

## The Importance of Discipline

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One of the most popular misconceptions in the world is that those who end up being the most successful somehow achieve this success through shortcuts, not through working hard. Each time someone is able to achieve incredible success without a lot of work and with some luck, multiple news stories are generated about it and the person becomes almost legendary for their instant success.

Why? Because it is so rare and it gives people an incredible amount of hope. People want to feel they can get a lucky break, suddenly get extremely rich, and never have any worries again for the rest of their lives. This is so rare and occurs so infrequently that the examples of people who were able to achieve it are almost legendary.

In our current culture, athletes, musicians and others are often held up as examples of what anyone can achieve with next to no education and some moxie. While this level of success does happen, it's rare and the success is never all that long term. One of the greatest success stories I remember when I was younger was when Leon Spinks beat Muhammed Ali in 1978. He was suddenly thrust in the spotlight and quickly had great fame and fortune. This didn't last for long, however. A December 2005 article in *The Boston Globe* relates:

COLUMBUS, Neb. -- At the Columbus Family YMCA on a recent Saturday morning, the Champ punches only a time clock.

The man who dethroned Muhammad Ali on a February night in 1978 in one of the greatest upsets in boxing history puts on his gloves -- not the red Everlast boxing gloves, but the orange Rubbermaid cleaning gloves. He methodically gets the cart with the brooms and the cleaning chemicals and gets to work.

A similar story can be told about one of my favorite musicians when I was younger; MC Hammer didn't stay on top for long, either. An article about him relates:

"U can't touch this," and few could. The song topped charts in 1990 and earned an estimated \$30 million. At the top of the ride, Hammer had a \$12 million dollar mansion in Fremont, CA, 17 luxury cars and a staff of 250.

"Hammer time" was over by 1996, when \$13.7 million in the red, he declared [bankruptcy](#). After breaking his leg in 1996 and the murder of friend Tupac Shakur, Hammer experienced somewhat of an epiphany and went back to being "a man of God" (Hammer grew up in a religious environment and was no stranger to spiritual endeavors).

Hammer is now an Evangelist, his shows now consist of prayer, preaching, and gospel singing. He lives in a four-bedroom home in Northern California with his wife and 4 children.

The truth of the matter is people who achieve the greatest success in any calling don't simply have the sort of "luck" that people like Spinks and MC Hammer had. They get consistent results almost indefinitely and continue to build upon themselves over and over again. These results come largely through incredibly hard work.

Over the past several years, I've had the opportunity to spend time with numerous people who've managed to accumulate hundreds of millions of dollars through various enterprises in a legal and ethical manner. One man did this in the [financial industry](#). Another one I remember did this with property, but was only able to get into property due to income he earned from being a [physician](#).

I've met and spent time with numerous people like this throughout the years.

Recently, I was meeting with a man who is a developer. Up until just a few years ago, this developer was a physician. The man has made hundreds of millions of dollars as a developer. However, most of this wealth came about due to investments he made when he had a steady and predictable income as a physician. Being a physician provides people with a steady paycheck that makes banks happy to lend you money for property. Over the course of several decades, this man invested in low-cost property and waited a decade or more for the market to turn around in his favor. Keep in mind, however, that none of the incredible riches this man was able to make ever would have been possible unless he had been a physician first.

When I meet successful people like this, I am always extremely interested in learning about how they achieved their success and I spend a great deal of time listening to how they work. In the case of this particular individual, I was very interested to learn about his life as a physician. For 30 years, he went into his office each day and had back-to-back appointments from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, with no lunch hour. He would take appointments throughout the entire day with no rest whatsoever. He had his own practice and set up his life this way. He started out investing in properties with some spare income when he was younger and just kept going.

"I've never wanted a jet," he told me as we sipped coffee together and he reflected on the incredible life he'd built for himself.

Think about seeing 3-4 people per hour, for 8 hours a day, for 30 years. This is an incredible feat. In order to do this:

- you need to stay on your feet 8 hours a day;
- you need to arrive at work at the same time each day;
- you need to be extremely dedicated to what you do;
- you need to stay in good health;
- you cannot go out late at night and report for the office tired the next day;
- you need to have a good staff of people supporting you;
- you cannot get bored and distracted;
- you need to be good at what you do to consistently get this many patients; and,
- you need to be honest so people keep coming to see you.

Could you do the same thing day in and day out for 30+ years, every single day, from the same office? Could you stay on your feet every single day? I'm not sure if I could handle this task. In reflecting on his success, this physician told me that the secret to being so good at his profession was being incredibly honest with all of his patients and never recommending more of any service than any patient needed. However, when I think about this physician, I know the secret to his success as both a physician and developer was his ability to be disciplined and do the same job over and over again. If he was unable to do this, he never would have been anywhere near the success he ultimately was.

He wouldn't have earned as much as a physician.

He wouldn't have qualified for as many mortgages.

He also wouldn't have held onto his investment properties for decades.

The same success that characterizes this developer (whose discipline enabled him to amass hundreds of millions of dollars) also characterizes many of our cultural heroes, like Warren Buffett. A major cause of Warren Buffett's success lies in his ability to hold investments for several decades and never sell them. Because he never sells his investments, he never pays capital gains taxes and more and more money continues to go to work for him without being taxed. While a great deal has been written about Buffett, his discipline in executing this one simple strategy is something that's a major cause of his success.

People want great things for their lives. I do a lot of reading of various types of motivational books and a lot of what I read simply makes statements like "you can do and be the things you set out to do and be." People love believing these sorts of thoughts and they are very comforting. However, what most people miss when studying these lines of thought is you cannot do and be anything without discipline.

The freedom to be like Warren Buffett comes at a cost. Buffett has gone into the same office every day for decades and done his job. He also does his work in a certain way and according to certain principles, which he does not deviate from. The cost of the freedom to be whatever you want in your life is being disciplined. There are very few success stories out there of people who were able to do incredible things without discipline. They simply don't exist.

You cannot achieve anything in your life just by thinking about it. Instead, you need to actually get out there, do the work, and continue doing the work that's going to lead to the results you seek. Max Weber, a German economist, wrote a book called *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* that was first published in German in 1934. In the book, Weber came up with what is popularly known as "the Weber thesis." Here, Weber argues that capitalism as we know it came about when the Calvinist/Protestant ethic influenced great numbers of people to engage in work in the secular world, take part in trade, and create their own enterprises in order to make money. Under the Weber Thesis, people become more involved and interested in the "physical" aspects of work in order to receive salvation from God, than the contemplative aspects of life (i.e., prayer) to receive salvation. Weber quotes the writings of Benjamin Franklin:

Remember, that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides. ... Remember, that money is the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six, turned again is seven and threepence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds. The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds.

The Protestant Work Ethic that developed according to Weber's analysis, holds that only through hard work can we achieve our desires and dreams. The idea is that there are really no short cuts, and in order to realize long-term success, it almost always requires long-term discipline. The most important thing you can do for your ultimate success is have and apply long-term discipline to your work and life. The more discipline you have, the better long-term results you are likely to have.

## **THE LESSON**

You cannot achieve anything in life by just thinking about it; you must get out there and consistently do work that brings you closer to your goals. There are no short-cuts, so you will need long-term discipline to realize and measure of success. The most important thing you can do for your success is to have and apply long-term discipline to your life and work.

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