

Chapter 22

Making The Transition To a Follow Through Mindset

Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not. It is the first lesson that ought to be learned; and however early a man's training begins, it is probably the last lesson that he learns thoroughly.

Thomas Huxley

Part I: From Crutches to Tools

“These follow through strategies work great!” said Jan, a successful entrepreneur. “I’m keeping many more of the promises I make to myself and others, and I’m a lot better off because of it. Just ask my staff, or my husband, or my kids! It’s been a blessing.

“That’s why I’m embarrassed to admit that there’s a part of me that wants to reject everything I’ve learned about following through! There’s this little voice inside me that says, ‘Grow up, Jan. Where’s your pride? If you’re really serious about doing something, then for crying out loud, you *should* just do it! You shouldn’t need any of these silly gimmicks. They’re just crutches. If you want it badly enough, you should have enough willpower to do it on your own.’”

Perhaps you recognize Jan’s little “Should” voice. It’s the official voice of the Follow Through Fairy Tale - that irresistibly appealing notion that good intentions magically produce good results; that “wanting it badly enough” is all it takes to get it done; and that the only remedy you need for failing is to “try harder next time”.

To the Follow Through Fairy Tale, “crutch” is a dirty word.

By referring to these follow through strategies as crutches, Jan's little "Should" voice is accusing her of being both lazy and stupid. The voice is implying that, not only doesn't Jan really need "outside help," but that by relying on it, she's doing herself a great disservice. "These crutches will prevent you from exercising your own inner resources - your willpower and your self-discipline," the voice scolds. "How can you possibly expect to fully develop your own abilities if you rely on outside help?"

The little voice in Jan's head - and the Follow Through Fairy Tale it speaks for - is right about one thing and wrong about everything else. In one sense, follow through strategies *are* crutches.

But so what? At this stage in human evolution, we need all the help we can get.

Clinging to the belief that you can follow through by relying on inner resources alone is a lot like clinging to the belief that you can fly by flapping your arms. Both are appealing ideas - tempting fantasies. But mistake either for a doable option, and you'll fall flat on your face.

Not only do we *need* help from follow through strategies, the idea that relying on such help will harm us in some way is pure hogwash. Sure, it's true that if you rely unnecessarily on crutches to help you walk, you can deprive your muscles of exercise they need. But if you rely on a follow through strategy to help you follow through, the only thing you'll deprive yourself of is another follow through failure!

The truth is, there's not a shred of evidence to suggest that relying on outside help to follow though can in any way weaken your inner resources. To the contrary, what we've seen over and over again is that people who learn how to use follow through strategies effectively come to enjoy greater access to their own talents and abilities. They report having a keen and satisfying sense of being the captain of their own ship.

So, little "Should" voice, you can refer to follow through strategies as crutches if you want. But to people who have learned to use them well, follow through strategies are about as much like crutches as paintbrushes were crutches to Leonardo DaVinci. Leonardo was certainly "guilty" of relying on brushes to paint his masterpieces. But rather than holding back his inner resources, brushes were "tools" that enabled him to make magnificent use of his talent. And instead of gazing at the *Mona Lisa* and

thinking, “Sure, it's a beautiful painting, but DaVinci cheated. He used brushes,” we simply gaze and think, “What an amazing talent.”

The right tools never hold your abilities back; they allow you to go further with the abilities you have. Whether it's an artist's brush or a follow through strategy, using tools to get better results is not cheating; it's not being lazy; and it's not being stupid. It's just being smart.

So the next time you're getting ready to use a follow through strategy and you hear that little “Should” voice inside ask, “Where's your pride?” proudly tell the voice, “My pride is in getting the job done.”

Part II: From Inside-Out to Outside-In

You'd think the success Jan achieved by using follow through strategies would have been enough to silence the voice of the Follow Through Fairy Tale. But the Follow Through Fairy Tale isn't like all the other fairy tales we're encouraged to believe in as children and then encouraged to shed as we grow older. What's different about the Follow Through Fairy Tale is that we, as “grown-ups,” are *still* being encouraged to believe in it!

We live in a culture that's in love with the idea of being inner-directed. We're bombarded with messages that teach us that “we have what it takes” - that “we can do anything if we try hard enough.” We watch movie after movie where a hero or heroine, thanks only to a crystal clear vision, a burning desire, and an iron will, defies the odds to achieve an impossible goal. We find nothing more inspiring than stories of people who reach deep, deep inside and come up with whatever it takes to make their dreams come true. Such stories are as universally appealing as a beautiful sunset. They stir our emotions and invite us to follow suit - to look inward for solutions.

The problem is that our love affair with inner-directedness blinds us to the powerful role that outside influences can play in our lives. When we hear accounts of people doing “the impossible,” we think, “Wow, the awesome power of talent and determination!” What we fail to notice, however, is the awesome power of outside influences to bring our inner resources fully to life.

Occasionally we get a fleeting glimpse of the vitally important but well-camouflaged role that outside influences play in our success. For example, in reflecting on his own success, basketball legend magic Johnson once said of his chief competitor, Larry Bird, "Larry Bird made Magic Johnson the best that Magic Johnson could be."

Unfortunately, such glimpses are few and far between. We don't have time for them. We're too busy teaching and learning the Follow Through Fairy Tale. And it's not just in the movies and in our sports arenas that it's "taught." It's taught everywhere. It's taught in popular magazines and in the overflowing self-improvement section of bookstores. It's taught in the most expensive and sophisticated seminars and workshops for sales people and executives. And it's taught both "live" and on tape by those merry messengers of the follow through fairy tale known as "motivational speakers."

Imagine, as an adult, attending workshop after workshop, reading book after book, listening to tape after tape, hearing speaker after speaker tell you that there really is a Santa Claus. It's just a harmless fairy tale, right? Well, there's a point where the fairy tale stops being harmless and starts being dangerous. There's certainly no harm in believing in a jolly old man who knows everything and loves children. But when you start counting on Santa to actually bring gifts for your family, you've gone too far!

Likewise, the Follow Through Fairy Tale is harmless until you count on your inner resources *alone* to make sure that you'll follow through on your good intentions. Just as it's fine to believe in Santa as long as you make a point of buying the gifts yourself, it's fine to believe in the power of inner resources as long as you also make a point of using whatever outside help you need to get the job done.

So, by all means, go ahead and reach inside for all the inspiration, willpower, talent, vision and determination you have. God knows, these are absolutely precious resources. But, unless you're just making an inspirational movie, don't stop there! If you really want to make your dreams come true, reach *outside* too. Line up all the help you can get for the tough job of following through. It's better to get to the job done with outside help, than to not get it done at all.

Part III: From Double Standard to Single Standard

When it comes to following through on our good intentions, the message our culture sends is loud and clear: “Real achievement comes only from within.” It couldn’t be any clearer if the warning, “No crutches allowed,” flashed constantly in the sky for all to see.

We humans open up wide and swallow the “Up with inner resources” epigram whole. We buy hook, line and sinker into what we call The Doctrine of Inside-Out. It’s the belief that success is a pure, unadulterated expression of inner resources.

But, without realizing it, we’re guilty of adopting a double standard. While we seem to embrace *Inside-Out* when it comes to ourselves, we don’t buy it at all when we want someone else to succeed.

The fact of the matter is, we *preach* Inside-Out, but when it comes to helping others succeed, we *practice* Outside-In. In other words, we never hesitate to recognize and rely on outside influences to bring out the very best in *other* people.

Just ask any teacher, or coach, or boss, or parent.

Teachers may value their students’ inner resources. But you won’t find many teachers who count on Inside-Out to get their students to learn and succeed. Homework, exams, term papers, grades, detention, “gold stars” and the time-honored threat of a trip to the principal’s office are just a few of the Outside-In tools that teachers use every day to help their students behave in certain ways.

Coaches give great speeches about “inner drive.” But find a coach who counts only on athletes’ inner drive to win a championship, and we’ll show you a coach who’s unemployed. Coaches rely on Outside-In tools all the time. Inner drive is great. But inner drive *with* mandatory practices, team rules, pep talks, and lots of one-on-one coaching is what brings out the best in athletes.

Sales managers urge members of their sales force to reach deep inside. “Be a self-starter,” they plead. “Grab the ball and run with it.” They sure talk a good Inside-Out game. But most managers know better than to count on Inside-Out. They put most of their eggs in the Outside-In basket. They rely on quotas, bonuses, contests - all Outside-In tools - to keep their people moving.

And then, of course, there are parents. No matter how much parents believe in and cherish their child's inner resources, they wouldn't dream of relying on Inside-Out alone. Parents use Outside-In constantly. They carefully choose and aggressively arrange outside influences in an effort to bring out the very best in their child. They try to choose the right schools, the right teachers, the right friends, the right neighborhoods, the right movies, the right *everything*. Heck, using Outside-In is what parenting is all about!

So, when it comes to influencing *other* people's behavior, we definitely get it. We know that Inside-Out is not enough. We understand the power of Outside-In. And we're not afraid to use it.

To follow through consistently, you don't have to disregard your inner resources. You just have to discard the Double Standard. You have to realize that it's not just what's on the inside that determines whether you'll follow through. It's what's on the outside, too. You have to recognize the power of Outside-In and be willing to use it - freely, boldly, creatively - to influence *your own* behavior.

It's an interesting paradox: The key to being successfully inner-directed is to take full advantage of how outer-directed you are.

Part IV: From Knee-Jerk Freedom To Real Freedom

There may be another little voice in your head that urges you to reject what you've learned about following through. It's hard to talk back to this voice because it's hard to think of it as being anything but on your side. The voice we're referring to is the "voice of freedom."

The voice of freedom speaks from deep, deep inside. It speaks from way below the level of conscious thinking. It speaks from the level of reflexes.

To the voice of freedom, life is simple. "Freedom is good. Restrictions are bad." That's all there is to it.

The voice of freedom is utterly obsessed with keeping your options wide open. It hates when you close any doors. It bristles when you let yourself get pinned down. It rolls its eyes when you accept anything "with strings attached." It gets prickly whenever you go down a one-way street. And it goes absolutely ballistic when you *deliberately* restrict yourself.

The voice of freedom is passionate but primitive. It can't grasp the idea that accepting a restriction *now* may be the best way - and sometimes the only way - to achieve greater freedom *later*. "A restriction is a restriction," the voice insists.

The voice of freedom regards follow through strategies as a threat. "Stay away from them," the voice insists. "Can't you see, those strategies restrict your freedom!" the voice shouts.

Well, in one sense, the voice is right to be threatened. Follow through strategies *will* restrict your freedom. They'll restrict your freedom to fail!

Freedom is often the enemy of follow through, not it's ally. Too much freedom prevents you from getting the job done.

Suppose, for example, you want to free yourself from the bondage of being overweight. The voice of freedom hears, "Free," and it's behind you all the way - all the way, that is, until you accept any of the restrictions that you have to accept in order to lose weight. For example, consider keeping foods you shouldn't eat out of your home, and the voice of freedom will object. "You can't do that," the voice insists. "That's restricting your freedom!" Consider promising your grandmother that as a gift for her 90th birthday, you'll get rid of those fifteen pounds she knows the doctor urged you to lose. The voice of freedom will object again. "You can't do that!" the voice shouts. "Don't commit yourself. Don't make a promise. Don't get yourself pinned down. Leave your options open."

The voice of freedom is too short-sighted to be anything but an obstacle to following through. So listen carefully for it. And when you hear it urging you to reject what you've learned about following through, talk back.

Tell the voice that the road to real freedom is paved with the right restrictions.