

HOW TO PERSEVERE THROUGH YOUR ACADEMIC STUDIES WITH EXCELLENCE

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Sadly, one of the most difficult, painful, and scary experiences students typically face is when they come face-to-face with course requirements. Whether we are looking at the course syllabus on the first day of class or facing a deadline on a major exam, term paper, or project, going to school can be daunting, oppressive, and overwhelming, emotionally, physically, or spiritually. The weightiness of the problems becomes even more arduous when we look around and see other students who seem to have it all together; they seem to succeed in whatever they attempt to do. We find ourselves, from time to time, asking "why?" "How is it possible for them to do so well?" Perhaps that leads some of us to experience an identity crisis, a growing unhappiness about who we are. We wish we were someone else, had a better upbringing, and perhaps raised by a family whose lifestyle and ideals were healthy, wholesome, and dedicated to loving us with our best interests at heart.

But for those of us who were raised in nurturing homes that addressed our whole needs with a passion for intellectual and moral excellence, we still find ourselves betraying what we have been taught and raised to become. We are faltering in our studies and as a result, when those times come when we are facing a fixed deadline to submit a term paper, a dreaded exam, or a project, the deep-seated anxiety ("*angst*") begins to emerge. Our pulse quickens when we think about what we have done and regret finds sobering expression. We have felt these feelings before but time and time again, we find ourselves failing to adequately prepare ourselves to conquer these assignments. We realize the issue is not capacity; we have the capacity. The issue is willingness or desire.

To be sure, the problem may not be whether we have the capacity or the willingness. Our struggle may not be fear or laziness. Instead, our problem may be distractions and diversions. Because of extra-curricular activities like sports, leisure activities like entertainment, and pleasure-seeking

activities such as those we find in relationships, our lives have become habituated for "vacations." As a result, diversions and distractions keep us from focusing upon what is most important. We do not mean to be distracted. Rather, it just happens. Some times the greatest enemy to persevering through our studies with excellence is not what is evil, but what is good. We have chosen some activity, some pursuit that is good, but is not the best. Afterwards, when faced with this deadline we perhaps shake our heads in grief, saying something like, "*Why have we killed time instead of making the most of it?!*" or "*Why can't I seem to learn from my past mistakes?!*" We throw up our hands, exasperated with ourselves, but only to find ourselves once again being distracted by what is not most important, enriching, or valuable to academic success.

What we do? When we fail to do well on a term paper, an exam, or a project, rather than accept responsibility, we have a tendency to...

Conjure feelings why we dislike the particular course.

Displace our responsibilities by blaming the professor or the academic bureaucracy.

Complain that the professor's instructions were not clear.

Add fuel to the "Eeyore" complex that is finding expression in our lives.

Ponder, plot, and scheme how we might be able to get out of this assignment. We put more thought into trying to find a way to get the grade without doing the work than by doing the work.

Wonder how we might best rational our failures to our parents, friends, or significant other.

Marginalize our giftedness, identity, and self-worth.

Daydream in an effort to avoid our responsibilities.

Lie to ourselves.

Allow apathy to gain a foothold in our lives.

Look for more diversions to avoid what we have done.

Put off our responsibilities thinking that this other goal is much more important, necessary, and vital.

Give it all up.

While indifference to our studies is perhaps the most extreme attitude to adopt, wreaking a pathway of personal destruction with long-term effects, many of us want to get ahead but do not know where to begin.

Well, in order for you to persevere through your studies instead of making up excuses or rationalizing your poor behavior, I would encourage you to instill the following seven principles. While this list is not exhaustive, I believe these seven principles are necessary:

First, recognize there will be always be people who are more and less intelligent than you are. Do not concern yourself with what other students can and cannot do. Comparing yourself to others is not a fruitful exercise of your energy, time, and resources. In fact, rather than comparing or even competing with other students, see how you might help them to get ahead. By helping others you will find that you are also helping yourself.

Second, be aware that when it comes to meeting course requirements, even in classes that seem impractical to you, there is a larger reason at stake, namely, becoming all that you can be. Consider, we all want a vehicle that performs brilliantly-with every part of the car functioning at 100%. Likewise, look at your course requirements as opportunities to assimilate the strengths, insights, and ideas into your person, using them as tools to better assess, evaluate, and foster benefits in the present experience, reflect upon and learn from the past, and anticipate potentialities from the future. In other words, think of learning as tools to help you get ahead in life. Some tools you will only use on rare occasion. Others tools you will use repeatedly. How incredible it is to have a wide array of tools to assist you in every day living in order to make the most out of your life.

Third, take seriously your course objectives as dictated on syllabus. After studying what those cognitive and affective course objectives are, commit yourself to not only meeting those goals, but also exceeding them! Visit with your professor and strategize how you might anticipate, meet, and exceed them in order to best glean from your professor and allow this course to become an enriching, nourishing experience in your life.

Fourth, realize that education you are receiving is not only for your benefit, but will also influence and impact your family, posterity (family line), and your community. It is in everyone's best interest that you become all that you can possibly be. Everyone will benefit when you pursue intellectual and moral excellence for the world feeds on us as we feed off the world. Thus, the legacy you leave behind will either nourish or malnourish those who come after you. Sweet nectar, bitterness, or non-nutritious meals could be the choice of meals you serve to others. So the little decisions you make often decide the type of choices people have down the road.

Fifth, the opportunity is before you while you have air to breathe to make yourself count for something great. You must let go of past mistakes and regret, and embrace what is now before you. Some times our past is our greatest enemy because it immobilizes the present, and darkens if not blinds us from the vision of possibilities. Therefore, learn from the past and use those past lessons as tools to help you engage the present and anticipate the future. Do not neglect your past; utilize your past to engage your present circumstances.

But I would also remind you that in order to make your life count for something great, you must never settle for minimal efforts. Do not allow the temptation to only do what is minimal to find expression in your studies. The pursuit of the minimal will generate a lifestyle of anemia and generates unnecessary negative consequences. If you pursue your activities with minimal effort, your work will not only be marginal, but your goals will also be small, the return on your work poor, your character deprived, and your possibilities disadvantaged. You will introduce a terrible way of seeing and doing into your life that will not only reap havoc on your life, but also all those in your sphere of influence. Therefore, never settle for pursuing a

task with minimal effort. In contrast, when pursuing a paper, working on a project, or taking an exam, BE ALL THERE!

Sixth, learning is pleasurable. All too often we fail to see learning as something being pleasurable. But if you look at other areas of your life, you have found learning to be pleasurable, whether it is learning how to throw a ball, dress beautifully, or play a video game with superb skills. Likewise, learning for the sake learning must be viewed as something pleasurable and not merely should be seen as something you "must" do. If you can develop this mindset, so many things will change for the better for you.

And lastly, in the daily choices you make you must develop persistence. "*Persistence*," that is, pressing on in spite of obstacles, it to become a virtue (a good habit) in your life. In other words, you must stay the course no matter how difficult your studies become.

Recently I heard message on perseverance from Tony Tripi. The practical advice he offered is incredible, commonsensical, and widely used by successful leaders. So, I have taken his insights and expanded them here in order to help us embrace persistence in our studies. Hopefully, this information will not only dynamically improve your pursuit of academic excellence, but also transcend or spill over into other areas of your life, inscribed into the very character of your person.

To persist you must develop the following qualities:

Develop Purpose & Passion. Positively, you must develop concrete goals. These goals must be imbued or saturated with passion. Therefore, think of the six previous principles I just mentioned. The goals you pursue are not just about you; your goals affect those you love, strangers and friends alike, and the legacy you leave behind. Negatively, you must eliminate excuses in your life. In fact, do not even go looking for excuses. The bottom line is that we pursue what we are passionate about. Be passionate about the intellectual life! Remember, learning is pleasurable. A lack of purpose is costly. "For what a man thinks within himself, so he is." What we think about seeps into our affections and dominates our will.

Embrace Responsibility. Positively, you must take ownership of your studies. No one will do it for you. Like an athlete, you must condition your life. Like a track star cannot change the obstacle course, you cannot change reality. It is what it is. Therefore, quite trying to change the track. Rather, embrace it. Train for it. Redirect all your resources to finishing well. Negatively, do not be double-minded. Instead, redirect all your energy and resources to doing well. Like an outstanding athlete, he or she converts everything to taking ownership of the opportunity that is before him or her and winning the prize. Diversions, divisions, business, lack of evaluation and reflection, and pursuit of false or trivial pleasures will keep you from embracing excellence. Moreover, short cuts do not work. Therefore, accept responsibility by taking ownership of the opportunity that is before you. Seize the moment and live as if today is the last day of your life.

Generate Stamina. Develop stamina by studying everyday. Like a person who lifts weights or one who runs long distances, keep on practicing, keep on learning and reviewing!!!! Failure to practice generates failure. Just because you are not good the first time you practice, does not mean that you will not become good at studying.

Focus on Incentives. Focus on the future when the present is difficult. If you can finish this particular test or complete this project, then you are one more step in graduating and fulfilling the dream you have. Another aid is to consider how this particular course of studying may fit into the larger context and goals of your life. Negatively, do not die before you die. Work on being renewed by celebrating your accomplishments-no matter how small they may seem to you or others.

Be Tenacious! Keep trying! Exercise creativity even it means going "*outside of the box!*" Do not hesitate to ask others how they succeeded; assimilate their wisdom into the way you live! Learn from your failures and the failures of others. Positively, recognize you are not a failure! Just because you fail does not mean you are a failure. Rather, translate those failures into learning opportunities and allow it become an incentive to conquer what is before you.

Regularly, find sources of refreshment. Once again, celebrate each and every victory! Keep good time management! Moreover, surround yourself with friends who are like-minded, pursuing academic excellence.

Negatively, do not lose your vision! Failure is not an option! If you find yourself losing your purpose and passion, you need to seriously ask yourself "why?" Like a parent who sends his daughter or son into the bedroom to reflect upon the poor choice he or she made, you must reflect upon your choices in such a way that you do not merely deal with the fruit, you deal with the root! Unfortunately, you may have to cut yourself off from those who are not contributing to your pursuit of academic excellence. Misery loves company. When surrounded by people whose pursuits are polarized to our own, you will be affected and infected by their company, especially those whose lives are occupied with indifference, mediocrity, fleeting pleasures, or trivialities. As painful as it may be, we have to remember that larger things are at risk when we give into compromise and participate in activities that stifle, mock, or scorn academic excellence. When we intimately engage in that type of activity at a certain point in time, a tipping point occurs, and our vision becomes small, our thinking mundane, our creativity quenched, our pursuits anemic, and our legacy insignificant or dysfunctional.

In conclusion, when you are faced with an exam, a presentation, a project, a quiz, or a term paper, if you will practice these principles in the moment-by-moment choices you make, you will not only discover that it is not the most brilliant people who succeed in their studies, but those who stay in target, pursuing their studies with intellectual and moral excellence. You will become aware of the fact that you are capable of becoming more than you ever thought possible. Perseverance generates qualitative growth- no matter your past. *"Even the littlest person can change the course of events."* If you will become a student who perseveres, making the most of your studies with a passion for excellence, then you will find yourself in a larger world filled with enriching experiences that will exceed your greatest dreams. You will not only contribute to your community in a meaningful, qualitative way, but you will also live a life worth living and offer a heroic testimony to those who are presently before you and those who come after you.