

## How Using the Power of a Routine Can Make You a Top Performer

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

In the early 1990s, a very rigorous scientific study was done in Berlin on music. The study's objective was to understand why certain violinists were more talented than others. This study is relayed in a fascinating book by Geoff Colvin called *Talent is Overrated: What Really Separates World Class Performers from Everybody Else*.

In order to do the study, the researchers created three groups of violinists--best, above average, and good. Each of these three groups were spending the same amount of their time involved in music-related activities.

One of the most interesting things going into the study was that the violinists all seemed to know what particular activity mattered most in order to make them better at the violin: practicing alone. In fact, all of the violinists seemed to know this but, of course, they all didn't do it. The researchers quickly discovered that the amount of time the various groups spent practicing alone varied dramatically.

The study discovered that the advantages of consistent practice built-up over time. All of the test subjects were asked to estimate how much they had practiced. The results were significant:

- **Best Violinists**-By the age of 18, these violinists had accumulated 7,410 hours of lifetime practice on average as a group.
- **Above Average Violinists**-By the age of 18, these violinists had accumulated 5,301 hours of lifetime practice on average.
- **Good Violinists**-By the age of 18, these violinists had accumulated 3,420 hours of practice on average.

The study concluded that:

The differences between expert performers and normal adults reflect a lifetime period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain.

The reason this study is so significant is due to the fact that it flies in the face of the idea of innate talent. While many people work hard, this study also shows that the people who work the hardest typically end up doing the best. The harder you work, the better you will typically do.

One of the biggest secrets of the most successful people that is almost invisible to most other people is the power of routine and practice. You cannot become extraordinary and incredible at anything unless you use the power of routine. The person who practices violin more than the next person is following just such a routine. Routine, however, is not necessarily enough. You must have "deliberate routine" and your routine must be somewhat demanding. The routine doesn't necessarily have to be fun. The routine should be something that pushes you.

For example, in the field of practicing a [musical instrument](#), playing the instrument four hours a day wouldn't be enough. Instead, the person practicing the instrument would do far better if they were pushing themselves to learn difficult tunes instead of easy ones they already understood. They would also do much better if they were having their work critiqued and getting constant feedback.

What most of us generally do when we practice anything is we don't push ourselves. We simply do something in a way similar to the way we've always done it. This doesn't necessarily help us. What we need to do is make sure that we are able to both see, hear, and understand more. The more we have a routine that constantly pushes us, the better we do in most cases.

I remember when I was in fourth grade, a student who was in my class in third grade had left our [public school](#) to go to a very demanding private school on the other side of town. At the time, this private school was very difficult to get into and was also quite expensive. For some reason, the student came into our fourth grade class to spend the day and tell the other students what going to the private school was like compared to going to the public school. I remember this quite well to this day.

He said that at the private school they were doing all of the same work with the addition of a few hours of homework every night instead of hardly any homework at the public school. This was the entire difference. Years later, I attended this private school and I had the same experience. I had to do hours of homework each night and, at the public school, I rarely had to do any homework at all. The private school sent legions of kids to schools like Stanford, Harvard, and Yale each year. The public school, which had probably 20x more students in my town, was probably lucky to get a student into any of these schools once in a decade or more.

What this meant to me is that there is an incredible power to practice and routine. The more we practice something, the better we get. The kids from the private school probably ended up performing much better in the long run precisely because they were forced into a routine of doing lots of homework each night. They ended up getting smarter and more effective in standardized tests and everything else over time due to this exposure.

This is how it works. Top performers in all fields are exposed to a tremendous amount of long-term practice and continually push themselves to get better and better. They do this through routine. Top performers have a better understanding of what they do than average performers because they practice it more.

For example, marathon runners typically have larger hearts than average runners. Most people look at this characteristic and may presume that this is something they have naturally and this is what helps them be better runners. However, the opposite is true. After years of training, the hearts of endurance runners actually end up growing after having practiced for years and years.

Routine is perhaps among the most powerful weapons in terms of your success, your [job search](#), or anything you try to do. When you use routine, you use the force of incremental improvement and consistency. Routine is among the most powerful career forces in the universe. However, one of the more important things with routine is that you have to pick what you want

to do. You simply cannot practice and become an expert in everything. You can be exceptional at a limited number of things if you apply yourself over and over with the power of routine. You have very little prayer of becoming exceptional at anything unless you are completely committed.

The biggest challenge in becoming great at anything is designing a system of practice where you do it over and over again. You need routine.

Routine forces you to address something you do each day and continually push in the direction you try to go. Moreover, the power of routine is something that, the more you do it, the better you will become. You will make small, incremental improvements every time you do something. This routine is incredibly helpful and it's something you need to become world-class at whatever it is you do for a living. Being great at anything isn't something that's reserved only for a preordained few. Instead, it is available to everyone.

Whatever you do and whatever your profession is, you can get better by using routine and making sure a deliberate routine that challenges you is incorporated into your everyday life. The better you use routine and the more you make routine work for you, the better you are likely to do. What makes one person do better than another is almost always:

- Not general ability
- Not inborn abilities
- Not experience

Instead, what makes one person much better than another is most often the power of the routine they follow and how much work they do with their routine over and over again. It's often that simple. By following a routine, you can get incredible results in everything you do.

The odds are that you and most of the people around you are not exceptional at what you do. The fact of the matter is almost no one around you, or you, will ever achieve greatness. The world is inhabited almost exclusively by dabblers and those who never focus on one thing.

A couple of years ago, I decided I needed to be healthy and in good shape. I'm in my 30s and I heard about a couple of people I grew up with dying of cancer. Another died when his heart stopped. I live in Malibu, California, and there are a lot of healthy people here. Being healthy seems to be an obsession with a lot of people I know. I wanted to be healthy, too. For the past decade, at least, I had spent the better part of my life indoors and behind a desk all day. I decided I needed to be healthy. The whole idea really wore off on me. I stopped eating dessert every day. I stopped drinking alcohol when I went out. I took a sauna and went swimming daily. I started making myself a health juice drink every day. I started exercising seven days a week. It's the exercise I'm most proud of because it's so much work!

Every morning, I get up at around the same time, 6:30 am. I exercise very hard for a short period then I go running later in the day. I also do some yoga each day. I exercise at the same time every day. I started doing this a few years ago. Despite the fact that I'm getting older and am at an age where I should be slowing down, I keep getting healthier and healthier. I can run faster. My weight keeps going down by a little bit every year. I just got life insurance and the insurance agent had to give me a reduced rate because I qualified as "super preferred" after getting a physical. A few years ago, before I started my aggressive exercise, I was in poor shape and my mental and physical outlook wasn't as good. I know this has everything to do with exercise and routine. I simply started something and made sure that I repeated it each day.

I keep pushing myself in my exercise as well. I exercise a little bit harder each month. This is what you need to do in order to keep improving. It takes practice. I feel healthier due to the steps I've taken with my health. I set a goal to get healthier and the only way I knew I could do this was to follow a routine. I do my routine day in and day out. I do this at the same time each day because it's a routine. I look forward to my routine. My body loves to exercise and actually wakes me up to do it each day. Around 6:00 a.m. each day, I get up and I lie awake because my body is eager to start exercising.

Professionally, I have other goals as well. Another thing I wanted to start doing around six months ago was start writing more. I used to love writing articles about [getting jobs](#) in the [legal profession](#) and, years after writing these articles, strangers used to write me various emails thanking me for them. I got these emails a couple of times a week at least, and it made me feel like I was contributing something to the world. Since I'm in the job search industry and have been able to give people lots of useful advice about finding jobs in the past, I decided to start writing articles about how people could [find jobs](#) each day. I set aside time from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., then 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. each day for this.

Is this a good use of my time? Maybe, maybe not. But it's something related to the companies I work for, and I enjoy it, so this is something I do. I write for two hours each day, every day without fail. This is also part of my routine. The longer I've done this, the more I enjoy it. This routine I follow is also consistent with my goal of being passionate about getting people jobs. It enables me to put something out there each day that can help people in even the smallest possible way.

Religions use routine. One of the reasons many religions continue for thousands of years, I think, has a lot to do with the power of the routines they instill in people. For example, during the weekly Shabbat in Judaism, from sundown on Friday until sunset on Saturday people aren't supposed to work. In Mormonism, the family is supposed to spend the evening together on Mondays. There are various holidays throughout the year. The holidays and routines all serve a purpose in these various religions and are something that give these religions a great deal of their power. Without routines, such as Sunday services in Catholicism, for example, many religions might fall apart.

So it is with your life. If you don't follow a routine, you may be directionless.

Routine is something you need to incorporate into your life. Preferably, your routine should be related to an activity or something you enjoy doing immensely. In your career, your routine can also make all the difference in the world.

The best people in the world at anything are most often those who have immersed themselves in whatever it is they do, continually learn more and more about it, and continually get better and better at it.

When splitting a large rock with a hammer, it generally isn't going to split the first time you hit it. Instead, you need to hit the rock again and again and again. It may take 1,000 or more hits before the rock splits but, at some point, the rock will split in two.

You need to incorporate routine into your life and push yourself in one direction. This is a secret of huge success in any undertaking. If you are [looking for a job](#), for example, setting aside a certain amount of time each day to network, a certain amount for applying to jobs, a certain amount for brushing up on your interview skills, and a certain amount of time for following up could be an extremely useful strategy. I can guarantee you that probably few to none of the people you are

competing with for jobs will be doing this--but you will. Putting in consistent effort like this on a daily basis will make a huge difference. The power of routine isn't just about applying for a job, though, it's actually more about doing the particular job. The more you focus on improving and getting better and better at what you do, the better off you will be in the long run.

### **THE LESSON**

Maintaining a routine in both life and work is important to success. Not only do you need to establish a routine, you must make that routine demanding and push yourself to the limit. Budget a certain amount of time each week for networking, applying to jobs, brushing up your interview skills, and following up with employers. Such consistent effort on a daily basis will make a huge difference to your career success.

---

<https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/>