjoy this story and get a lot out of it, and your thoughts are very welcome.