



Discipline Equals Freedom

Field Manual

By Jocko Willink

13-minute read

Synopsis

Discipline Equals Freedom (2020) is your field manual to the art of self-discipline. It uncovers what you need to do to meet your full potential – and why being disciplined sets you free.

Who is it for?

- Fitness buffs looking for a new angle
- Fans of straight-talking tough love
- Anyone seeking inspiration to work harder

About the author

Jocko Willink served as a Navy SEAL for 20 years and completed several tours of duty in Iraq. After returning home, Willink became a SEAL instructor and founded Echelon Front, a leadership training consultancy that applies SEAL training to corporate leadership.

What's in it for me? Push yourself to the top.

Are you the happiest, fittest, and most successful person you want to be? If not, why? Maybe you're too busy to work on yourself right now? Or you don't have the money – or motivation – to turn things around yet. Or maybe you just need to quit making excuses and do it!

That's where these blinks come in. Tackling everything from diet and exercise to being a leader, this is your field manual to a more confident, healthy, and prosperous you. Discover what drives discipline; how action, aggression, and relentlessness get you closer to your goals; and why taking responsibility for your life is the key to setting yourself free.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- why there are no shortcuts in life;
- the three pieces of equipment you need in your home gym; and
- the only martial art you'll ever need.

Discipline comes from inside you – what are you fighting for?

People always want to know the secret to getting better, smarter, and stronger. But more than that, they want to know how to get results *fast*. What life hacks can they learn? What shortcut can they take on the road to success?

The answer is: nothing! Real self-improvement can't be hurried. It needs time and tons of discipline.

Discipline is your weapon in the fight against that little voice in your head that says, "Do it tomorrow." You know the one. It coaxes you back to the couch instead of finishing the dishes. Now, discipline may repel laziness, but where does it come from? According to author and retired US Navy SEAL Jocko Willink, it comes from within – you just need to search for what drives you.

The key message here is: Discipline comes from inside you – what are you fighting for?

Jocko knew from a young age that he was preparing for war, and he knew he'd eventually have to confront his enemy. He didn't know when or how, but he knew he'd need to be mentally and physically prepared to win. This drove him to mercilessly train himself and his men for battle. He didn't allow excuses to stop them. And when he and his men were called into action, they fought hard and won.

Today, his military tours are over, and he's back in the civilian world. What drives him now are the memories of his fellow soldiers that never made it back home. He makes every second of his day count to honor their sacrifice. And to make the most of every moment, you just need to find what drives you.

How? Well, the first step is to stop making excuses. Only *you* have power over yourself. So if you want to wake up early, *do it*. If you want to work out every day, *do it*. With a little bit of mind control, you can do *anything*.

Becoming better, fitter, and stronger takes work. Yes, it's stressful – But life is stressful. And that's OK. Humans were made to withstand incredible stress. Think of all the soldiers that fought the epic wars throughout history. Jocko did, which is how he got through his tours in Iraq. If warriors before him had been able to endure horrific situations like facing death in the First World War's Battle of the Somme, or the Civil War's Battle of Gettysburg, then so could he.

That's discipline – getting some perspective, conquering what you can control, accepting what you can't, and then getting on with it.

Make aggression your default mode.

Discipline not only arms you against laziness, but it fuels you to succeed. It gives you purpose and clarity. You know why you're choosing to wake up at 6:30 a.m. instead of hitting that tempting snooze button. That commitment to meet your goal every day should take the shape of *aggression*.

Of course, that doesn't mean you should be openly hostile for no reason or confrontational all the time. Aggression is the fire that ignites you to go after what you want. It's a fighting attitude to use everything you have to outmaneuver and outperform your opponent. When you're aggressive, you're proactive – you don't wait for your enemies to attack first.

Aggression isn't a bad thing; it's a character trait that drives you to win.

The key message here is: Make aggression your default mode.

Now, you may think you're born with this internal aggression, but when it comes to the debate on nurture versus nature, Jocko believes that neither matters. You ultimately become who you are based on your *choices*.

Do you choose to work hard to become your version of success? Or will you wait for luck to dictate the person you become? See? It's about choices.

And if you think that your circumstances dictate your future, that's not true. Jocko worked with people from all walks of life in the military. He met Ivy League grads and former gangbangers, kids from good families and kids with no families at all. He can attest that there are success stories and failures in every category of life. Nature and nurture doesn't write your life story. You do.

Look, it's easy to sit on the sidelines and do nothing, but discipline uses fear of failure to force you onto the front

line to fight. Jocko disagrees with the sentiment that it's OK to fail. He thinks you should be so scared of failure that you avoid it at all costs. This is the fear that keeps you thinking, striving, and pushing to be better. It's the fear that motivates you to stay at the gym longer or put in more time at the office so you don't lose – ever.

Along with failure, you should fear mediocrity. Specifically, fear waking up in ten days, or ten years, realizing that you've watched your life go by without making an impact on the world. That's a truly scary thought that you should battle against every single day.

Focusing on the wrong things is stopping you from being the person you could be.

You only have one life to live – and one shot at making it matter. This comes with a lot of stress, but adopting a few good habits will keep you moving toward the best version of yourself.

You need to eliminate anything that stalls your progress, like dwelling on mistakes. They're bound to happen. Everyone makes them. And though it's easy to dwell on those mistakes, the past can't be changed. Regret just stops progress. The only productive purpose for regret is to teach a lesson on what to do differently next time. That's it. So let regret fuel you to learn from the past, but not live in it.

The present is the only thing that's certain. You'll make the most impact by turning your focus on positive action *now*.

The key message here is: Focusing on the wrong things is stopping you from being the person you could be.

Discipline drives you to success. But what exactly is success? It's what *you* want to achieve. Once you've figured it out, don't lose sight of it. Ever! And don't get sidetracked with short-term goals that are fueled by instant gratification like momentary glory; these just slow down your long-term progress. Be relentless so your long-term aim becomes embedded in your mind. Let it take over your thoughts. Tell other people about it, write it down, do whatever it takes to not forget it. But most of all, take action to make it happen – now!

Don't hesitate. In fact, banish *hesitation* from your life. The scariest moment when deciding to do something is between the time you're waiting to do it and when you're actually doing it. The battle is won or lost in that short timeframe. That hesitation stops you from moving forward. You can only win by acting before hesitation takes hold and hands your opportunity to your competitors.

The idea is to always push forward without letting anything stop you, especially fear. You're faced with fear many times a day. But what are you going to do? Quit and run away? Or will you choose to absorb the most

impact, pain, and stress? No, you should *lead*! Choose to be the person with the broadest shoulders to carry others with you. Be the person who draws first, like in combat situations. The soldier who draws first gives the group an advantage. In war, it can distract the enemy or identify where they're located. For you, it's being the leader who's not afraid to stand and fight!

Conquer your mornings, and you'll conquer the competition.

Now that we've covered what it means to have discipline, let's put it into action. There are two crucial everyday habits that everyone should start ASAP: a rigorous exercise routine and good sleeping habits.

First off, if you're not exercising regularly, you should be. Exercise pumps up your natural endorphins and testosterone levels while giving your immune system a boost. Additionally, it makes you smarter by improving blood flow to the brain and releasing chemicals that help you think.

If you struggle to find time to work out, you're just making excuses. If you need the time, find it. In fact, you can make more time by getting up early. Very early. Like, predawn early. In the military world, getting up that early is known as *standing to*.

The key message here is: Conquer your mornings, and you'll conquer the competition.

Armies around the world have been disciplined to wake up extremely early every day. This isn't to punish them, but to give them an advantage over their enemies. If their enemy attacks, they'll be ready to fight back. In World War I, troops were expected to be up by first light, standing in the trenches with guns loaded.

So no excuses! If they can do it, so can you. Start setting your alarm for 4:30 a.m. and hit the gym on the double. Getting up this early gives you a psychological edge over your competitors. It makes you feel stronger and more confident to know you're conquering your first wins of the day while they're still asleep.

But who wants to wake up that early? It's exhausting! True, but it's possible . . . with discipline. It just means getting to bed early enough – maybe earlier than usual. Most adults need just seven hours of sleep, so if you go to bed at 10:00 p.m. you should wake up well-rested at 5:00 a.m.

And if you've gotten used to sleeping longer, then improve the *quality* of your sleep by getting more exercise, which makes your body tired enough to sleep well, and sleep less.

Another key to good sleep is turning off electronic devices *way* before shut-eye. Scientists believe the blue light they emit tricks your body into thinking it's the middle of the day, which makes it harder to fall asleep. So, read a book instead. It'll be more relaxing than a

YouTube video and will make you smarter in the process.

Commit to exercise, and build a home gym.

Regular exercise is 100 percent essential to becoming the best version of yourself. But what's the very best workout? Anything! All exercise is equally valuable.

What matters is that you're doing something, whether that's stretching, walking, lifting weights, swimming, or playing a game of basketball. Exercise doesn't need to be complicated or proven by some science-driven methodology. You just need to move your body.

Whatever you choose to do, though, it's a good idea to track your progress. Make a note of how far you ran each day, or how heavy your weights were each session. Not only will tracking let you see your progress, it will also help you build goals into your regime.

The key message here is: Commit to exercise, and build a home gym.

Discipline is about not accepting excuses, right? Well, with a home gym, you won't have any. Find a small space or corner in your home – like a spare room, office, backyard, or garage – it's a convenient workout space you can't avoid.

If you think a home gym is too expensive, think again – you only need a few things to get started. First, install a *pull-up bar*. You can do push-ups, pull-ups, squats, and ab exercises with this simple rig; it gives your entire body a workout! Another piece of relatively cheap equipment are *gymnastic rings*. You can mount them to any wall and do ring dips, ring push-ups, and L-sits. The last piece of equipment for the beginner's home gym is a *squat rack* with a barbell and weights. And with rubber bumper plates instead of iron ones, you can execute dynamic lifts. This setup delivers an effective home gym that you can add to as your workouts advance in the future.

If you stick to your exercise routine every day, you'll see results – and the occasional injury. But that's not an excuse to skip your workout sessions. Injuries happen, so work around them. Switch your focus to exercises you can do safely. If you injure your knee, concentrate on your upper body for a while. If you pull your shoulder, work your core and legs until the shoulder gets better.

And if your injuries keep you at home and you simply need to rest, that's fine. Do what your body needs you to do. But keep going after *something*. Don't stop. If you can't work out, then use the time to build on another skill. Remember, if *you* don't, your enemies will.

Start your martial arts discipline with Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

You never know when you might find yourself in danger. It happens even though nobody likes to think it will. But just being strong isn't enough protection in threatening situations. That's why Jocko recommends training in the ancient self-defense practice of *martial arts*.

The fundamental principles of martial arts have never changed and never will, but they evolve with new techniques and moves all the time. Martial arts can be explained in three broad categories: *grappling*, which uses leverage and holds to dominate your opponent; *striking*, which uses any body part – like punches, kicks, and headbutts – to defeat your enemy; and martial arts with weapons, which involve, well, *weapons*. Think sticks, knives, and firearms.

The key message here is: Start your martial arts discipline with Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

The primary goal of self-defense is to run away, but that's not possible if your attacker has a hold of you. When that happens, expect to be grappled to the ground. That's where *Brazilian jiu-jitsu* helps. It's an advanced form of grappling that focuses on self-defense from the ground so you can free yourself and escape.

Another great thing about Brazilian jiu-jitsu is that it's the most complex of the martial arts and never gets old. There's an infinite number of moves to learn beyond the fundamentals, with the bonus of stimulating your mind as you develop and improve your skills.

Of course, repelling an opponent in a controlled environment is different than facing a real-life threat. That's why Jocko's first line of defense is to always maintain *situational awareness*. That means you're assessing people and surroundings wherever you go, and always thinking of contingencies – like locating the closest escape route or cover – to protect yourself if needed.

While maintaining situational awareness is a good step, nothing can guarantee you'll never face an immediate threat. If you do, Jocko directs you to ACT!

First, if you can run away, do it! If not, use your training to attack first and *fast*. As soon as you see an opportunity to run, take it.

If guns are involved, get down ASAP! Stay on the ground and call the police if possible. Listen to the gunshots. If it's rapid-fire, look for substantial cover to hide behind until there's a lull in the shooting, and then run – it could be your only chance. If it's single shots at a slow pace, Jocko advises us to “run immediately and keep running.”

Your body is not adapted to digest grains properly.

Food is fuel for your body. If you want to become stronger and faster, you need to give your body the right fuel. But many of us rely on empty calories like

doughnuts and cookies to get us through the day. You might think of them as food, but they're not. They're simply sugar delivery systems.

So, what should you be eating for optimal fuel? Let's look to our human past to understand how to eat in the present. Our prehistoric ancestors thrived on a diet of vegetables and meat, with limited fruit.

Today, we clog our bodies with grain-based foods such as pasta, bread, and rice. Unfortunately, the human machine never adapted to processing grains. We've only been eating them for the last ten thousand years; our prehistoric ancestors never touched them.

The key message here is: Your body is not adapted to digest grains properly.

This means that whenever you eat grains, they turn into simple sugar after being processed. And everyone knows that eating a lot of sugar isn't healthy. In short, grains should be avoided altogether.

Instead, embrace your inner caveperson with meals based on grass-fed beef, free-range poultry, and wild-caught fish – as well as vegetables, nuts, roots, and small amounts of fruit. Stay away from grains, potatoes, refined sugars, salt, and legumes. Whereas the typical Western diet tends to be high in carbohydrates and low in fat, eating like our ancestors means flipping today's diet on its head. Limit carbohydrates and eat plenty of fat, followed by lots of protein.

The key is to eat a caveman diet 100 percent of the time. The popular 80/20 rule of eating healthily 80 percent of the time and unhealthily the other 20 percent is like playing with fire. Bad foods, especially sugars, are addictive. Giving yourself permission to eat them 20 percent of the time is like being a recovering heroin addict who's allowed heroin from time to time. The temptation is too strong, and it just isn't worth it.

Of course, this doesn't mean you can't have an occasional, reasonable treat. But don't use it as an excuse to start mainlining sugar. When Jocko wants to treat himself, for example, he dips a small chunk of dark chocolate into coconut oil or tops a bowl of whipped cream with chopped nuts. These might sound like modest rewards, but when you're following a clean diet, these treats can be deceptively decadent.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

There's no shortcut to a better you. Stop making excuses about why you're not eating right, exercising, or meeting your goals. Nothing in your life will work unless *you* do, so take action to be the person you want – today. No matter what kind of upbringing you've had, you have the ability to absorb stress, toil relentlessly, and conquer your competition at every turn.

Actionable advice:

Power nap with your feet up.

Taking a power nap, even if it's just for ten minutes, will boost your energy. You can make your nap even more effective by sleeping with your feet raised above your heart. This takes the stress off your circulatory system while helping distribute the blood that has pooled in your legs. So, if you're napping in a chair, put your feet on the desk. Or if you're in your bedroom, try lying on the floor with your feet on your bed.

Got feedback?

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