

# The Process



George Zink

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## ***Introduction***

I've learned a lot on the tennis courts and in life, and I realized a few months ago that I felt a need to share what I've learned with my students. This book has been the result of a lot of patience and support on the part of my wife, Lauren, and three children, Tyler, Lindsay, and Kate. It's required a lot of translation of my words into a clear message on the part of my writer, and a lot of energy and focus all around.



These lessons, one each day for a full month, are intended to give everyone who reads them a clear idea of what it took for me to become a nine-time national tennis champion -- and how you can do the same thing in your life. Every one of these lessons applies not only to the game of tennis, but also to the game of life.

So please, read these 42 lessons with an open heart and mind, and practice them daily. They've been invaluable to me, and I believe with all my heart and soul that they will improve the life of anyone who approaches them with an honest desire to be the best -- whether it's at tennis or anything else.

Thank you,

George Zink

## ***Lesson 1: Enjoy The Process***

Have you ever spent an afternoon reading a great book, and not noticed that it was suddenly three hours past dinnertime? Or started a short walk around the park only to end up miles away and feeling great about being on the move? That feeling is the secret of the first lesson.

There a lot of things that can make you good at something. Talent is good -- if you were born able to slug a homerun, you'll do well at baseball. Natural gifts are good -- if you were born seven feet tall, you'll be a shoo-in for the high school basketball team. But nothing that replaces *passion* -- the pure, unadulterated enjoyment of loving what you're doing.

I hear a lot of people say that practice makes perfect, and there's a lot of wisdom in that old adage, but it took me years to really get it. It looks simple: if you don't practice -- a LOT -- you won't get good enough to be the best. But if you're going to practice that much, you have to enjoy practicing -- be *passionate* about it.

That's the essence of Lesson 1: enjoy practicing. Enjoy the process of becoming great.

No matter what you're doing, from housework to playing tennis, there is much more than a single task to master. No amount of talent or natural gift can make you good at the whole of housework or tennis -- or anything else. There are always more details to learn, more facets to master. That's why I adhere to the 10,000 hour rule.

It means just what it sounds like: do something -- anything -- for **ten thousand hours**, and you'll become a champion. Nothing else will do. Ten thousand hours sounds really intimidating, but you already know the secret for making it easy.



Enjoy the process.

Love practice.

Ten thousand hours really can fly by -- six hours every day, three hundred days a year, and you've done something for just over five years. It's easy to spend five years practicing something you love. It's so easy, that you'll wake up one day and realize that you don't even remember what it was like to be a novice anymore.

That's really the part that I enjoy the most. I love to wake up every day knowing that I'm a better tennis player than I was the day before. I've probably put in double that 10,000 hours, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. It shows: today, I have **nine** national championships to my name.

Every one of those championships was born of pure, passion for tennis...passion that made each minute of practice a joy. And that's the big secret: if you enjoy the process of improving, you will improve.

## ***Lesson 2: Discipline***

Nothing is *always* fun. Some days, you just don't want to get out of bed. Stress, minor illnesses, and drama can keep us feeling like we'd rather lay around than kick butt. What we don't realize when we feel lousy is that, once you get up and out, it doesn't take long to enjoy the process again. That ability -- to get up and start something even when you don't feel like it -- that's Discipline.

The same thing applies to everything in life, from your job to your hobbies. Humans just aren't psychologically made to wake up bright-eyed and motivated every day. That's why discipline is such a vital attribute to have: it's the key to enjoying the process *anyway*.



16-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer is renowned for being able to sense where an opponent is going to hit the ball simply by watching their body movements. He wasn't able to do that in middle school - it's not a God-given talent. That ability came from more than ten thousand hours of practice. Those ten thousand hours of practice came from a disciplined drive to be one of the best. He got up every day, even when he had personal issues, or a runny nose, or an invitation to party with a friend...and he practiced. And now he's one of the best.

The light at the end of the tunnel is this: energy and focus are *cyclical*. That means they come back once you've force yourself to get started, and when they do, you win. You end up feeling even better because you persevered. It's like you got a do-over on your lousy morning.

Because really, you did.

Because you maintained your discipline.

Compare that to the other scenario: you take a couple of days off, lounge around, and eat a gallon of Ben and Jerry's. When you finally get back into the game, your skills are actually *worse* than before your break, and you realize that you not only didn't get any better, but you've got a few days that you have to put in *all over again* just to get back to where you were before you stopped playing.

So GET UP! Do it anyway. There's no better cure for a bad day than doing something you love. Period.

## Lesson 3: Focus

The same kid that's bored out of his mind at school can't pay attention, but goes home and plays Xbox 360 for six hours straight, forgetting food, pets, and even the bathroom. That's focus. And that kind of intense focus only comes from really loving what you do.



People's attention naturally wanders, especially when they're doing something they've done a bajillion times before. I know that when I cook dinner, I'm often thinking about my last (or next) major match instead of about the food that's in front of me. But when you're on the court -- or striving for greatness in whatever you're doing -- you have to be *there* and not anywhere else.

On the court, I can see patterns in my opponent's behavior -- if I'm paying attention. Maybe they always serve wide to my forehand when the point is important, or maybe they always slice when they get nervous. If I catch those patterns, I can exploit them and earn points easily. If I'm preoccupied thinking about my bills or how the umpire's last call was clearly wrong, I won't see those patterns *and* I'm more likely to fall into predictable patterns myself. I go from exploiting my opponent to being exploited.

The challenge is figuring out how to stay focused over time. Very few people can actually focus 100% of their mind on one thing. The skill lies in bringing your attention back rapidly back to the task at hand. Don't let your distractions become your main thoughts.

Fortunately, you can *practice focusing*. Whether you're on the court or making dinner, you have the ability to tell yourself to stay 'dialed in.' Don't ask a lot of yourself up front -- just three minutes of distraction-free effort can get a startling amount done. As you get used to deliberately focusing, you'll find it gets easier to recognize when you've lost focus. More importantly, it gets easier to get back into focus. That skill that will allow you to have side thoughts, acknowledge them, let them go...and then come back to the process ready to kick butt.

The same thing can apply in the classroom, but in the classroom, your opponent isn't a person with a racket, it's your own ignorance. During class, your focus should be on what your instructor *isn't* saying. Some people think that asking questions means you're stupid -- they're wrong. Asking questions shows your teacher that you're focused on the lesson. If you stop asking questions, you lose focus, and you lose out on everything the instructor is trying to teach you.

Focus. Be here now.

If you do what is in front of you, and you think about what is in front of you, focus comes naturally. That's a large part of the lessons of Zen philosophy, and it's so profound and important that it could have been Lesson One.

## Lesson 4: Passion

What excites you? What do you looking forward to so much that you can't sit still when you think about it? What do you do over and over and over again, even if it's not easy?

Entry Word: **Passion**

Function: *noun*

1: a strong or constant regard for and dedication to something

2: a strong wish for something

3: depth of feeling

That's passion. Without it, people wouldn't be good at anything. If you aren't passionate, you can't enjoy the process. Without passion, focus just won't last. Passion is the root of all greatness.

Everybody is passionate about *something*. Whether it's physics, or ultimate Frisbee, or the piano, I guarantee you that there's *something* that gets you fired up. The trick is finding it, chasing it, and getting great at it.

I have a passion for excelling at whatever I do. I didn't like every subject at school, but I was passionate about learning, and I was determined to do my best. Focusing on increasing my knowledge made the individual subjects stop mattering -- as long as I was learning, I was happy.

I don't always feel great every morning, but I always go to tennis practice. If I'm tired or distracted or just grumpy, I always try to focus on my passion. I think about what I love most about tennis, and get myself fired up. That's what passions means -- getting *fired up*. Not just enjoying the process, but getting EXCITED about it!

My father used to tell me each night before bedtime: "I'm excited, son. I'm excited for tomorrow - excited to get up and go to work and do my best." It sounds kind of funny looking back at it, but it really meant something to me. It rubbed off on me. I AM excited to wake up the next morning. I AM excited to go to work every day.

I'm a passionate person, and I'm passionate about getting YOU passionate. I want you to get fired up about something. I'd like to get you amped up on tennis, but even if that's not your thing, I want you to try to get excited about *learning*. Feel what I feel -- that incredible feeling of anticipation for every chance to improve. That's the most important kind of passion you can have. Every champion feels that passion.

Will you?

## ***Lesson 5: Patience***

Most people think that patience is all about sitting on your butt and doing nothing. People with passion and focus know better -- patience is the ability to *wait for the right moment*. You don't have to sit still, but you have to find something to do besides the thing you really want to. Getting impatient and acting out of frustration and annoyance leads to lack of focus, lack of enjoyment, and failure.

When I watch inexperienced players on the courts, there are a few things they just LOVE to do. They love to hit the ball as hard as they can with that massive overhead. They love to run up to the net and put the ball away. They don't love long drawn-out rallies and working for every point. That's where patience wins the day.

Opportunity comes to the patient. Our culture preaches fast cars, fast food, and fast Internet, because we've lost the ability to wait for the right moment. We want everything *right now*. But the wiser among us have a saying: opportunity only knocks once. If you're busy chasing after your next McFix, you won't hear the knock. If you've learned the art of waiting, you'll be able to seize the opportunity when it comes.

On the court, that means long volleys while you watch your opponent carefully, looking for your opportunity. The winner is the person who is patient enough to let the other person make the first mistake. Then, when you see your opponent stumble, your patience has paid off, and you have to act decisively. That's when 10,000 hours of practice comes in handy.

Let me give you an example. There's a match that I remember very clearly from about three years ago. I was playing against someone who was very good, and we had been playing for a long time. Both of us were on the verge of cramping up -- and I could see it on his face. He bent over like he was trying to avoid a cramp-up, and I could feel it coming on myself. But rather than panic and make a desperation play to win the point, I waited -- even though I was in pain. The longer the points went, the harder my opponent tried to hit the ball -- like he

could get a point in out of sheer power. I kept grinding away because I wanted to prove to him that I wouldn't give up. In the end, patience in the face of pain won me that match.

So how do you *become* patient? That's an excellent question, and all I can tell you is what worked for me: focusing on the opportunity. Just like getting 10,000 hours of practice is a matter of focusing on the long-term goal, learning to wait for the opportunity is a matter of being aware that the opportunity is coming. You have to acknowledge to yourself that opportunities will present themselves, and you have to tell yourself that *being ready* is the most important thing you can do.

Be patient. Be ready.

Seize the opportunity.

The same thing applies in all situations that require patience -- even in a traffic jam. You're in traffic because you're *going somewhere*, and the opportunity to get there will arrive. Focus on what you'll do when you arrive, and the trip will become a preparation rather than a painful grind. The same applies to everything from schoolwork to competitive sports.

## ***Lesson 6: Knowledge***

In order to seize the moment, you have to understand that the moment is right, and what the opportunity is. That's where knowledge comes in.

Knowledge, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as "expertise and skills acquired by a person through education and experience." Knowledge allows you to recognize and seize opportunities; patience is nothing without the knowledge to capitalize on it. The entire purpose of the 10,000 hour rule is to *acquire knowledge*.

In tennis, that 10,000 hours teaches you racket skills, footwork, and strategy. But really, that's just the first 1,000 hours -- the other 9,000 teach you the inner workings of tennis -- the ability to anticipate your opponent's actions, see their weaknesses, and force mistakes.

So how do you acquire knowledge? Well, in tennis, you do it by surrounding yourself with tennis. I watch tennis matches on TV and in person, and as I watch, I constantly ask myself -- "How did Nadal win that point off of Federer just now? Could I have won that point? Would I have been lured into making the same mistake that Federer just did?" In school you do it by engaging the subject -- staying focused, and looking for questions to ask.

Knowledge can be found everywhere, not just on the court or in the classroom. I have friends that seem to know about everything, and it's because they surround themselves with opportunities to learn. They watch TV; they read newspapers and magazines and non-fiction books; and they talk to other knowledgeable people online and off. They also study history.



I used to hate history in school because I always thought that the future was more relevant than the past. But as I grew up, I learned that understanding the past helps me understand what will happen in the future. On the tennis court, that means I can

learn how my opponent works by watching all of their old matches -- which gives me the tools I need to beat them. You can learn a lot by studying the past, understanding it, and then building on it.

The most amazing thing about knowledge is that it builds upon itself. It doesn't matter what you study; every piece of knowledge you obtain helps you achieve understandings and have insights. Even if you don't understand exactly how, exercising your mind and learning new things can improve your grasp on the subjects you love.

Sun Tzu said it in *The Art of War*. Battles are won through knowledge. Know yourself, and know your opponent, and you will win. Every time I go up against someone I know is my equal, I study up and I study hard because I know that better understanding equals a better chance at being the winner.

## ***Lesson 7: Confidence***

Confidence is massively important. I can often tell who is going to win a tennis match just by watching the players walk onto the court -- the one that's more confident has an instant edge over his opponent. Doubt causes hesitation, and hesitation causes failure.

Whenever I look at a new tennis player, I see several things. I see their eyes, their feet, and their grip; sometimes those things are good, sometimes they're bad. But one thing *every* new player has is doubt. They don't think they'll be able to do well, even if they really want to learn.

That's understandable -- but I also see full-time players who still have that same doubt. Why? Who knows? I've often told my students that confidence is the hardest thing to obtain, and the easiest thing to lose. Any time something bad happens, it can make your confidence crumble.

Confidence comes from discipline, focus, knowledge, and repetition -- from doing something so many times that you don't have to worry about *how* you're going to do it. You just do it. But there's a shortcut to building confidence, and it's the simplest thing in the world: congratulate yourself.

So often, I see new players miss an easy shot and say, "I suck! I can't do this!" That's an excellent way to build self-doubt and cripple your confidence. But building confidence is just as easy if you get into the habit of congratulating yourself. It sounds a little corny -- and it feels like it at first, too -- but every time you do something right, you should tell yourself that you did a great job. You don't have to tell anyone else, but you do have to actually tell yourself. Out loud. Pat your own back. Seriously. It *works*.

The other side to building confidence is responding differently to failure. When you mess up, don't say that you messed up, or that you suck.



Instead, try to figure out what you did wrong, and promise yourself that you won't make that same mistake again.

There is a trap to watch out for: overconfidence. Overconfidence goes beyond faith in your abilities and creates an *expectation* of success. Confident people are always grateful for their successes, but overconfident people get angry when they fail. That's the difference. Some people say that Roger Federer is overconfident, but watch what he does when he wins a major championship: he collapses in gratitude. He doesn't expect to win; he's happy that he did. That's the mark of a supremely confident -- but not overconfident -- man.

## ***Lesson 8: Respect***

Ever heard of Aretha Franklin? She sings this great song -- "R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Find out what it means to me." It's an entire song about how she wants to get respect. Respect is something that everyone wants, but few people seem willing to give.

Respect simply means conducting yourself in a way that shows esteem for yourself and the people around you. When it comes to your opponents on the court or in other areas of life, respect means acknowledging that they have skills, abilities, perspectives, and purposes that are worthy of your attention. It doesn't mean believing that your opponent will win -- but it means believing that he could.

When I go out onto the court, I remind myself that my opponent can beat me, and if I don't play my hardest, I'm not showing him that I respect his abilities. So I give every match my all, because anything less is disrespectful. If I lose, hey, I played the best I could-- all the more reason to respect my opponent for his victory.

Doing the best you can do is a critical form of respect. You respect your teachers not just by calling them Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Jones, but by participating fully in class -- respecting the work they put into teaching you -- and doing the best you can do. When you're at work, doing the best work you can shows your boss that you respect the fact that he chose YOU to do that job. In fact, failing to do your best is disrespecting yourself.

Someone who respects their opponents acknowledges that they might lose a match, but someone who disrespects themselves WILL lose the match. But more fundamentally, someone who disrespects themselves just doesn't know how to respect anyone else. So all respect starts with self-respect -- which is why Confidence comes before Respect: confidence is a form of self-respect.



If I lose my temper and I act out on the court -- throwing rackets, shouting at the line judge, or making rude gestures at my opponent -- I'm disrespecting everyone involved. I'm disrespecting my coach and my parents by showing that they haven't taught me well enough to keep my cool. I'm disrespecting my opponent by telling him that I don't think he was skilled enough to have won that point. I'm disrespecting the viewers by wasting their time. But most importantly, I'm disrespecting myself by acting like a jerk. I'm better than that, and I should act like it.

Respect extends well beyond the court and the classroom, though. Everyone around you has stuff going on in their life-- from the lady who serves you at the restaurant to the guy who drives really slowly on the highway -- and they are all doing what they think is best. Respect means acknowledging that other people are, by and large, doing the best that they can -- and that you are willing to do what it takes to make their day easier instead of harder.

How does this relate back to the process? Self-respect leads to self-discipline and vice versa, so respect is key in focusing through the down cycle. Respecting your own abilities leads to confidence. Respecting your opponent means you'll earnestly seek the knowledge you need to defeat him, and it means you will be more content to patiently wait for the right opportunity. Respecting your coach means you'll put in the 10,000 hours you need to. Respect is a vital foundation to good sportsmanship, good habits, and success.



## Lesson 9: Organization

I'm going to be honest: I struggled with this for *thirty years* before I finally figured it out. I've always been kind of a random guy, and I let myself be a random guy for the first three decades of my life.

I've envied organized people my whole life, but it took me a long time to take any steps toward organization. First, I created organization around a small part of my life -- my office. Next was my car. Then my bedroom. One small step at a time. Organizing is the easy part. Some people say that they can't find



anything after they've organized, but that just tells me they did something wrong somewhere. If you focus and pay attention to how you use things, it should be pretty simple to organize things so that everything is in a place that makes sense.

In his book, *Open*, Andre Agassi describes his tennis bag, and it's stuck with me ever since I read it. He keeps everything in his tennis bag in little baggies, from his rubber bands for his rackets to the energy bars he eats on the court. That's organization: every time he goes over to his bag, he knows where everything is.

I've met a lot of businessmen over the years, and I've noticed that the most successful ones are usually that are the most organized. Organization is a kind of self-discipline - the same kind of discipline you rely on to get up and get going on those 'off' days.

So start with something small. Your backpack, or your locker at school. Something you use every day. Clean it, organize it, and use your discipline and focus to KEEP it clean and organized for 30 days. Don't let a single day go by without making sure it's perfectly together. After 30 days, you won't let it to go back to the way it was. I've been there myself.

Several years ago, my family and I were getting ready to sell our home. We had to keep everything in it perfectly clean and ready to show to any potential buyers that came in. It was hard at first, but we got into the necessary habits.

When the house finally sold and we moved, I realized that I never wanted to let my new house get as cluttered as the old one did. Since then, I've realized that organization is just a habit, like practicing every day, and I've learned to enjoy the process of staying organized.

When you're organized, you don't forget things. You don't lose things and waste hours looking for them. You are ready to go practice, go to school, and give it your full attention without worrying about what you might have forgotten, or trying to remember what's happening tomorrow. Organization is the foundation of focus and confidence. Get into the habit.

## Lesson 10: Preparation

It's the Boy Scout motto: *Be Prepared*. It's really short and to the point, but it means so much. Being prepared isn't just about emergencies or unexpected situations -- it's also about preparing for things you *know* will happen. It means thinking about what you'll need and want in a given situation, and getting those things ready -- whether it's some energy bars for a long trip, or enough repetition of your backhand that you can use it without worrying about it when the pressure is on.

The classic example is the test at school. Students know that these tests are coming a week ahead of time, but they wait until the last night to study. Then, they've got all this pressure on them, and they lose focus because they're stressed out. It's so much better to study a bit every night.

When I know that I have a big tennis tournament coming, I start getting ready *six weeks* beforehand. I start drinking extra water, paying close attention to what I eat so that I get complete nutrition, and I get on a regular (and plentiful) sleep schedule. I make extra sure that all of my rackets are perfect -- same weight, same grip, same string tension, same everything. And I start practicing. I play a lot, concentrating on individual things like my forehand and backhand and footwork, until I'm positive that my game is at its top form.

Another good example are astronauts, who prepare for space years before they go up. Even though they're not on a mission, they eat the same foods, breathe the same oxygen, and go into freefall simulators and on high-atmosphere flights -- all to simulate the circumstances they'll be in *without the pressure*. That way, when the pressure is on, they don't have weird food and strange conditions to adapt to in addition to whatever may go wrong.



Back on Earth, let me tell you a quick story about the easiest job interview ever. I'm used to kind of flying by the seat of my pants; I even have a friend that

tells me, "George, you're the best at winging it." But for this interview, he specifically told me, "I want you to write this presentation down. Study it, read it, memorize it, present it to yourself in a mirror." I did - and after I had delivered it to the interviewer, she just stared at me for a second, and said, "When can you start?"

Preparation is huge. It's an integral part of being able to focus through stress. People who are ready for the stress of a tournament win much more often than people who aren't -- and the same is true of almost any aspect of life.

## **Lesson 11: Desire**

Desire gets confused with passion a lot. Desire is *wanting* -- wanting something so badly that you can feel it in your joints. So much that it makes your fingers tingle. If you're passionate about something, you want to be doing it -- but desire is a more specific need. You might be passionate about skateboarding, but your desire is to master a specific maneuver or to win a particular competition.

I'm passionate about tennis -- but I desire to win the next tournament. My eyes are always on the path to that next victory. Some people think that desire has a negative connotation to it. Maybe if you desire things that are bad for you, that's true -- but in most areas of life, desire isn't just good, it's VITAL.

You can desire something without being passionate about it. You might desire things like a new car or good grades. The difference is in how you react to the desire. If you want something without being passionate, you'll be happy if it falls into your lap, and you'll take steps to get it -- but if you ARE passionate, you will chase it to the ends of the earth.

Similarly, if you're passionate about something without desire, it's basically a hobby. You might be passionate about poker, but if you don't have a desire to play well, you won't take the steps you need to in order to deliberately improve your skills.

How do you translate passion into desire? By setting goals, and driving yourself toward attaining them. Figure out what you're passionate about, and write down where you want to be in relation to your passion - in six weeks, six months, and six years. Set realistic goals that you can actually achieve, and then make achieving them important to you. Desire is your passions made real by setting goals.

Most of the people I've met in life don't really know what their goals are. They want things -- they may even *long* for things -- but they don't know how to align their passions with their desires. If you can do that, you can create the kind of burning need to achieve your goals that makes enjoying the process

automatic. Mix in some discipline, and focus becomes the natural result. Add knowledge, and confidence is born. Get organized and prepared, and you've opened the door to a place within you where anything is possible.



## Lesson 12: Loving the Battle

Loving the battle is the hardcore upgrade of enjoying the process. Enjoying practicing and getting better in a 'safe' environment is one thing, but it's entirely different to put your reputation, your skills, and your body on the line and risk it all in front of a crowd of people.

Most people are afraid of the battle, and it's really hard to love something you're afraid of. Whether the battle is a tennis match, a challenging project at school, or a job interview, many people assume that they can't succeed, so they don't really try. That way, if they fail, they can always tell themselves that they didn't care in the first place.



There are two things they don't realize: fighting makes you better at whatever you're doing, and people respect a fighter who does his best, even if he loses. Knowing that you don't ever have to be ashamed of giving something your all -- and that you improve in innumerable ways

when you dive into a challenge head-first -- you can learn to overcome your fear and love the fight.

I can't tell you how many times I've gotten a player down 4-1 in the first set of a match and they've responded by getting petty. They throw rackets, whine, and make up excuses about why they're losing. That's not confidence, it's not focus, and it's certainly not loving the fight. When I get behind -- heck, even when the match is even -- that's when I get my sharpest, because I love the fight. I start thinking about exactly what it's going to take to get back on top, or win the set.

You've probably heard someone talk by now about how Tiger Woods or Roger Federer get extremely nervous right before game-time. That nervousness comes over them because they genuinely *care* about the results of the game. They want to **win**. Nerves aren't a sign of weakness or fear, they're a sign of

desire. And desire is the root of loving the fight -- you just have to add the discipline to get past those nerves and commit to doing your best.

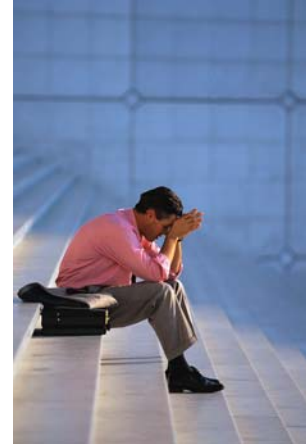
People with this skill do *better* under intense pressure, not worse. They let the stress of possible failure sharpen their focus and steel their resolve. And because of their love for the battle, they have an amazing ability to *win*.

## Lesson 13: Failure

Do you remember the last time you really wanted something, you tried to get it, and you failed? Failing hurts, and the more you want something, the more it hurts when you fail to achieve it. That's why people don't love the fight -- they're afraid to fail.

Can I tell you a secret that separates the people who succeed in life from the people who don't? Here it is: it's *important* to fail. In fact, it's pretty common to hear very wealthy or powerful people say, "Fail until you succeed."

That's a powerful idea. Fail *until* you succeed. Most of us only look at what's right in front of us: this tournament, this match, this point, this serve. But life keeps happening even after we fail, and soon we've found something new to want, and we ask ourselves whether we're going to fight for it. Here's where the secret comes in.



People who don't know the secret live in fear of failure, and they hide from the fight. People who know the secret know that every fight is a chance to win -- and that every time they fail, they have a valuable lesson to apply the next time they have a chance to fight.

I've only met one tennis champion who let his emotions get the better of him when he failed: John McEnroe -- and I call him "the exception that proves the rule." For the rest of us, getting angry or petty when we fail is a sign that we're not learning from our mistakes. Don't give up, don't get emotional, and don't berate yourself for failing. All of those responses only make each failure into an obstacle rather than an opportunity.

Every obstacle *can* be an opportunity if you learn to fail correctly. (That sounds funny, doesn't it? *Failing correctly* is an idea that took me a while to get, because it means that you can fail the wrong way. You can fail...at failing.

Failing correctly means acknowledging that *you* did something wrong. It means owning your mistakes as well as your victories. But it's way more than

that. It also means seeking out what you did wrong, examining it, and trying to figure out a way to not make that mistake again in the future.

Did you know that, before he was President, George W. Bush drove several oil companies into the ground? He tried unusual strategies, tested his management skills, and he failed pretty epically, multiple times. But his experiences taught him to lead, and his leadership ability made him the most powerful man in the world. That's what "Fail until you succeed" means.

So the next time that you have an opportunity to fight for something you want, don't step back because you're afraid of failure. Resolve to fight, and if you lose, resolve to figure out WHY you lost, so you won't ever lose that way again. Learn to fail correctly, and every challenge becomes a question not of winning and losing, but winning and *learning*.

## Lesson 14: Self-Image

Self-image is something that people think they can't change. People get out on the court and they tell themselves, "I haven't been playing well lately...my game hasn't improved enough." But an outsider would say "Wow! You've gotten so much better since the last time I watched you play."

Most people will defend their self-image, and say "No, I'm really on a plateau. I haven't gotten any better." Some of us tend to be perfectionists, and we feel like if we haven't mastered this skill or beaten this opponent, we're not improving. That leads to a negative self-image -- and a negative self-image prevents us from enjoying the process or loving the fight.

Maintaining a positive perspective, then, is VITAL. As a tennis coach, no one ever comes to me and on that first day, says, "Coach, I'm playing awesome tennis lately. Let's go!" It's always, "I'm in a slump. I have no backhand. I can't return serves..." The first thing I know they have to change is their self-image.

Fortunately, doing that is easier than it sounds. Improving your self-image is actually a lot like building confidence. Sit down every week for a season, and tell a friend about everything that you've learned, every skill that's improved, and all of your victories. Tell your friend about what you're learning now, and your plan for the future. Don't mention anything that you think you did wrong or any goals you didn't achieve -- focus on the improvements, and celebrate them. I guarantee that at the end of the season, your self-image will have improved.



In that way, building positive self-image is like building confidence, except when you're building confidence, you need to tell yourself you did well *right then and there*, and when you're building self-image, you need to do it when you're not in the heat of the moment.

Taking that lesson from the court into the rest of life: the process of improving your self-image is often referred to as *counting your blessings*. So the economy is down? Look at all of the stuff you have, and celebrate it. Someone criticized your work at school? Talk yourself

through all of the A-plus projects and papers you've already turned in. Everyone alive has reasons to be grateful. Learning to focus on those things improves your confidence, your ability to enjoy the process, and makes you a better person to be around.

## **Lesson 15: Courage**

I've seen it a hundred times: a tennis player is down 4-1 or 5-1 in the first set, and they're scared. They're so scared, in fact, that they're unfocused, and because they're not focused, they're making mistakes -- the same mistakes they're scared they will make. It's a self-fulfilling fear, and it's one that affects far too many situations both on the court and off. Courage is the factor that would change everything.

People don't realize that they're afraid of something that isn't real. Real things are things that are happening *right now*, and fear is always about something that hasn't happened yet. Conquering fear -- by creating courage -- is about recognizing that your fear is an emotional response, not a reality.

Start by asking yourself exactly what you're afraid of -- and *why*. Are you scared of losing a tennis match? Why? Maybe you're scared that your parents will be disappointed, or that the crowd watching will think you're not a good player. Why? Do your parents have a history of being disappointed in you? Will the crowd be so upset that they'll refuse to come to watch another one of your matches?

Not likely. Asking yourself *what's the worst that could happen* -- honestly and without exaggerating the answer -- is often the only real tool you need to be courageous. I remember the first time that I was seeded number one in a tournament, and my dad came to watch me play. He saw how scared I was, and he asked me, "George, what's the worst thing that could happen? You might lose the first round...and then what? Will I love you any less?"

Of course he wouldn't. The worst thing that could happen is that I would go home, be a little upset, and start getting ready for the next tournament. That realization changed the way I felt.

Finding courage is as simple as that. It's confidence, self-image, and loving the fight, all wrapped up in one. All you've got to do is give it a try. What's the worst that could happen?

## Lesson 16: Positivity

I work hard to maintain my positivity. There are too many people in the world that are negative, and it just plain sucks to be around them. People like to be around positive people, not others who just constantly talk about all of the bad things that have happened or will happen to them. Negativity is like a disease: it's contagious. Listen to a few people talk about how horrible their life is, and see how you feel. So how do you keep your positivity when people are being negative around you? And how do you regain it when you realize that you're being negative yourself? This is going to sound cheesy, but it works: smile, say something positive, and have a mantra.



*Smile.* Seriously, smile, right now. Smile like you mean it. Make sure your eyes are smiling. Don't you feel your mood changing already? It's a funny thing about being human, but our moods actually follow our expressions -- if you force yourself to smile, your mood changes. The longer you hold it, and the more focus you put into it, the better you feel.

*Say something positive.* Your mind cannot be positive and negative at the same time. Figure out what you're negative about, and think of four or five positive things to say about it. If you're upset about your tennis game, think of four or five tennis skills you have that are worth bragging about, and brag about them to yourself.

*Have a mantra.* A mantra is just a phrase or a sentence that you repeat to yourself when you're feeling negative. It should remind you of something positive, whether it's your new pet bunny or getting accepted into a good school or...whatever, really. But it should be something that you can always feel good about -- something that makes YOU feel like you have value. Discipline yourself to say it every time you start to feel negativity coming on, and let it bring you back around to a positive outlook.

Do you know what the best part about positivity is? It's contagious, too. Smile at people, and they'll smile back. Talk about things you value, and they'll be reminded of the things they value. All you have to do is conquer your own negativity and you can brighten the days of the people around you, too.

You need discipline, though. You need to learn to ask yourself constantly, "Am I being negative right now?" It's hard to recognize -- I've listened to students say fifteen negative things in a row, only to have them say "No, I'm fine," when I ask them if they're feeling negative.

If you can learn to recognize your own negativity, and combat it with these tools, you can create a long-lasting positivity for yourself. Do it every day for 30 days -- whatever it takes -- and I guarantee you that you will find people are a lot more interested in having you around. More importantly, you'll be set up to be a more positive person for the rest of your life.

## ***Lesson 17: Communication***

Communication sounds like an easy thing -- you talk to someone, they talk to you -- but it's actually much more complex than that. Most people are good at talking -- especially once they learn confidence and positive self-image -- but not many people are good at listening, and even fewer people are good at talking *to themselves* in a constructive manner.

Communication with yourself is vitally important to get through the hard parts of life. You can actually change the way that you see yourself and the events around you if you talk yourself through it. We've discussed the processes of talking yourself through failure, talking yourself into positivity, and talking yourself out of fear.

Trying to deal with the stresses in life by clamming up and shutting them away is going to lead to fear, negativity, and a bad attitude. When you try to deal with stress, if you don't talk it through, at least inside yourself -- but it's better with a friend -- you can't ever change your negative perspective on it.

Dealing with stress gets even worse when you're part of a team -- like playing doubles. If you get upset or depressed and you don't communicate with your partner, they can't help you get over it and focus on the match. You end up losing for you AND them. Taking a moment to talk your strategy over and get an idea about how you should proceed can totally change your mindset and the outcome of the match. Dealing with a boss, a significant other, or a teacher requires communication just as much as a doubles game does -- sometimes more.

Communicating with someone else has a profound effect on your attitude, because the simple process of communication puts your focus on the process instead of whatever is bothering you. Let me give you an example: coaching. When I've got my



coach hat on, I have to listen to players with a wide variety of communication styles and figure out how each one works. Some people only respond when they're pumped up; others only really learn from a more Zen-like approach.

That ability -- to put myself into people's shoes and see how they learn -- is HUGE off the court. Here's an example you can probably identify with: have your parents ever yelled at you? You probably either lash out and yell back at them, or shut up and withdraw. Both responses cut off communication. Yelling says you don't care what they're trying to say because you want them to hear you instead. Withdrawing tells them you don't care what they have to say, and you won't bother to try and meet them halfway.

The same thing happens at work, between friends, and pretty much everywhere. If you can get past the initial shock and rebellion of getting yelled at, you can take a moment to concentrate on the process of communication instead of the negativity, and you can get through to the upset person. That's when friendships are made (or saved), anger is defused, and lives are changed. If you can master the skills of internal communication and listen to the people around you, you can become a force to be reckoned with, on and off the court.

## Lesson 18: Trust



I don't have to tell you what trust means. We all know that one -- it's feeling like you can rely on something. It doesn't have to be a person; it could be your car, or your ability to hit a backhand crosscourt with a lot of topspin. In fact, trusting your skills is vital to being a champion. And trusting your skills means trusting the process.

You can't even really enjoy the process if you don't trust that it will work. Why would you push through 10,000 hours of training if you don't know for certain that it will make you a champion? That makes trust the foundation of discipline. But that part of trust is so basic that most people don't ever question it, because they don't need to.

You *should* question whether or not you can trust yourself and the people around you. Can you trust yourself to play your BEST and love the fight? Can you trust your doubles partner to cover for that lob over your head? Can you trust your coach to get you ready for the next tournament?

Almost everyone has a couple of people that they trust: their parents. That's easy. Trusting yourself, on the other hand, can be very difficult. We're all inclined to think about the things we could have done better -- our last failed match or our general feeling of not being good enough, or not feeling well. The trick to trusting yourself is that there is no trick to trusting yourself.

That's right. You *have* to learn to trust yourself the "hard way" -- the 10,000 hour way. Practice until you don't have to ask yourself if you can do it, only if you will do it better than your opponent. That's the foundation of trusting yourself: trust the process, and be disciplined enough to stick to it.

The same applies to basically any skill in life, from typing to tennis to taking over major businesses. Do it until you trust yourself to do it. It's like "fail until you succeed" taken to the next level -- succeed until you can succeed without fail.

## Lesson 19: Caring

When something lame happens, it's easy to just brush it off and say, "I don't care." But caring is important -- it's like passion and desire, but even more personal. People who really don't care literally just go through the motions of whatever they're doing, not really trying to get good results at all -- and there are a LOT of people out there that are just going through the motions. They get lost in partying or drinking or whatever, but that's not caring; that's trying to keep from having to care.

Are you here because you care?

Back in the lesson about fear, I mentioned nervousness. We talked about Tiger Woods and Roger Federer and how both of them are famous for being really nervous before a game or match -- because they *care*. We have to know deep inside ourselves that nervous energy is a good thing, because it shows that the results of our actions **mean something**.

One of the hardest things to learn to do is to acknowledge that you care. Showing that you care means that you're responsible for your own attitude if something doesn't go your way.

Hopefully, if you're on the tennis court, it's because you care about tennis. Hopefully, if you're at your job it's because you care about doing that job well. At the minimum, I hope it's because you care about winning (or succeeding). If you don't care about your specific job, I hope you at least care about doing a *good* job!

If you can explore yourself and find what it is that you care about -- and acknowledge to yourself that you DO care -- you will immediately feel more whole as a person.

I have two daughters. They fight like cats and dogs, and when they're fighting, it's easy for them to look at me and say, "I don't love my sister -- I hate her!" But those fights are just



surface scuffles. When one of them gets hurt or there's something that's gone genuinely wrong, the truth comes out. Suddenly they are backing each other up, and they are able to say that they care. That's what *should* happen.

If you don't care about anything, you have no motivation. Nothing matters. But people aren't built to live a life that doesn't matter. So think it over. Figure out what -- and who -- you are ready to commit to caring about.

## **Lesson 20: Self-Doubt**

No matter how well you've learned the lessons of positive self-image and courage and all of that, you will still find negative voices that pop up in your head from time to time. We all do. It's normal. Some people don't like to admit that they can have negative voices in their head. They regard themselves as generally positive people, and they don't think that they let themselves get down. But even positive people can sometimes get caught in 'stinking thinking.' The thing is, those voices are insidious. They can really catch us off guard.

For example, maybe I'm on the court, and I miss a shot that I think I should've made. Suddenly, I think, "Oh, no! What if my opponent has uncovered a weakness I didn't know I had? What if I'm going to start missing my forehands for the rest of the match? It's all over!" Those voices happen to everyone, and they're so quick that you can't stop them. Ignoring them only makes them louder and louder until they're the only thing in your head. You **HAVE** to deal with them.

I've trained myself. Every time I realize that I'm hearing those negative voices, I shout at them. Remember everything we said about talking to yourself? Every one of us has many little sub-personalities with different opinions and ideas, and you can use them to fight one another. It's a very complex psychological concept, but it's simple to use.

It means that you can actually drown out your own negative inner voices. I shout, "NO!" at my negative inner voice every time it pipes up, and then I immediately think a positive thought to back up my rebuke. So, if I just thought that my opponent has uncovered a weakness in my game, I think, "NO! I missed a shot, but it was MY shot. I will take control and hit it perfectly the next time!" That teaches my mind to think positively and ignore the negative part of my personality.

Like all of the self-talk I've mentioned before, it sounds silly on paper, but knowing that there's more than one *you* in you -- and you can consciously control which you to listen to -- is really an incredibly powerful tool to shape your own behavior. Use it and conquer your inner voice of doubt -- one outburst at a time.

## Lesson 21: Self-Expectation

I talk to a lot of people every day. As a husband, coach, businessman, and father, I deal with people almost every waking moment. I've watched them for a long time, and I've started to notice some patterns in people. Many people are perfectionists -- they expect to never screw up, and they're really, *really* hard on themselves if they do. Others are the opposite; they have expectations so low that they barely have any drive to do anything. Neither is setting up to be a champion: their own self-expectations are sabotaging them.

If you feel like you might fall into one of these categories, don't worry. Self-expectations can be changed. The first thing you have to do is evaluate them. What are your realistic goals and dreams? Do you expect to fail? Do you expect



to work hard? Do you expect to suffer until you achieve? Those are the expectations of a champion. Let me share a beautiful and perfectly true quote with you. "World-class performance comes from striving for a target just out of reach, but with a vivid awareness of how the gap might be bridged. Over time, through constant repetition and deep concentration, the gap will disappear, only for a new target created just out of reach once again."

That means that if you are a perfectionist, you have to take into account that failure is part of the process of improvement. You won't always bridge the gap right away -- time and constant repetition are vital. On the opposite end, if you have very low expectations of yourself, you'll never set a target that's out of your own reach. You don't improve unless there's a gap to be bridged, and you need to bridge it.

Remember, while you might not achieve a specific goal on any particular attempt, you cannot truly fail until you give up trying. You cannot fail as long as you're willing to try again. **You can't fail until you quit.** Yes, it's important enough that I said it three times. Remember, in the lesson on failure, I said you

can't learn except by failing? Well, you can't bridge the gap without learning -- so you can't bridge the gap without failing...but it's *not really a failure* as long as you get up and try again the next day.

Michael Jordan once famously said, "I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." It took me *years* of repeated losses before I became a national tennis champion. You should *expect* to have to get up, brush yourself off, and try again -- and again -- and again. That's how a champion is made.

## ***Lesson 22: Being a Role Model***

When I was 11 or 12 years old, I remember acting like a pretty bad sport sometimes. I never realized that people were watching me -- kids at the same tennis camps that were only eight or nine, and thought that I was a good role model.

Today, I watch my nine-year-old son as he looks up to players that are 11 or 12, and while they're pretty good at tennis, sometimes they don't act like good sports or they don't have good self-control. They might throw a temper tantrum, and my son will ask me, "Dad, is that OK? Is that how good players act?" I have to explain to him that no, good players don't throw their rackets or yell at the line judge.

The lesson here is that role modeling starts at a very early age -- in any activity in life, you are a role model for anyone watching. If you're good enough at tennis that you're going to a tennis camp, you're already a role model to someone -- I guarantee it.

So, every morning starting tomorrow, you need to get up and look in the mirror and ask yourself who you want to be. If someone were watching you every second of every day, how often would you be proud of the example that you set for them? How often would be ashamed to have them copy your behavior? I'm not just talking on the court, either -- I mean every minute of every day.

Would you *want* someone to use you as a role model? Like it or not, you are constantly influencing the behavior of everyone around you. You have the choice to be a positive influence or a negative one.

You can decide to be a good example by being a little bit more conscious about your actions. Ask yourself, every day, "Who is watching me? Who is going to be affected by my behavior?" Get into the habit by disciplining yourself to ask and answer the questions, and you can forge yourself into a good role model for the many people who are looking to you from the sidelines of life every day.



## ***Lesson 23: Pride***

Pride is a word that we all have strong feelings about, in part because it means so many different things. It's one of the Seven Deadly Sins, but that's not the kind of pride that I'm talking about today. I'm talking about the kind of pride that you have when you do a good job, and you want to show someone. The kind of pride that makes you stand tall and invite other people to look at who you are and what you do. That kind of pride isn't just good, it's *vital* for a champion to possess.

Are you proud of who you are? We talked in the last lesson about being a role model, but deciding to do the right thing because someone else might be watching isn't quite the goal. You should decide to do the right thing because YOU are watching, and you want to make *yourself* proud of who you are.

Andre Agassi once famously said that the most important five minutes of your entire day are the five minutes you have right before you fall asleep. When you look back on your day, you have an opportunity to ask yourself whether or not you can be proud of who you were. If not, you can resolve to do better tomorrow -- if yes, you can revel in it. Take a moment and just be proud.

A champion's pride is a personal commitment to being great. It's an attitude that refuses to accept mediocrity and insists on excellence. I'm not talking about snobbery -- like refusing to wear off-the-rack clothes or drive a beater -- but excellence, like performing at the highest level you are capable of every time you step onto the court, into the classroom, or anywhere else.

You can't be proud of anything less than your best -- but even if your best isn't good enough to win the tournament, it's something you can be proud of. You have to love the fight *and* know how to fail correctly in order to maintain the right kind of pride, but a champion's pride shows in every aspect of his life.

When you hit your pillow tonight, and your five minutes come, will you look back on today and be proud of who you were?

## **Lesson 24: Determination**

Go home.

Right now.

No, seriously, just leave.

You can't play tennis here anymore.

Get out.

No? You want to stay? Why?

Are you absolutely determined to stay? Why?

Determination -- specifically, the determination to achieve your goals -- is what you get when you learn discipline, add passion, and you set high expectations for yourself. Determination is an important component of any champion's personality; if you aren't absolutely determined to succeed, you will accept something less than the best from yourself.

"A firm or fixed intention to achieve a desired end." That's the definition of determination. Let's look at that for a second. Firm or fixed means that you don't change your mind and give up, and a desired end means you know what your goal is. But the word that might throw you off is *intention*. When someone really intends to do something, they make a conscious effort to make it relevant to their life. They set aside time for it, they'll do a good job at it -- because they've made their intention important.

Determination also means finishing what you start. If you're going to practice tennis, or work out, or even write a bunch of lessons for your students, you can't stop partway through -- you have to be determined to achieve your goal, and determination doesn't allow half-measures. Every morning, I work out, and I always finish my hour of cardio, even if no one is around to bug me about it because I'm just determined to do it.

It took a lot of determination for me to write these lessons. It's not something that comes naturally to me, but it was important for me to share what I've learned with you. So I set myself a goal, and I was determined to finish it --

and I did. No matter how uninspired I was, I disciplined myself, and I got *done*. I set my goal and I didn't waver in my intention to complete it. That's determination.



## Lesson 25: Attention

I love to be the center of attention -- I love to talk. All the time. I used to talk so much that I missed a lot of what other people were saying around me. I wasn't paying attention to them; I was paying attention to myself. In fact, the only time I ever shut up was when people that I considered 'better' than me were talking.



One day -- I don't know exactly what made me realize it -- but I woke up and I suddenly *knew* that I needed to start paying attention to the people around me. I needed to start listening.

The first step to listening is to stop talking. Stop talking, and stop thinking about what *you're* going to say next. It's hard to do -- remember the many inner voices that are always competing for attention? Well the outer voices, the voices of people talking around you, are competing for your attention, too. In most of us, the inner voices win out over the outer voices, and we have a hard time paying attention to what other people are saying.

Fortunately, there are a few things that we can do to 'trick' ourselves into paying attention. Have you ever noticed that when you think about something that's not right in front of you, your eyes tend to drift? You look up or down, left or right -- anywhere but at something in front of you. Kind of like smiling to make yourself think positively, you can also consciously focus on the person that's talking in order to direct your attention to them and away from those inner voices.

You can also give yourself a challenge: try to memorize what someone is saying as they say it. Make it a game -- try to repeat to them, verbatim, what they just said as soon as they've said it. You might not get every word right, but you will have a much easier time remembering the gist of it.

I can tell you that, as a coach, I know when my students aren't paying attention, and I don't appreciate it. It's so much easier to teach someone who pays attention -- it's like feeding energy back into the teacher-student loop. It helps me to know that I'm doing well, and it gets me excited, so I teach better, and we all benefit. Compare that to a student who isn't paying attention, which drags down my energy level, and we all suffer.

I have a saying: "When a drop of water hits a sponge, it gets absorbed - but when it hits a rock, it bounces off." The water represents knowledge, and you have the choice to be a sponge or a rock. Here's the deeper side of it: enough water will eventually erode a rock completely away. That's called ignorance, and it's the result of years of not paying attention when people try to talk to you.

My dad taught me a lot before he passed away in 2008. One of the secrets he shared with me helped me get through life without working as hard as everyone else. He told me that if you really pay attention in class -- if you make the lesson really *matter* to you (caring!) -- you won't have to study as hard later, because your brain will remember without as much review.

Just remember that even if you feel like you can't shut off the voices inside, you always have the ability to decide where to look. Discipline yourself to look at whoever is talking, and your focus will follow your eyes.

There's a reason we call it "paying" attention. Attention is the currency of every relationship, be it with your friends or your teachers or anyone else. Pay attention, and you'll get paid back -- with interest.

## ***Lesson 26: Punctuality***

Punctuality might seem like it doesn't really fit in with everything else that we've talked about so far, but really it's HUGE. Punctuality is a form of respect, but it's more than that. People who are always late are stressed, and stress keeps you from performing at your top level. People who are always too early get bored, and that boredom robs your focus.



For the people who are constantly late, there are a few things you can do to fix that problem. The first step is admitting that you have a problem getting places on time, or at least that you're just not conscious of the time. It usually starts in the morning, because of the dreaded snooze button. Seriously, if you need 10 more minutes of sleep, you need to discipline yourself to go to sleep 10 minutes earlier, period.

But even if you get up on time, it's easy to lose minutes just messing around. So if you know that you're the kind of person who runs late, try a simple double-whammy trick: roll your clocks forward 10 minutes, so it looks like it's 9:00 when it's really only 8:50, and then write out all of your appointments 15 minutes early, so write 8:45 if you have to be somewhere at 9:00. Between those two tricks, you should be able to get everywhere with plenty of time.

Now, let's say you're chronically early. There are not many people that are, but maybe you're one of them. According to the famous motivational speaker and businessman, Zig Ziglar, dealing with being early is just a matter of bringing something to do. He used to take magazine articles and newspaper clippings and just bring some with him to read.

I know that when I go to the doctor's office, I hate waiting around, so I bring something educational to read while I wait. With all of the Kindles, iPads, and audiobooks for your MP3 player or your smartphone, there's no excuse to be bored while you're waiting for your appointment.

Here's a big secret: being exactly on time is stressful. Being late is even worse, because not only is it stressful to you, it's disrespectful to everyone else. No good can come of stressing yourself out or disrespecting others -- it just makes your mood plummet and your performance suck. So aim to be like Zig Ziglar: be a little early, bring something stimulating to read, and avoid all that stress while showing the proper respect to the people you've come to see.

## ***Lesson 27: Handling Criticism***

No matter where you go and what you do in life, there are always going to be people who tell you that you didn't do as well as you could have. Some of them are only trying to tear you down by pointing out your flaws; they're called jerks, and we ignore them. But most of them are actually trying to help you improve by pointing you in the right direction. That's called constructive criticism, and it's hard to handle properly.

I'll be straight with you -- I'm *still* working on handling criticism. It's difficult! But it's also **very** important to learn to do. Constructive criticism can propel you to great new heights if you learn to accept it with grace -- or it can blow your mood and turn you into a total grump if you take it the wrong way.

When I'm doing something that I'm proud of and someone starts to criticize me, my first reaction is to defend what I'm doing. I basically just stop paying attention to what they're trying to say, and start right up with all kinds of reasons why what I did was OK. I've had to discipline myself to look them in the eyes as they talk (paying attention), and then to write down what they're saying. That way, no matter how I'm feeling at the time, I can look back when I'm not in the heat of the moment and I can see if their words still feel wrong when I'm calmer.



Here's an example that really happened to me. I was inducted into the local Hall of Fame, and they asked me to give a speech. I wrote all of my notes down on cards to remind me about what I wanted to say, and I was really proud of what I wrote. Then, I gave the speech and I was really proud of how I delivered it. Then a friend came up, congratulated me on my speech, and said, "But you know, you could have been a little more enthusiastic -- you spent a long time looking at those cards."

Now my father was in the audience, and that meant a lot to me. To have this friend of mine tell me that my father watched me deliver an imperfect speech was just devastating. My mood collapsed faster than a burst bubble. But I had disciplined myself, so I got out a pen and paper and started writing (an added benefit of doing this is that you have to explain WHY you're doing it, which is a good chance to politely acknowledge their criticism by saying you're writing it down so you don't forget later). Later, when I looked back, I determined that the next time I had to give a speech, I would memorize it.

Now this isn't to say that every time someone points out something wrong with what you did, they're trying to help. Some people really are just mean-spirited -- but you can tell because they don't offer suggestions about what to do better next time. Just ignore them. But ignoring constructive criticism is turning down the opportunity to improve your skills. A champion takes *every* opportunity to improve -- that's what loving the fight and enjoying the process are all about. So remember the right way to fail: don't let someone who's trying to be helpful bring you down; just pay attention, identify the lesson, and determine to never make that mistake again.

## ***Lesson 28: Friendship***

When I was young and just starting to get really competitive in tennis, every opponent that stood across the court from me was my enemy. I had to conquer them, defeat them, and humiliate them. They were obstacles that stood between me and victory.

Now that I'm older, I realize that the people across the court from me are just people -- like me. I have a lot in common with them. We both love tennis, for example, and we're both determined to win and to learn a good lesson if we lose. That's more than enough in common for most of my opponents to be my friends.

That's part of why sports build solid friendships. So do businesses, and pretty much any competitive venture, no matter how widespread. We live in such a small world these days that it's easy to keep track of people even if they travel to Slovenia for a year to practice with some guru -- they'll be back.



So when you're playing tennis or engaged in any other competition, always keep in mind that your opponent is a *person*. You get so much more out of empathizing and respecting that person than you do out of treating him like an obstacle. At the minimum, you'll have an opponent that respects you, and who knows? Maybe with enough time, you'll find a friend.

Speaking of time -- time is *crucial* for friendships. You can give someone you respect a gift, or advice, or what have you, but to give someone your time -- whether it's helping with some project or just hanging out -- is always something that builds friendship.

So remember: every opponent you play against has a lot in common with you. Give them a little bit of your time, talk about the things you share, and respect your opponent for those shared attributes. They might just walk away, but you might be opening the door for a friendship that can last a lifetime.

## Lesson 29: Creative Thinking

One year, I ran a tennis tournament for the Special Olympics, with a big money prize. I wasn't sure exactly how to pull it all off, so I got a bunch of people into a boardroom -- people that I knew were smart and had done similar stuff before -- and I asked them to be my planning board. I told them to give me ideas about how to pull off this big public tournament...and got nothing.

I was really disappointed with them. These people had some amazing minds, but they just didn't have the creativity (or maybe the energy) to come up with ideas for my tournament. They were really uncreative and kind of useless, and I ended up having to do most of the planning myself. Fortunately, I'm a creative thinker.

Creative thinking is the key to getting yourself out of difficult situations. Normal problems can be solved with normal, straightforward thinking, but sometimes the typical routes all fail. Let me give you an example.

Imagine that you're playing tennis against someone who is just all-around great. You've played a few games, and you just can't put your finger on his weakness. His forehand is solid, his backhand is great, he serves well, and he returns well. You're not going to beat this guy by targeting the fundamentals.

Time to get creative. Try the more exotic tricks. Put a lot of spin on the ball. Try changing the depth and start creating angles. Get quirky with your footwork, try to fake him out. It might not work, but it's certainly going to have a better chance than what you're doing right now -- and the more creative and different stuff you can think up on the fly, the better your chances of uncovering a weakness.

It takes an all-star player to pull that off, though. You have to stay cool, evaluate honestly your chances of winning on the fundamentals, and understand that more extreme measures are required. Get flustered or grim, and your focus vanishes -- and it takes *intense* focus to be creative under pressure. You have to think more than just, "I'm absolutely determined to win this," -- you have to



acknowledge that attitude alone won't carry the day, and start analyzing and trying things out.

Being a creative thinker is a huge weapon off the court, too. 'Unsolvable' problems come at you from every area in your life, from relationships to business, and they're all solvable. The only question is this: will you be creative enough to find the solution?

## ***Lesson 30: Responsibility***

I see it happen every day, in every part of my life: people blame everyone around them for the things that go wrong. Don't be like these people, blaming the people around you for your own mistakes and faults. Take responsibility for the parts of your life that you don't like. That's the only way you grow as a person, on or off the court.

As a coach, I hear doubles players disrespecting their partners as they leave the court. All the time, they blame their loss on their partner -- and often, each partner blames the other!. But a great player brings out the best in their partner, so if your partner isn't doing their best, it's your responsibility.

Accepting responsibility means accepting that **you** will take action and **you** will change, whether it's changing yourself or changing the situation so that it's better for someone else. If you don't accept responsibility for your mistakes, you never change what you're doing -- and if you never change, you never improve your skills OR improve as a person.

So if I'm playing doubles, and we're losing because my partner isn't playing his best, I make it my responsibility to fix it. I say to myself, "How can I get us out of this mess?"-- and then I say something to him like, "Hey, let's just make a few returns here. The more balls we get back, the better off we'll be."

Notice that I did three things right there. First, I took responsibility for the entire situation by being the one to point out that we were behind. Second, I took the burden of guilt off of my partner by using "we" instead of "you". And third, I didn't make my accepting him dependent on winning -- I made the goal something pretty simple (returning the ball).

No one likes to feel like they're at fault. If you take responsibility for a situation, you make everyone else more able to deal with it -- especially if they're stressed because they feel they're to blame like the situation. Of course, if you really ARE at fault, you also need to take complete responsibility and deal with the consequences. If you don't, you cannot ever learn from your mistakes and grow as a result.

## Lesson 31: Thinking Big

Thinking big means believing that you have the power to accomplish major goals. Some people think that making a million dollars is 'big,' but I'm talking beyond that. Thinking big means thinking beyond yourself and what *you* can do or what *you* want. It means thinking about how you can benefit your community, your country, and your world.

Remember that tennis tournament that I said I ran for the Special Olympics? In the years before I ran it, it was a \$5000 prize tournament. When they asked me to take charge of it, I immediately told the planning board that I wanted to give away \$20,000 in prizes. They thought I was *nuts!* But we put together a plan, we worked out how to get and distribute the prizes step by tiny step, and in the end, we pulled it off. I set the bar high, I reached for it, and I made it happen.

Little kids have an innate ability to think big. Ask a little kid what he wants to do in life, and you'll hear it: I'm gonna be a doctor, a lawyer, an astronaut. At first, adults seem to think that this is all OK, but at some point, someone tells them that they have to scale their dreams back a little, accept something less than their dream. And little by little, they're taught to think small. Don't fall for it.



Think BIG. No, think **BIGGER!**

Do you watch MTV? Have you seen the show called *The Buried Life*? These four guys decided to write down 100 things that they wanted to do before they died, and they just went for it. They did crazy stuff like play basketball with President Obama and help deliver a baby. Along the way -- and this is key -- they helped other people that they met fulfill dreams of their own. That's thinking *big*.

Thinking big can also be about getting past your own faults and fears. One great girl that I coached told me once that she was going skydiving. I was really impressed because she was trying to get past herself -- her fears -- and she went BIG to do it. It's hard to do something more impacting than jumping out of a plane. By encouraging us to take chances and stretch our limits, thinking big helps us grow as individuals.

So think big, every day. Think big, but remember that big things are made up of many little things that all have to be right. Break your big goals down into little tiny steps, as small as you can make them. The smaller the steps you have, the easier it is to get to that huge goal, and the more it really feels like you can do it. Before you know it, you'll have raised a pile of money for a charity you care for, and you'll start to realize that even thinking big is just the beginning.

## ***Lesson 32: Happiness***

Being happy all the time sounds kind of goofy, doesn't it? No one is happy one hundred percent of the time. So many people get down on themselves because they aren't achieving their goals as quickly as they think they should, or because some obstacle got in the way. But we can improve our lives considerably if we learn to be happy *in the moment*.

When I was younger, there was a really insanely popular song called "Don't Worry, Be Happy." It was all about how, even when the world was falling apart around you, you could be happy and not worry about it. The song resonated with so many people because really, we'd all like to stop worrying and just be happy for a while. The secret is: *you can*.

Remember the process? Enjoying the process and loving the fight are basically ways of telling you that every obstacle is an opportunity to improve yourself as a person. Everyone wants to improve, so keeping your eyes on the goal of improvement makes you able to be happy that you have an obstacle to overcome. Instead of letting trials and tribulations get you down, let them get you excited!

Of course, sometimes it's not an obstacle or a challenge that has you down. Sometimes, real tragedy can happen. A couple of years ago, I lost both of my parents within six months of one another. That made it really, really tough to be happy...and it's OK that it was tough. But every time a challenge came up, I got myself into the moment, focused on what was right in front of me, and I loved the fight, and I was happy in the moment -- even if it was just for that moment.

Happiness is all about gratitude. Even in the face of adversity, I wake up every morning, and I deliberately stop for a minute to think of all of the things that I am grateful for -- to count my blessings. I thank God for my success, and I thank God for my opportunities, and if I don't feel all that perky, I also thank God for my problems. I acknowledge that every problem I have is a chance for me to grow as a person. It's that kind of self-talk that helps me overcome any lingering doubt or depression, and attack my day head-on.

Being happy just makes you *feel good*. It makes you energetic, focused, and better at everything you do. Every morning -- every **moment** -- is an opportunity for you to decide to be happy. I choose to be happy. Is it easy? Does it come naturally? *Absolutely not*. But when I realized one day that it really was MY decision whether or not I was grumpy or excited, you're darn right I chose to be happy, and I keep making that decision every day.



## ***Lesson 33: Believing in Yourself***

Every single movie, cartoon, book, and TV show made for teens has at some point pulled out the line, "Believe in yourself, Main Character!" Usually it's yelled out by the love interest just before M.C. does something really crazy difficult. It's so everywhere that in some ways it's lost its meaning, but it's actually really incredibly important.

Personally, I think about this every single day of my life. When I'm going into a tennis match, I ask myself, "Do I believe that I can win this match?" I always do believe in myself, because I *have to* believe in myself in order to perform. So many people out there don't believe in themselves, and it's a shame.

We all have gifts and blessings and things that go right in our lives. We have the power to maximize those gifts and reach new limits by developing them. But you can't do that -- you can't stretch your boundaries -- if you don't believe in yourself. Great champions like Roger Federer and Raphael Nadal just absolutely *radiate* belief in their own abilities. If you want to play on their level, you're going to have to believe that you can get there.

I have a method that seems awkward at first, but it works so well that you have to give it a shot: every morning for 30 days, get up and look in the mirror. Talk to yourself. Tell yourself about everything that you did right yesterday, everything you're really good at, and all of your skills. Talk until you have a solid image in your mind of yourself as a success. Do this every morning, even if you have to get up a little early and make time to do it. After a month has come and gone, you will find that your ability to believe in yourself has skyrocketed!

So, before you go out onto the court -- or to a job interview, or even to a big test at school -- ask yourself if you believe that you can achieve your goals. And if the answer is no, go back to your mirror and talk to yourself some more. You can tell yourself who you are and who you want to be, and you will achieve those self-images. Believe it!

## Lesson 34: Time Management

Time management is a critical part of world-class performance. Can you imagine getting 10,000 hours of practice in if you're constantly getting sidetracked, distracted, and otherwise occupied? It would take *decades*. So you need to have respect for your time, and that means learning to manage it preciously.

Remember how I mentioned that attention was like money? You pay attention, and you get results in return. People say that time is money, too, but it's a little different. You don't pay time; you *invest* it. And like any investment, the more time you put into something, the higher the return. But there are a few things that might keep you from investing your time intelligently.

Maybe you over-schedule yourself, like I'm prone to doing. Maybe you just think you can get so much done so fast that you try to get it done all at once, and



you don't actually give yourself enough time to get any one thing done *right*. You need to learn to back off and prioritize.

Maybe you under-schedule yourself, and you spend too much time not doing anything functional. Maybe you think that you'd rather not be pressured and that you can get everything you need to get done on your own time. The problem with that idea is that you don't have any motivating force, and so you accomplish so much less than you should be accomplishing on any given day. You need to learn to step up -- and prioritize.

Being in charge of your own time is a massive responsibility. I could go to practice and spend all day just hitting with a partner, and I'd improve a little. But if I go to practice and I make a list and I prioritize my lessons so that I'm working on the things that are actually going to help me win my next big tournament, I improve a LOT. That's the difference between a strong player with no time management skills and a champion that wins national recognition.

So the biggest thing is figuring out where your priorities should be. It's pretty well acknowledged that you only have time to get four or five big things done each day -- some experts even say to pick two work-related and two personal things to get done and deliberately not do anything else. So if you're a to-do-list kind of person, try to stick to four items, and certainly no more than five.

Here's the important part: set a time limit for getting each thing done. If you're an over-scheduler, add 10 minutes to every item to make sure you have plenty of time to get it all done. If you're an under-scheduler, *subtract* 10 minutes from every item, and promise yourself that you won't spend more time than allotted to get things done. That will make sure that you feel a little pressure to encourage you to move.

Then, arrange the list so that the most important stuff gets done first. Before you check your Email or answer your phone, before you make a snack, before you go play tennis -- get the most important stuff done *first*.

Being conscious and aware of how you're spending your time is one of the keys to becoming a top-level competitor in any sport or business. It all comes back to respecting yourself enough to want to use your time well, and being organized enough to keep on top of it. Use your time wisely, and every other part of your life will benefit.

## ***Lesson 35: Keeping Current***

Keeping current is part enjoying the process and part being prepared. Current events are like history as it's happening. You have to know what's already happened in order to influence the future, whether it's as small as knowing your opponent's weaknesses in order to win the match or as big as knowing about recent changes to corporate law so you can keep your business from being purchased by Mc-Archer-Daniels-Midland-Glaxo-Smith-Kline-MSNBC-AOL-Donalds.

The more details you know about your current circumstances, the easier it is to think creatively and find solutions, and details come from knowing the events that shaped those circumstances. For example, I know lots of tennis coaches today that teach the exact techniques that they learned in the 1950's -- but we've come so far in the sciences of body mechanics and in tennis in general that there are entirely new and better ways to teach today.

I go to conferences, and I research online, and I watch TV shows about tennis, all so I can keep track of changes in the game and in methods of coaching. I know all too well that it's easy to become set in your ways -- I remember my dad hating my music when I



was growing up because he got stuck with the music that was around him when he was a kid. I promised myself that I was going to stay current with music, and I have. Now I listen to the same music that my 9- and 10-year-old kids do, and it makes me feel younger and more connected.

When you're keeping up on your field – be it tennis or chess -- you have a part of your mind that's always thinking about the game, always trying to find ways that you can use the current trends to your advantage, and that's HUGE.

Staying connected helps you in tennis, it helps you in business, and it helps you keep your mind younger and more agile. So grab a newspaper, watch The Daily Show, do whatever it takes to keep yourself informed and interested in the world around you.

## ***Lesson 36: Urgency***

I have a saying: "Hurry, but don't rush." Rushing is inefficient. You start to cut corners and not do things completely. Let's just say there's a reason they say "haste makes waste." Hurrying, on the other hand, just means letting yourself feel the pressure of a situation and responding appropriately -- with **urgency**.

Have you ever watched the LA Lakers play basketball? Every time their opponents score a point, Kobe Bryant immediately drives the ball as hard and far as he can toward the opponent's hoop. That's urgency. He feels the pressure, and it makes him focused, fast, and efficient.

All world-class athletes, businessmen, and other competitors have a powerful sense of urgency because they understand that *time matters*.

But they don't rush. Rushing means not being prepared, not being organized, and not managing your time. Rushing is what people do when they're off-balance and trying to catch up. Rushing is failure waiting to happen.

There's an important concept in the business world that applies here. It's called *eustress*. Stress can be divided into two parts: distress and eustress. Distress is the kind of stress that makes you break down and cry, and it's unhealthy and best avoided. But too many people try to avoid ALL stress, because they don't understand eustress. Eustress is the kind of stress that pressures someone to exceed their limits, to perform faster, better, and more efficiently. Urgency is the result of eustress.

So when I'm on the court, I let the pressure of the match guide my sense of urgency. I let myself feel the pressure, because the pressure is *good*. I need to be urgent; to be asking myself "What is important to me *right now*? What can I do in this next instant to win this match?" That focus, that determination, that's the goal. That's urgency.

## Lesson 37: Enthusiasm



Have you ever spent time with someone that just sucks the energy out of whatever they're a part of? There are lots of names for people like that. I've heard everything from 'doldrum' to 'psychic vampire' -- but I've always called these people 'deadbeats.' No one likes a deadbeat, period. Especially because it's so easy to get energetic, enthusiastic, and excited about living. Your tone of voice, your level of engagement, everything about you changes when you're enthusiastic -- so *do it*.

Be enthusiastic about what you're doing. Enthusiasm is half happiness in the moment and half urgency and half positivity. Yeah, there are three halves there -- that's part of what being enthusiastic means! Be enthusiastic about what you do. You have the ability to wake up every morning and get enthusiastic about your life, about what you're doing that day, and about who you are. If you think about those things, and it makes you smile, you're in the right place. If not, start smiling and *get there*.

On the court, enthusiasm is a form of respect -- respect for the game, for yourself, and for your opponent. The worst thing you can do in tennis -- or any competition -- is tell your opponent how much you don't want to be there, even if it's just with your body language. It's HUGELY disrespectful to treat a match like a chore.

Imagine that you're talking to a crowd of people. I do this a lot, so I know how nerve-wracking it can be. Imagine being up there at the podium, and delivering what you think is one of the best speeches you can muster...and some dude in the second row is *snoring*. Literally, asleep in his chair. It *kills* you to have stuff like that happen. It makes you doubt yourself -- are you that boring? You can't be an enthusiastic speaker if the audience isn't enthusiastic about listening. Tennis is the same way.

Being enthusiastic means paying attention to what's going on. If you start to drift, do something to get your focus back. One thing that I do is to drop a heavy book onto a table. **BAM!** Instant focus.

Your enthusiasm is under your control. You can *choose* to be enthusiastic, just like you can choose to be happy in the moment. And if you have the choice between moping through each day and not loving your life, or waking up ready to kick butt and determined to enjoy every second of it, why would you ever choose to be a deadbeat?

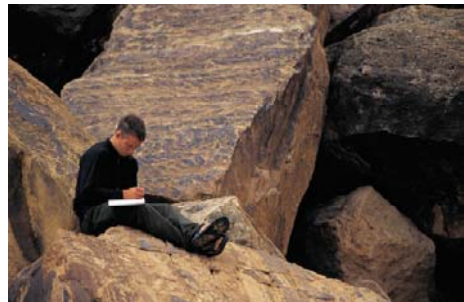
## Lesson 38: Chunking

When I was younger, I thought that I had to get everything done in one go -- if I couldn't finish it in the time I had, I shouldn't bother trying in the first place. That philosophy didn't really work for me; I missed out on a lot of things that I couldn't do all at once. Eventually, I came up with the idea of chunking.

Chunking just means breaking large goals down into smaller goals that you CAN achieve in whatever timeframe you have. So let's say you need read *Atlas Shrugged*. You can break that up into little chunks, and say "OK, I have a month. I'm going to read two chapters every day." At the end of the month, *voila!* You're done.

You can use chunking on any long-term goal, from something as easy to define as mastering the basic rules of tennis to something as complex, to something as abstract as running a big-prize-money tennis tournament, or even running for Congress. Just remember to keep each chunk manageable, and make sure every chunk contributes directly to accomplishing the goal.

I use chunking to make sure that I get all of my skills honed before a big tournament. Every day, I pick a skill that I know needs work, and I write out a plan to make sure that I have enough time to practice all of my skills before the tournament. One day, I might practice just smashing the crap out of my inside-out forehand. Anything else I do that day can be passable, but my inside-out forehands have to be spot-on for that one day. Then, the next day, it's something different.



Chunking is really important for getting big goals accomplished. This book wasn't easy for me to put together -- I knew I had a lot of stuff that I wanted to convey, but it wasn't until I actually broke it down into 42 parts that I could finally see myself getting it done. And I did -- every day, I did one part, and in no time at all, it was ready for you.

Chunking is part organization, part time management, and part preparedness. It's an absolutely vital tool for accomplishing major goals in your life -- so if you plan to be a world-class *anything*, arm yourself with this concept, and use it.

## Lesson 39: Taking Action

Here's a famous quote for you. You've heard it before. "Just do it." That's from the company, Nike. Did you know that Nike is the Greek goddess of victory? There's a lesson there: you can't win if you don't *do* something. Whether it's learning to play the flute, or speak Japanese, or dance the samba, you can't achieve your goals without **action**.

First, figure out what you want. Then, write those things out in the form of goals. Then, break those goals up (chunking) into steps that you can take every day. Let's say you want to play the drums. Just sitting there and wanting it is just going to make you frustrated and make you feel powerless. So ask yourself what it means to be able to play the drums. Does it mean you can play a few specific songs? Does it mean you can read music and play it even if you've never seen it before? Does it mean you can improvise well enough to go join a jazz quartet?

Once you know what it means to *you* to "be able to play the drums," you can start writing steps that you need to take to accomplish those goals. Maybe your first step is "take a lesson," but you don't have the money to do that, so that has to break down into more steps, like "get a job," which breaks down into the steps of "write my resume, turn it in to eight businesses every day until I get hired, work until I have enough money to take some lessons and buy a drum set." Then, every day, you follow the steps in order until you've taken that lesson, purchased that drum set, mastered reading music and playing directly from the sheet, and eventually you can achieve your major goal.



It's easy to sit around and dream up stuff that you'd like, but until you break it down and list what it will actually take to achieve it, you won't be able to make the decision whether to pursue it or not. If you don't ever make the decision, then you'll eventually start to get down on yourself for wanting stuff and never having it. That creates negative voices in your head that can ruin your self-image.

So sit down tonight, and write down three things: one you want to do, one you want to have, and one you want to be. For example, you might say, "I want to go see Stonehenge, I want to own a car, and I want to be an A student." Write down what you need to accomplish those goals, and what steps you can take to attain those things. Then, **do it**.

It's funny, because I look back sometimes and I remember watching people on the tennis court, wondering how they could be so good at tennis. Then I catch myself easily hitting a gigantic forehand , and I think...I did it. I took action, and I'm here.

How awesome is that?

## ***Lesson 40: Persistence Without Exception***

Just doing it is all well and good in theory, but what if someone tells you that you have to stop? What if someone says your goal is unrealistic, or just plain dumb?

Just do it anyway.

Persist. Persist through people telling you that you can't do it, no matter how reasonable they sound. There is *always* a way.

When I was playing tennis, I practiced until I got something right, no matter how long it took or how silly I might have looked. When I was practicing my deep volley, I put cones 18 inches from the baseline, and I determined that I was going to go until I could hit twenty shots *in a row* between those cones and the baseline. It got so dark that I couldn't see the ball anymore, but there I was, persisting and persisting until I got it right. Persisting without exception. That's how I acquired the skills I have today.

You have to persist in order to achieve your goals. Even if you've chunked up the steps, you still have to persist in getting every step completely done, and you have to persist enough to take the next step every single day. You cannot fail until you quit. If you just keep working on it, you can eventually accomplish anything.

Way back in Lesson 2, we talked about having the discipline you need in order to get past the bad mornings and get back into the process anyway. Persistence is like that discipline but HUGE. Bad mornings are annoying, but when you've got your friends telling you that your dreams aren't that important or your parents telling you that you can't afford to achieve your goals, you have to persist *without exception*. One hundred percent persistence.

Babies are a good example. I watched my children fall down about a bajillion times while they were learning to crawl, then stand, then walk, then run. They knew from the beginning what they wanted -- mobility and freedom -- and they persisted until they got it, even if it took months and months or even years.

Be like a baby. Don't let anything stop you from doing what you have a passion for. You cannot fail until you quit, so never quit. Surround yourself with persistence. Write it on your bathroom mirror, in your binder at school, and across your bedroom door: "My name is George Zink and I will persist *without exception* today and every day."



## **Lesson 41: Excellence**

Excellence. It has the word "excel" right there in the word. Excel...lence. Striving for excellence means you strive to excel in everything you do. Taking action and being persistent are critical, but if your goal isn't to *excel*, you won't ever become a champion. Mediocrity is completely unacceptable.

The trick is that excellence, like all other goals, can be chunked. For example, if I want to excel at tennis, I need to have a great forehand. So, I practice my forehand until it's great. Then, I need a great backhand -- so I practice that, too. Piece by piece, I put together a complete set of amazing tennis skills, and in the end, I'm playing for a national championship.

The thing about excellence is that it's not specific to any one thing in life. You can -- and you **should** -- strive to excel at getting better. You should strive for excellence in the process of improving: excellence in discipline, excellence in focus, excellence in every one of these lessons and more.

You should strive for excellence in *everything you do*. That's right -- remember what I said about thinking big? This is the ultimate example. You CAN be excellent in everything you do, so why set the bar any lower?

Remember, you can't fail until you quit. You cannot fail until you quit striving. Striving is the important part. If your best isn't good enough at one particular moment, learn the lesson that the moment had to teach you. Move on to the next moment and commit yourself to excelling at that one.

I've tried to offer you one way to chunk up that goal -- it's 42 lessons long. Start by excelling at Lesson 1, and once you've mastered enjoying the process, move on to discipline, and focus, and so on. By the time you've gotten to excelling at striving for excellence, you'll be a magnificent human being, and the kind of person who is on the path to being a world champion -- whatever goal you choose to pursue.

## Lesson 42: Teamwork

Excellence as an individual is crucial to being a champion, but there's one thing that we haven't discussed yet that's just as important. Teamwork. As a team, everyone achieves more -- and an excellent team player is so much more valuable than an excellent individual player, whether you're talking about sports or business or anything else.

Tennis is largely considered an individual sport. Even Andre Agassi in his book, *Open*, described tennis as a 'lonely sport.' I have to say, I disagree. I have a team. It's made up of my wife, my kids, my friends, my nephew -- everyone who shows up to support me during practice or during the game. Even my late parents are on my team: they helped make me who I am today.

So I pride myself on being an excellent team member. I love my team, and I want to give them the best me that I can give. You've probably heard people



say that there is no "I" in team. That's because people who are only interested in their own excellence are incredibly disruptive to the team mechanic. In a team, your goal has to be the success of the team, not any specific member.

Whether it's made up of your family, your coworkers, or your church group, every team you're a part of can benefit from your membership if you learn to excel at teamwork.

We've actually already talked about this indirectly. When you're on a team, there are two things that you need to do to be a good teammate. The first is to apply yourself to solving the team's problems -- bring creative thinking, focus, and persistence to the table. The second is to be responsible for the team's results. That means you do everything you can to ensure a victory, including working on improving the morale and focus of team members that aren't all there -- without blaming them for anything that's not working as well as it should.

This book was a massive example of the power of teamwork. I have huge support from my 'home team' -- my wife, my kids, my friends -- and without them I never would have gotten these ideas out at all.

Remember back when I told you about the tennis tournament that I ran, where I asked for ideas and no one had any? That wasn't really a team, at first -- it was a bunch of deadbeats in a room. I could easily have blamed them for failing me and run the tournament like it had been run for the last umpteen years -- but I pride myself on being an *excellent* team player, so I took responsibility. I led them out of their collective funk, got them focused, and together we kicked butt.

So don't be a deadbeat to your team. Don't slow them down -- bring them UP. Bring an idea to your team every time you get together. Look after the ones that aren't energized and ready to win, and do whatever you can to get them focused. Be *that guy*, and everyone will want to pick you first when the time comes.

## ***Postscript***

Hopefully, you can see how each of these pieces fits together to make a coherent plan for achieving great things. Every piece builds on every other, and they are all important for building the character required to excel.

I honestly believe that *you* can be a champion if you take my experience and develop it into your own life and build on it. I've said throughout this book and will continue to say it: choose your dream, follow these steps, and it will be yours.

I've really enjoyed the process of putting this book together. I hope that you've enjoyed reading it, and I hope that you'll continue to read it and take new lessons away from it over the years.

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