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PE.550 Designing Your Life
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Lecture/Discussion 1: Promises and Consequences, Areas of Life

Principle: Promises and Consequences

Pick an area that you have had difficulties designing, and that you would like to focus on. Got it? Now we're going to take action to get you to your dream life in that area.

Promises

We have dreams about where we want to go. To make those dreams a reality, we need to take action. In this class, we code that action in the form of weekly promises to ourselves. For example, I want to lose weight. Therefore, this week I promise myself that I will go to the gym three times.

Articulating and accomplishing your promises is a way to build up your personal integrity. The muscle of doing what you say you will do takes strengthening and practice. There is no magic pill you can take and all of a sudden be better. It just takes time and effort and dedication to getting stronger. For example, It's like learning to run a marathon: set up a training schedule, practice, don't give up even if you're tempted to stay on the couch, condition your body to the feeling of running. After several weeks, you notice that you're now able to run farther than before. It takes effort, and you're never going to have to stop trying.

Promises should be realistic: something you believe can happen

Example: growing a monkey tail vs. losing 10 pounds.

Promises should take on big stuff that you wouldn't routinely attempt. They should be part of a bigger plan for where you want to go in your life. Finally, promises build on each other.

Making promises is a process of refinement as you learn what works for you. Be as specific as possible in your promises: duration, how hard, etc. Pay careful attention to use active language "I will" vs. "I wish, I hope." The latter sets you up for failure. You will inevitably find loopholes, and it is your job to make a call as to your intention when you made the promise; what you said vs. what you meant. This should be easy to tell, because you can feel it. Then tighten up the promise in the coming week so it is no longer ambiguous.

- For example, you say you will run three times this week. You go backpacking for a weekend. Does that count?

Get to know yourself, where you are going to cheat, and put in restrictions.

- For example, you say "I will call my brother this weekend" and you call him at a time when you know he won't be around.

Foresee and manage external dependencies, such as depending on someone else to execute your promise. Keep promises challenging and interesting; once you've mastered one, move on to another.

Don't judge yourself based on these promises. We are human and so don't want to keep our promises to ourselves when they are inconvenient or uncomfortable or when we simply want to do something else. This is a game that you can play, and by winning you get a big pot of gold: integrity and the life you want!

Consequences

A consequence is something you pay when you don't keep your promise. The goal of consequences is to improve the rate at which you keep your promises, to make you more likely to follow through. Consequences also give you a chance to restore integrity. Consequences are NOT punishments, but rather a chance for you to clean things up.

You don't necessarily need consequences. You can give yourself rewards for keeping promises, or have no consequence at all. But if you don't keep those promises, you should switch to consequences. At the end of the day, we've found that consequences are the most effective motivator.

Examples of consequences include:

- throwing money on the street
- wearing bunny ears in public
- giving up desserts/wine/chocolate
- taking on more chores at home.

Each week, ask yourself how you did. What thoughts and feelings came up? What form did your temptations take? What promises and consequences worked for you, and which didn't? Are you getting closer to your goals, and are they the right goals for you. What does it feel like to be in integrity?

A few tips:

- An hour never equals 60 minutes, only about 40 minutes with 20 minutes for being human, maybe 10. Negotiate with yourself. Don't plan your whole life, allow time for reorganization if something blows up
- Sometimes you do the very thing you are trying not to do. So focus on what you want to do, not what you don't want to do.
- You are really in charge, so do not set yourself up to choke by making the promises very hard.

What are you trying to create? What are you going to do? It's your opportunity to show that you are serious, but play with it. Have fun and laugh! You have to have the fight, do the battle, but enjoy the process. This is Designing YOUR Life. This is designing your laws, it's your privilege to start your own rules and change them if they suck. There is a consequence to everything. You are playing the sport of being alive.

Dealing with the inner voice

Sometimes you will find negative chatter in your head that tries to talk you out of keeping a promise. To deal with that chatter, you should *purge* it: write down everything that the chatter is saying. Give us everything. Exposed to the light of day on paper, it should look gross. Ewww, did I really think that? Next, invent a new inner voice that catches the negative chatter. And hold onto this voice and listen to it.

Class Participation

Participant 1: This seemed so easy at IAP, but it's hard to have the discipline to kick my butt when I haven't for so long. For example, I don't go to the gym. I made the consequence that I had to clean my office. I did it. But man, it takes a lot of effort.

Lauren: This is why we have the continuing class. This takes hammering. We need to get you addicted to integrity.

Participant 2: I told my gym buddy that I would give her \$50 if I didn't go to the gym with her. She was very supportive, and called me to make sure I'd go. And I went. The \$50 makes the voice in my head go away.

Lauren: We conjure up a "poor me" story that makes it seem impossible to do something. But we really are capable. It's just the voice.

Participant 3: I signed up for an exercise class, and then started beating myself up for doing it. I'm not going to be here in March, it's a waste of money. But I realized it was the voice, and stopped it.

Lauren: You're going to find out that you are not that complicated. It is always the same three. We are in the business of finding those three.

Participant 4: I am writing a letter to my father. I still don't want him in my life, but I am at least going to tell him my truth.

Lauren: Good job getting that moving.

Participant 5: I feel like I'm in chaos. Sometimes I feel like I don't have control.

Lauren: There are many things in your life that you have 100% dominion over. You are relinquishing your power.

Participant 6: It's so hard to get up early in the morning. I just need more sleep.

Lauren: That's a theory. Put a consequence in that for each 1 minute late you get up, you will get 10 minutes less sleep the next night.

Homework

1. Design a set of promises and consequences for three of your 18 areas of life. These promises should get you closer to your dream in each area. Email us the promises and consequences by tomorrow night, and send us the results of the week's promises and promises for the coming week to us by Sunday. Report on whether you kept or did not keep your promises. Suggested format:
 - a. Describe the promise
 - b. Write for each promise "KEPT" or "NOT KEPT"
 - c. Describe the consequence
 - d. Write if you paid the consequence or not. IF no, by when will you pay it?
 - e. What are your stats on keeping the promise (e.g. I kept 5/7 days).
 - f. What did you notice about yourself? Where did you stop yourself? Where were you a chicken or brat, and where were you great? You can include this for any promise, but ALWAYS do this for every promise that was NOT KEPT.