

**THE DISCIPLINE**  
**FACTORY**





## The orientation talk

“Re”.

It means “again”.

Review. Recalibrate. Reset.

Replan. Rework. Recycle.

Renew. Rethink. Reinvent.

Refocus. Retrain. Restart.

Repeat.

Done it before?

Know that it pays?

Understand its value?

Then do it again.

*(Nerdy aside: Re also happens to be the chemical symbol for Rhenium, one of the rarest elements in the earth’s crust, super-hard metal used to make jet engine turbine blades, combustion chambers and catalyse the production of gasoline. Plus! Its radioactive isotopes can be used to treat liver and pancreatic cancer. Handy stuff. But super rare.)*

Re is a rare discipline.

To go back, to mine, to learn,  
and then to go again. And  
again. And again. For better.

Review. Recalibrate. Reset.

Replan. Rework. Recycle.

Renew. Rethink. Reinvent.

Refocus. Retrain. Restart.

Repeat. **The Discipline**

**Factory (2021)** is a rework of  
a daily EDM created for and  
delivered to a team of clients  
a decade back.

**The Discipline Factory**

**(2011)** was the successor  
to “**The Beach Run**” and “**Big  
Picture. Details.**”, and the  
precursor to “**Puff**”, “**Robus-  
ta**”, “**Ristretto**”, “**Shop!**” and  
a host of other daily sales,  
leadership, CX and strategy  
missives I wrote early each  
weekday morning for many  
years. Back catalogue [here](#).

The Discipline Factory  
is a mental anvil for  
shaping success practices,  
melded from the foundations  
of what went before.

Back then, the daily  
notes (written fresh as  
muffins early each weekday  
morning) were designed to  
focus, inspire and challenge  
ambitious professionals,  
day in, day out. In a mildly  
entertaining style (the  
spoonful of sugar helping the  
medicine go down).

Today, in a shiny object  
world, the value of that rib  
poke service hasn't dimmed.  
To focus. To clarify. To be as  
comforting in their regularity  
as they are discomforting  
in what they ask of you (for  
that's the only way to grow).

The Discipline Factory  
2021 was written and  
delivered early each morning  
for quick consumption by  
those appreciative of a  
positive focused word shot to  
calibrate their professionalism  
for the day. One hundred  
pokes, prods and provokes.  
Review and apply them at  
your leisure. But they're most  
powerful consumed and  
employed, one by one, daily.

The Discipline Factory 2021  
is free to anyone, but not for  
everyone. Because it's only  
ever of value if it's worked.  
And that means work. Please  
feel free to pass this on to  
those you think have the work  
in them.

If you're new here, welcome  
to **The Discipline Factory**.  
This is a place and moment  
where professional disciplines  
can be forged.

And if you're an old friend  
that knows this shop floor?

Welcome again.

The fire's on.

Just head on in.

And get to work.

Good discipline.

**Troy.**

# Contents

1. Your endeavour's Purpose
2. Your organisation's Vision
3. Your enterprise's Values
4. Standards
5. Each customer's experience
6. Strategy
7. Plans
8. Pattern recognition
9. Senescence
10. Flexibility
11. Speed
12. Partnerships
13. Rigour
14. Merit
15. Ownership
16. What are you doing?
17. Questions
18. Energy
19. Affect
20. Listen
21. Acknowledge
22. Systems thinking and acting
23. Generosity
24. Reining in the asymptote
25. Translation
26. I don't know
27. Contact
28. Time homes
29. Opportunity costs
30. Can do
31. Follow-up
32. Loop back on the PVV
33. Catalyse
34. Thinking
35. Tenacity
36. Read
37. Collaboration
38. Next steps
39. Simpatico
40. Log
41. What if?
42. Risk
43. Recognition & reward
44. Upbeat
45. Candor
46. Second thoughts
47. Plan B
48. Cheer
49. Cull
50. Nobody's fool
51. Testing heuristics
52. Two birds
53. Standing out
54. What you're asking them to pay
55. A thoughtful buffer
56. Values enlivened
57. State of your art
58. DIFOTIS
59. Linking lessons
60. Tare weight
61. Numbers
62. Bringing in the pros
63. Percolate
64. Scroll
65. Remember
66. Grinding
67. Criteria
68. Better
69. Early indicators
70. Within
71. Alarm
72. Effective
73. Unassuming
74. Learn
75. Bravery
76. Recover
77. Perspective
78. Decision revision
79. Facetime
80. Hone
81. Practice
82. De-conclude
83. Brand
84. Try
85. Bother
86. Control
87. You promised
88. Do unto your business
89. Pleasant distractions
90. Document
91. Lunge
92. ...Tentative?
93. Footprints
94. Draw the line
95. No
96. Do it in public
97. Stretch
98. Rest
99. Both
100. Keep your feet

# 1. Your endeavour's Purpose (the Dream for Others)

Your Purpose (or Mission) Statement describes what more than anything your enterprise exists to do for others. A big, important benefit of some nature, for the betterment of a defined group. The legacy you'd like to be remembered for, the way you'd like to have made the world better in some focused way through your efforts.

So answer yourself this.

**What, above everything else, is it that my organisation is here to do, or deliver, or improve, or fix, for our clients or community? In that single bottom-line mic-drop sentence?**

Now run your eye down today's to-do list and pick one thing on it that you can soup up or tighten in order to better serve that Purpose.

Good discipline.

## **2. Your organisation's Vision (the Dream for You)**

The Vision Statement (your big hairy audacious goal, the 5 or 50 year aspiration you've etched on a plaque on the boardroom mantelpiece) clarifies the position, result or outcomes you're working in alignment with others to realise. Likely means nothing to outsiders, but it'll be a majorly important milestone win for your crew. A badge of pride you're busting to earn, that'll tell you that you bagged what you were aiming for.

So answer yourself this.

**What's the longer term outcome our business is most intent on achieving in the year or years ahead – the big one?**

And so, step by step, what's one thing you will commit to nailing today, that'll move the dial ever so slightly towards it?

Good discipline.

# 3. Your enterprise's Values

Your Values are the handful of principles, beliefs or behavioural standards that your organisation has committed to embodying in its every decision and action. (Hopefully) not manufactured, but time-tested emergent ideals that describe how you believe in approaching your craft, your market and your value delivery. Real. Honest. Reflective of you, in how you conduct yourself in good moments and through challenges. What others can expect to feel, see and experience when they meet you.

Discipline is knowing your core beliefs and putting them into the world regardless of the corner you find yourself in.

So answer yourself this.

**What are my core values... our core values... and what do they really, really mean?**

Then pick one you'll get on the front foot with today, one you'll champion and showcase in some way, for the upside of another.

Good discipline.

## 4. Standards

When a client hears your name, sees your logo or interacts with your value proposition, part of their internal assessment is about the kind of standards they believe you hold. Standards of quality (“do they cut corners, or are they diligent i-dotters?”). Standards of integrity (“do they deliver on their promise every single time, or is that just reserved for certain customers or situations?”). Standards of commitment (“will they have my back if it all goes pear-shaped, or are they good-time friends?”). If brands are imbued with client perceptions of your standards, then knowing what yours are is a good place to start.

Discipline is having standards and holding to them, rain, hail or shine.

So answer yourself this.

**What non-negotiable, everyone-gets-them-every-single-time standards is my business committed to upholding?**

Then take a look down the day’s activity list and check that everything passes standards muster (and make the fix if there’s any doubt).

Good discipline.



# 5. Each customer's experience

Walmart Founder Thomas Walton once said *“There is only one boss. The customer. And he (or she) can fire everybody in the company..., simply by spending (her or) his money elsewhere.”* Some organisations focus on defining *“Our Customer Experience”* or *“The Customer Experience”*. Each customer will have a different, individual set of experiences with your enterprise. But considering what those mix of experiences should look like, feel like, entail and create? The non-negotiable norms for all, and the ring-fenced range of acceptable or desirable elements experienced by anyone, at each of the dozens, hundreds of customer touchpoints you have?

Discipline is imagining and engineering everything you do and how you do it with the customer in mind.

So answer yourself this.

**If I had just three words to define what I'd like every customer to experience when they interact with us... what are they?**

Then what's one thing you can go a bit further with today, to ensure at least one customer enjoys that kind of experience?

Good discipline.

## 6. Strategy

Strategy is the roadmap of decisions you're making about priorities and pathways to get you to where you want to be. Over-the-horizon choices about directions, vehicles, drivers, speeds, as well as what you'll leave in the rear-view mirror, based on a sound assessment of who you are, where you are and what lays between you and your ambitions. It's not a set-in-stone 5 year tablet, but it is a resilient sketch of how you'll progress through ever-changing conditions that's been crafted while wearing longer-term lenses. It will need to flex and change in time, but it's not flighty or flippant.

Discipline is knowing, at any point in time, the key things you need to hold focus on to keep progressing to your long-term goals.

So answer yourself this.

**In a sentence or two, what are the key elements of our current strategy to realise our Vision and fulfil our Purpose?**

Run your eye down today's to-do list, and shrink or bump a non-strategic task to add or expand a more strategic action.

Good discipline.

# 7. Plans

Plans permeate all levels of an enterprise. From the highest order (strategic, operational, enterprise resources, marketing, budgets and staffing) to the granular and now (sales call plans, procedural plans, in-case-of-fire-here's-what-to-do checklists), the vast majority of what you'll work through today is either factored into, aligned with or (should be) guided by a plan of some sort. How formal, how detailed, how diligently governed they are will differ. The value of a plan is that someone has sat down having either previously experienced what you're about to navigate, or at least thought it through in a sober moment, and mapped out what they think is the best way to confront what's ahead of you, conscious of the desired endpoint.

Discipline is having a well-considered, realistic-to-implement plan to deal with that which you can reasonably anticipate each and every day.

So answer yourself this.

**The likely things I'll be tackling today – the common or imaginable challenges, the activities I can take on to progress us towards our goals – have I formulated or am I readying to apply a well-thought out plan for them?**

Take one thing on the day's to-do list that is meaningful, and sketch out or review and work through a plan to make it a success.

Good discipline.

## 8. Pattern recognition

How much time do you spend looking for trends and patterns that develop in data sets in and around every business (including yours)? In considering and exploring the recurring or regular occurrences in customer behaviours, in staff responses to a given stimulus, in common problems that arise, or in when or where desirable outcomes manifest? Where patterns can be discerned – repetitions or similarities in actions and reactions – then root cause analysis and predictions and modelling can follow.

Discipline is continually looking for and seeking to understand why certain things keep recurring with some predictability, so that you might leverage or build upon or change them to your advantage.

So answer yourself this.

**Where is there a clear or emerging pattern of thinking, behaviour or results appearing in my organisation or immediate market, that's having an impact on how successful we are?**

Today, what can you do about or with that pattern, for the benefit of your team, business or customers?

Good discipline.

# 9. Senescence

Senescence is the deterioration of something's function with age. Your eyesight fades, your bones brittle, your skin gets wrinkly from collagen breakdown. Features and functions get old and not as good as they once were. Stuff stops serving the purpose for which it was designed because it wears out. It's an idea not just reserved for breathing biological organisms. If you think of your enterprise as a living, growing, ageing (and likely one day dying) construct, what's senescent in your business? What's getting old, getting on, worn down, past its used-by date, no longer as fit for the function it used to be so terrific for?

Discipline is knowing when it's time to put a practice or mechanism out to pasture because it's not as effective, efficient or economical as a new, better replacement will be.

So answer yourself this.

**What's senescent in our business, that has reached the point where it's past its best, no longer giving us what we need from it... and needs to be retired or superseded?**

Cast your eye across the business today, look for the creakiest old task, tool or approach you're still employing, and do something about it.

Good discipline.

# 10. Flexibility

*“The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry”.*

So in a thick brogue said Poet Robbie Burns, a thought that 2020 couldn't have proved better if it tried. For while a professional life without considered data-driven planning is likely to lead to much circle work and unpredictable achievement, holding overly rigidly to a set of plans in a rapidly evolving world is likely to end in tears. Being flexible – adjusting your sails in response to changing climates and forces – gives you the opportunity to capitalise on new breezes and mitigate the risk of buffeting headwinds.

Discipline is continually shifting your perspective, adjusting your approach and flexibly dealing with unavoidable changes as and when they arrive.

So answer yourself this.

**What's changed very recently, that makes an element of my planning either somewhat redundant, less effective or likely wrong for the aim I have... and how can I flex my thinking or approach to redraw a productive path to the goal?**

Find one element on today's to-do list that flexes from your original thinking to better align with the conditions you now find yourself in.

Good discipline.

# 11. Speed

Results being the products of actions, and actions being the consequence of “starting”, the logical conclusion - “quicker you get started, quicker you’ll get a result”. Quicker you can add value, benefit or learn something that’ll shape a better next result. This lesson in the bleeding obvious is brought to you by the verb “speed” – getting something done pronto. It’s an idea many fear for its potential to create wobbles, to expose holes in pre-planning, for the grazes that tumbling at pace can cause, and because stationary or slow feels more comfortable.

Discipline is getting going and cracking on with something you believe or know will create value, deliver value or educate your ability to crystallise value tomorrow.

So answer yourself this.

**Where can I up the pace on something strategically important to my organisation, to move it forward, further, faster, in order to start harvesting upsides or lessons sooner?**

Eyes down the to-do list... where’s the first opportunity you can see to put the foot down a little more firmly to get things happening?

Good discipline.

## 12. Partnerships

Sustainably successful endeavours are never the result of working in isolation. Even sole traders and lone hired guns rely on the support and inputs of suppliers, collaborators, occasional contributors and indeed clients. Partnerships mean sharing – risk, labour, investment, spoils and plaudits. Partners have either a common goal or aligned, complementary goals. A vested interest in the success of the other. They consider a partner's needs alongside their own, and they'll lead, follow or travel in lockstep with their partner as the situation requires for mutual benefit.

Discipline is knowing who you need to partner with to achieve your goals, and appropriately investing in the partnership to ensure mutually satisfactory outcomes.

So answer yourself this.

**Who, given a goal I've set for myself this year, do I need to be partnered with, for what they can help me achieve, and what do I need to invest to ensure their side of the ledger is balanced?**

Today, commit to doing one thing to deepen, enrich or nurture an important partnership you've begun. Tighten it, strengthen it, and give it the fuel it needs to work for you longer term.

Good discipline.



# 13. Rigour

Where speed gets stuff begun and done, rigour gives it every chance of being right or effective. Rigour is care, thoroughness, time on the detail, checking of facts. It's diligently considering, then meticulously planning, then vigilantly executing, then closely inspecting. Rigour is about finding any flaws or needed fixes before it finds its way to the front door of the payers. Its purpose is to preserve your reputation and ensure their delight first time, every time. It's an investment and function of time and effort.

Discipline is rigorously scrutinising, stress-testing and shining each piece of work before you ship it.

So answer yourself this.

**Where in my regular bag of daily work am I a little light in applying rigour? Where would I, and the beneficiaries of my work, benefit if I were to measure a little more tightly, build with a little more care or apply a proven process more routinely?**

Today, take one task on your to-do list that you'd otherwise be tempted to ship in draft form, and give it a tighter, more thorough once-over before it goes out into the world, to ensure it has every chance to do the good work you intended it to do.

Good discipline.

# 14. Merit

How many of your daily actions are selected because you've freshly and critically judged them to be the best course to get the best outcome in this moment... and how many are force of habit, routinised or a path of low resistance? The idea of merit-based decision making is actions being chosen for their worth, not purely their convenience or because they're part of an established pattern. Heuristics – rules of thumb and mental short cuts that save us cranial labour that would be frittered on inconsequential choices – are great for the little things, but when a choice has the potential to markedly impact (or not), assessing the merit of your options has... merit.

Discipline is selecting a pathway for its fit, its power and its ability to deliver the target outcome, not just because it's in front of you.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one decision I need to make on today's list, one I know my default option is based on "easy", where reconsidering the merits of my potential choices might give rise to a better, goal-progressing course of action?**

Pick a path that's more likely to get you where you want to go, not because it'll be a smooth ride.

Good discipline.

# 15. Ownership

In the list of things you want to see progress, there's "they" stuff, "we" stuff and "me" stuff. "They" stuff is done by others. Circle of concern perhaps without your influence stuff. The "we" stuff is collaborative or collective – together, moving the wheel. And then the "me" stuff, all on your shoulders. You own it. It's likely you know those that spend their days bleating about the slowness or inadequacies of the "they" stuff. Perhaps some that grizzle about co-contributors or who don't take their fair share of the "we" stuff. But you and I know where the real dial shifters prioritise their energies.

Discipline is owning it. Whenever, wherever humanly possible. End of story.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one "they" or "we" thing I've been let putter along in the hands of others for too long, that impacts my ambitions, that I could pull an element of into my "me" list?**

Today, show the tasks on and watchers of your to-do list what ownership really means and looks like. Choose to actively expand your circle of influence by owning your concerns.

Good discipline.

# 16. What are you doing?

Stop. Hammer in the tentpegs time.

The discipline factory kilns are still just warming up, but lots of you have already approached the fire with your professional swords fifteen times now.

Fifteen simple but pointed pokes in the ribs to sharpen a discipline. To do something important for you and others, not complicated, just challenging in that it asks for focus and paying shiny object costs.

Of the fifteen times you've elected to invest 30 seconds reading these missives, how many have you actually acted on? Changed something in what you did that very day to apply the discipline? How are you doing, out of fifteen? High Distinction? P1? Just used reading them as a semi-entertaining alternative to real work?

Whatever you got, and whatever you did, and whatever that gave rise to (or didn't if you did nothing with them), that's behind you now.

Discipline is "next". Discipline is "re". Discipline is "again".

It's not for everyone. If it's not for you, goodbye and good luck.

If you know you'll benefit from it, hang in, and good disciplines. Much more bankable than luck.

# 17. Questions

Socrates said “*Let the questions be the curriculum*”, suggesting wisdom and enlightenment don’t come from spoon-fed facts, but via navigating the process of thoughtful inquiry. Giving over to inquisitiveness, progressively improving what you ask and how you ask it, and building critically-formed perspectives out of ever-more-insightful questions. Aside from what they might illuminate or expose, the asking process is an incredibly powerful relationship builder and intelligent personal brand strengthener. It shows care and interest.

Discipline is asking intelligent, thoughtful, care-ful questions before heading to conclusions or proffering purported wisdom.

So answer yourself this.

**Where in the conversations that today’s to-do list might give rise to is there an opportunity for me to dig a little deeper, to develop more clarity, to provoke thought or unearth preferences, biases or worldviews via asking a smartly-constructed question?**

Today, rather than spouting your brand of clever from atop a soapbox, why not instead engage minds, hearts and catalyse better connections by asking where you’d otherwise tell?

Good discipline.

# 18. Energy

One of the things that catches aspiring change makers by surprise – people with an idea and a plan to better the world with something fresh – is just how much energy it takes. To get a concept into a tangible form, to move a body of work from its inert position, pushing to hernia level to achieve that first inch of motion, then to keep it moving, over hill, over dale, through the rain and beating sun? Hard, hard work. Requiring seemingly indefatigable pipes of energy. And (energy being a closed system concept), to expend it, you first have to have it, which means building and nurturing it. Because the next bit of work is always uphill.

Discipline is continually working to keep your energy bucket full, then deploying it smartly in the service of your goals.

So answer yourself this.

## **What do I know fills me with the energy needed to do the heavy lifting?**

Today, top the tank. Even a little. Whether it's quiet time, creative practice, hanging with other humans or stretching the legs. Pump your own tyres, then put that little extra oomph into the plans you've made to progress.

Good discipline.

# 19. Affect

Your affect is your outward expression of your inner emotions. The look on your face, the smile dimples or brow furrows. The strut in your step or slump of your shoulders. How well you're radiating sunshine or bringing a scowl to the party. Who knows if grumpy cat really is grumpy, but they have a grumpy affect, and so we think "grumpy". Synchronised swimmers don't just paddle hard to stay afloat in harmony – they smile for gold. How you come across, how you're perceived by others, has the power to engage, to motivate and to enhance the work you're trying to do... or neuter it.

Discipline is continually checking how you're presenting yourself to the world.

So answer yourself this.

**This week, have I been coming across to others the way I'd like them to perceive me?**

Think about how you'd like the people you'll interact with today to think about you (Upbeat? Friendly? Positive? Can-do? Or.....) and double-check your affect to portray it.

Good discipline.

## 20. Listen

Not sure whose Grandmother the expression about having two ears and one mouth (and please use them in that ratio) came from, but consider who learns more. The spouter of words, directions, instructions, opinions and perspectives... or the aural recipient? The storyteller... or the inquisitor? Listening well is not a passive process, like vegeing on the couch and letting the tennis commentary wash over you. It involves the choice of focusing, of tuning out distracting thoughts, turning away from competing forces, and opening your mental doors via your stirrup, hammer and anvils to consciously take on what other mouths are gifting you.

Discipline is actively keeping your antenna up and listening hard for what's being said and what's not (well before you decide what that means).

So answer yourself this.

**Who's one person in one conversation I'll be part of today that I'll commit to activating all listening muscles for?**

Listening is raw data collection that enables better fit solutions to be built and offered. Replace a mouthful of yours with an earful of another's today.

Good discipline.



# 21. Acknowledge

While everyone loves deserved rewards and most people value a little earned praise, it's a pretty basic human want to know that others see us, that they accept we exist, we count and we're doing something that at least we believe in. Acknowledgment doesn't imply or need agreement, and it doesn't have to be particularly gushing. It's eye contact, it's nods, it's fundamental courtesies, it's attributing that which we've done to us. It's another's validation of our contribution, rights or status. Can you get by without it in a professional context? Maybe. But you won't stay long, and its absence creates culture cancer.

Discipline is acknowledging the work, the value, the effort, the role, the contributions and the presence of others, whenever, wherever and however it's required.

So answer yourself this.

**Who will I acknowledge appropriately today, from the front foot, for what they've done, what they're doing, what they're attempting (or just for the fact I know they're part of the collective effort)?**

In the rush to get the to-do list shrunk, to make a deadline or hit a target, it's so easy to skim past the basics we know every person appreciates. Lock eyes with and dip your lid to another today.

Good discipline.

## 22. Systems thinking and acting

You know the one about the butterfly flapping its wings and the Tsunami it triggers in the antipodes? Systems thinking is an appreciation that we're connected to lots of other things, the subjectors of causes and impactees of effects stemming from disparate elements of the business, market or wider world. What we do, everything we do, has ripple effects. Cascades of consequences, good, bad, predictable and surprising. Decision X in the sales team has Impact Y in the warehouse. Systems thinking is realising and appreciating the nature of interconnectedness, and doing your best to build it into key review, innovation and planning processes.

Discipline is thinking about the logical or likely flow-on effects from your actions, and making a thoughtful, consequence-considered decision accordingly.

So answer yourself this.

**A key action I'm about to undertake today... have I fully thought through the likely or potential impacts this will have on others (and if those impacts bear out, will this have ultimately been the best activity to move me / us forward?)**

You can't predict, imagine or plan for the infinite impacts your actions will create, but as you stare at the crossroad and contemplate going left or right, have you thought just one degree further about what it will likely mean for others?

Good discipline.

## 23. Generosity

Give a little more than you ask for in return. Be first in offering the hand. Go a little further than is expected or needed. Take a load off the shoulders of another if and where you can. Try to help before it's asked or when it's not rightfully expected. Just do something nice, unprompted, with no requirement to reciprocate. Generous acts are in a veritable rainbow of colours.

Discipline is going that little beyond where others might expect or go themselves, for the benefit of others, generously.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one act of generosity I'm planning today, from the front foot, for the delight of someone else, that's beyond a reciprocal transaction?**

Feedback, ideas, effort, counsel, support, encouragement... generosity doesn't always mean putting your hand in your pocket. The funny thing about it is that when you give it without expectation, the Universe has a way of amplifying it back down the track.

Good discipline.

## 24. Reining in the asymptote

If you've consigned high school math to the dusty archives in the attic of your mind, permit a refresh – an asymptote is a line on a graph that a curve gets ever closer to, but never actually touches. Think of “perfection” as an asymptote.

Over years, decades, your diligent practice, continued saw-sharpening and time in the arena will indeed make you better, great, even ninja-level in your craft... but never perfect. Because there's always another improvement you can make.

Discipline is working each and every day, in the smallest most focused way, to get that little bit closer to the desired asymptote.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one skill, one strength, one avenue you have to deliver value to others, that you can seek to improve on today, to do that little better, or more efficiently, or more impactfully?**

Asymptotes are imaginary (for no-one's actually ever touched or held them), but they need to be appreciated, because they define the ceiling all are stretching skyward to touch. Appreciate that you never will... but that's no reason to stop trying to get closer.

Good discipline.

## 25. Translation

Every market, organisation or team develops a way of communicating that's a little foreign to outsiders. Acronyms that you have to be in the know to appreciate. Terms that are part of the inner lexicon but confuse those beyond the tent. Project names, milestone happenings, "that bloke that everyone in the industry knows and that damn hobby horse he rides, you know what he's always on about...". Tribal stuff. Meaning non-tribers don't always get it. To be engaged, first we have to feel like we get it.

Discipline is thinking about and then making the effort to translate your communication in ways that can be understood and embraced by those that don't have your knowledge.

So answer yourself this.

**A conversation or piece of comms I'm entering into today with someone not fluent in all the terminology or topics I want them engaging with... how will I break it down into easy-to-understand terms?**

If diversity of networks strengthens them, and diversity means "different" – backgrounds, knowledge, exposures – then the one that can translate to engage all in a common dialect? The network is their Oyster bed.

Good discipline.

## 26. I don't know

Adam Grant calls it “intellectual humility”. Charles Darwin said “ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge.” Socrates said “I know that I know nothing.” The observable human trait - that the more experience we gain and the more time we spend in a domain, rather than being able to confidently proclaim complete mastery, our appreciation of the myriad deficits in our knowledge also builds. We start to really appreciate the magnitude of what we don't know. That it's the loud one on the soapbox hawking their brand of absolute certainty and gospel knowledge that should give you more concern than the one saying “I don't know... but maybe we can figure it out”.

Discipline is understanding and admitting the limit of maps of your knowledge and expertise, then seeking to fill the holes bit by bit.

So answer yourself this.

**If I'm honest with myself, what's one thing I don't know, but would benefit from working to figure out, to solve a problem that's on my to-deal-with list today?**

It feels like the older we get, the less certain about anything we get. Which of course is our opportunity to get better, to continue on as lifelong learners, curiosity piqued, trying to accumulate a little more each day.

Good discipline.

## 27. Contact

A wise friend who managed business broker teams for many years once told me that the hardest part of the team's job was staying in regular contact with clients (sellers) when you've got no news for them. No functional progress, no nibbles on the hook, no "good things are happening!" updates. But, he explained, that difficult practice – fronting up with not much more than smiles, a supportive tone and letting them know "we're still here and still in your corner" - was the thing that sorted the wheat from the chaff longer term. It separated transactionalists from deep, sustained relationship builders, and kept the coals alive until the next opportunity breeze blew in.

Discipline is actively staying in touch with those you want or need to sustain a long-term relationship with.

So answer yourself this.

**Who haven't I reached out to for a while, that I'd like to have (or would value having) in my circle years from now, that I could flick an email, say hi and suggest a coffee?**

Why wait for them to call or email? If you think of yourself as a leader, then show it and reach out first.

## 28. Time homes

To-do lists are fantastic, but their good intentions fall victim to a few malaises. One of them is a lack of rigour around what gets done when. Few people set distinct start and finish times for the work they'll do on a particular task on a given day. We do this for meetings (or we should), and we don't send our kids off to school at 8:30am until "whenever you think you've had enough or something more pressing pops up". Bookending the time you'll invest in distinct activities selected to move you towards your goals each day – giving tasks time homes – makes you make priority choices in advance.

Discipline is putting critically important activities into distinct time homes in the diary in advance.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one activity I have a fair idea of how long will take to knock over (at least in critical part), that will help me immensely if I get it done today, that I can diarise in a hard-to-negotiate-out-of time home with clear start and finish clock points?**

Time homes aren't inflexible, and it's a smart practice to time home some buffer time as well. But by having a default day that's been force ranked for impact and structured with you-only-get-this-many-hours-today realities? You've got something you can test stick or shift decisions against.

Good discipline.



## 29. Opportunity costs

Sinatra might have had too few regrets to mention, but it's likely most of us have been nagged once or twice by that voice that said "if you'd only taken that other path, here's what you'd be enjoying right now". The regret of opportunity costs – the benefits you forewent by not taking a particular course of action to instead do what you did. The reality of not being able to save your cake and eat it too, opportunity costs are simply the price of choices. In strategic decision making – the big calls about the directions and roads you'll take – it's a fence against regret to first understand and then get to grips with the opportunity cost consequences of those decisions.

Discipline is confronting and reconciling what you're saying no to because you'd prefer to say yes to something else.

So answer yourself this.

**For a choice I'm about to make today, to get something I want, what will I be saying "no" to, and having thought about what that other path might have led to longer term, am I happy that my choice is still the best one for my long term aims?**

Like everything, trying to imagine the full buffet of opportunity costs is crystal ball gazing. You can't know. But the discipline of weighing the likely longer term positions two competing choices might lead you to, and assessing which is preferable, helps you absorb the blows of doing it your way.

Good discipline.

## 30. Can do

Heading into the wilds to forge a new track while pursuing a big dream, or steeling your spine to confront, climb and conquer the challenging change cliffs that will forever appear in your eyeline, takeschutzpa. A can do attitude. We've all worked with, maybe occasionally regressed ourselves into those people that get overwhelmed by and can't shift focus from the reasons it can't be done, the difficulties, the yeah-buts. That Eeyore grey gloom and doom mindset feeds itself and grows. Takes courage and the d word to be the other person in the conversation.

Discipline is choosing a can do mindset each and every day.

So answer yourself this.

**The most challenging task on my to do list today... can I do it? Can I make progress, some headway, make the situation just that bit better? And, knowing full well I can, what's my first step?**

Can do mindsets don't guarantee success on every challenge. Sometimes you lose. But if you didn't die in the process, you've got the chance to learn, better and attempt the next. Which you can do.

Good discipline.

# 31. Follow-up

On the back of the poke about “can do”, I think it’s fair to say that the world has no shortage of “gunna do”-ers. Committers, promisers, well intentioned hand raisers and vehement noddors. “Leave it with me, champ”. At the back end of meetings, the verbal wrap-ups would indicate that lots will happen from here. Annnndddd... Not always. Following up on your commitments, your promises and stated intentions, with actions? Actually getting back to people when you said, with what you said? A rare professional brand element.

Discipline is following up.

So answer yourself this.

**From yesterday’s discussions, from the promises made or intimations or the perceived actions that other parties expected me to have ownership or stewardship of... what do I need to follow-up on or with today?**

Follow-up is a fundamental driver of progress (not to mention lobbing the ball back over the net for reaction). It’s also a reputation supercharger, simply for how rarely it’s done consistently. Something you’d benefit from becoming famous for?

Good discipline.

## **32. Loop back on the PVV**

Why are you here again? Why is your organisation – the structure that pays your bills and gives you a means to flex your professional muscles – in existence? What's the biggest problem it's trying to solve for others? What's its PURPOSE?

Where are you aiming at again? The biggest most impressive goal, the mountaintop you're all working together to summit? What's does the dais you're all intent on standing atop sometime in future to say "we did it. We got here!" look like? What's your VISION?

And what do you all believe in again? The common perspectives and non-negotiables in how you behave that binds you? The standards most important, the traits and approaches you want to be famous for, because they just fit? What are your VALUES?

Discipline is continually calibrating your plans, actions and approach against your agreed Purpose, Vision and Values.

So answer yourself this.

**Does everything on today's list embody or point to these as well as they possibly can?**

Point the telescope once more skyward. Look again for your North Star. Realign where you're going, how you're going (and remembering why you're going).

Good discipline.

## 33. Catalyse

A catalyst is something that causes a change without itself being consumed. Starts something, increases the rate of something, kickstarts a process and a chain of events. Leadership acts are often catalysts, as are coaching conversations, facilitation processes and feedback mechanisms. Not doing all the heavy lifting to enable the change, but lighting the fire, provoking the discussion or suggesting a path.

Discipline is playing the starters gun role when it needs to be played, to get forward motion towards the goal happening.

So answer yourself this.

**What do I need to see move forward today, that isn't for my heavy lifting, but that I can play a catalyst role in getting others to roll up their sleeves and push in the right direction (and what do I need to do to create a spark in that tinder?)**

Catalyst roles need care and thought – random ill-considered firestarting will just scorch the earth around you. Be mindful what you start, but when it needs starting? Start it.

Good discipline.

## 34. Thinking

The big difference between “habits” and “disciplines” is that one of them, with sufficient practice, happens somewhat automatically (habitually), while the other takes thought and decision. Thinking – the precursor to good decisions – means not just letting the dolly roll mindlessly along the tracks to a fatalistic outcome. It needs a question or two asked (“*wait – what’s happening here, and what do I want to happen next?*”). It needs consideration of the what-if options (“*I could go left, right, backwards, purple, faster or stop...*”). And it needs critical assessment (“*which of those fits best?*”). It’s work.

Discipline is taking the right amount time before making decisions to think before locking in a course of action.

So answer yourself this.

**The thing I’m looking at on today’s to-do list, that I do routinely, out of habit, a certain way... what if I thought about that differently, a little deeper... what if...?**

The other big difference between habits and disciplines is that only one of them can “go bad”. Autopilot for the inconsequential stuff is fine, but consciously fronting up to make thoughtful, important choices each day?

Good discipline.

## 35. Tenacity

Fitness guru Neila Ray has a saying – “*I already know what giving up feels like. I want to see what happens if I don't.*” Tenacity is the practice of holding on, tight, determinedly, and not letting go. It's a practice, because it's learnable and improvable, even if it doesn't get easier. It needs candid upfront acknowledgment that you'll be battling headwinds and strength-sapping forces trying to prise your white knuckles off the progress vehicle you're clinging to like grim death. It will result in bruises, in fatigue and in watching other limpets fall away and behind. But it serves your endurance goals.

Discipline is holding on tight, tighter, when the going gets harder, because the goal warrants tenacity.

So answer yourself this.

**One thing I'm tired of enduring, of banging my head against a wall with, that really will benefit me longer term if I keep going (but man, it's tiring)... can I hold on another day... another week... another month, for what it will give me longer term?**

The feeling of not fail-quitting (quite distinct to success-quitting, to discuss another day) is quite something. Give yourself the gift of holding tight through the rough for what's on the other side.

Good discipline.

## 36. Read

Long-form anything has been out of fashion awhile now. A consequence of perceived time poverty (aka us electing to prioritise “more things” over “deeper things”), the burgeoning availability of Nori Roll sized morsels of information (like this EDM) and the skyward trajectory of our global addiction to more and more feel-good dopamine hits underpinning instant gratification. So “the work” of investing time each day to read, not skim, but read, and burrow, and mine information from longer form pieces isn’t so routine anymore. Which is of course the stand-out opportunity.

Discipline is reading to learn, to update, to deepen and to strengthen the knowledge element of your value proposition each and every day.

So answer yourself this.

**Were I to diarise 15 minutes today with a pertinent book, a periodical, an industry paper or written source of deep knowledge (and were this to evolve into a daily discipline), would I be better and more valuable for it longer term?**

Reading tweets and FB updates, skimming the e-news headlines... not really reading. Tuning out the noise awhile, giving absolute focus to uploading and working to understand a body of work that might help you take a more informed step forward? A play the smart are reading.

Good discipline.



## 37. Collaboration

Involving others in decision making and planning can, to the proactive driven leader, feel cumbersome, slowing and diluting. Like those group projects at high school where you feel lumbered with the dullard, the slack-off or the take-credit-for-the-work-of-others, collaboration can feel like a handbrake to “let’s just go” progress. But once you breathe and put your arrogance to one side, and consider the sustainability and strengthening power of diverse inputs, multiple engaged heads and experienced vantage points different to your own uniquely biased view, there can dawn an appreciation that more ideas, perspectives and eyeballs on the Where’s Wally map is a valuable thing.

Discipline is seeking out the engagement and input of collaborators to improve the likelihood of success of a plan.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s one thing on my list I’ve just been going solo on, just leading from the front without any other perspectives shaping it, that I could run by a trusted other for a bit of feedback, input and maybe engaged support?**

Collaboration doesn’t have to mean grinding things to a halt with bureaucratic committee mechanics like a municipal Council. But as a foil to your own inevitable blinkers, knowledge gaps and limited abilities (amazing as you are)?

Good discipline.

## 38. Next steps

A boss once taught me that the trifold purpose of any sales meeting was to learn something, share something and agree on a next step. Great if it's a purchase order, but at very least, define an action to generate more information, or reconvene later, or consult with others. That without the last part – a commitment to doing something positive or productive with the output of your shared time investment – you've wasted an opportunity.

Discipline is defining and committing to undertake next steps for every meeting you enter.

So answer yourself this.

**The discussions I'm entering today, where I know broadly what will be covered and the general vicinity they might end up in... can I draft a default next step for these in advance (ready to refine them as the situation unfolds)?**

The next step might be "Follow-up in 12 months because there's nothing going to happen until then". So be it. Diarise it. Use whatever the meeting gives you to strengthen the foundation for the next thing.

Good discipline.

## 39. Simpatico

Simpatico means “easy to get along with”. Likeable. Compatible with the people you’re interacting with. Doesn’t mean being a pushover, a yes person, or that you have to naturally click with every human you meet. It describes an affect you can adopt as you try to build relationships, trust and engage important others. Being positive and open and friendly. Inquiring about them before talking about yourself. Seeking common grounds rather than focusing on differences and gulfs between you. A demonstrated mindset of wanting and being willing to work well together (versus waiting to see where the barbs might appear).

Discipline is focusing on finding ways to build “easier” relationships by how you choose to approach them.

So answer yourself this.

**One relationship I want to progress today – how can I be a little more simpatico, to try being just that bit easier to get along with, to inspire them to want to work more closely with me?**

This one gets some peoples dander up – “why should I give ground here or adjust my natural approach?” Because “more likeable” simply opens more doors, like it or not.

Good discipline.

## 40. Log

Josh Kaufman, author of *The Personal MBA*, has a practice of logging his accomplishments, decisions and motivations at the end of each day. In part, it's to build a library he can review over time to see patterns in his decision-making (to make better decisions tomorrow). But it also serves as a foil to the "never ending to-do list". His observation – to-do lists that never get finished (and they never do) can deflate you, make you feel like you're constantly spinning your wheels. Logging your accomplishments, making notes on some key progress markers and the key choices you made, gives you a sense of "I'm achieving things, I'm contributing, and I'm progressing".

Discipline is consciously logging how far you've come as well as how far you've got to go.

So answer yourself this.

**Yesterday, what did I achieve, progress, decide or deliver on, small as it may be, to move the dial that little bit further forward towards "goals"?**

Logging isn't tricky. The biggest barrier to doing it is remembering to do it. Why not use a recurring electronic diary appointment of 5 minutes each day to remind you?

Good discipline.

# 41. What if?

Having the rug yanked from beneath our collective soles in 2020 has led a few more organisational leaders to ask “What if something like this happens again? What would we do?” The question “what if” is often easily dismissed with a wave, a pish and a “it’ll never happen” or “we’ll cross that bridge if we come to it” move-along prompt. Alternate scenario analysis and mapping, potential opportunity and risk considering, Plan B, C, D and break-emergency-glass stuff is easily bumped during the busyness of managing daily operations.

Discipline is asking “what if”, regularly, thoughtfully, about the more likely challenging or opportunity-creating scenarios that could play out in your work.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s the biggest “what if” potential scenario I need to think about, either because it’ll challenge my current plans or it’ll open up an opportunity (and what should I probably have ready in my back pocket if it does?)**

What-if-ing might be an insurance policy you never need to claim. The challenges or opportunities might not ever manifest. But if they do, and if you’ve what-if-ed them, you’ll have half a chance of moving forward effectively, quickly.

Good discipline.

## 42. Risk

Taking a step forward and trying something new, different, carries risk. It might not work. It might make things worse. It might have side effects. It could harm you, or others, physically, emotionally. It could impact your brand and the perceptions others have of you. A step into the unknown carries unknowable outcomes, and they may set you back. Risk analysis and factored decisions aren't about accurately predicting how things pan out, but rather reconciling how much you're willing to accept things going wrong.

Discipline is considering and reconciling your acceptance of predictable risks as you set out to try new things.

So answer yourself this.

**A new action or endeavour I'm getting ready to attempt today... have I thought through the more likely risks to me, to the business, to others (and if they were to play out, can I accept that?)**

Like the possible side effects listed on the information sheet with any medicine, risks are immense in number (and potentially, but rarely, fatal). But balance them with the risk of doing nothing, of sitting on your hands... where is the more likely risk (and its impact) unacceptable to you?

Good discipline.

# 43. Recognition & reward

I used to work in a business where a “win” in the form of a large complex sale or a large client conversion might only come every two or three years. That’s a long time between glass clinks and proud boss tyre pumps. Like that one sweet shot between strings of hacks on a golf course, finding something every so often to keep you feeling like you’re “winning”, to keep you interested and motivated and striving for the next upside is important. A celebration, a public acknowledgment, a nice prize to keep the enthusiasm fires alive, even if it’s not for the big end result, but rather marking important progress milestones along the road.

Discipline is recognising and rewarding progress towards a goal to keep the interest and the energy for continued progress alive and healthy.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s something I have recently achieved, or am about to achieve, that’s significant, that should be marked, acknowledged and celebrated, even if it’s just in a small way, and even if it’s just by me?**

Reward and recognition is lovely if it comes as a signal from others. But notching your own belt and nodding in satisfaction to no-one but yourself? Don’t underestimate its value – you earned it, you know it, so gift yourself a moment (and let what that does to you gift your next steps a spring).

Good discipline.

## 44. Upbeat

The clique around the water cooler, gasbagging about the stupid new policy or having a grizzle about the boss or bemoaning the difficulties of dealing with a particular client... do you indulge? When the very real frustrations shared across your team are fodder for distracting discussions, and the very real human desire to bond at the bottom of the pond with your peers is strong... do you let yourself go there? When it's just hard, when challenges mount and all are teeth gnashing, woe-is-us-ing... do you follow suit? Or...

Discipline is presenting as upbeat, forward-looking and can-do, even when it's tough, even when the rest aren't.

So answer yourself this.

**The negative office scuttlebutt that's going around, the topic others are being glum or dour about and feeding one another's misery... can I show them what the alternative looks like in how I front up and step ahead with optimism and intent?**

It's a choice. It can be really hard (that's why they call them disciplines). Follow the grumbling, dirt-kicking herd. Or don't.

Good discipline.



# 45. Candor

If you've ever asked someone "may I speak candidly?", did they ever say "no, I'd much rather the vague, saccharinised version of whatever's on your mind"? Candor is speaking clearly, plainly, truthfully and putting forth your frank thoughts without too much tinsel. It's avoided by many so much of the time because it has the potential to hurt feelings. The potential deliverers of candor are worried about rankling others and perhaps damaging their own personal brand in the process (a self-interest outweighing the desire to help). Yet, if a relationship is to progress on an honest, lets-help-each-other footing, it's often the most helpful gift you can give. The plain truth as you see it.

Discipline is being candid.

So answer yourself this.

**Where do I need to deliver a clear, candid message or piece of feedback today, to help a penny drop, a reality be realised, and give the recipient an honest baseline to move forward from?**

There's a difference between being overly blunt, tactless, even harsh, and candid. Perceptiveness and nuanced thinking in how you communicate and being smart with timing is valuable, but don't shy away from candor.

Good discipline.

## 46. Second thoughts

Few get it, or get it right, fully, the first time. Our first impressions leading to those amygdala-driven “fight, flight or freeze” survival responses that kick in faster than our more thoughtful neurons, just aren’t capable of getting around all the elements of a scenario we need to make a decision about. And even when we’ve had that first window of time to consider how we should react or respond, our biases, our deep personality grooves, are still strong pulls to an often predictable position. But giving it a little more time, a second thought, to really work through the ups, downs and then right-for-you’s?

Discipline is recognising that first impressions usually benefit from second thoughts, and putting the time in to have them.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s something I’m confronting today, where my current response was fairly set from my first impression, that perhaps would benefit from me giving it a second thought to think a little deeper on risks, opportunities and right next steps?**

Third, fourth, fifth and fifteenth thoughts probably means you’re procrastinating (why?) or need help (who?). But, before making your “cut once” act, diligently “measuring twice” in your head?

Good discipline.

## 47. Plan B

The big boat wedged in the Suez Canal is an in-the-face example of what happens when the narrowest choke point in a supply chain actually chokes. One strong gust of wind, one boat, and 10% of the worlds maritime freight (and global oil prices) disrupted. Having alternate routes, fallback positions and Plan B for when things don't go quite according to plan doesn't feel particularly pressing when everything is beer and skittles. The value of insurance policies, of having considered and mapped mitigation pathways, comes into clearest focus in the darkest of moments.

Discipline is asking yourself "if the worst was to bear out, how we would survive it?", and having the bones of Plan B ready in your pocket.

So answer yourself this.

**When I look at the plans I'm implementing in my business, what's a clear risk I can see that would throw things into disarray... and while less appealing than my current course, what could, would or will we do if the risk plays out?**

Not all choke points are stentable, and not all alternate paths are as efficient, economical or easy to love as your current trajectory. But "a different way" might be needed, because the change train waits for no-one. Ready or not?

Good discipline.

## 48. Cheer

A client just created and hosted a new cycling event. The crowd didn't know what to expect – new format, novel, unknown. So, change fearing creatures, we stand still and wait. The first race went around in near silence. Right until close to the finish line. Then someone cheered. “Come on! Go!”. Then the followers did what they do. The wave of support grew, the energy levels went up, the riders rode a little higher in the saddle, the fun and optimism and experience had by all ratcheted. A positive affirmation, a public voicing of support.

Discipline is cheering for the triers, those having a go, even when others are quiet.

So answer yourself this.

**Who's battling, attempting, trying to push things forward, for better, for more, in my ecosystem, that would walk that little taller with a shout of my encouragement (and who, if they heard that cheer, might echo it for scale and ripple effect?)**

The power of cheering does so much. Instils confidence. Incentivises continued effort. Bolsters mood. And the best bit? It's as powerful for the cheerer as the cheerees.

Good discipline.

## 49. Cull

Part of what ties folk in knots, whether it's around making priority choices, picking a path, taking action, determining who to align with... it's often not so much about what they *should* do. It's so much more about what they should *no longer do*. Firing stuff from your to-do lists. Dumping activities that have passed their best before dates. Saying goodbye to people and time consuming things in your world that just don't fit where you want to go or who you want to be. (Deep down, you know that to lose 1 kg, it's not about running another lap. It's about dumping the donut.)

Discipline is continually culling the non-contributing, non-aligned, non-purposeful stuff to make room for better.

So answer yourself this.

**What, when I come back on deck the day after the Easter break, will I simply get rid of from my days?**

We have a fear of vacuums. Some idea we need the "better" option ready to jump straight in and fill the void of the cull. But opening up that gap? It'll teach you something pretty quickly, and might inform you as to what brand of "better" you should really be chasing.

Good discipline.

## 50. Nobody's fool

It's that day in April, the sucker-you-in capital of the year, where some scallywag is going to try getting a (hopefully) funny one past you. The term "fool" comes from the latin word "Follis", which was the term for a Blacksmith's bellows (meaning "full of air", then morphing into "empty headed"). There's the light-hearted gentle-spirited "gotcha!" nature of being fooled. And there's the more malicious, sneaky taking you for a fool (and likely trying to part you from your money). Generous as your nature may be, vigilance and savvy around when something doesn't seem, feel or sound right is part of a pros lot.

Discipline is being alert to those trying to take you for a fool and quarantining their influence accordingly.

So answer yourself this.

**If I look down this list of contacts and interactors, who's taking the proverbial, trying to take more on the sly than they're giving in return, and why am I letting them?**

We've all got different tolerances for fools or foolers. But actively managing those people simply not willing to play fair or give anywhere near what they're taking *out of your life?*

Good discipline.

# 51. Testing heuristics

Heuristics are “rules of thumb”. Mental shortcuts or educated guesses we make to avoid having to do repetitive heavy lifting because it’s likely we can fast forward to a reasonably accurate conclusion. “I bought a Mazda last time, it was a good car, so chances are this next Mazda will be a good car too.” “These types of people have fit our culture in the past, so let’s just focus on finding more of them, and that should fit too.” Sensible, logical, and possibly accurate (and applying the heuristic save lots of time and resources). But because they’re a short cut, because they don’t require any real diligence or account for changing climates or nuanced evolutions, they occasionally need recalibrating.

Discipline is occasionally remapping the long route to your endgame to see if the shortcuts are actually still shortcuts.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s a decision I make routinely in my days, that I just default to “the way I’ve always done it (or at least for a while)”, that might be outdated in its thinking, that might have been usurped by a better way (but I’m not going to find out until I relook at the decision path in its entirety)?**

We don’t tend to learn much on short cuts (we rarely take in our surrounds, for the end game is getting through them to the other side ASAP). The long route tends to open eyes, challenges you to think about what’s really going on around you and tests how important the destination is to you. Worth taking every so often.

Good discipline.

## 52. Two birds

A nearby shopping centre has installed carpark shade structures. The shades are actually solar panels. Keep customer cars cool, and keep electricity bills lower. Two birds, one stone. A couple of colleagues are about to run a seminar, inviting existing customers and giving them a plus one option. Satisfy existing clients, and expose yourself to potential new clients. Two birds, one stone. A coffee meeting later today to celebrate a client's win and discuss their next phase plans. Two birds, one stone.

Discipline is looking for additional upsides for more beneficiaries for little or no additional investment whenever and wherever you can.

So answer yourself this.

**What's something on today's to-do list that potentially could deliver another upside to another party, with little more than a skerrick of thought and planning?**

Write a daily note to clients, that reminds them of fundamental success practices, that forces your own nose to that same wheel, and that keeps you in their thoughts regularly? Three birds...

Good discipline.



## 53. Standing out

The wasted brand is the one that blends in with the crowd, indistinguishable from others, offering no clear signals about how or why they're different to the choices adjacent. Some stand out for noise and colour. Some for quality and prestige. Some for raw results power. Some for speed or economy. Some for humans, or processes, or the pack they've managed to magnetise to them. Some for novelty, or innovation, or for sticking firm to old fashions. To stand out is to identify yourself as something, for someone, to some end.

Discipline is continually checking that you're standing out in the right ways for the right sets of eyes.

So answer yourself this.

**When I look at how my endeavour is presenting to my target market, compared to the competition, are we really standing out in the right way, and is there something I can do to widen that “good-different” gap a fraction through my actions today?**

Standing out in the right way means critically assessing the Venn diagram intersection of “our offerings”, “competitor offerings” and “our customer wants & needs”, without believing your own hype. A regular warts-n-all assessment of whether you're genuinely, positively separated from the pack?

Good discipline.

## 54. What you're asking them to pay

Your new product, program, course, seminar, workshop, process, idea, way-of-doing-things for your clients... that "road to better" you believe offers so much to them? Consider what you're asking them for. There's cash, likely. Time, both put to good use, and some that'll be burned. A change in their current behaviour (oof). A learning curve. The opportunity costs (both around what they're currently doing, as well as potential other things they could have shifted to). There's risk (personal, brand, cash again). There's a deepening of the relationship with you (when they're used to the current dynamic). There's...

Discipline is reviewing and reconciling all the prices you're asking them to pay, and ensuring that what's on the upside for them significantly outweighs them all.

So answer yourself this.

**The "change" thing I'm trying to catalyse in another today (a sale to a client, or a new action I'm asking my colleagues to undertake) – have I considered everything I'm actually asking them for (and have I helped them appreciate that's still a small investment for the meaningful goals it'll help them achieve?)**

"Price" is the objection so frequently trotted out, but its more often another price you're asking someone to pay that's the stumbling block. Thinking about what it is? Reconciling it? Showing what it'll recoup?

Good discipline.

## 55. A thoughtful buffer

Full days and dance cards are the essential lot of proactive, progressive do-ers. And our electronic calendars will let us schedule things down to one minute increments, so we have the enablement mechanisms to map and eke boatloads from every 24 hour lap. And “waste” of any sort lives on the minimise list (or should) for all. But building in some extra for safe? A vacant, potentially redundant white space in the diary, not crammed with “must do”, but open to “might need for”? A bit of extra, there if things don't go according to the time map? Heaven forbid, to think and imagine and plan?

Discipline is building appropriate buffers into your days, projects and critical meetings, to allow for inevitable curve balls, left fields and dynamic forces.

So answer yourself this.

**The long list of stuff on my action plan for today... have I rostered sufficient buffer time should things get messy? And if something on the list had to give (diarised elsewhere, delegated, downsized or just dumped?), might I use the buffer time that would create to better effect for something else?**

Building 6 hours of buffer time in each day probably isn't optimising things, but creating a little breathing room, space for fixes, for calibration or for reimagining?

Good discipline.

## 56. Values enlivened

Those four, five or seven words on the “about us” page of the website, displayed neatly in the entrance foyer, given a nod in the annual report... how alive are they? If I watched you and your team operate for a few weeks, doing good work, navigating lumpy bits, interacting with others, would I have half a chance of guessing them correctly? Can I see these things, your values, manifest day in and out, guiding your decisions and actions, differentiating you from others chasing the same set of silverware?

Discipline is bringing your values to life all the time.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s an action on the to-do list where I could conduct myself in a range of ways carrying the task out... but that I’ll consciously put one or more of our core values into how I do it?**

What you value. What you say you value. What you show you value. That’s what those values words are. If they’re honest, value them.

Good discipline.

## 57. State of your art

Discipline is a fundamentally solo pursuit that demands head-down focus and introspection. So every so often, when you pull your head up for air, you might find things around you have moved. The bar on what you thought “good” looked like got upped. The cutting edge and contemporary migrated down the line. The standard you measured yourself against, it looks different. Google “Leading practices in (your art)”, “Innovative new approaches to (your art)”, “Fresh examples of (your art)” every so often.

Discipline is keeping an eye on the state of your art to calibrate your own practices accordingly.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s something I’ve been doing awhile, that, by the standards of 3 years back, is pretty good... but I’ve not really checked in of late to see where my approach sits versus “world’s best”?**

You might not want to be leading edge, or you might decide the way the pack is heading isn’t right for you. But to know the level others are resetting their expectations for?

Good discipline.

## 58. DIFOTIS

It means “Delivered in full, on time, in spec(ification)”.

What you said you’d do, when you said you’d do it, how you said it would be done. The RSVP delivered before closing date. The call back you make after you hit the “can I call you back” prompt on your ringing smartphone. The feedback session you promised your team member. The 6-month client review it says in your services menu comes with their silver tier package of benefits. The debriefs and replanning conversations you committed to having nailed by April 1.

Discipline is delivering in full, on time, in spec.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s a promise I’ve made to someone, that comes due when the clock strikes 12 tonight (or by Friday, or by month end), that I’m tempted to let slide a little... but I won’t?**

DIFOTIS is a binary metric – you do, or you don’t. No ifs, buts or candy nuts. And while shades of grey, realistic prioritisation and the need for some flexibility might be ok in lots of scenarios, where it’s possible to DIFOTIS?

Good discipline.

# 59. Linking lessons

Yesterday taught you something. Today gives you an avenue to reflect and apply it. Tomorrow offers a chance to assess its impact and refine it for better. So, one experience, three time points to connect with it, and a better future position to do it again from. We get stuff burned in our brain by repeated instruction, time-and-time-again stuff. But with just a modicum of conscious effort, even once a day, to pick up the learning nugget (or fertiliser) from a scan of yesterday? It's your DeLorean into the future, a wagon you can rail and ride to improvement.

Discipline is learning from the past to apply to the present and better in the future.

So answer yourself this.

**Yesterday... what's one simple thing I learned from my endeavours... that I can apply to something specific I'm working on today... that I can then physically diarise a review moment sometime in the near future to review how it went (and what can be bettered again?)**

One learning from yesterday, applied to one scenario today, reviewed and calibrated at one point tomorrow. So clean. So clear. So effective. So rare.

Good discipline.

## 60. Tare weight

If you've ever used electric scales for cooking, when you measure an ingredient, you put the empty bowl on the scales, then press a button called "Tare". It zeros the scales, taking into account (and subtracting) the weight of the empty vessel, or the "tare weight". Then you'll only be weighing whatever you put into the bowl on the scales. Re-zeroing every time you empty the bowl, to ensure you're not overweighing, overaccounting, overestimating or overcharging. Writing off background noise, infrastructure costs and "history", because what really counts is what you're about to put in the bowl afresh.

Discipline is pressing "tare" at the start of each day, each new project, each sales call, each opportunity you have to create and deliver value anew.

So answer yourself this.

**Before I jump into fresh value creation today, what can I do to mentally "zero" the background noise, the stuff that otherwise threatens to weigh me down and distract me from the main game?**

Of course the vessel has weight, and to "tare" your day doesn't mean you don't have to carry the burden of all the peripheral tuff needed to do your work. But mentally sinking that cost ("it's paid, forget it"), putting it aside and starting the bowl filling from scratch?

Good discipline.



# 61. Numbers

Each role and enterprise has them. Numerical markers of health, performance or purposefulness. Maybe they're about sales and margins and cost containment. Maybe they're about activity levels and efficiencies and people going home well. Maybe they're about attraction or retention or engagement or effective deployment. Maybe there are two or three that sit above the others in terms of importance and impact and so your focus. Maybe it's an index, or percentage, or the ratio of a few bundled together.

Discipline is knowing the most important numbers.

So answer yourself this.

**What's the critical number, or numbers, I'd benefit from having my finger on the pulse of today?**

Beware the sirens lure of one-off numbers – they are generally snapshots there and gone. It's the trends, the patterns, the unfolding trajectory that should really hold your interest.

Good discipline.

## 62. Bringing in the pros

I can change a light globe and a tap washer, but I'm not skilled or qualified to mount a TV antenna on the roof or plumb a laundry. I could certainly try (there are enough YouTube videos out there, it might save me money, and I don't lack unjustified self-confidence...) But the costs of getting it wrong are really high, the imagined savings are likely a fallacy, the opportunity cost I'm paying by not spending time on stuff I can do well is silly, and... there are others for whom this is bread and butter.

Discipline is bringing in the pros when you need them and when they'll add more value than they'll cost.

So answer yourself this.

**What's something in my business that needs doing well, that I've ummed and ahed about having a crack at myself, that I'm really not the best person to try it, that I really should get a pro to sort out (because the end result will more than justify the investment)?**

Employing the skills of others for a cost-rationalised purpose is almost always the end result of failed ham fisted first attempts when you know you're out of your depth – why not do it earlier than later?

Good discipline.

## 63. Percolate

French Press coffee needs time to brew in the beaker before you plunge it. Tea needs to steep for the flavours and aromas to adequately fill your cup. A good casserole should bubble away gently in the Crock Pot while you're at work on a winters day. Red wine should breathe first. Some things need to sit, to steep, to seep, to slowly unveil their nuances to you. Ideas. Suggestions. Requests. New insights. Different pathway options. Stuff that you'll interpret better letting it sit a little while before moving on it.

Discipline is giving sufficient time to let an idea or perspective percolate in your mind long enough to reveal up and down sides before you make a critical decision with it.

So answer yourself this.

**Something I've just had suggested to me, or thought of myself... a different way, that I've already got a knee-jerk action path forming in my head about... how about I let it percolate a day or two before making the big call?**

Don't confuse percolate with procrastinate (at some point, the tea has steeped and just gets cold and bitter if you leave it longer). Just long enough to connect some dots, and see it from a few different angles.

Good discipline.

## 64. Scroll

One of the consequences of our eerie algorithm-arranged lives, of our perceptions of time poverty and that heavy sense of choice bombardment, is that we're increasingly inspired to take the "chef suggestion" or the "feed me" menu. "We trust them, they're the experts, they'll know what we want", I don't have the time or inclination to think". So we don't move beyond page one of our Google Search Results (heck, do you even go down to item #5?). Our newsfeeds increasingly fill with "stuff we seem to like reading", the opinions we subject ourselves to become unipolar, and the range of choices we let in narrows. Which feels efficient, but...

Discipline is continually opening up what you're exposed to by scrolling a little more and seeking out diverse inputs to challenge your assumptions.

So answer yourself this.

**Rather than "the regular feed" I consume each day, what about I search a little more widely for something that'll give me a different flavour, a different feel, a different vantage point?**

A scroll beyond "the regular" might inspire you to stay right where you are with the perspectives you already have. That's OK too. You tested your comfort zone?

Good discipline.

# 65. Remember

Quietly, individually, respectfully.

(A note for ANZAC day, and a practice worth applying every so often to all those who've gone before you to help give you what you enjoy today).



## 66. Grinding

Some days, it flows, easy. Some days, it's a joy, a pleasure to lose yourself in your craft, building, delivering, supporting and serving. Some days, inspiration unveils and stuff synthesises smoothly and you find yourself producing prolifically like a polished pro. And then some days? Some days, it's like gloopy mud. Like nothing's connecting. Like your mojo and momentum got a 2-for-1 deal on the last bus out of town and you're left on the bench on your Pat Malone. And whether your challenge is to fill a blank page or execute a populated one, it just looks, feels and is hard.

Discipline is grinding, getting on with it, regardless, to get the important work done.

So answer yourself this.

**That thing that's been sitting there, intimidating, unappetising, on the to-do list for a while, waiting for me to be struck by inspiration or energy to knock it over... why don't I just grind through it today?**

So it hurts, and you sure hope all days aren't like this. But if it's important, and it'd be better off your plate than building and festering there longer? Get it done.

Good discipline.

## 67. Criteria

When confronted with a choice, how do you select between the different options? Is it the first one that presents? The easiest, quickest or cheapest? The one that looks like it'll stand time's tests better? Is it about the feeling in your gut or a sense of YOLO whimsy or the status you feel a particular path will stamp you with? Is it about goal attainment, or values demonstration, or maximising upside for more, or stealing further ahead of the pack? Do you even know why you're leaning towards the path you're preferring?

Discipline is applying a set of criteria to important decisions – criteria that are aligned with the things most important to you.

So answer yourself this.

**For an important call I need to make where there are a few different options... what are the 2 or 3 most important criteria I need to judge this decision against?**

The diversity of your decisions won't allow a single criteria checklist, but the act of asking yourself for every decision "am I clear on the MOST important criteria to make this by?"

Good discipline.

## 68. Better

Not everything. Not by extreme degrees. Not to an unreachable or unsustainable standard. But on something? By a small amount? An aspect, a dimension, a component or step? Are there elements of your work that can be bettered? And would that betterment have positive implications for you or others? And can you see one imperfect piece of that work, one tiny part, that with thought, care and a little effort, could be bettered by a degree, a minute, a second, when you carry it out today?

Discipline is seeking out “better” every single day.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s one thing I’m planning to do today, that I’ve done before, that if I did it better than last time would have positive upsides, that I can try doing just a fraction better?**

Better means learning, means growing, means resetting the standard just that fraction higher. And giving yourself a higher foundation to build atop tomorrow?

Good discipline.



## 69. Early indicators

They plant rose bushes at the end of vineyard rows to let vignerons know if a disease strike is on its way. The roses pick it up early. They took canaries down coal mines back in the day as a heads up for noxious gases. The canaries picked it up early. The refrigerator has an alarm that sounds when you leave the door open too long, letting you know that defrosting and spoilage is coming. The door picks it up early. We have regular customer check-in chats to get a feel for the temperature and trajectory of the relationship. The proactive call picks it up early.

Discipline is putting in place, and listening to, early warning indicators that alert you to, and help you avoid preventable problems.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one thing we've implemented to give us the earliest possible indicator about the health of, or looming danger to, a key element of our business (and what's it telling us today?)**

This one's trickier than most disciplines – takes real thought to figure out how to give yourself “Danger Will Robinson!” early alerts. But the time spent doing exactly that?

Good discipline.

## 70. Within

I heard a terrific interview with actor Ethan Hawke the other day, talking about the importance of “*servicing your craft, not waiting for it to serve you*”. His point was that if you go into your work with the express intent of achieving fame, success and its many trappings, you’ll be sorely disappointed and invariably won’t deliver work of real connection and quality. Focus on the craft though, on doing it well for your intrinsic sense of pride, and less on what it might give rise to? The output will be better. Find the rewards within, not by waiting for standing ovations as your inspiration to keep going.

Discipline is doing work that gratifies you for the work itself, not waiting for the spoils or plaudits to please you.

So answer yourself this.

**If they don’t cheer me on today, if they don’t fete me with attaboys or throw roses at my feet, where within the work can I find a sense of gratification and accomplishment, just for me?**

The trappings are lovely. The equitable quid pro quo for doing the work is fair. Few abhor plaudits. But focusing on doing work for the rewards found *inside* the work?

Good discipline.

# 71. Alarm

One of the great derailers of a well mapped day is getting lost in flow, deep in discussion or thought, and looking up at the clock and realising you've gone over (and now something else is paying the time price). Pencilling activities in the diary is important, and being thoughtful and realistic about necessary buffer time or gaps between meetings is smart, but how to catch yourself in the moment when things are starting to get a bit tight? Try that alarm function on your smartphone.

Discipline is setting in place alarms and alerts to help you stay on track to get the things done you'd planned to.

So answer yourself this.

**A meeting or activity I'm in today, that I've allowed a fair time aliquot (but I know might be at risk of going over if I'm not careful)... can I set an alarm to alert me to when I need to pull up stumps?**

There are always cases for going longer than planned, including deepening client relationships or leveraging the momentum of flow. But alarms that stop you from inadvertently abandoning a smartly framed calendar?

Good discipline.

## 72. Effective

When solving a problem or working to achieve a goal or collaborating with a group to progress an idea, there are often lots of paths you can take. The creative path, the fast path, the engaging path, the alternative path, the illuminating path, the differentiating path, the high moral ground path, the clever clogs path... but we don't always choose the most effective path. The bit that gets you from A to B most certainly, most likely. It might be less fancy than smartly thought-out options. It might mean sacrificing bells and whistles or muting the bright colours of the glitzy version you'd dreamed about. It might even mean "less than ideal". But if it works?

Discipline is staying focused on effective.

So answer yourself this.

**Something I've been working on a really bright, colourful, intelligent fix for, or trying to tick every box on the project desirability list... what at the core will it take to just get it done effectively (and what can I do to progress that today)?**

There's that old quote – "you can be *right*, or you can be *effective*". Maybe you can be both. But which one is more important?

Good discipline.

## 73. Unassuming

Do you ever leap to conclusions? Make judgment calls too early, before you're armed with enough important information? Do you ever formulate an answer before the question has been adequately articulated, or come to a conversation pre-armed with ready-to-rumble (but par-baked) thoughts, conceptions or proposed pathways to lay out? You wouldn't be Robinson Crusoe. It's fair to say making or leaping to assumptions creates plenty of trip hazards to understanding and progress.

Discipline is regularly checking you're not operating with a set of inaccurate assumptions.

So answer yourself this.

**A conversation I'm heading into today, where I think I've got the landscape sussed, the backstory, the perspectives, the problem and the way out... how about I test my assumptions with a smart question or two?**

It's why new team members often kick early goals where their experienced tenured colleagues are floundering – they're not afraid of asking the “dumb question”, the stuff everyone else thinks they know (but fail to appreciate it changed awhile back). Checking in?

Good discipline.

## 74. Learn

I spent a few hours in a seminar this week, as a participant, being exposed to models and insights and tips about leading teams effectively. When you sit in PD events, you can leave it at that – participating. Maybe let stuff wash over you in the hope some seeps in via osmosis. Or you can be active, go deeper. Pay close attention. Consider the logic. Think about the fodder in the context of your work, your challenges, your goals. Apply the thinking, see what it drives you to realise, plan to put it into play tomorrow. Make the conscious choice to learn. And the best part is, you don't even need a seminar to approach that choice junction.

Discipline is choosing to learn.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one thing I can think harder about, study, review, consider deeply, and overlay onto something practical happening in my world, that will enable me to learn something?**

Since before we were all born, it's never been about more material, more classes, more teachers, more topics. It's all there, right in front of you. It's just a choice. Making the choice every single day whenever and wherever you can?

Good discipline.

# 75. Bravery

Matt Damon, playing Benjamin Mee in *We bought a Zoo*, said to his son “All you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it.” Ask anyone that ever stepped out of the comfort of the corporate nest to go it on their own, who took that deepest of breaths, momentarily ignored those predictable inner voices screaming “don’t do it, you fool!”, and just leapt. Ask any of them (even the ones that went back later). None regret it. Not a one. Sales professionals find and apply it daily. Entrepreneurs. Leaders. Change makers. Anyone committed to facing the unknown without a head lamp and moving forward.

Discipline is summoning and applying just a little bravery, every single day.

So answer yourself this.

**What’s one thing I’m quietly packing my dacks about, that could be amazing (but it’s scary)... what if I mustered just a pinch of brave, just momentarily, and did one thing to move forward?**

Brave is just a seed. In most folk, it starts tiny. But plant it, do something with it, and then again? Gets bigger. Gets easier. And catches on.

Good discipline.

## 76. Recover

After a jog (and I'm being generous with that descriptor), my Garmin watch not only tells me my pace, time, heart rate average, cadence and distance covered, it also gives me a recovery time. The time it'll likely take my body to get over the (mild) exercise regime I've put it through. Rest – let your body heal, get cherry ripe – and then lace the sneakers again. The aspiring high performer generally wants to race from one mountain top to the next, notching the belt as frequently and fast as possible. But to be sustainable? For the next effort to have the requisite energy, re-kindled motivation and bank of stamina to smash it?

Discipline is putting in the recovery time between big bursts.

So answer yourself this.

**What am I burnt out from, crispy fried, where I've been busting my backside hard awhile and just feel cooked... what if I gifted my future efforts a little recovery time from that particular activity?**

Recovery time doesn't mean laying on the couch. The footy players take team walks together in the cold ocean the morning after a hard game. Figuring out what an appropriate recovery regime might involve for you and your sustained efforts?

Good discipline.



# 77. Perspective

How we feel about things (and the actions we subsequently take) is framed by our perceptions. The invariably-biased, life-influenced, vantage-point-limited views we have of situations that are never the complete picture, just one side of an apeirogon, the “shape of infinite faces”. The skill and practice of remembering this, and then asking a smart self-directed question, and then attempting to stand in the shoes or wear the spectacles of another, to shift and extend that view just a bit, is a means to cross the limits of the paradigm we work from.

Discipline is considering perspectives beyond your own to form a more balanced view before deciding and acting.

So answer yourself this.

**Where am I butting heads with another, where I might benefit from taking a step back and up, and have a go at seeing things I'm currently not, from where they might be coming from?**

Frustration and disappointment so often bubble out of others not seeing things from our point of view. Maybe flipping that coin and having a harder think and taking another look from closer to where they're perhaps coming from?

Good discipline.

## 78. Decision revision

When was the last time you looked at some of your decisions in the rear view? Did the big ones you made these past 3 years pan out well for you or others? Which ones, with the benefit of looking back, were bang on the money (and why)? Which ones gave you a wonky result where, as you sift through the rationale, you can see how and why that outcome might've been somewhat predictable? Which ones delivered a poor outcome, but critical reflection shows that you simply made the best decision you could with the information you had? Which ones were perhaps decisions you made too quickly, or too slowly, or too consultatively, or too insularly?

Discipline is investing time to revise the big decisions you've made, to see what you can learn, in order to improve the next wave of choices you'll face.

So answer yourself this.

**What are 2 or 3 really big business decisions I've made these past 2-3 years, and with the benefit of what I know now, how would I rate them and what can I learn from them?**

Be critical in your review (you won't learn if you gloss over it), even bring someone else in to ask you a few harder, probing questions about the decision making process and rationale. There's nothing to be lost by doing it, and so much to gain.

Good discipline.

## 79. Facetime

A friend who'd been Zooming with her new interstate team most of last year finally got the chance to get face-to-face with them. What took her aback was the realisation of how little she'd gotten to know these people in a virtual relationship. The differences and nuances in their affect, the little snippets of their stories, views and personalities she got to hear face-to-face that just never made it into a hyper-efficient digital discussion. She said how surprised she was that "*they weren't quite the same in the flesh as I'd gotten to know them in 2D*". Zoom is great, but facetime? Actual physically proximate time together, over coffee, in the same room, talking and interacting and learning and collaborating?

Discipline is prioritising some regular facetime with your community of customers, colleagues, collaborators and chain of suppliers.

So answer yourself this.

**Who do I need to book a real-life, face-to-face conversation with, to deepen or nurture or build the relationship with, rather than just another email, phone call or Zoom?**

Of course there are geographic, time and Covid-enforced restrictions to this. But where you can do it, with whomever you're able to, for the value of in-the-flesh human interactions?

Good discipline.

## 80. Hone

It's a great word. It can be a verb – “to hone ones skills” means to sharpen them, refine them, make them ever better, clearer, more focused and thus more impactful on the task you set them. Or it can be a noun – a “hone” is a whetstone, particularly one used to sharpen razors. Perfecting, ever-bettering your approach, your efforts, over time, by putting yourself in situations where your rough or blunt edges will be smoothed and focused.

Discipline is continually honing your efforts and energies in the direction of your goals.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one line item on this week's plan where honing my attention, focus or efforts will likely pay longer term dividends?**

Even super sharp blades blunt with time. So honing is a lifelong commitment. But if the skill you're applying it to is important for the attainment of your goals?

Good discipline.

# 81. Practice

Remember how you got your times tables down pat? How you gradually improved the number of times you got the ball through the ring, sticks or onto the stumps? How your presentations in front of crowds started feeling less angsty and more free-flowing? How having the tough conversations became slightly less daunting even though they're still hard? The practice of practice – rehearsal, simulation, drilling, role playing – built your proficiency in every skill you apply with a measure of confidence and competence today. Investing time off the field to play around with the things you'll be required to do to the best of your ability on the field.

Discipline is practicing your professional craft to improve it and keep it sharp.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one thing I can do today that'll help me practice a skill I want to get better at?**

Practice doesn't all have to be done in a simulator box. You can practice in the field, in real conversations and settings. But consciously going through a process over and over again with a view to refining it to next level?

Good discipline.

## 82. De-conclude

The practical problem solver seeking to add value as fast as they can is apt to gather data points, add one and one and one, conclude that the insight is three, then design or suggest a fix accordingly. We don't tend to slowly manifest or meander to conclusions though. We jump to them. Leap to them. Land on them (sometimes from a great height, without a parachute softening the blow). And sometimes that's fine. But sometimes, it's a barrier to deeper understanding. To investing the time, without judgement, prejudice or bias, to really let the scenario seep into all the nooks and crannies of your head, where easy-to-miss insights and appreciations might grow and illuminate.

Discipline is being cautious about desires to leap, jump or race to conclusions, and taking a little longer to more deeply understand what's happening before judging.

So answer yourself this.

**What's a matter I'm rapidly forming a conclusion about, and rather than "leap", could I take a little longer, consider it from a different set of angles, to inform me more fully before I lock in a judgment?**

While de-conclude isn't a real word, the maturity to step back and uncouple yourself from fast-arrived-at conclusions every so often, to test your assumptions and let more information shape your view?

Good discipline.

## 83. Brand

Some define brand as “*what others say and think about you when you’re not in the room*”. The resonant image or perceptions of you, your enterprise, your products or services, that follows or precedes you, that defines you in the minds of others. It’s a combination of what you do and don’t do, how you portray yourselves and how you make people feel. We hire people to help us shape, define or refine our brands, crafting brand stories and brand assets to hopefully lead others to think about us the way we’d like them to. Likely the biggest impactor on brand is the affect, attitudes and actions of the humans we align beneath the brand, to show we’re a certain kind of team.

Discipline is continuously thinking, mapping and acting with brand in mind.

So answer yourself this.

**Am I really clear on the hallmarks of the brand we’re trying to etch into the minds of our target audience, and what’s one thing I can do today to show that it’s real, valuable and “me”?**

If you’re scratching your head thinking brand is a family of logos and slide deck template your marketing department demands you use, start here – values. What values does your business strive to embody and benefit others via? Linking brand with values?

Good discipline.

## 84. Try

While a lot of motivational memery has been developed around a small green Lucas Films Jedi Master's pithy one liner, "Do or do not. There is no try", here's the stark reality. It's all you've got, trying. You can "try and try again". You can, as Samuel Becket said, "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." The crystal ball and time machine business sector isn't garnering a lot of love from Wall Street, because the outcome of the very next thing you have a crack at on your to-do list? It's just unknowable in advance (no matter the pedigree of consistency your prior results possess). So attempting? Again?

Discipline is trying afresh, anew, again, and learning from what it gives you for the next try.

So answer yourself this.

**What's a metaphorical cliff ledge (or kerb) I've been reticent about stepping off – a task I don't know will work (but deep down, wonder if it might just be a great step), that I can summon the gumption to try it today?**

In rugby, the scoring term "try" originates from the fact that grounding the ball behind the line earned you a "try at goal" (via a kick). Today, the try is worth more than the conversion. Finding something worth a try?

Good discipline.



## 85. Bother

Often presents as “*I can’t be bothered*”, or “*why bother?*”  
The more passive forms, “*if it’s not too much bother*” and “*sorry to bother you*”. It sort of means trouble. To trouble someone or something, or endure troubles foisted on you. It’s associated with change, effort, energy, activity or action. Every parent on the planet has less hair as a result of an apathetic child laying on their bed after being asked to tidy their room or do their homework, moaning “*I can’t be...*” It’s infuriating because the fix is never about a lack of skill, tools, time or means. It’s just effort.

Discipline is bothering to do the impactful stuff that others seemingly can’t be bothered doing.

So answer yourself this.

**What on the list of “stuff that’ll help us”, that others (myself included) simply haven’t been bothered to do yet... that I could?**

When requests for a helping hand come, receiving the response of “*it’s no bother*” accompanied by an aligned action is music to the ears of any client, colleague or collaborator. And doing what it takes to occupy that musician position?

Good discipline.

## 86. Control

Unnecessary angst builds up when we spend our time worrying about the things beyond our control. But the stresses also build when there are things within our control that we don't pay enough attention to and they spiral out of control. Control in a professional context doesn't mean rule with an iron fist or set rigid train tracks for things to follow. It means to actively manage any evolving situation by keeping an eye on things and intervening (or putting the mechanisms in place) to bring things back to within acceptable parameters. Adjusting, calibrating, changing gears, accommodating changing circumstances while maintaining progress. One eye on the prize, one on the tiller.

Discipline is controlling the controllables that matter most to your goal attainment.

So answer yourself this.

**What's one thing I've let meander outside the desirable lane, that I need to be moving forward smoothly, that I can exercise some smart effective control over today?**

We employ control groups in experiments – it helps us determine whether any differences are due to interventions or just “luck”. Continually checking whether your successes and failures are happening for clear reasons versus randomness?

Good discipline.

## 87. You promised

It's a pretty big thing, to make a promise. "I give you my word". The closest thing we have to an ironclad moral contract. "I promise I'll..." Get you an outcome. Give you my best. Look into it. Sort things out. Find out what's going on. Make good on this. Be there for you always. Promises are easy enough to make. But know that they are a star dropper you stake deeply in the mind of another, a standards marker that won't easily be removed. It sets in place a binary dynamic – you will either fulfill it, or you won't, and you'll be judged accordingly. So make them with great thought and care. And if you make one?

Discipline is delivering on your promises, and promising only what you're committed to delivering on.

So answer yourself this.

**Who have I made a promise to, that I haven't yet fulfilled, that I can chart or make progress a few steps closer to the point of promise delivery today?**

We can certainly seek out and identify those more analogue "things that hold a lot of promise" to fill our opportunities buckets. But only staking your reputation via a promise on the sure things you'll serve up?

Good discipline.

## 88. Do unto your business

At a coffee with a colleague recently, they said “the stuff I help clients with, I need to take some time to do that stuff for my own business”. Nassim Taleb, the bloke that coined the term “black swan events”, calls this phenomenon “domain specificity”. That we enthusiastically put our valuable talents out into the world for others, but become blinkered and neglect to put them to work in our own backyard. The web designer whose site hasn't been updated in yonks. The accountant that's late on their own BAS. The strategic planning facilitator whose own strategic plan is... you get it.

Discipline is taking the time to drink the medicine you help others with, for your own sustained health and for your ability to keep ministering sustainably.

So answer yourself this.

**What's something I do that's really valuable to others, that helps them be better, that I haven't been paying enough attention to for myself (and so today I'll ...)?**

It's a confronting way to consider just how valuable what you're putting out into the world really is, if you can't be bothered making time to pour it on your own plate. Checking in on that and adjusting accordingly?

Good discipline.

## 89. Pleasant distractions

We stick air pods in our ears when we go for a run, not for the fashion statement they make, but for the bangers they pipe to take our minds off the building pain and desire to quit. We put nice pictures of our kids and landscapes and statues of cows in our office, not because we forget what they look like, but because it gives us a pleasant change of mental pace and emotion, something to smile about as we do the heavy lifting on report writing. We whistle while we work (well, some of us do). We open a bottle and pass the cheese and Jatz around at Board meetings (don't look at me like that). We stick TVs on the ceiling above the dentist's chair. We do these things as a means to make the important-but-painful work more pleasant and bearable. That lets us sustain it, and keeps us at the wheel to forge progress.

Discipline is putting in place the pleasant struts and lightening distractions to help you hold your nose on the grindstone longer.

So answer yourself this.

**Something I've got to tackle that's a little ugly, but really important... what can I do to make it that tiny bit more pleasant, something to distract me from the desire to quit?**

You have to do these difficult, sometimes unpleasant and painful tasks anyway, right? The Spotify playlist doesn't shorten or remove them. But if you're less inclined to procrastinate on them, more inclined to keep doing them for longer, for better?

Good discipline.

# 90. Document

Moons ago, when I was a drug rep, we had to write notes on customer cards after each doctor visit, documenting what we discussed, any customer responses, any “small talk” cues useful for next time, and the call to action we’d committed to. If I left writing these notes until the end of the day, I’d remember probably 95% of it. If I left the notes until the end of the week, I remembered maybe 60%. With more time, less recall. Today I aim for email follow-ups after all meetings within 24 hours (even if they’re just quick thanks-see-you-soon). I push to get my chicken scratch workshop butchers paper notes translated into a summarised product within 24 – 48 hours, even in busy stretches. The truth is, the longer I leave it, the more is lost.

Discipline is writing it down, capturing it, leaving a trail that you can go back to later.

So answer yourself this.

**Is there something I’ve been building, realising, or developing an understanding of, that’s in my head right now, but that I really should document before the detail and nuance gets lost?**

Everyone that’s been on the planet long enough has built a remarkable portfolio of experiences, learnings and mineable moments. Only a few turn that portfolio into something tangible that’s able to be reviewed, learned from and then built on. Portfolio documenting?

Good discipline.

# 91. Lunge

Interviewing some leading Agronomists the other day, I asked, beyond technical competence, what it takes to stand out from the pack and earn the position of “most trusted advisor” in the minds of farmer clients. One said *“there are moments you’ve just got to put in. Pressure periods, where the need is immediate, it could be 10pm at night or 4:30am, and they need something, and so you just have to go, put in, and help them out.”* That what so often sorts wheat from chaff, the highly valued and trusted from the also-rans, is an unquestioning willingness to lunge, sprint, drop everything else and bend your knees, brace your back and lift when the moment asks. Intense, valuable bursts.

Discipline is putting in when you need to put in, more than can rightfully be asked, to get the outcome you’re committed to.

So answer yourself this.

**If VIP # 1 or 28 called late tonight and said “I need your help right now”, am I ready (and keen as mustard) to lend that hand? (And is there anything I can do to help them further before it gets to that moment?)**

A lunge is that late burst of effort, drawing on the reserves to leave nothing in the tank and finish having given more than the rest. Using more of what’s in the tank to help those that trust you?

Good discipline.

## 92. ...Tentative?

When sent an e-invitation to attend a meeting, do you ever click the “tentative” button? The “maybe” button when asked via Facebook? Here’s what you might mean by that. *“I’d like to attend, just let me confirm that it’s possible for me to do so.”* Here’s what some (most) recipients actually hear and feel. *“Mmmm. Curious. It’s potentially worth a Plan B placeholder in case I’m at a loose end, but if something better / more important / interesting comes along between now and then (or I just can’t be bothered on the day), you won’t see me for dust.”* A fence-sitting non-committal message that tells others you’re half expecting a superior offer that’ll render their event less worthy of your attendance. This of course makes it challenging for them to firm *their* plans. Is that the brand you want preceding you?

Discipline is making choices, yes or no, left or right, committing, reconciling and paying the opportunity costs, and following through.

So answer yourself this.

**What have I been unclear in my position about, vacillating, fence-sitting, fuzzy, sending a confusing and difficult-to-use message about, that I can shore up today and take away ambiguity.**

*“But something more important MIGHT present!”*

Sure! Stuff changes. Hierarchies of importance are real. Flexibility is necessary. But sending a response that’s fundamentally unreliable? The alternative is the practice of choosing clearly, and then being reliable.

Good discipline.



## 93. Footprints

We're being encouraged to think more about our carbon footprint – how much greenhouse gas your life creates. I was just reading about our water footprint – how much fresh water a human life requires (including what's needed to make the products you use or consume). The aim, for a more sustainable non-depleting existence, is to reduce both of these to the smallest possible number. Shrinking “waste” footprints. But there are footprints, lasting impacts, you might think about maximising. Your enthusiasm footprint – how many people you're infecting with a can-do, have-a-go attitude. Your service footprint – how many folk you've given a leg-up, supported and helped to “better” (and maybe inspired them to do the same). Your creative footprint – the extent to which you've developed and delivered art, innovation or ideas manifested to be enjoyed by more.

Discipline is consciously considering and acting on the footprints you should minimise and which you should stamp around in size 14's to expand.

So answer yourself this.

**Where am I not yet leaving enough of a positive lasting impact on the world that I can plan to expand, not for vainglory, but for what it'll do for others and the ripple effect it might have?**

There's that sign you see in national parks, “*Take only memories, leave only footprints.*” The latter can be destructive, trampling and ruining the space for the next folk. Or they can leave a light but clear trail for others to follow to better.

Good discipline.

## 94. Draw the line

All good, bad and indifferent things must come to an end of sorts. Moments where stumps gets called, new paths get turned onto, or a measuring stick is produced to assess whether or not you got what you wanted from an endeavour. The bell clanging to pre-empt “last drinks!”. The shot clock winding down from 24 seconds. A 12-month contract closing as EOFY approaches. The facilitator barking that you’ve got 2 minutes before all come back to a single conversation to hear what the group came up with. Setting the expectation with the crew that soon, at a clearly defined interval ahead, we’ll be pausing, assessing or rethinking.

Discipline is giving your VIPs a clear signal that change is ahead (so get ready and do what needs doing beforehand).

So answer yourself this.

**What’s something I know is ahead, where change is inevitable, that I should flag with the concerned parties to give them opportunity to ready in ways that might benefit all?**

Taking that medicine, here’s the heads up that, in just over a week’s time, come Edition 100, **The Discipline Factory** will be closing the flues on its furnaces and taking a moment to remodel its value proposition. The shift isn’t done yet, but if you’ve not yet extracted some value from the last 94 days worth of these daily pep, poke and point talks, know that you’ve got a handful to go. You’re here anyway. Why not make ‘em count? (We’ve saved a big 6 ‘til last... stick around a little longer...)

Good discipline.

# 95. No

The default response of the initiators, the doers that catalyse and drive change with positivity and infectious energy? That's a fat "yes". Bite off more than you can chew and all that jazz. Figure out the how as you go. That's what built these kilns you find yourself at, working to forge greater disciplines. But to have capacity for that? To hone focus, to deepen value delivered and the calibre of your contribution via intense, active workouts in a finite set of domains? That means saying "no". To lots. Lots and lots and lots. The easy-to-fire stuff. Distractions, irrelevants, annoyings, futiles. The bit-more-thought-required stuff. Interesting but non goal-aligned. Fun but fattening. Routine and easy (but ungrowable). And there's the hard-to-resist stuff. Old friends and habits without sufficient future value. Shiny stuff that lands on the lap but is outside your chosen lane. Cool and trendy but probably temporary sugar hits.

Discipline is saying no to anything that simply doesn't meet the criteria you've built for future vision realisation.

So answer yourself this.

**What will I say a deep, earnest "no" to today, for the right long term reasons?**

Super easy to say no to the wrong stuff. Easy for no to become a default to any future change requests. Saying no often (but not ever letting it be your default response, and instead asking yourself the clear hard question first?)

Good discipline.

## 96. Do it in public

Gyms stink. Not a fan. Sweaty, fungal, kinda-intimidating, lookit-my-new-lulu-lemon grunt and pose factories. But, for their myriad pitfalls, they work for lots, because sitting passively on the lat pulldown machine or standing on the treadmill not doing anything for half an hour just won't cut it. You're there. The oglers are watching you. Better put in, pull down and start panting. Giving up smoking or cutting down on Iced VoVos or having a Dry July? Put it out there for your friends, family and a crowd of onlookers to know about. Maybe they'll support you. More powerfully, you'll hold yourself on the hook, because you don't want to look like or feel like a failure in the eyes of others.

Discipline is supported by letting others know about a hard-but-important commitment you're making to yourself or others.

So answer yourself this.

**What's something positive but difficult I've been thinking of doing, that I really want to succeed at (but I'm half a chance of quitting early-ish if no-one knows I'm doing it), that I can broadcast to others today (and then, like the genie, it's out there, and un-re-bottleable)?**

When I get asked about writing these daily emails ("what... EVERY day?"), after "why would you do that?", the next question is "how do you manage the discipline to do that?" The answer is not about inherent self-discipline (promise I have no more than most, and possibly less). It's fuelled by the power of putting it out there, making a public commitment in front of a cohort I care about, and then letting an overcharged ego that refuses to look like a quitter do the rest. Finding ways to put your character traits, even flaws, to work for good?

Good discipline.

# 97. Stretch

I'm a runner. Ahahahahaha..... Well, I go for a sluggish jog most weekends. Parkrun on Saturday mornings, a terrific initiative, and in line with the "do it in public" discipline support idea, it's a great way to avoid quitting when things hurt. When it's over, I do one of two things. Stretch for 5-10 minutes. Or, more often, sit down for 45 minutes for a coffee with friends, getting cold while my muscles seize up. You can imagine which one sees me move more freely the rest of the weekend. Stretching is the practice of releasing the tension in muscles that have been working hard by bending yourself in the opposite direction. Standing up, flexing backwards and looking at the ceiling after you've been sitting at the desk too long. Letting your eyes meander out the window after staring at a screen for yonks. Doing something completely opposite to that which has tired you.

Discipline is stretching your practices in the opposite direction every so often to avoid cramps, fatigue and repetitive strain failures.

So answer yourself this.

**What have I been doing now for too long, that's tiring me, that's got me tense, that I'd benefit from briefly doing something in the complete opposite direction?**

If you've been grinding on analytics, try something creative. If you've been strategising for eons, get tactical. If you've been smiling at customers until your cheeks hurt, head back of house and help the warehouse team. Stretching in the professional setting is taking a moment to rebalance, recentre, relieve and then reset for the next run.

Good discipline.

## 98. Rest

I remember feeling overwhelmed when I first started watching Gary Vaynerchuck's "Daily Vee" videos a few years back, a reality show documenting the daily workload of a very driven entrepreneur, starting in the wee small hours and ending well after most have thrown it in. Who can sustain that? Granted, there are a very rare few history tells us didn't need much sleep and got lots done. So it was reassuring to see Gary V put out messages that he sleeps 6-8 hours each night. He makes the point over and over that, like any athlete wanting to reach and maintain peak performance for a sustained period, it's about using the time you're actually working really wisely and efficiently, and also being disciplined about taking the rest periods your body and brain need to stay fresh, healthy and en pointe.

Discipline is taking the rests when the rests are needed to perpetuate sustained quality performance.

So answer yourself this.

**Do I need a rest? From what? How will I make it happen? Sustainably?**

We can't all take Fridays off and start at midday Mondays. But a lot of us can turn devices off after 6. We can let folk know we're not available on the weekend for calls. We can take the walk at lunch rather than perusing emails while scarfing down a sandwich. And when the break is there, break. Keeping batteries charged by regular power-down-to-recharge processes?

Good discipline.

# 99. Both

This is the post I actually started **The Discipline Factory 2021** to write. I won't do the idea justice, but I think it's the single most difficult and probably greatest realisation I've had in fifteen years running my own professional services business. I held it off fleshing it out a little until Edition 99 because it's discombobulating, it's hard to express... and it's the answer you're after.

It deals with whether a leaders' focus should be strategically long-term obsessed, or whether it should be honing in on the tactically day-by-day exceptional.

It covers whether you should move quicker in capitalising on evolving market dynamics, or whether you should cautiously chew, digest, consider and carefully plan a brighter path than those rapid responders.

It talks to whether you should craft and curate a brand persona around your target audience's wants, needs and peccadillos, or whether you should just "do you", authentically, warts and all.

It's for overlaying on whether you should buy into broader market barneys and publicly put your moral stakes in the ground to advertise what you do and don't stand for, or whether you should let the crowd quibble with one another while you grab the ball and move forward beyond the noise.

It's on whether you should be open, generous and magnanimous in making and giving away as much value as you can, or being smart and squirrely in building quiet engines that scale longer-term value for your endeavours.

It's about collaborating versus going it alone.

About sticking to your proven knitting, or striking out innovatively, freshly.

About diversifying versus building consistency.

About asking versus directing.

About sprinting or slow trekking.

About leading or following.... (continue)

About the very next polar opposite choice you will see appear on your decision list today.

And the answer?

Discipline is knowing that the answer, without a DeLorean to show you the perfect answer in advance, is invariably, indubitably, inarguably, infinitely, **“both”**.

It's also knowing that at any given moment, you simply can't handle the magnitude of “both”.

And so it's figuring out a way to move forward positively, confidently, **anyway**.

So answer yourself this.

**Will the sun come up tomorrow regardless of whether I turn left or right, go quicker or slower, be brave or be cautious, try something different or hold tight to the known effective? And if it will, is there really a whole lot of benefit to letting myself feel like I'm drowning in a near impossible and perpetually ambiguous choice set?**

**(And so.....?)**

The ability to work and progress and lead in ambiguity. Maybe that's the pinnacle skill worth spending a lifetime sharpening at the discipline forge. Will things ever get less ambiguous? Will there always be a “but...”, an alternative that's not completely without merit? By my reckoning and the physics text books, there's “black”, there's “white”, and between those two absolute poles, there is an infinite spectrum of grey (not to mention the brighter hues). Should we continue to strive for true north and south binary peaks, absolute outcomes at the top of the pile? Or should we get comfortable zig zagging, blundering, navigating the ever-undulating sine waves of “in between”? Well... both.

To appreciate the impossibly perfect decision will elude you forever, but to keep moving forward anyway?

Good discipline.



# 100. Keep your feet

The next step... requires feet. Or wheels. Or hands. The means to move from where you are to where you want to be. If you're flat on your back out of puff, or you quit, or you broke, or you sat down for a bag of Burger Rings because they're not playing the game fairly and that kid over there called you a name... the next step will elude you. Remaining upright. Remaining viable. Staying present. Being there and able to take a step.

Whatever it takes to keep you in the game so you've got even the slightest chance to progress from wherever you are to somewhere better?

## **Discipline is doing that.**

Still on your feet, I see?  
Why not try this then?

Tomorrow morning, take a short walk back to Day 1 at The Discipline Factory. Back to "Your endeavour's Purpose (the Dream for Others)".  
Re-visit it.

## **Re.**

Review. Recalibrate. Reset. Replan. Rework. Recycle.  
Renew. Rethink. Reinvent. Refocus. Retrain. Restart.  
Repeat.

Re.

It means "again".

(And going "again"?)

THAT takes discipline.)

**Here's to yours.**

## There's the whistle!



Thank you for spending time in The Discipline Factory. I hope you mined more from it than you gave. And I hope you keep your eyes peeled for the next project (See? Rising behind the scaffold on the building site next door? We'll let you know when the curtain's ready to fall...)

Would **you** like support in developing and applying proven disciplines to achieve **your** professional goals or realise your organisation's Vision?

Maybe Troy Forrest can help.

Troy is the Managing Director of Strategy Road Pty Ltd, an Adelaide-based consulting, advisory and professional services enterprise dedicated to helping organisations, leaders and their teams develop, deploy and realise the desired upsides of smart strategy.

Troy is a leading facilitator of strategic and business planning processes, advisor on business growth, sales and CX improvement initiatives, and has coached and mentored over 1,000 senior leaders and customer-touching professionals.

Together with seasoned business advisor James McGill from Chatham Capital Exchange, Troy has created The Advisory Deck, a service for SME owners and organisational leaders that want the benefit of experienced counsel to help them make, implement and govern important strategic decisions. The Advisory Deck internet television series, featuring Troy and James interviewing business owners and providing insights into important strategy and leadership topics, is a free resource that can be viewed on YouTube.

Troy helps a number of organisations grow their sales by providing strategic and tactical communications and messaging support. Together with graphic designer Deb Trebilcock from Coalmine Canary, Troy has developed LexicoAesthetica, a copywriting and collateral design service specifically created to help organisations build winning tender, proposal and bid documents that employ effective language and compelling design aesthetics. (A very big thanks to Deb for her design aesthetics work on *this* book!)

Troy is also the creator and curator of The Swarm, an organic association of more than 25 independent consultants, advisors and professional service providers with expertise in a diverse range of business, government, personal and community support arenas.

Beyond supporting and learning from one another's expertise, The Swarm collaborate on mutual client projects and form a trusted referral network held together by a values-aligned approach to delivering above and beyond client expectations.

If you're a leader or driver of an enterprise, and you're tired of making decisions alone, or you see the value in bringing diverse, skilled and committed professionals and their valuable skills to your table, please get in touch for conversation with Troy.

**[www.strategyroad.com.au](http://www.strategyroad.com.au)**

**[troy@strategyroad.com.au](mailto:troy@strategyroad.com.au)**

**m +61 4 430 308 963**



