

“A Look at Self-Discipline: You’re Gonna Need It to Learn a Language”

Harrison’s 3rd Week

“Who’s gonna carry the boats and the logs?” - David Goggins

There comes a time for every new endeavor when you will hit a wall. It could be the frustration of not progressing as much as you wanted in a hobby by a certain point. Or maybe the routineness is getting to you, and you just don’t feel like spending another hour practicing your skill. It isn’t the starting a project that’s the difficult part; anybody can learn a few guitar chords or figure out how to name all the different colors in Spanish. It’s the commitment that’s the hard part. It’s figuring out how to stay motivated during those rough days when you’d rather just watch Netflix and do nothing.

I was expecting I would hit the wall at some point, and I finally did: this past week I could barely keep my Duolingo streak going. I had only been learning for a month and I could already feel all motivation going down the drain. It’s understandable, sure; with everything going on in the news, me on the hunt for jobs and trying to find time to talk with friends, it seems like there’s a lot to distract me from my journey to learn Spanish. It’s times like this when you don’t need motivation, but something a little stronger.

When I was working a seasonal job at a nearby park a few summers back, my co-workers got me really in to physical and mental fitness. We’d go on runs during our lunch break and talk about meditation techniques. One of the things that inspired us was sharing videos from David Goggins. For those of you who don’t know, David Goggins is an ex Navy SEAL and ultra athlete who took part in the nightmarish Hell Week, a part of the SEAL’s BUDS training, three times. Among his other exploits, he completed an ultramarathon with a broken ankle. We’d always be quoting Goggins when we needed to push ourselves to go just a little bit further in our runs. I remember we would go on runs and do push ups in the pouring rain, and in the scorching heat we’d be rolling tractor tires up hills. One of my coworkers even completed his first Spartan Race that summer. And the key was, whenever one of us wanted to take a break for the day or maybe have an

entire calzone for lunch, the rest of us would get on his case and we'd all be doing pull-ups on the monkey bars later that day.

A couple years later, I realize that it wasn't simply motivation getting us through those hot summer days; we were building up our self-discipline. As David Goggins puts it in his autobiographical book *Can't Hurt Me*, we were callousing our minds. We were forcing ourselves to keep going, to see what our limit could be, because we knew we would be better for it. As Goggins himself puts it, "it takes relentless self-discipline to schedule suffering into your every day, but if you do, you'll find that at the other end of that suffering is a whole other life just waiting for you."

Now, the word "suffering" may sound a bit extreme when talking about something like studying Spanish. And it is; but the concept is still true. When we really want to see a change, when we want to come out of the tunnel as better people than when we went in, we have to push ourselves to our very limits and see what we are really capable of. For Goggins, that meant becoming a record-breaking ultra athlete after already serving as a Navy SEAL. For me, I just want to learn Spanish!

And that's the difference between motivation and self-discipline. Motivation is what gets you started, it's that little exciting taste of a new thing that keeps you coming back because you want more. But it does wear out, no matter how much you want whatever it is at the end of your tunnel. Self-discipline is much harder. Self-discipline is the grueling 10 mile run on a 100 degree day, it's finishing the hike in wet socks rather than turning back to change. It's the peak of uncomfortability and the peak of self-doubt, the stage when you start to ask yourself "do I want this bad enough?"

Self-discipline is not easy. It does have to be built. In some ways, it is the most important skill out there. Master self-discipline and you can go after anything you want. That's the stage I'm at right now, I think. I need to keep pushing myself out of this rut. I need to set a timer to make sure I study for an hour each day, and not give myself an excuse. Each of us have the same 24 hours in a day, but we have to find the best ways to use it.

I apologize for the lack of language content this week, but it will be back next week. Hopefully, I can also fill you in on different methods you can use to build up self-discipline. But for now, I am still learning all that myself.

In the meantime, I'm putting in links for videos talking about what self-discipline is, a video explaining the stoic interpretation of self-discipline used by men like Marcus Aurelius, and a video talking with the man himself, David Goggins.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACYHERGmais>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njDLNt-1ugM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLKxdTmk-zc&t=41s>