



**The Obstacle is the Way** - Ryan Holiday  
*The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph*  
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Reader's Key:

**\*\*Chapter Header\*\***

Quotes from the book attributed to the author.

“Quotes attributed to someone else” - Quoted Person  
mike's notes on the book

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### **\*\*Preface\*\***

Marcus Aurelius (170 CE) journaled and wrote on the most effective formulas for success: A formula for thriving not just in spite of whatever happens but because of it. It was only a paragraph.

“The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.”

Setbacks and problems are always expected and never permanent. He truly saw several of his obstacles as an opportunity to practice virtue: patience, courage, humility, resourcefulness, reason, justice, and creativity.

That advice has weathered the agents and several have followed it to success. The choice: “Will we be blocked by obstacles or will we advance through and over them?”

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### **\*\*Introduction\*\***

What if the obstacle or problem in front of you wasn't so bad?  
What if it had benefits, exclusively for you and you alone? What would you do with it?

Most of us are paralyzed with the obstacles in front of us. What blocks us seems quite clear.

These obstacles are unique to us. The responses are the same: Fear, frustration, confusion, helplessness, depression, anger.

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Countless books on how to achieve success, what is there to overcome failure? Only one thing is typically at fault: Our attitude and approach.

Those historical successes had a method and a framework for understanding, appreciating and acting upon the obstacles thrown at them.

“Bad companies are destroyed by crisis. Good companies survive them. Great companies are improved by them.” - Andy Grove, former CEO of Intel

Great individuals find a way to transform weakness into strength.

Most of the modern obstacles are minor inconveniences or disadvantages.

This book is about the lessons and tricks to overcome the obstacles. And share the collective wisdom of generation

Tackles: Overcoming mental, physical, emotional, and perceived obstacles. Aim is to turn those into an advantage for you..

Not *this is not so bad* **but** *I can make this good for me.*  
*The Obstacles that lie before us.*

Think about what holds you back. Then run down the list of those who've come before you. Have there been others in similar situations who have turned things around?

Far too many gave up, but some persevere and made it through. We can learn from them.

When you have a goal, the obstacles are there to teach you how to get where you want to go. They carve your path.

Most of the modern obstacles are internal not external.  
Abundance can be its own obstacle.  
Great times are great softeners.

*The Way Through Them*

“Objective judgment, now at this very moment. Unselfish action, now at this very moment. Willing acceptance, now at this very moment-of all external events. That's all you need.” - Marcus Aurelius

Overcoming is the critical steps: Perception, Action, and Will.

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Obstacles are not only to be expected but to be embraced as opportunities.

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### **\*\*Part 1: Perception\*\***

Perception: how we see and understand what occurs around us and what we decide those events will mean.

Learn to limit your passions and your own control over your life to prevent being overcome by them.

Takes skill and discipline to separate bad perception from clear reliable signals. Can get you to the truth. Seeing things as simple as they are. Not good or bad just...there.

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### **\*\*The Discipline of Perception\*\***

Rockefeller was a bookkeeper and aspiring investor before becoming, well, Rockefeller. He kept his head while everyone else lost theirs in the Panic of 1857. Learned the market was inherently unpredictable and volatile. Only the rational and disciplined mind could hope to profit from it.

Speculation = disaster. Ignore the mad crowd.

Had the strength to resist temptation or excitement no matter how seductive, no matter the investing situation.

This was a learned behavior that he translated to Standard Oil

Within 20 years of the panic of 1857, he owned 90% of the oil market.

What matters is what you see in the obstacle, how you react to them, and do you keep your composure with them?

We choose to feel the way we continue to feel. First reaction isn't permanent.

Outward appearances are deception, what's beneath them is what matters.

Unhelpful perceptions can invade our minds and throw off our direction.

Our brains are evolved for a completely different environment than the modern world. Primed for existential threats. And dangers that don't exist.

Discipline in perception allows you to filter your emotions and see the advantage and thus the people's course of action. Hone your ability to control, understand, and channel these signals.

Any event is a chance to move forward for somebody.

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Keep in mind to try to

- Be objective
- Control emotions and keep even keel
- Choose to see the good in a situation
- Steady your nerves
- Ignore what disturbs or limits others
- Place things in perspective
- Revert to the present moment
- Focus on what can be controlled

It is a self-discipline and logic process. Just deploy it.

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### **\*\*Recognize your Power\*\***

“Choose not to be harmed-and you won’t be harmed. Don’t feel harmed-and you haven’t been.” - Marcus Aurelius

I might not have wanted this to happen, but I can decide how it will affect me. No one else has the right to decide that.

They can deprive us of everything, they’ll never control our thoughts, beliefs, or reactions. Which means, you are never completely powerless. If you can keep your wits about you, you can break the perceptions and reactions you have.

“Nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” - William Shakespeare.

Through our perception of events, we are complicit in the creation and destruction of every obstacle we face.

There is the event itself and then the story we tell ourselves about it.  
A mistake can become training.

Perception can only be relinquished by your decision.

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### **\*\*Steady your nerves\*\***

“What such a man needs is not courage but nerve control, cool headedness. This he can get only by practice.” - Theodore Roosevelt

We are a pile of raw nerves.

When you aim high, pressure and stress come along for the ride.

Events will happen that catch you off guard, and scare you.

Surprises are guaranteed. The risk is always there.

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Talent isn't what makes it through those situations.

Grace and poise are. Those precede the opportunity to deploy any other skill.

We must possess "Tranquil courage in the midst of tumult and serenity of soul in danger." -Voltaire - in english: A cool head.

"Having Nerve" is a matter of defiance and control of your grace, poise, and serenity.

*I refuse to acknowledge that.*

*I don't agree to be intimidated by that.*

*I resist the temptation to declare a failure.*

It's also acceptance.

*I guess it's up to me.*

*I don't have to be shaken up by this.*

*People are counting on me.*

Defiance and acceptance come together. There is always a countermove, always an escape.

Prepare for your realities of your situation.

Steady your nerves so you can throw your best at it.

If your nerve holds, did something really happen of consequence?

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### **\*\*Control Your Emotions\*\***

"Would you have a great empire? Rule over yourself." - Publilius Syrus

Astronauts were trained in one skill more than anything else: The art of NOT panicking.

Panic leads to reaction and reactions can derail any plan, procedure or rule.

Panic gets trained out. And it doesn't happen fast.

Slowly, they were trained and step by step earned the feelings and sights and sounds of launch day. From wake up to breakfast all the way to lift off to where nothing that day would have seemed new.

Training is authority. Authority relieves uncertainty and fear.

With enough exposure, you can adapt.

The question for space is not how skilled you are, they only select the skilled. Can you keep the urge to panic at bay and focus on only what matters?

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Obstacles make us emotional. The only way to survive is to keep them in check.

The greek word "Apatheia": - keep steady no matter what happens or external events occur. Not the loss of feeling like the modern English, but a skill that comes with the absence of extreme or irrational emotions.

Focus your energy exclusively on solving problems rather than reacting to them.

Does getting mad provide you with more options? Are you the hulk?  
If the emotion can't change the condition or situation, it's likely unhelpful, even destructive.

It's ok to feel it. The real strength lies in harnessing the emotion. The "domestication" of it, - Nassim Taleb.

Don't conflate feeling an emotion and dealing with the problem.

Remind yourself: "I am in control, not my emotions. I see what's really going on here. I'm not going to get excited or upset."

Defeat emotions with logic. Logic is questions and statements.  
Enough of them and you can get to the real root cause of the issue and deal with that.

"Does what happened keep you from acting with justice, generosity, self-control, sanity, prudence, honesty, humility, straightforwardness" - MARCU Aurelius

Ask yourself: Do I need to freak out over this?  
No, you practiced for this and can control yourself.

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### **\*\*Practice Objectivity\*\***

"Don't let the force of an impression when it first hits you knock you off your feet; just say to it: Hold on a moment; let me see who you are and what you represent. Let me put you to the test." - Epictetus

"This happened and it is bad" are two totally separate impressions. The and is so quick it can feel like one.

Perception is weak, observation is strong. Observing simply sees what is there. Perceiving interprets, and can judge obstacles, setbacks, and issues.

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Perceptions give you problems and information you don't need exactly at the moment when it would be better to focus on the reality of the situation.

Our brains attempt to compress the space between observation and perception. Milliseconds. Deer brain : See car. Run. [run into traffic] Question that impulse. Disagree with it, override it if you can. Examine the threat before you act.

Martial arts trainers focus as much on mental training as they do on physical training. Both are equally important.

Contemptuous Expressions: Use contempt to lay things bare and strip away any pretext.

Take away the glamorous description.  
See things for what they really are and not the ornamentation of them.

Objectivity means removing "you ", the subjective part, from the decision process. When you give advice, aren't their problems clear to see?  
When we hear others' problems, we don't bring our baggage with us. We can be objective with others.

Take the situation at face value, and immediately set about helping.  
Give clarity, not sympathy. Repeat until you become skilled at observing. Then bring perception back in.

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### **\*\*Alter your perspective\*\***

"Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become the next moment. By the same token, every human being has the freedom to change at any instant." - Viktor Frankl

Perspective is everything. Fear can be explained away.

We choose how we look at things.  
We retain the ability to inject perspective into a situation.  
We can't change the obstacles, but we can set perspective on that obstacle.

It's your choice when you speak and put "I" in front.  
"I hate public speaking." or "I am hurt by this."

These add an extra element to the situation: you.  
That perspective can throw the rest of the judgments into overwhelm.

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The way to cut it down? The right perspective can cut these down to size.

The next opportunity may just be better.

Is your perspective truly giving you perspective or is it contributing to the problem? Limit and expand it to keep you calmest. Think selective editing.

Perspective = Context and framing  
Context - sense of the larger picture  
Framing - individuals' unique view.

Are you the one that “wants to be picked” or the one that’s “the right answer to the problem, if they pick you great. If not, whatever.”

Understand what they’re looking for and deliver it. Where the head goes, the body follows.

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### **\*\*Is it up to you?\***

“Is there a chance? Do I have a shot?”

Tommy John pitched for 26 years in the majors. He would look for anything to get back on the mound after injury, even experimental surgery. That’s why the ligament surgery is called Tommy John surgery.

Tommy John showed up at spring training at 46 to get a shot. And was opening day pitcher.

Serenity Prayer. Learn to focus your efforts on what you are able to change.

What is up to us?

- Emotions
- Judgments
- Creativity
- Attitude
- Perspective
- Desires
- Decisions
- Determination

Everything else? Not so much.

Winning athletes don’t argue for the rest, they make the best of these 8 factors.

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The people who can determine the difference between those things that are in our power and those that aren't are those who accomplish feats.

If someone got to your idea first? Not your choice. To improve upon it or fight for your path? That's your choice.

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### **\*\*Live in the Present Moment\*\***

List of companies that started during economic crises.

- Fortune Magazine, Fedex, UPS, Disney, HP, Charles Schwab, Standard Oil, Coors, Costco, Revlon, GM, Proctor & Gamble, United Airlines, Microsoft, LinkedIn

These founders were focused on what was at hand, not whether conditions would get better or worse.

They had a job or idea and got after it.

Our understanding of the world of business is all mixed up with storytelling and mythology.

Half of the fortune 500 started in a bear market/recession.

Most people don't actually start from an advantageous position. Those who survive it take it day by day.

Focus on the moment, not the moments that may or may not be ahead.

Take the constraints around you and work with them to make a gain.

Humans are the only ones seeking meaning.

"We cannot spend the day in explanation" - Emerson.

Right now is right now, that's what matters.

The implications of our obstacle are theoretical. They exist either in the past or the future.

How to pull yourself into the present.

- Strenuous exercise
- Unplugging
- Walk in the park
- Meditation
- Get a dog.

You have to work at living in the present.

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Limit your scope by editing vs acting. It's just a moment *in* your life.

Focus on what's in front of you and ignore what it could mean or represent.

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### **\*\*Think Differently\*\***

"Genius is the ability to put into effect what is in your mind." - F Scott Fitzgerald.

Steve Jobs - when you factored in vision and work ethic, much more things were possible. Not in delusion, but for accomplishing something.

Aim high, if things went right, creates something extraordinary.  
Aim low and you will accept mediocre accomplishments as great.

Doubts and self doubts feel real but have no bearing on what is/isn't possible.

Perceptions determine your reality. If you believe in the obstacle, it will win.

Many great artists set their own definition of art. Be open. Question.

We don't control anything about reality, only our perception to influence other perceptions.

Do you tolerate people who don't believe in their own ability to succeed?  
Even if it's uncomfortable or ambitious to demand such?

Learn to reject first judgments and the objections that spring out of them. They're almost always rooted in fear.

Faith in your ability to make something where nothing was before?  
If it's never been done, that's a good thing. Go chase that.

Obstacles illuminate new options.

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### **\*\*Finding the Opportunity\*\***

"A good person dyes events with his own color...and turns whatever happens to his own benefit." - Seneca

Blitzkrieg worked in WWII simply due to the flinch response to seeing such a massive column of tanks.

Eisenhower declared - no more calling these disastrous. "Regarded as opportunity"

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Turns out, he was right. As long as the Allies would bend but not break, they would capture the column in a net of more soldiers.

What used to be invincible was now the German's weakness. They left their flanks exposed.

It's one thing not to be overwhelmed, it's another to gain control of the emotion then do the mental flip.

"There is good in everything, if only we look for it." - Laura Ingalls Wilder.

We are bad at looking for that. Are you using it as a chance to test your resolve? Take advantage of the lesson in front of you?

Study your rival. Study the judgements

Athletes that had an injury study

Initially? Isolation, emotional disruption, doubts about their ability.

The elite? Over time, gain a desire to help others, additional perspective, and realize their own strength.

They turned those fears and doubts into greater abilities in the exact areas they doubted.

Adversarial Growth = "That which doesn't kill me makes me stronger."

The struggle against the obstacle can propel you to the next level.  
The obstacle is the advantage.

This strategy can ALWAYS be used.

Everything can be flipped. Ignore the package and see the gift.

See through the negative, find the corollary positive.

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### **\*\*Prepare to Act\*\***

Problems are only as bad as we think.

The worst thing isn't the event. IT's the event AND losing your head. Then you have 2 problems.

Once you see reality, you must act.

Proper perception = rational, ambitious, clean = can isolate the obstacle.

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Clear head, steady hands. Boldness is acting even though you know the negative and reality of the obstacle in front of you.

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### **\*\*Part 2: Action\*\***

Action requires courage. Right action, directed action, must be done to service the whole.

Dismantle step by step then be persistent and flexible.

Movements and decisions define you - be deliberate, bold and persistent.

Action is the solution.

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### **\*\*The Discipline of Action\*\***

Demosthenes, the famous speaker, was sickly, frail, and had a speech impediment as a kid. Then his father dies, then all his inheritance gets stolen.

Had a vision of what a great speaker looks like, someone who moved an entire crowd with just his voice. IT inspired him.

So he did several things about it.

Created his own speech exercises, shaved half his head, locked himself in a study to avoid distractions.

Venturing out was a way to learn more. Improve his conversation, his art.

Allto go to court and win back what he had lost [he did.]

Every speech made him stronger, every day he became more determined.

Someone once asked Demosthenes what the three most important traits of speechmaking were. His answer? "Action, action, action!"

Action is natural, innate. When you fall, your body reacts instinctively to act to protect the most vulnerable parts.

We may be able to define it, come up with a detailed plan, but then the problem is still there. Why? We ignore and pretend.

That's not going to work. You'll have to act.

It doesn't matter what happens to you or where you came from. IT matters what you do with what happens and what you've been given.

The ones who make moves?

Don't feel sorry for themselves.

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Don't quit

Don't delude themselves with easy solutions

They do the one thing that matters. Apply themselves with force and creativity.

By all means, vent. Then take stock.

You can't run or hide from them. The obstacle will always be there.

What we can do? Show up with:

- Energy
- Persistence
- Coherent and deliberate process
- Iteration & resilience
- Pragmatism
- Strategic vision
- Craftiness & savvy
- Eye for opportunity & pivotal moments.

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### **\*\*Get Moving\*\***

"We must all either wear out or rust out, every one of us. My choice is to wear out." - Theodore Roosevelt.

People who defy the odds say yes and get the momentum going. Even if conditions aren't perfect. Anywhere, anyhow.

Because they know once they get started, if they can just get some momentum, they can make it work.

You've got to start moving to go anywhere.

Is your full effort in it? Those who attack problems with the most energy usually win.

Don't sit and complain about what you're not doing. Courage at its most basic level is taking action.

Conditions will never be perfect. If you want the momentum, you have to start moving to create it.

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### **\*\*Practice Persistence\*\***

None of the plans for Grant to take Vicksburg worked, the newspapers called for his replacement, until he went south, through the fire then came up from Louisiana.

Do not be rushed by external noise.

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Do not let a failed attempt stop the whole goal.  
Chip away at it.

After exhausting all traditional options, new is the way. This is how innovation works.

Genius is often persistence in disguise. Persistence: to strive to seek to find.

Knowing that inevitably one tactic they try will work.  
You're not going to outthink it. You've got to look at it and take it on.

It wasn't "pure genius" it was slow pressure that eventually found the crack.  
Repeated from many different angles, eliminating other options that didn't work as well.

The genius came from the singular purpose, not listening to doubt, and the desire to achieve.

Working at something works.

You are usually skilled, knowledgeable, and capable enough to do it.  
Will you refine your idea?  
Will you knock on enough doors to find the right people?  
Once you attack, quitting is not an option.

"Persist and resist" - Epictetus.

Doing new things invariably means there will be a new obstacle. New paths are uncleared, that is what makes them new.

Persistence and time are what clear debris and remove obstacles.

Discourage is ok, quit is not. To keep going/to keep trying is persistence.

It's supposed to be hard and the first attempt isn't supposed to work.  
You have renewable energy on your side.

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### **\*\*Iterate\*\***

Silicon valley companies launch with minimum viable products, not the perfect release.

An engineer's joke: Failure is a feature. Failure is an asset if what you're doing is improving, learning, or doing something new.

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Each time it happens, you have new options.  
Isolated research is a fear of failure.

MVP model embraces failure and feedback. Gets stronger by failure.  
Iterate, Fail, Improve.

Your capacity to keep going is linked to your ability to tolerate failure.

When failure comes, ask:

*What went wrong here?*

*What can be improved?*

*What am I missing?*

This is why great success stories are almost always preceded by an epic fail.

Great entrepreneurs are never locked in forever, never afraid to lose a little bit, never bitter, never embarrassed, and never out for long.

Anticipated, temporary failure hurts less than catastrophic permanent failure.  
The lesson is paid for in discomfort or loss or starting over.

Be glad to pay the cost. The way to guarantee not to benefit from it? Choose not to learn from it and continue doing the same thing over and over and over again.

Those failures are feedback “try another way”

Listen. Failure shows us the way-by showing us what isn't the way.

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### **\*\*Follow the Process\*\***

Nick Saban - “The Process”

“Think about...this moment. ...think about what we can do today, the task at hand.”

Break it down into pieces. What you **need** to do **right now**.  
Then do it well, then do the next thing.

Follow the process and the prize will come.  
It's about steps, it's about finishing Each Step.

Don't think about the end, think about the now.  
The process is relaxing. There's no need for panic, all the steps are just component parts.

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Stop

Isolate the variables

Solve for ONE

Then do the next.

Take a breathe

Do the immediate.

Complete the step.

Move on to the next.

Trapped is a position, not a fate. You get out of it by addressing and eliminating each part of that position. Small deliberate actions get you out over time.

Goals put the blips and bumps in proper proportion.

Let the process be the boss.

“Shut up and get back to work.”

Replace fear with process. Depend on it, trust it, Don't rush it, let it unfold in steps.

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### **\*\*Do your job, do it right\*\***

“Whatever is rightly done, however humble, is noble.” - Sir Henry Royce.

Andrew Johnson & James Garfield went from poverty to president by always doing what they were asked to and did it right with pride.

Doing it better than anyone else. Even if no one else wanted to.

Everything is a chance to do your best.

ONLY self-absorbed people think they're too good for the title.

We owe it to ourselves, our craft, and the world to do it well.

When action is our priority, vanity falls away.

Whatever we're asked, Hard Work, Honest, and Helping others as best we can is our job.

You should never have to ask yourself “What am I supposed to do now?”

The answer is “Your Job.”

Whether or not anyone notices.

No obstacle can truly prevent us from carrying out our obligation.

Every part, even the parts that nobody sees can be done with pride and dedication.

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Right action is the answer to how to find the meaning of life. Unselfish, dedicated, masterful, creative action. We can always act right.

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### **\*\*What's Right is what works\*\***

Pragmatism embodied. It's not about the most correct theoretical way, it's about the way that gets the task done.

Anyway that works is the motto.

Make due with what you've got, don't wait for perfect conditions or perfect process.

To accomplish your mission, how far are you willing to go?

What are you willing to do about it?

Pragmatism is flexibility. There are several ways to get somewhere. It won't be a straight and narrow line.

Don't pass up what's in front of you for the perfect solution.

Did it get done? Does it work?

Radical Pragmatist: Ambitious, aggressive, rooted in ideals, imminently practical, guided by the possible.

Not on everything, but on the things you need.

Think progress over perfection.

Since you're going around the obstacle or breaking them they're irrelevant.

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### **\*\*In Praise of the Flank Attack\*\***

George Washington was wily, evasive, and evaded more battles than he fought. He told his men: "Never attack where it is obvious."

Washington was better at withdrawing than advancing. Skilled in saving troops that would have been killed. Not the most glamorous skill, but the one that won the war.

When studying military history, only 2% of decisive victories were from direct attack on the main army. Everywhere else was much more successful. From the flanks, from the unexpected.

Take a step back, then go around the problem. Find another path to leverage.

Approach from the "line of least expectation."

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The triangle offense of Phil Jackson (really Tex Winter) is designed to route the basketball away from defensive pressure.

The path to mastery really means they're doing less than the rest of us. All the noise is cut. They exert only enough calculated force to be effective. Not playing attrition.

Being outnumbered, coming from behind, and being low on funds is an advantage. You can't afford the full frontal assault.

You HAVE to be creative and that's what works. The inertia of success makes it hard to develop a different, better technique.

Don't push back, pull until opponents lose their balance. Then make your move.

Never tell the reader, do this, or that, show them new ways or flooking or understanding the situation.

Find common ground before you challenge their opinions. Look for leverage to make them listen. Build an alternative with so much support that the opposition abandons their side and joins us.

Sometimes the long way around is the shortest way home.

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### **\*\*Use Obstacles Against Themselves\*\***

Gandhi didn't fight for independence from the British.  
Martin Luther King never started a fight.  
The Russians defeated Napoleon and the Nazis by allowing them into the interior and letting the winter defeat them.

If you don't have the option of attrition/persistence or learning on the fly/iteration, you don't need to give up. Some adversity is impossible for you to defeat, how could you use that?

Before steam power, boat captains on the Mississippi would tie themselves to a boat going downstream and to a tree/rock and slingshot up the river.

Instead of fighting obstacles, find a way to make them defeat themselves.

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Alexander the Great broke a horse not by traditional methods but by mounting and simply hanging on until the horse tired.

Restraint can be the best action to take in the right cases.  
Let the obstacle fizzle itself out.

Sometimes a problem needs less people to take it on.

Moving forward isn't always the right winning move. You can stay put, go sideways, or backwards. That may be best to eliminate the obstacle in your path.

Using an obstacle against itself is different than doing nothing.  
Passive resistance is active choices.  
The actions are discipline, self control, beating fear, strategy, and determination.

The more they fight and tire themselves out, the easier it becomes for us.  
The harder you fight, the less you achieve.

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### **\*\*Channel Your Energy\*\***

Arthur Ashe could control his emotions and channeled that energy into a fluid playing tennis style.

Feelings need an outlet. Ashe chose his physical movements rather than his words.

Put your constraints to good use. Let it power your actions and guide your path. And be loose and bold elsewhere.

Instead of acting out, act on. The athlete may be stopped from one action, but there's probably another option.

To be relaxed takes no talent. We want the right action.  
Being tight = anxiety, eventually you snap or hurt.

Relaxed drives your opponents and competitors nuts.

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### **\*\*Seize the Offensive\*\***

Barack Obama's "A more perfect union" speech during his early campaign:  
Addressing everything directly.

It's not enough to take advantage of opportunities. You must also learn to press forward when everyone else sees disaster.

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The “when least expected” moment when you can act swiftly.

“Crisis provides the opportunity for us to do things that you could not do before.” -  
Rahm Emmanuel

History shows that negative/shocking events have led to much needed reforms.

Great people take trouble and apply their best in that situation. They find a way to turn tragedy or misfortune into their advantage.

Do you accept it as an exclusively negative event or can you work through the negative and then mount an offensive.

Is this a chance to try a solution you've been wanting to? If you don't take that on it's on you that is slipped by?

Great commanders look for decision points.  
In many battles...two opposing forces will often reach a point of mutual exhaustion.

The one who decides to fight rather than retreat often wins.

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### **\*\*Prepare for none of it to work\*\***

We can control what we do, we can't control the world around us.  
You might do everything right and still fail.

Nothing can prevent you from trying.  
Some obstacles may after all attempts be impossible / impassable. That's not bad.

In every situation that which blocks our path actually presents a new path with a new part of us.

“Problems are a chance for us to do our best.” - Duke Ellington.

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### **\*\*Part III: Will\*\***

Will is our internal power that cannot be determined by the outside.

It is the last of agency if all others are gone.  
The power of it needs to be cultivated.

The ability to take a negative situation and turn it into something with a positive outcome takes will power.

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

True will is quiet, humble, resilient, and flexible.

Ambition is not will. It is ambition and fails under tough obstacles.

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### **\*\*The Discipline of The Will\*\***

Abraham Lincoln battled depression his entire life. His life was defined by great difficulties, personal losses, and election defeats.

He came to think that these were to prepare him for some great thing. He learned to endure it and find benefit from the challenges he faced.

The US in the 1860s needed a leader of compassion and force of purpose. They found it in Lincoln - an expert in will and patience.

“This too shall pass” was one of Lincoln’s favorite sayings.

Clear head and action aren’t always enough to overcome the obstacle.

We should be ready for our attempts not to succeed.

Leadership requires determination and energy. Certain situations call for the leader to find the energy to simply endure.

Perception and action are the disciplines of the mind

Will is the discipline of the soul.

Will = fortitude and wisdom. Strength to endure, contextualize, and find the meaning in unconquerable obstacles

Lincoln learned to comfort those who suffer, making the best of a terrible circumstance. And deal with it in compassion with a hope for resolution

Stoic Maxim: sustine et absinthe - Bear and Forbear

Know the pain but carry on anyway.

Technology can’t control the world. We won’t ever get rid of all the unpleasant and unpredictable events and situations in life.

Will as the 3rd critical discipline:

Think, act, and adjust.

The will prepares you, protects you, and allows you to thrive.

Confident, calm, ready to act.

Ability to continue when hope seems lost.

Perceptions and emotions are easier to control than will.

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

We can

- Always prepare ourselves for difficulty.
- Always accept what we're unable to change
- Always manage expectations
- Always persevere.
- Always learn to love our fate and what our outcome is
- Always protect our inner self, retreat into ourselves
- Always submit to a greater larger cause
- Always remind ourselves of our own mortality
- Always prepare to start the cycle again.

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### **\*\*Build Your Inner Citadel\*\***

"If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." - Proverbs 24:10

Theodore Roosevelt suffered severe asthma as a child. He was quite frail and had near-death experiences frequently. His father told him he would give the tools to make himself better, it was up to him to do it. Theodore said "I'll make my body."

TR then worked out daily for years, slowly building his muscles, and overcame his asthma in his 20s.

He kept at it every day and was prepared to handle hard things. He didn't take weakness as a granted permanent state, he chose to do something about it.

He didn't accept his bad start. He remade himself. He prepared for the hard road. Had to forge that himself.

"Mens sana in corpore sano" Sound Mind in a Strong Body.

Every bit of ancient philosophy was to strengthen the mind as much as the body.

The Stoics called it the "Inner Citadel" - the fortress that no external adversity can break down. Only internal strife.

No one is born with the inner citadel, it must be crafted.

You can have success toughening yourself up more than trying to soften up the world around you.

To be great at something takes practice. Obstacles and adversity are no different.  
You strengthen an arch by putting weight on it, it locks the tension into place.

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

The path of least resistance is a terrible teacher.

Are you strong enough to go a few more rounds?

Are you accepting challenges?

Are you uncertain?

These will happen, you just don't know when or how.

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### **\*\*Anticipation (Thinking Negatively)\*\***

“Offer a guarantee and disaster threatens” - Ancient Inscription at the Oracle of Delphi

Postmortem exercise: identify what happened that led to an unexpected outcome.

Premortem: envision what could go wrong and prepare a backup plan to address it.

Your plan and its results rarely are identical.

“If you're not humble, life will visit humbleness upon you.” - Mike Tyson

The premortem dates back to the stoics as “premeditatio malorum” (premeditation of evils)

Preparing for disruption, allows you to manage expectations.

These shouldn't be a constant surprise, although they will be constant. “Things will go wrong.”

Beware the calm before the storm

Hope for the best, prepare for the worst,

The worst is yet to come

It gets worse before it gets better.

It's far better to seem like a downer than to be blindsided or caught off guard.

Probe for weaknesses and find the inevitable failures, address them, then carry on.

Bad luck events like this, when properly considered, create advantage for the prepared.

Anticipation doesn't make them easier, it makes preparation possible.

Knowing the potential outcomes can inform our decisions.

Anticipation lets you raise defense, avoid some obstacles entirely. Plot a way back to the path.

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

### **\*\*The Art of Acquiescence\*\***

Thomas Jefferson was a terrible public speaker. We chose to accept that and channeled his thoughts into writing instead.

Writing became his strength and now it's why we know his impact.

Accepting the things you can't change is good. You can let them direct you to things in your control to change.

That channeling requires acceptance of current affairs.

Don't allow it to prevent you from your ultimate destination, but it may change how you travel and the length of the trip.

Denial only delays the cure.

You don't have to like something to master it or to use it to some advantage.

Acquiesce to the things that are "immune to action."

To get unexpected benefits you have to accept the unexpected costs.

It is hubris to assume we can change everything that is somewhat new. Nature hasn't been domesticated.

The great men of history understood this. Fate is an ancient word.

Washington said the revolution was "in the hand of God."

Eisenhower said about the invasion of the allies "the answer is in the lap of the gods"

Letters used to be signed "Deo Volente" = god willing.

As fate would have it.

Heaven Forbid

Nature Permitting

Murphy's Law

Not much has changed since ancient times.

Reality gives you plenty to work with. Taking people and events as they are is enough to get started.

Either

a.) you're robust and resilient enough to handle it.

b.) you can't do anything about it anyway or

c.) you're looking at a big picture and long timeline to know that whatever you have to accept is still a negligible blip on the way to the goal.

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

Indifference isn't the weakness.

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### **\*\*Love Everything that Happens: Amor Fati\*\***

Edison's lab burned down, he told him some, "go get your mother and all her friends. They'll never see a fire like this again."

When asked his reaction. "It's all right. We've just got rid of a lot of rubbish."  
Within 3 weeks a factory was partially back up and running. And the products they made churned out 10x revenue vs the prior year.

Discard your expectations. Accept the reality. Find a way to love what happens and face it with unflinching cheerfulness.

Turn it from "must do" to "get to do."  
Calm, in control, and the opportunity to prove yourself.

The stoics commanded themselves: Cheerfulness in all situations, even the bad ones.

Not simply "I'm ok about it, I think I feel good about it."  
But "I feel great about it. I am meant to make the best of this now."

Amor Fati = love of fate.

It's unnatural to feel gratitude for things we didn't want to happen.  
You'll love those events because they become fuel you need to make the best out of it.

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### **\*\*Perseverance\*\***

Odysseus leaves Troy after 10 years of war and 10 years to get home. = Perseverance  
Grant searches for some way to Vicksburg in the Civil War = Persistence.

Perseverance is more than persistence.  
Persistence is attempting to solve a specific problem  
Perseverance is larger, about the long game and every path towards the goal.

Life is not just one obstacle but many.  
Persistence is action. Energy  
Perseverance is will. Endurance.

"Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" - Tennyson

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

With all the improvements in technology, one strategy has been more effective than all the other: force of will.

“With the exercise of self-trust, new powers shall appear” - emerson

Perseverance can only be stopped by death.

Momentum and defeat are not mutually exclusive-we can keep going.

Actions can be constrained, your will cannot be by others.

Churchill's acronym: KBO = keep bugging on.

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### **\*\*Something bigger than yourself\*\***

CMD James Stockdale, US Navy Pilot was shot down over Vietnam and captured in 1965. As a POW he chose to be an example to the soldiers in captivity.

In captivity, he threw out any notion of what happens to a soldier. He set up a network of support within the camp “We're in this together.”

They stayed to show their compatriots that their well being mattered.

When you choose to be the good example, your own personal fears and troubles diminish. The desire to quit fades.

“If I can't solve this for myself, how can I at least make this better for other people?”  
Hopelessness lifts from that question because now you have something to Do.

Stop putting “I” in front of events.

Start thinking: Unity over Self. We're in this together.

Compassion and camaraderie are always an option as a choice in tough times.

We're not special or unique simply by virtue of existing.

Remember, someone likely stood on that same spot on the earth a decade earlier and felt very similar things.

Embrace being part of the larger whole and help your fellow humans thrive and survive. Be strong for them and it will make you stronger.

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### **\*\*Meditate on your Mortality\*\***

“When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” = Dr. Johnson

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

Montaigne: nearly dies, takes stock, emerges from the experience a different better person. Becomes a famous writer, dignitary, and confidant of the king.

It is possible to meditate on death and not be a downer.  
Every culture has a way to do this. The Romans had “memento mori” Remember you are mortal.

Deep down we act and behave as if we're invincible.  
Like we know we have plenty of time left.

“The paths of glory lead but to the grave.” - Thomas Gray

If something is in our control, it's worth every ounce of our efforts and energy. Death is not one of those things. Death is the most universal obstacle.

Being aware of mortality is invigorating. Make use of it rather than denying it.

Death can be useful to help prioritize, appreciate, and hold to principle.

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### **\*\*Prepare to start again\*\***

Nature never stops. There is no end. Just when you've conquered one obstacle, comes another.

Life is a process of breaking through the obstacles - to continue to live.  
Each time you do, you learn, you grow,

The more you accomplish, the more things will stand in your way.

Think of life like a marathon, conserve your energy for the great obstacles.  
Each battle is one of many.

Simply flip the obstacles that are in front of you and improve despite them.

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### **\*\*Final Thoughts\*\***

Marcus Aurelius' oldest friend rebelled against the Roman Empire. Instead of anger, he endeavored to meet and forgive Cassius. Before he could reach him, Cassius was killed by an assassin.

Marcus chose to forgive everyone involved. It made him a better leader.

Any event, any wrong against us can always be turned into an advantage for us.

## *The Obstacle is the Way - Ryan Holiday*

The pattern?

Something stands in someone's way.

They stare down, and aren't intimidated.

Lean into the problem, give everything they have

Even though they didn't always conquer, they came out a better stronger person.

The obstacle becoming the way brings lightness and flexibility to how we approach problems.

Many have a familiarity with ancient stoicism.

- 1.) See clearly
- 2.) Act correctly
- 3.) Endure and accept the world as it is.

Gather strength as you go.

What blocked the path is now the path.

What once impeded you now advances you.

The obstacle is the way.

The essence of philosophy is to inspire action - making good on the ability to see a problem and the greater context.