

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Until the End

Stay focused. Keep going.

### Nature vs. Nurture

How about NEITHER?

### Good

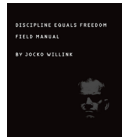
The response to any/all challenges.

### Stop Eating Sugar

You have more willpower than a donut.

### Do

Theory to Practice to Mastery.



# Discipline Equals Freedom

Field Manual

BY JOCKO WILLINK · ST. MARTIN'S PRESS © 2017 · 208 PAGES

“People look for shortcuts. The hack. And if you came here looking for that: You won’t find it. The shortcut is a lie. The hack doesn’t get you there.

And if you want to take the easy road, it won’t take you to where you want to be: Stronger. Smarter. Faster. Healthier. Better.

**FREE.**

To reach goals and overcome obstacles and become the best version of you possible will not happen by itself. It will not happen cutting corners, taking shortcuts, or looking for the easy way.

**THERE IS NO EASY WAY.**

There is only hard work, late nights, early mornings, practice, rehearsal, repetition, study, sweat, blood, toil, frustration, and discipline. DISCIPLINE.

**THERE MUST BE DISCIPLINE.**

Discipline: The root of all good qualities. The driver of daily execution. The core principle that overcomes laziness and lethargy and excuses. Discipline defeats the infinite excuses that say: Not today, not now, I need a rest, I will do it tomorrow.

What’s the hack? How do you become stronger, smarter, faster, healthier? How do you become better? How do you achieve true freedom?

There is only one way.

**THE WAY OF DISCIPLINE.”**

~ Jocko Willink from *Discipline Equals Freedom*

The other day [Cal Newport](#) and I were having one of our chats. We were talking about our Optimize Coach - Class I graduation, our focus on virtue and the fact that, immediately after “graduating” on Day 300, it was Day 1 and we all started again.

Cal told me that our approach reminded him of Jocko Willink. Then he told me he loves Jocko’s kids books. So... I went to Amazon to get them. And, that’s when I found THIS book. I got it.

And...

Although I really enjoyed Jocko’s first book [Extreme Ownership](#) and I knew this one would be good, I didn’t expect it to be THIS good. It’s almost impossible to describe how powerful it is.

The words literally *explode* off the page. Not just because each micro-chapter was an incredibly inspiring micro-manifesto but because each word was written by a man so clearly living in complete integrity with his deepest values.

John Maxwell would say his “moral authority” is extraordinary. I’d say his SOUL FORCE is palpable.

As I tried to explain to Alexandra just how palpable Jocko's Soul Force is and just how RARE it is to feel it through a book like this, we agreed that [Thich Nhat Hanh](#) is another example of a similar power. Although Jocko is the archetypal warrior and Thich is the archetypal monk, they BOTH have EXACTLY the same connection to the best within themselves matched by a fierce resolve to BE that best version of themselves. And, well, that's a powerful, palpable thing to feel. So, yah. I liked the book. A lot. (Get a copy [here](#).)

For those who may not know, Jocko is a retired Navy SEAL. He was commander of Task Unit Bruiser—the most decorated Special Operations Unit of the Iraq War. After retiring, Jocko co-founded Echelon Front, a management consulting company, wrote the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Extreme Ownership*, the children's book *Way of the Warrior Kid*, and created one of the top-ranking podcasts, JOCKO PODCAST.

If you're in the mood for a soul-rattling call-to-disciplined action, I think you'll enjoy the book as much as I did. For now, I'm excited to share a few of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump in!

## UNTIL THE END

“Something I saw in combat that I later tried to train out of people was the tendency to relax once the primary objective of a mission was complete. I tried to train that out of them because you can't relax until the entire mission is complete.

In training, we always attacked the platoons hard on their primary objective, but we always attacked them even harder after they left the main target, once the platoons were patrolling back to base, when their minds had already gone home and 'turned off.'

That's when we would bring it to them. Hit them with mayhem. So they would develop the attitude and the muscle memory to keep going until the end. And even when they got back to base, we would re-task them so they had to begin planning again. It wouldn't stop. That's the mentality I wanted to instill in them:

It is never finished.

You always have more to do.

Another mission. Another task. Another goal.

And the enemy is always watching. Waiting.

Looking for that moment of weakness.

Looking for you to exhale, set your weapon down, and close your eyes, even just for a moment.

And that's when they attack.

So don't be finished.

*Be starting. Be alert. Be ready. Be attacking. **BE RELENTLESS.***

Let the enemy stop. Let the enemy rest. Let the enemy finish.

You? Don't finish. Don't stop. Don't rest.

Not until the enemy is completely destroyed.

And even then... Turn your focus inward, on yourself, and take the opportunity not to rest...

But to make yourself *better, faster, smarter, stronger.*

Because with those goals, nothing is ever finished.”

That's from Part I: *Thoughts* in which Jocko walks us through his thoughts on a range of subjects including *Why* he does what he does with the intensity with which he does it (hint: to honor the fallen soldiers with whom he served), *Overcoming Procrastination: When and Where to Start* (hint: Here and Now), and *Weakness* (and how to overcome it).

Of course, I just love that passage above for many reasons.

First: Any time we talk about going to “war” against “enemies” I feel the need to step back and remind ourselves that pretty much all great teachers have used the metaphor of war to capture the struggles we ALL face in our lives.

As we’ve discussed, Socrates (who was also a former soldier, btw) told us: *“I desire only to know the truth, and to live as well as I can... And, to the utmost of my power, I exhort all other men to do the same... I exhort you also to take part in the great combat, which is the combat of life, and greater than every other earthly conflict.”*

It’s funny because as I did a quick search through our 580+ PhilosophersNotes to find that quote, I opened up our Note on Eknath Easwaran’s beautiful biography of Gandhi (called [Gandhi the Man](#)).

Talk about another exemplar of moral authority and SOUL FORCE!!!

You know what Easwaran, one of the leading spiritual teachers of the 20th century (and translator of the [Bhagavad Gita](#) and [Dhammapada](#)) has to say about the subject of war as it relates to living with more love?

Well...

Check this out: *“The Gita gives detailed instructions for crossing the sea of life. The battlefield where the narrative is set represents the individual human heart, where the forces of light and darkness, love and separateness, war incessantly for mastery over our thought and actions. In the dialogue which unfolds, Arjuna, the warrior prince who represents every man or woman, seeks to learn the art of living from Sri Krishna, the Lord of Love, who is the outward manifestation of Arjuna’s deepest self. Arjuna is a man of action. He is not interested in metaphysics or airy theories; he wants to know how to make every moment of his life count, free from anxiety and fear. His questions are practical inquiries into the problems of living, and Sri Krishna’s answers are simple and to the point. We are born to fight, he tells Arjuna; there is no choice in the matter. Our every desire must bring us into conflict. But we can choose how and whom we will fight. We can turn our anger against others, or we can turn it against what is selfish and angry in ourselves. We can use our hands to strike at others or to wipe tears away. It is a call to action, and that is why Sri Krishna describes the heroes and heroines of the Gita’s ‘way of love’ in the language not of sentiment but of war.”*

So, that’s Part 1.

Want to live with LOVE? Go to war with all that is evil within yourself.

Now for Part 2.

Guess what? That battle NEVER ENDS. Period.

[Phil Stutz](#)’s “Part X” and [Steven Pressfield](#)’s “Resistance” and whatever you want to call it is ALWAYS (!!!) waiting in the background ready to strike.

Which is why Jocko trained his soldiers to stay focused until the entire mission is complete. And then he immediately gave them ANOTHER mission.

Now... Does all that mean we never “rest”? Of course not. In fact, we know that our Energy (or “Zest” as the scientists put it) is, in fact, our #1 asset and greatest predictor of our well-being.

Note: Science LITERALLY says that your Zest (!) is the #1 (!!!) virtue to cultivate to live with eudaimonia and win that battle Socrates is exhorting us to fight.

Knowing that, we don’t let Part X keep us up late at night clicking on bait that leads us to Distractionville. We train our recovery as hard as our Work. Then we transition to our Love and give that the same intensity we gave everything else.

Repeat. Until the ultimate end. (Easier said than done, of course. But... Let’s do this.)

P.S. Adam Alter's wisdom from *Irresistible* came to mind on the Trail as I contemplated this section: "... the most dangerous time for an addict is the first moment when things are going so well that you believe you've left the addiction behind forever."

## NATURE VS. NURTURE

"What is more important: Nature or nurture? In my opinion: Neither. ...

To me, it is not about nature or nurture: It is about choice. ...

The people who are successful *decide* they are going to be successful. They make that choice. And they make other choices. They decide to study hard. They decide to work hard. They decide to be the first person to get to work and the last to go home. They decide they are going to take on the hard jobs. Take on the challenges. They decide they are going to lead when no one else will.

They choose who they are going to hang around and they choose who they will emulate. They choose to become who they want to become—they aren't inhibited by nature or nurture. They overcome both.

And I will tell you something else: It is never too late to make that choice. You are never too old to decide where you are going to focus your efforts and push to make the most out of every situation.

So. Think not about what you've been through and where you were. Think about where you are going, and choose. Choose to make yourself smarter and stronger and healthier. Choose to work out and study and eat good food and keep your mind clean.

Don't let nature or nurture make you. Choose to MAKE. YOUR. SELF."

Nature or Nurture?

How about NEITHER?

Jocko tells us that he's spent time with every type of person, from the *"Ivy League kids with silver spoons, former gangbangers, hood rats, prep school kids, kids from blue-collar families, kids from strong families and kids with no families, kids who were pampered and kids who were abused. And everything in between. Everything."*

And with all those different types of people, some were successful and some were not.

Yes, of course, we're influenced by our genes and our environment. And, yes, we can debate all day long about what percentage of autonomy is left after we account for the influence of nature and nurture on who we are today.

AND...

We ALWAYS (!!!) have a CHOICE in how we can respond. Always. RIGHT THIS SECOND.

Which is why [Viktor Frankl](#) (who lost the "Nurture" lottery when he found himself in a concentration camp) said this: *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."*

It's also why Frankl said this: *"Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible."*

And, that's why Stephen Covey made "Be Proactive" (aka: Be "Response-Able"/make CHOICES!) Habit #1 of [Highly Effective People](#).

Spotlight on YOU. Are *you* blaming your Nature or your Nurture?

Let's embrace reality. And use any and all obstacles as FUEL for our growth—knowing that if we have certain vulnerabilities we just need to work that much harder to Optimize that part of our lives. Let's move from being the Victim of our story to the Hero of our story and show other people in similar situations just what's possible as we FORGE our own SOUL FORCE and give the world all we've got. TODAY.

P.S. Joseph Campbell has some tough hero's journey love on the subject as well. In *The Power of Myth*, he tells us: "Freud tells us to blame our parents for all the shortcomings of our life, Marx tells us to blame the upper class of our society. But the only one to blame is oneself."

## GOOD

"When things are going bad: Don't get all bummed out, don't get startled, don't get frustrated. No. Just look at the issue and say: 'Good.'

Now, I don't mean to say something trite; I'm not trying to sound like Mr. Smiley Positive Guy. That guy ignores the hard truth. That guy thinks a positive attitude will solve problems. It won't. But neither will dwelling on the problem. No. Accept reality, but focus on the solution. Take that issue, take that setback, take that problem, and turn it into something good. Go forward. And, if you are part of a team, that attitude will spread throughout.

Finally: If you can say the word 'good,' then guess what? It means you're still alive. It means you're still breathing, that means you've still got some fight left in you. So get up, dust off, reload, recalibrate, re-engage—and go out on the attack."

"Good."

That's Jocko's response to any and every challenge.

And, if you've seen a picture of him, you know that he's DEFINITELY not "Mr. Smiley Positive Guy." He's Mr. Antifragile Stockdale Paradox Buoyantly Gritty Stoic Guy.

*"Didn't get promoted? Good. More time to get better.*

*Didn't get the job you wanted? Good. Go out, gain more experience, and build a better resume.*

*Get injured? Good. Needed a break from training.*

*Got beat? Good. We learned.*

*Unexpected problems? Good. We have the opportunity to figure out a solution."*

Got any challenges in YOUR life today? Good. How will you use that to fuel your Optimizing fire?

## STOP EATING SUGAR

"Sugar truly is addictive. It stimulates the same parts of the brain as heroin and cocaine. When you have it you want more of it. And you know this to be true. That's why you can't stop eating it. And when you do stop eating it, you will feel withdrawal. Headache. Irritation. Anxiety. ...

Stay strong. Get off the sugar train. Get off the addiction. Stop eating sugar."

After walking us through his "Thoughts" in Part 1, Part 2 is all about "Actions" and includes "Fuel: Feeding the Machine" and "Repair and Maintenance: Injury Prevention and Recovery" plus an Appendix with "The Workouts" that make you sore just reading about them. (Hah.)

In addition to (wisely) telling us to stop eating sugar, Jocko gives us a brilliantly succinct summary of Optimal Metabolism 101—reminding us that it's the carbs (especially the fast-acting variety) that disrupt our insulin/fat storage. He also tells us that just because a free donut is in the room, doesn't mean we need to eat it. In fact, those times when optimal food isn't available? They're perfect opportunities for a little fast.

Practically speaking: Still eating sugar? Remember: You have more willpower than a donut. :)

## DO

“Don’t just read this book.  
Don’t just listen to the podcast.  
Don’t just watch videos online.

Don’t just take notes.  
Don’t just study them.  
Don’t just share them with your friends.

Don’t just plan.  
Don’t just mark your calendar.  
Don’t just ‘get motivated.’

Don’t just talk.  
Don’t just think.  
Don’t just dream.

No. None of that matters.

The only thing that matters is that you actually do.

**SO:**

**DO.”**

Those are the final words of the book.

One more time: Theory? That’s the rudimentary philosophy.

Practice? Actually DOING the stuff we know we’re here to do? THAT’s the advanced work.

Let’s move from Theory to Practice to Mastery. And DO what needs to get done as we remember:  
Discipline Equals Freedom.

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Philosopher in Residence*

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you’ll probably like...

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[The Way of the SEAL](#)  
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## About the Author of “Discipline Equals Freedom”

JOCKO WILLINK



JOCKO WILLINK was a Navy SEAL for 20 years, rising through the ranks to become the commander of Task Unit Bruiser—the most decorated Special Operations Unit of the Iraq War. After retiring, Jocko continued on the disciplined path of success, co-founding Echelon Front, a multi-million dollar leadership and management consulting company, writing the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Extreme Ownership*, the children’s book *Way of the Warrior Kid*, and creating one of the top-ranking podcasts, JOCKO PODCAST.

## About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at [optimize.me](https://optimize.me).