

What Does Discipline Mean?

Brian Kight



Discipline. One word...thousands of opinions.

Is it punishment? Is it obedience? Is it rules? Is it enforcement?

Is it always doing the same thing? Is it always doing the right thing? (Whatever that is.)

Is it consistency? Is it doing what you're told?

Is it rigid? Is it boring?

Do you even get a choice? Do you just comply?

To understand what discipline really is and what it really means, let's look at the origin of the word to find its intent and true form.

The word "disciple" comes from the Latin word *discipulus* meaning "student." Most people believe a disciple is a follower, probably because of the religious context, but in reality it means student. A disciple is (and I'll make up a word here) a *studier.* The word "discipline" is from the Latin word *disciplina* meaning "instruction and training." It's derived from the root word *discere* — "to learn."

So what is discipline?

Discipline is to study, learn, train, and apply a system of standards.

What isn't discipline? Discipline is not rules, regulations, or punishment.

It is not compliance, obedience, or enforcement. It is not rigid, boring, or always doing the same thing.

Discipline is not something others do to you. It is something you do for yourself. You can receive instruction or guidance from one or many sources, but the source of discipline is not external. It is internal.

Discipline is not obedience to someone else's standards to avoid punishment. It is learning and applying intentional standards to achieve meaningful objectives.

Discipline is a choice ... your choice. It is a decision. Better yet, all your decisions.

Those who are first willing to lead themselves are eventually able to lead others.

The distinction between discipline being an external dynamic or an internal dynamic, a mandatory rule or a personal choice, is important. Understanding this at a deeper level is your gateway into a better, more discipline-driven life.

Since discipline is a choice and we're learning how to get more and better discipline, that provides us some direction as to what discipline does for us and why we want it.

We're learning how to get more and better choices. More and better

options. More and better standards. More and better skills. More and better flexibility.

Do you see how it works?

When you understand discipline as a choice, you are in control, not anyone or anything else. More discipline, more choice, more control. Less discipline, less choice, less control. Good, right?

Let's use a common example: I want to get up at 4:45 am and workout. I have a four-month-old son who usually wakes up at 6 am and, like all babies, needs a lot of time and attention. I have to take care of him, make coffee, get myself ready, and leave for work by 7:30 am. So, I need to workout before he wakes up ... hence the 4:45 am alarm.

My alarm goes off, I choose discipline, get up, workout, wake up my son, love on him, and leave for work. My first win of the day is in the books and my mind is clear to focus on my next priorities knowing my workout is done and I don't have to "find the time" to make it up later. I'm in control of me and my day. I can even splurge a little at lunch or dinner because I worked out hard. I burned so I earned.

Those who are first willing to lead themselves are eventually able to lead others.

■ But what if I don't choose discipline?

My alarm goes off, I choose default, sleep in, wake up my son, still love on him, and leave for work. I'm mentally and emotionally disappointed in myself because I should have gotten up and worked out. My mind is searching for when I can make it up. Tonight? Too busy, too late, too tired. Tomorrow? It was supposed to be my off day. Now I'm disappointed and distracted. I'm not in control of me or my day. I'm stressed and irritated, my discipline fades even further, so I make impulsive eating decisions at lunch and dinner because I'm already having an off-day. Might as well be consistent.

■ Sound familiar?

The two scenarios described above translate to any scenario in any environment. When we maintain our own

personal discipline, our choice, we retain control of ourselves and how we move through our environments.

When we lose our personal discipline, also our choice, we give control away to other people, external circumstances, and the inevitable randomness of life. We drift and become "the plaything of circumstances" (Viktor Frankl, "Man's Search for Meaning").

More discipline, more choice, more control. Better options. Higher standards. Improved skill. More flexibility.

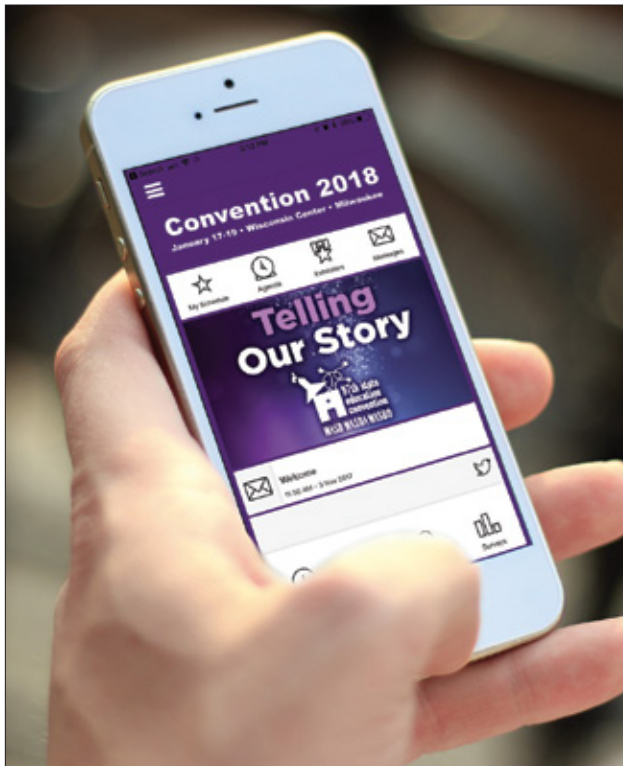
Less discipline, less choice, less control. Fewer options. Lower standards. Inadequate skill. Less flexibility.

Go test this deeper understanding of discipline, what it is, how it works, and why it works. Observe yourself throughout the day. Observe other people. Measure these words against what you observe. Get out in the field and do the work. ■

Brian Kight is CEO of Focus 3, an organization dedicated to developing exceptional leaders by implementing simple, yet effective systems.

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