*5*am Wake-up!

**Introduction**

*Wake-up at 5am for 30 days!* *What possible benefit could be derived from beating the sparrow out of bed?* The way I see it there are two. Firstly, if you do decide to pit yourself against this challenge you will, out of necessity, be forced to cultivate greater discipline. I will not, through fear of patronising the reader, expatiate on the many meritorious benefits of developing greater self-discipline. Yet, though self-discipline certainly is beneficial, in more ways than I care to catalogue, few possess this illusive, Scarlet Pimpernelian quality – wouldn’t you agree? (Oh, and whilst we’re on the subject, how many times did you hit the snooze button this morning?)

Self-discipline is like the Swiss army knife of personal attributes. Let me explain what I mean by this. One who is suffused in self-discipline won’t just find it easier to get out of bed at the appointed time. They are more likely to:

“I want to dedicate myself to training and discipline; I want to spend every moment of every day working to improve myself.”

*- Myamoto Musashi*

* Exercise greater dietary restraint, choosing healthier food options over unhealthy alternatives
* Sustain a physical fitness regime
* Avoid running-up personal debt
* Uphold the principals of punctuality
* Delay gratification and
* Pursue eudemonic activities as opposed to indulging in hedonic ones

Because self-discipline doesn’t discriminate you can apply it to pretty much any aspect of your life. And like other personal qualities, such as integrity, honesty and/or reliability, it can be developed, honed and fortified through continued practice. (Though there may be a smidgen of truth in the prevailing supposition that some people have a natural propensity toward self-discipline, those who aren’t so genetically fortuitous can still work on it.) I think it best to treat self-discipline as you would a muscle. If you want to make a muscle stronger, or enhance its functional utility, what would you do? Exercise it of course. Look at this challenge as weight training for your self-discipline.

Secondly, your day will be significantly expanded (depending, of course, on what time you currently enter the land of the living). Simply put, I’m offering you a chance to extend your life. When asked why he arose at such an un-godly hour and slept so little (less than 4hrs a night), Sir Walter Raleigh reportedly said, ‘Because I’ll sleep loads when I’m dead!’ Now I’m not entirely sure whether Walt really did say that but, irrespective of if he did or no, there’s a profound underlying truth there. That truth: once you’ve croaked it you’ll enter a non-experiential state for . . . wait for it . . . eternity! With that in mind every extra minute we can add to our waking day should be our chief endeavour.

How many times have you heard someone say something like ‘No, I can’t get fit because I just don’t have the time?’ or, ‘Yeah, I’d really love to learn a language but I’m too busy.’ (How many times have you yourself used the ‘I can’t do [such and such] because I don’t have the time’ excuse?) Whenever I encounter these excuses, and the first one I do a lot, being a health and fitness professional, my first prescriptive piece of advice is always: well get up earlier. Usually, when I serve up this rebuttal, the response is stunned silence, a swift change of subject or the automated ‘*Ye–ah* I would . . . but . . .’

Rolling out of bed an hour or so earlier will enable you to do those things you’ve been putting off because you previously had insufficient time in the bank. Think about that for a second. If you’ve ran into your overdraft to pay it off you’ll either have to curb spending, sell a kidney or pull a few extra shifts. When you’re running low on time you can simply wake-up a little earlier (or ring every drop of time efficiency out of your day). Set the alarm for 5am instead of 6 or 7 and – hey presto! – you’ve got an extra hour or two in the bank, it’s that easy.

*That easy? But what if you struggle to get out of bed at the best of times, let alone at such an ungodly hour?* According to historical legend the German philosopher Immanuel Kant hired a lackey to literally drag him out of bed at five every morning. Sometimes a physical altercation would ensue culminating in the dismissal of the lackey’s services. However, Kant, once he’d woken-up and soothed his fiery soul with a bit of philosophising, would always reinstate the poor devil just in time for the following morning reveille. If you don’t have the pecuniary means, or moral bent, to hire a personal slave then I have compiled a small list of tricks, tips and tactics that may enable you to more easily smash the shackles of sleep.

* Set a tune on your alarm clock that is really, *really*, irritating; a tune by the Spice Girls or Justin Bieber would wake me from a coma, let alone a light weekday slumber.
* Also, don’t have your alarm clock right by your bed, set it at a distance so you’ve got to physically get out of bed to silence *Spice up your Life*.
* Have a pre-bedtime pep talk. Tell yourself, prior to settling down for the night, *I absolutely will get up tomorrow morning without a moment’s hesitation*!
* Sleep in the nude. Yes, the comfort of pyjamas, or even a T-shirt, could be enough to tip the scales in favour of five more minutes – which of course can turn into ten more minutes, fifteen more minutes and . . . you’re back to day one of this challenge.
* Make things easy: set your alarm to play *I’m a Barbie Girl* and place it on the other side of the room. Before you hit the sack place your clothes and shoes by the alarm clock so that you can climb straight into them. Once you’re sufficiently garbed grab your keys and go out for a twenty minute brisk walk.

*Ok, so I’ve managed to alight at the appointed time thanks to implementing some of your tricks, tips and tactics; however, what am I now to do with all this additional time*? *all this additional life*? Simple. The things you love doing. *But I’m a boring git whose hobbies consist of watching reruns of Games of Thrones, hoovering and up-dating my Facebook status. What am I supposed to do with more time*? Well, consider going out for a run, maybe pick up a book (open it then read it), do some yoga, stretching, meditation or learn a new hobby. Whatever you do, don’t do more of the mundane!

**Rules**

The rules are very simple. However, if you break one you must ‘man-up’ to the fact and start the 30 days afresh the following morning.

* Set one alarm to go off at 4:59am and, without a moment’s hesitation or delay, throw yourself out of bed
* Absolutely NO f\*@K!n£ snooze button molestation (whoever invented snooze should be shot!)
* No Sunday morning lie-ins

**Participation Log**

All went rather well if I do say so myself – the second attempt did anyway. Yep, I must confess that on day 18 of the first attempt my alarm failed to go off and I awoke about 20 minutes too late; which, having progressed nearly two thirds into the challenge, was quite the crushing blow.

The initial shock of adjusting to an earlier wake up was, by day 18, starting to wear off and I was no longer struggling to scrape myself out of bed. One simple mistake (forgetting to charge my phone) and I’d inadvertently stepped out of bed onto a long slippery snake which sent me sliding all the way back to the start.

Though an unwelcomed setback I found myself more frustrated, not at the prospect of having to start again, as you might naturally assume, but at letting my partner down. I’d for some reason become really competitive with this challenge and she (my much better half) was rooting for me every morning. The alarm would go off and she’d whisper, ‘Time to get up’ (at which point I would groan or mutter some incoherent objection). ‘Come on you can do it.’ I found that this motivational pep-talk, sometimes barely comprehensible when spoken into a pillow, really spurred me on and fuelled my competitive spirit.

So, there I was, next morning at 5am, the prospect of 29 more days to greet me, up and out of bed slipping into my scruffs about to enjoy a twenty minute walk in the cold and the dark. From then on out it was pretty much plain sailing and I encountered no further problems other than the minor one of how to divvy up my extra hour of experiential existence.

I’m a creature of habit and I like to compartmentalise activities into hermetically sealed portions of time. Because I would normally, prior to the challenge, rise at 6am, I had one extra hour at my disposal. Here’s what I did with it:

**1st** **20 minute block:** walk – I found this to be the most effective way of shrugging off the boon of sleep. A 20 minute stroll in the biting cold of a November morning was more than enough to chase away the predatory ‘sleepiness’ that closely stalks those who have just escaped from the land of Nod. For the first couple of mornings I jumped straight on my guitar or picked up from the last chapter of the book I was reading, but five minutes in and I was fighting falling eyelids and nodding head. I found that a quick walk around the block solved this problem and when I got back I was fresh and wide eyed for the next two activities.

**2nd** **20 minute block:** guitar practice – I’m an avid guitar enthusiast and any additional practice is a bonus which only enhances one’s picking prowess. For twenty minutes I’d get my metronome out (a device for honing timing and rhythm) and practice scales and chord progressions. After only a week of this I’d improved my technical accuracy significantly.

**3rd** **20 minute block:** reading (sometimes interchanged with meditation) – invariable after forty minutes I was compos mentis enough to read and understand whatever the author was jabbering on about. Let me just say, I would not advocate reading some popular trashy novel (or a newspaper/magazine). Instead use this additional time to edify yourself either with a factual scientific publication or, better by far, Greek philosophy. I read the *Letters of Seneca* and a scientific publication on Global Warming. From Seneca I learnt, amongst other things, to cultivate self-sufficiency and to strive always to improve myself. From Thomas L. Friedman, author of *Hot, Flat & Crowded*, I now understand the many contributing factors which together fuel Global Warming and what we can do to mitigate the environmental apocalypse we’re heading towards.

**Outcomes**

* All said and done, after 30 straight days of waking up at 5am, I expanded my life by one day and six hours. To me that sounds pretty damn good. As a consequence of this challenge I now get up at 5:30 (as opposed to 6am before) for three mornings a week, 5am for three mornings and 6:30 for one (Sunday *snoozywoozy*), adding about 4 extra hours of life to my week.
* I’m a bit of a sad git, so, in order to get an accurate idea of how far I was walking each morning, I Google mapped the distance. It turned out to be little over a mile, meaning that I walked more than a marathon during the challenge.
* As I’ve already said, I expanded my experiential phenomenological experience by one day and six hours. If I sustained this for an entire year, and that’s exactly what I plan on doing, I would accrue 15 extra days of life.
* I read two excellent books and developed my guitaring skills.

**This Concludes the Challenge: 5am Wake Up**