

## [Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 126: How To Master The Consistency Of Achieving Your Goals & Sticking To Them: Nir Eyal

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Just before we started recording, I said to you, I look to pull these time management techniques and I've looked at these diet fads and there's so many of them because it appears that none of them really work without this underlying thing called discipline.

So you can have all the, you know, I can time box and I can, the one, two, three, four technique and the ABC five technique, whatever.

But if I don't have the underlying discipline, then I'm not going to do any of these things.

Even if it's such an interesting word, it's, it's, it kind of catches a lot of different things, a lot of psychological forces you've described, but, and this other theory of willpower that's sort of trundled on through the ages that we have a limited amount of willpower.

And if we try and do too many things at once, then we'll do none of them and only take on one bad habit at once.

Is there any truth to all of that stuff?

No.

No.

Willpower is not a limited resource, at least from the latest research, you know, science is never conclusive, but from what we know today, it seems, so a few years ago, there was this concept called ego depletion, ego depletion is exactly what you mentioned.

It's that we run out of willpower like someone would run out of battery charge on their phone, right?

That it's a depletable resource.

And this concept was, was promoted and kind of widely circulated in the popular press.

And there was some fine fantastical claims made that if you, if you drank a sugar sweetened lemonade that you would boost your willpower, and it turns out, as often happens in the social sciences, when something sounds a little fishy, we replicate the study.

We try and run the study again.

And Carol Dweck, you might know from, she's probably been on your show from her book mindset, she decided to replicate these studies.

She decided to run them again, these ego depletion studies.

And she found that the only people who experienced ego depletion, the only people who actually did run out of willpower, like someone run out of battery on their phone, the only people who experienced that were people who believed that willpower was limited resource.

That's it.

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So it turns out, I mean, this is incredibly important because it has implications for all sorts of things in our life, right?

When we believe that we are somehow deficient, that our brain is broken, that the world is conspiring against us to hijack our brains, when we believe these self-limiting thoughts, we act in accordance.

And so it's very much the case with this ego depletion myth that our willpower is not limited unless we believe it is.

And on this point of, because I think the word discipline is somewhat interchangeably used with willpower, it's doing the thing you said you were going to do and you intended to do.

I was trying to figure out what discipline is and where it comes from, why certain aspects of my life, like going to the gym now.

So for the last three years, I've gone to the gym about six days a week.

Before then, I couldn't DJing.

I've started DJing and I've done that for about 12 months.

I've been disciplined with that.

This podcast, I've been able to do it.

We released two episodes a week and we have done for a while now.

Why am I disciplined in some areas of my life?

Why can I continue to show up?

And why in other areas of my life is it this kind of failing battle to get back on the horse every other week because I've fallen off?

I had a hypothesis where I was like, well, with DJing, I have like a goal that mean, this is maybe my discipline equation, a goal that means a lot to me.

It's worth the pursuit.

If I attain it, you know, it feels like it's worthwhile plus the psychological engagement and enjoyment of the pursuit of the goal.

So like deep, like I want to be a DJ plus the psychological engagement and enjoyment.

I love the process of DJing.

It's like meditation therapy, listening to your favorite music for hours, doing nothing other than being in that flow state minus, this is where you kind of come in, I guess, is the psychological discomfort or disengagement associated with the pursuit.

So for example, if the DJing equipment was up in the spare room and I had to load it up every day and it took 35 minutes to do it and then I had to load up the software every day and it was really difficult.

I might find the process not worthwhile and my discipline might wane.

When you look at that equation, the why, the enjoyment of the pursuit minus the sort of unenjoyment of the pursuit, does that make sense?

There's a lot there.

I mean, the basics are there.

I think what's missing is that you, so with this DJing pursuit, you enjoy it.

And so it's not hard to do something you enjoy.

This is my problem with flow.

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You've heard about me how to accept me high with a concept of flow, that you can get into this state where time flies and it's effortless.

And the examples, if you read the book, many of the examples are from sports.

They're from things that people really enjoy doing.

And that's like Hollywood.

It's nice work if you can get it.

How do you get into flow when it's something you really don't want to do?

So right now you enjoy DJing because, to correct me if I'm wrong, you're not doing professionally.

Or maybe you are.

No, really.

So my guess is right now as an amateur, it's fun.

Stakes are low.

You're just enjoying the process.

Very much what I used to do when I first started blogging, writing for myself.

And then I got a few readers and it was kind of fun, just pure joy, pure amateur behavior.

And then what happened when I said, okay, now I want to publish a book, or when you,

if you decide to professionally DJ, it's going to start getting hard, right?

Now there's all this other stuff you don't want to do around the core experience, right?

Now you've got to figure out how do I build my brand and how do I get people packed into my show and all this stuff that you have to do that maybe isn't as fun.

And that's where flow falls down.

So this is exactly what's happening and happened.

So I started DJing and then we announced, I'm going to do a show.

We've got 3,000 people to come to this venue.

And in the lead up to that, DJing became a lot less fun.

And even now, so they've, they've, they're trying to book me to do a show on Ibiza in Marbella this year.

And suddenly I'm getting all uncomfortable about DJing again because, so when I look at the, the equation I presented, what seems to have happened in that equation is the perceived psychological cost has increased suddenly because there's like nerves and yeah, yeah.

Now there's like worry and all these other forces at play and that equations now I've killed.

My discipline has dropped.

Right.

Exactly.

Exactly.

And so that's where becoming indestructible comes into play.

You don't need to be indestructible for something you love doing anyway, right?

There's no problem with that.

The follow through is easy.

It's how do I do this stuff?

I know I need to do, but I really don't feel like doing it.

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If you ask, you know, we talked about earlier, the only reason businesses fail is because they run out of cash.

The only reason we fail at our goals is only one.

The only reason we fail at our goals, because we don't feel like it, I don't feel like it.

I don't feel like going to the gym right now.

I don't feel like working on that book.

I don't feel like whatever it is.

It's a feeling fundamentally.

It's a feeling.

Of course, there's outside factors, of course, but in terms of the number one reason we don't pursue our goal is we quit, right?

That's the most prominent reason.

We don't follow through and that tends to be because of a feeling.

So when there are these tasks that suddenly get hard, right, are suddenly difficult, that's when we need different tactics.

It's easy to do the stuff we enjoy.

It's hard to do the stuff that we don't enjoy.

So what would you advise me to do then in the case of DJing?

I've got, you know, potentially two shows this summer in Europe.

So I would start with your values.

So what are values?

The definition of values in my book is attributes of the person you want to become.

Attributes of the person you want to become.

So then what you do is you put your values in terms of these three life domains.

I look at them as concentric circles at the center of these three life domains is you.

If you can't take care of yourself, can't take care of others, you can't make the world a better place.

So in that, when it comes to that life domain, you look at the things that you want to do for yourself.

Time you want to spend to become the person you want to become.

And you look at your calendar, you look at this blank calendar for the next seven days and you ask yourself, how would the person I want to become spend their time?

And you put that time in your schedule.

So time for rest, time for reading, time for video games, doesn't matter.

Put that time in your schedule.

The next life domain is your relationships.

Part of the reason we have this loneliness epidemic in the industrialized world is that we don't have the time schedule for our relationships like we used to.

As the industrialized world became more secular, the church, the synagogue, the mosque, we don't go to these social interactions where we care for others and others care for us.

We don't have that schedule in our day anymore.

And I'm not saying it.

I'm pretty secular myself.

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I'm not saying we have to do that.

But that is what we have lost because we don't have these regular, what used to be religious institutions doesn't have to be real.

I mean, Robert Putnam was talking about this in the 1990s in his book, Bowling Alone.

We don't have these regular social interactions like previous generations did and we need to bring those back.

I actually think social media overuse is a symptom, not the cause of the fact that we don't see people regularly.

So you need to put in your calendar time for those relationships, your friends, your family, your kids, your significant others.

You have to put that time in your schedule.

Don't give them whatever scraps of time are left over, put in your schedule.

And finally, your work domain.

This is where most people start.

It's actually, I think, where we need to end.

Work comes in two flavors.

We have what's called reactive work and we have reflective work.

Reactive work is how distracted people spend their days.

Reacting to messages, reacting to notifications, reacting to requests, all day long reacting to things.

And that's fine.

Everybody's job will involve some amount of reactive work.

But if you're not scheduling time for reflective work, you're going to run real fast in the wrong direction.

You have to put time in your schedule to think.

If you want to do work that is creative, work that requires focus, you have to schedule that time.

It's okay if it's only 15, 20 minutes, but that time has to be on your schedule.

So to answer your question of, okay, well, what do I do with this, this passion I have around DJing?

It's a factor of how much time you want to put into it based on your values, based on the kind of person you want to become.

So what would the Stephen you want to become?

How much time, time, first and foremost, not outcome?

I think that's the problem with a lot of goal planning.

This is one of my beef with to-do lists.

To-do lists are a series of outputs.

I want to do this, I want to do this, I want to do this, I want to do this, I want to do this.

And it has no constraint.

A to-do list has no constraints.

You can always add more.

And so what happens?

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You come home with your to-do list of a million things after you've worked really hard all day long.

And most of those things you have not crossed off.

So what does that say to your self-image?

If every day you come home, and all these things still haven't been done after a long day of work, and you haven't done what you said you would do, loser.

So day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, you're reinforcing this self-image of someone who doesn't do what they said they're going to do, right?

As opposed to a time box counter has constraints, same 24 hours in a day, right?

And I don't care if you're Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk.

You can always make more money.

You can't make more time.

I think it's exactly flipped.

Most people are cheap with their money and generous with their time.

I think it should be the opposite, right?

We should be cheap with our time and generous with our money because you can always make more money.

You can always make more money.

You cannot make more time.

So a time box calendar forces you to work with constraints and decide based on your values how much time you can afford to spend on whatever you want to do, right?

Because if you put in everything, you'll get nothing.

You'll live in regret.

Whereas if you say, look, I only have four hours a week for DJing endeavors.

And here's where I'm going to put that in because I also want to spend time with my friends.

I need to take care of myself.

I need to take care of my business.

So it's not based on outcome.

It's based on input, right?

So if you went to a baker, okay, and you said, hey, my kid has a birthday party.

I need a two dozen cupcakes.

Bakers going to say, okay, I need flour, I need sugar, I need butter.

I need all these inputs.

I need these ingredients to make the output.

But when it comes to knowledge work, we only think about the output.

But what's our input?

Our input is just two things, time and attention.

Those are our ingredients.

That's it.

So you can't just think about the output.

You can't just think about the cupcakes.

You have to think about the input.

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The input is time and attention.

And that, just like ingredients for a cupcake, has to be budgeted for.

You have to plan that ahead or it's not going to work out.