

Habit, Not Discipline

Category: Exercise

written by Bob Dunas | July 1, 2021

I used to work at a facility that had a very well-equipped on-site gym for employees. I would meet a co-worker there just about every day and we'd exercise together. One day, while walking past the receptionist's desk, gym bag in hand on the way to my daily workout, the receptionist remarked, "You are so disciplined!" I smiled and continued on to the gym and my scheduled workout.

But I couldn't stop thinking about her comment—something about it felt not quite right. I mean, I may be a disciplined person, but going to the gym regularly didn't *feel* like discipline; it wasn't a "feeling" at all.

Later, she and I had a chance to chat, and I asked her what her routine looked like when she arrived home from work. She said she kicked her shoes off, grabbed something to drink, and sat on the couch as she went through her mail and read the newspaper. I asked her if it took discipline or will-power to make herself do those things, to which she laughed and said that no, she'd been repeating the pattern for so long it was just "what I do."

I told her that was how I felt about going to the gym—it had become "what I do." I said there were days I looked forward to it, but there were also days when I had some dread (depending on what the workout looked like!), but either way, it was much more about habit than discipline. In fact, I had been exercising regularly for so long that *not* exercising was actually more difficult than doing it!

I don't know if she ended up changing her lifestyle to include exercise, but sometimes all you can do is plant a seed. I believe it is important to challenge the preconceived notion that people fall into one of two categories—those who exercise and those who don't—and that the difference is whether or not you have the willpower/discipline to make it happen.

That incident was over 10 years ago, and although I don't work at the same place anymore, I still exercise regularly, because it is simply "what I do." So don't let a perceived lack of willpower or discipline derail your pursuit of health and fitness before you even get started. Focus on building a habit, one day at a time, and after a while it will become simply "what you do."

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