

Mike Tyson, Distractions, Your Career and Life

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

I saw the most interesting documentary on Mike Tyson recently, James Toback's *Tyson*. A review of the film in *Time* magazine relates:

At first he was a variation on the proverbial 97-pound weakling: an overweight street kid from the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. He got beaten up regularly by the local toughs—"Very few of them," he says, "are functioning adults right now"—who lured him into street crime. As a 12-year-old in a detention home he was discovered by Cus d'Amato, who had trained and managed Floyd Patterson to the heavyweight boxing title in the '50s. Cus saw potential in this soft-spoken junior thug, and Mike went along with the program because "I was afraid of being physically humiliated in the streets again."

In d'Amato, Tyson found the father he never had. "He broke me down and rebuilt me," Tyson says of his coach, who adopted him, raised him with the d'Amato family in the Catskills and gave the boy focus and purpose as a boxer. Tyson was an apt pupil: he obsessively studied old films of boxing legends, learned the spiritual side of the warrior mentality and, he says, "restrained myself from having sex for about five years." He tore through the amateur ranks, knocking out one opponent in a record eight seconds, and was heavyweight champ before he was 21. (His mentor died just before the big fight.) Those victories helped him realize that "I don't have to worry about anyone bullying me again."

<http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1893622-1,00.html>

The most interesting thing to me about the documentary was listening to Tyson talk about how d'Amato trained him to become a boxer. Instead of defining boxing to Tyson as a mere physical conquest, the coach taught him that boxing was a spiritual conquest. As Tyson trained with d'Amato, the coach would constantly drop suggestions to him on how to increase his self-confidence and his self-image as he boxed. These suggestions would be short little blurbs about how Tyson was the best, the strongest, and so forth. I found this part of the movie completely fascinating because d'Amato was changing Tyson's self-image and the messages that Tyson was hearing in his mind. Instead of hearing "you are a poor thug from the Bronx," Tyson began hearing other messages about how he was a champion and how great he was.

One of my favorite d'Amato quotes is, "The hero and the coward both feel the same thing, but the hero uses his fear, projects it onto his opponent, while the coward runs. It's the same thing, fear, but it's what you do with it that matters." One of the biggest distractions that most of us face comes not from others, but from ourselves. Most people out there are continually questioning themselves on what they are capable of. They do not believe they are smart; they do not believe they are attractive; they do not believe they are clever; they do not believe they have the ability to achieve the things they want to achieve; they do not believe they are going to be promoted; they do not believe they are going to [get the job](#); they do not believe they are going to make the sale; they do not believe other people will like them; they simply do not believe in themselves. Many of us are cowards. We run away from what we are actually capable of.

What do you believe? If you are constantly distracted by your insecurities and your doubts, you are never going to get where you want to go. It just will not happen, because you will not allow it to. If you are not confident and at peace with who you are, the negative voices inside your head will keep you distracted. The miracle of what d'Amato accomplished with Tyson was that he was able to change the voices inside of Tyson's head from being distractions that were keeping him down and holding him back, to whispers of encouragement that drove him forward to become a champion.

If d'Amato could do this with Tyson, couldn't we all do this with the voices in our heads?

Some time ago, I was at a retreat. All those in attendance were broken up into groups of ten or eleven people each and were asked to go find certain items that were placed throughout an obstacle course, as a group, and then get back to the base camp as quickly as possible.

"Do not worry about anything except finding the items, staying together, and returning to base camp," we were told.

Our group was set loose, along with six or seven other groups, on a piece of land that was no larger than the size of a football field. As we foraged along, various leaders who were supposed to be acting as guides (and were not participating in the scavenger hunt), began appearing on the obstacle course telling us they had found something and to come look at it; others pretended to be injured; others pretended to want to tell us a secret about another group; and some requested we approach them to get some piece of advice.

What should have taken each group less than ten minutes to accomplish, instead ended up taking around thirty minutes, because everyone kept getting distracted.

Several times our group forgot the basic idea that what we needed to do was to gather up a few things and return to the base. Instead, we became incredibly distracted by the things going on around us. Every group did.

The lesson of this exercise was that the more you get distracted, the less you will be able to reach your goals. You simply cannot make the most of your career and life when you constantly allow yourself to get distracted from what you are trying to achieve.

One of the most important things you can do is look away from the things that

- distract you from becoming a better person,
- distract you from doing better in your job,
- distract you from being healthy,
- distract you from succeeding,
- distract you from being happy,

- distract you from achieving your goals,
- distract you from being the person you are capable of being.

Often in the movies you will see a scene in which kids who are growing up in a bad neighborhood are pressured by the other kids in the neighborhood to join a gang or to participate in some kind of negative activity. The kids always face the challenge of having to walk by a group of thugs and not give in to peer pressure. In the movie *Gran Torino* with Clint Eastwood, for example, a young Vietnamese boy was being pressured to join a gang. Often these types of characters go on to become great musicians, athletes, and so forth. As an audience, we find ourselves rooting for the underdog to find his way out of the darkness and to achieve success. This is the attraction of the *Tyson* documentary as well.

This particular character resonates with us because the people who are able to resist the distractions around them are able to become something better. The ability to resist distractions is incredibly important--more important than many people realize. The better you are at resisting distractions, the better you will do in your career and life.

If you had enemies who were trying to distract you from achieving a goal, these enemies would do everything within their power to distract you. They would tell you that you could not do it, that you are not good enough. They would point out every single weakness you had, distracting your mind with these negative ideas, all to undermine your confidence and to diminish your concept of what you are capable of achieving. If someone around you were constantly telling you how bad you were, how ineffective you were, and how little you are capable of achieving, you would probably consider the person an enemy--especially if he or she were repeating this nonsense several times a day. In addition, this is probably not the sort of thing any of us would ever do to another person and, if we did, we would probably consider ourselves horrible people. *However, isn't this what we all do with ourselves constantly? Don't we all spend a lot of our days questioning what we are capable of, and distracting ourselves from meeting our goals?*

You will never reach your goals in life if you are distracted by others or by yourself. The only message you need to focus on is the one about how *good* and *capable* you are. Create your goal and a game plan, and then fill your mind with the right messages. Do not listen to or concern yourself with negativity or things that distract you. *Keep looking ahead. Fill your mind with positive and hopeful messages that will drive you forward to your success.*

THE LESSON

Do not be distracted by your insecurities and doubts, or you will never achieve success because you will not allow it to happen. Focus only on the message about your skills and capabilities. Identify your goals and create a gameplan, and fill your mind with positive and hopeful messages that will drive you towards said goal.

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