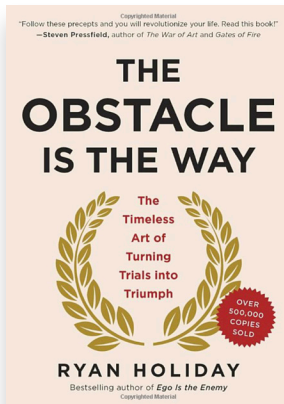


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# The Obstacle is the Way

## THE SUMMARY

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### Introduction

Great individuals, like great companies, find a way to transform weakness into strength. It's a rather amazing and even touching feat. They took what should have held them back and used it to move forward. As it turns out, this is one thing all great men and women of history have in common. Like oxygen to fire, obstacles became fuel for the blaze that was their ambition. They were (and continue to be) impossible to discourage or contain. Every impediment only served to make the inferno within them burn with greater ferocity.

These were people who flipped their obstacles upside down. They lived the words of Marcus Aurelius and followed the ancient Stoics even if they'd never read them. They had the ability to see obstacles for what they were, the ingenuity to tackle them, and the will to endure a world mostly beyond their comprehension and control. Most of the time we don't find ourselves in horrible situations that must simply be endured. We face some minor disadvantage or get stuck with some less-than-favorable conditions. Sometimes we're trying to do something really hard and find ourselves outmatched, overstretched, or just out of ideas. Well, the same logic applies. Turn it around. Find some benefit. Use it as fuel. It's simple but, of course, not easy.

It's not just thinking this is not so bad? It is willing yourself to see that this must be an opportunity to gain a new foothold, move forward, or go in a better direction. Don't just "be positive;" learn to be ceaselessly

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creative and opportunistic. Not only can it be done, but in fact, it has and is being done every day. That's the power we will unlock in this book.

## Part 1: Perception

***The Discipline of Perception.*** You will come across obstacles in life that are fair and unfair. You will discover, time and time again, that what matters most is not what these obstacles are but how we see them, how we react to them, and whether we keep our composure. You will learn that this reaction determines how successful we will be in overcoming them.

Where one person sees a crisis, another can see opportunity. Where one is blinded by success, another sees reality with ruthless objectivity. Where one loses control of emotions, another can remain calm. Desperation, despair, fear, and powerlessness are functions of our perceptions. You must realize that nothing makes us feel this way. We choose to give in to such feelings or choose not to. We can learn to perceive things differently, to cut through the illusions that others believe or fear. We can stop seeing the "problems" in front of us as problems. We can learn to focus on what things really are.

Too often we react emotionally, get despondent, and lose our perspective. All that does is turn bad things into really bad things. Unhelpful perceptions can invade our mind and throw off our compass. We can see disaster rationally by seeing opportunity in every disaster, and transforming that negative situation into an education, a skill set, or a fortune. Seen properly, everything that happens is a chance to move forward.

There are a few things to keep in mind when faced with a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. We must try:

- To be objective
- To control emotions and keep an even keel
- To choose to see the good in a situation
- To steady our nerves
- To ignore what disturbs or limits others
- To place things in perspective
- To revert to the present moment
- To focus on what can be controlled

This is how you see the opportunity within the obstacle. It does not happen on its own. It is a process that results from self-discipline and logic.

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**Recognize Your Power.** We decide what we will make of each and every situation. We decide whether we'll break or whether we'll resist. We decide whether we'll assent or reject. No one can force us to give up or to believe something that is untrue (such as, that a situation is absolutely hopeless or impossible to improve). Our perceptions are the thing that we're in complete control of.

It is through our perception of events that we are complicit in the creation, as well as the destruction, of every one of our obstacles. There is no good or bad without us, there is only perception. There is the event itself and the story we tell ourselves about what it means.

Just because your mind tells you that something is awful or evil or unplanned or otherwise negative doesn't mean you have to agree. Just because other people say that something is hopeless or crazy or broken to pieces doesn't mean it is. We decide what story to tell ourselves, or whether we will tell one at all. Welcome to the power of perception. Applicable in each and every situation, it's impossible to obstruct. It can only be relinquished, and that is your decision.

**Steady Your Nerves.** When we aim high, pressure and stress obligingly come along for the ride. Stuff is going to happen that catches us off guard, threatens or scares us. Surprises (unpleasant ones, mostly) are almost guaranteed. The risk of being overwhelmed is always there. In these situations, talent is not the most sought-after characteristic. Grace and poise are, because these two attributes precede the opportunity to deploy any other skill.

Defiance and acceptance come together well in the following principle: there is always a countermove, always an escape or a way through, so there is no reason to get worked up. No one said it would be easy and, of course, the stakes are high, but the path is there for those ready to take it. This is what we've got to do. We know that it's going to be tough, maybe even scary. But we're collected and serious and aren't going to be frightened off.

This means preparing for the realities of our situation and steadying our nerves so we can throw our best at it. It also means steeling ourselves, shaking off the bad stuff as it happens and soldiering on by staring straight ahead as though nothing has happened. If your nerve holds, then nothing really did "happen" or at least our perception made sure it was nothing of consequence.

**Control Your Emotions.** Obstacles make us emotional, but the only way we'll survive or overcome them is by keeping those emotions in check. The Greeks had a word for this: *apatheia*. It's the kind of calm equanimity that comes with the absence of irrational or extreme emotions. Don't let the negativity in, don't let those emotions even get started. Just say, "No, thank you, I can't afford to panic."

This is the skill that must be cultivated so you can focus your energy exclusively on solving problems, rather than reacting to them.

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As Gavin de Becker writes in *The Gift of Fear*, “When you worry, ask yourself, ‘What am I choosing to not see right now?’ What important things are you missing because you chose worry over introspection, alertness or wisdom?” Does getting upset provide you with more options? If an emotion can’t change the condition or the situation you’re dealing with, it is likely an unhelpful emotion, or quite possibly, a destructive one.

**Practice Objectivity.** Objectivity means removing “you” from the equation. Just think, what happens when we give others advice? Their problems are crystal clear to us, the solutions obvious. Something that’s present when we deal with our own obstacles is always missing when we hear other people’s problems: the baggage. With other people we can be objective. We take the situation at face value and immediately set about helping our friend to solve it. Selfishly and stupidly we save the pity, the sense of persecution and the complaints for our own lives.

Take your situation and pretend it is not happening to you. Pretend it is not important, that it doesn’t matter. How much easier would it be for you to know what to do? How much more quickly and dispassionately could you size up the scenario and its options? Think of all the ways that someone could solve a specific problem. Give yourself clarity, not sympathy. It’s an exercise, which means it takes repetition. The more you try it, the better you get at it. The more skilled you become seeing things for what they are, the more perception will work for you rather than against you.

**Alter Your Perspective.** When you can break apart something, or look at it from some new angle, it loses its power over you. We choose how we look at things. We retain the ability to inject perspective into a situation. We can’t change the obstacles themselves but the power of perspective can change how the obstacles appear. How we approach, view, and contextualize an obstacle, and what we tell ourselves it means, determines how daunting and trying it will be to overcome.

The right perspective has a strange way of cutting obstacles down to size. For whatever reason, we tend to look at things in isolation. We kick ourselves for blowing a deal or having to miss a meeting. We just missed 100 percent of that opportunity, but what we’re forgetting is that “business opportunities are like buses; there’s always another around.” One meeting is nothing in a lifetime of meetings; one deal is just one deal. In fact, we may have actually dodged a bullet. The next opportunity might be better.

The way we look out at the world changes how we see these things. Is our perspective truly giving us perspective or is it what’s actually causing the problem? That’s the question.

**Is It Up to You?** To harness the power to change, recovering addicts learn the Serenity Prayer.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

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This is how they focus their efforts. It's a lot easier to fight addiction when you aren't also fighting the fact that you were born, that your parents were monsters, or that you lost everything. So what if you focused on what you can change? That's where you can make a difference.

Behind the Serenity Prayer is a two-thousand-year-old Stoic phrase: "taeph'hemin, ta oukeph'hemin." What is up to us, what is not up to us.

What is up to us? Our emotions. Our judgments. Our creativity. Our attitude. Our perspective. Our desires. Our decisions. Our determination. This is our playing field, so to speak. Everything there is fair game. What is not up to us? Well, you know, everything else. The weather, the economy, circumstances, other people's emotions or judgments, trends, disasters, etcetera.

When it comes to perception, this is the crucial distinction to make: the difference between the things that are in our power and the things that aren't. That's the difference between the people who can accomplish great things, and the people who find it impossible to avoid not just drugs or alcohol but all addictions.

Focusing exclusively on what is in our power magnifies and enhances our power. Every ounce of energy directed at things we can't actually influence is wasted, self-indulgent and self-destructive. So much power is frittered away in this manner. To see an obstacle as a challenge is a choice that is up to us.

**Live in The Present Moment.** It doesn't matter whether this is the worst time to be alive or the best, whether you're in a good job market or a bad one, or that the obstacle you face is intimidating or burdensome. What matters is that right now is right now. The implications of our obstacle are theoretical in that they exist in the past and the future. We live in the moment. The more we embrace that, the easier the obstacle will be to face.

You can take the trouble you're dealing with and use it as an opportunity to focus on the present moment, to ignore the totality of your situation and learn to be content with what happens, as it happens. One thing is certain. It's not simply a matter of saying, "Oh, I'll live in the present." You have to work at it. Catch your mind when it wanders and don't let it get away from you. Discard distracting thoughts. Leave things well enough alone no matter how much you feel like doing otherwise.

It's easier when the choice to limit your scope feels like editing rather than acting. Remember that this moment is not your life; it's just a moment in your life. Focus on what is in front of you, right now. Ignore what it "represents" or it "means" or "why it happened to you." There is plenty else going on right here to care about any of that.

**Think Differently.** Be realistic, we're told. Listen to feedback. Play well with others. Compromise. Well, what if the "other" party is wrong? What if conventional wisdom is too conservative? It's this

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all-too-common impulse to complain, defer, and then give up that holds us back. An entrepreneur is someone with faith in their ability to make something where there was nothing before. To them, the idea that “no one has ever done this or that” is a good thing. When given an unfair task, some rightly see it as a chance to test what they’re made of—to give it all they’ve got, knowing full well how difficult it will be to win. They see it as an opportunity because it is often in that desperate nothing-to-lose state that we are our most creative. Our best ideas come from where obstacles illuminate new options.

***Finding the Opportunity.*** It’s one thing to not be overwhelmed by obstacles or discouraged or upset by them. This is something that few are able to do. Only after you have controlled your emotions, and you can see objectively and stand steadily, a mental flip becomes possible. It’s our preconceptions that are the problem. They tell us that things should or need to be a certain way, so when they’re not, we naturally assume that we are at a disadvantage or that we’d be wasting our time to pursue an alternate course. Every situation is an opportunity to act but we are so bad at looking we close our eyes to the gift.

Of all the strategies we’ve talked about, this is the one you can always use. Everything can be flipped. Or we can fight it the entire way. The result is the same. The obstacle still exists. One just hurts less. The benefit is still there below the surface. What kind of idiot decides not to take it? No one is talking glass-half-full-style platitudes here. This must be a complete flip by seeing through the negative, past its underside, and into its corollary: the positive.

***Prepare to Act.*** We all have to make assumptions in life; we have to weigh the costs and benefits. No one is asking you to look at the world through rose-colored glasses. No one is asking for noble failure or martyrdom. Boldness is acting anyway, even though you understand the negative and the reality of your obstacle. Decide to tackle what stands in your way—not because you’re a gambler defying the odds but because you’ve calculated them and boldly embraced the risk. After all, now that you’ve managed perceptions properly, what’s next is to act. Are you ready?

## Part 2: Action

***The Discipline of Action.*** In life, it doesn’t matter what happens to you or where you came from. It matters what you do with what happens and what has been given. The only way you’ll do something spectacular is by using it all to your advantage. Born with nothing, into poverty, strife, or the chaos of decades past, certain types of people were freed from modern notions of fairness or good or bad because none of it applied to them. What was in front of them was all they had. Instead of complaining, they worked with it. They made the best of it because they didn’t have a choice. We can always (and only) greet our obstacles:



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- with energy
- with persistence
- with a coherent and deliberate process
- with iteration and resilience
- with pragmatism
- with strategic vision
- with craftiness and savvy
- and an eye for opportunity and pivotal moments

Are you ready to get to work?

**Get Moving.** Life can be frustrating. Oftentimes we know what our problems are. We may even know what to do about them. We fear that taking action is too risky, that we don't have the experience or that it's not how we pictured it or because it's too expensive, because it's too soon, because we think something better might come along, or because it might not work.

What happens as a result? Nothing. We do nothing. The time for that has passed. The wind is rising. The bell's been rung. Get started, get moving. When you're frustrated in pursuit of your own goals don't sit there and complain that you don't have what you want or that this obstacle won't budge.

We talk a lot about courage as a society, but we forget that at its most basic level it's really just taking action whether that's approaching someone you're intimidated by or deciding to finally crack a book on a subject you need to learn. All the greats you admire started by saying, "Yes, let's go." They usually did it in less desirable circumstances than we'll ever suffer. Just because the conditions aren't exactly to your liking, or you don't feel ready yet, doesn't mean you get a pass. If you want momentum, you'll have to create it yourself, right now, by getting up and getting started.

**Practice Persistence.** Doing new things invariably means obstacles. A new path is, by definition, uncleared. Only with persistence and time can we cut away debris and remove impediments. Only in struggling with the impediments that made others quit can we find ourselves on untrodden territory. Only by persisting and resisting can we learn what others were too impatient to be taught.

It's okay to be discouraged. It's not okay to quit. Planting your feet and inching closer until you take the impenetrable fortress you've decided to lay siege to in your own life is persistence. What set Edison apart from other inventors is tolerance for difficulties, and the steady dedication with which he applied himself toward solving them.

In other words, it's supposed to be hard. Your first attempts aren't going to work. It's going to take a lot out of you—but energy is a renewable resource. Stop looking for an epiphany and start looking for weak points. Stop looking for angels and start looking for angles. There are options. Settle in for

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the long haul, try each and every possibility and you'll get there. When people ask where we are, what we're doing, or how that "situation" is coming along, the answer should be clear. We're working on it. We're getting closer. When setbacks come, we respond by working twice as hard.

**Iterate.** In a world where we increasingly work for ourselves, it makes sense to view ourselves like a start-up of one. That means changing the relationship with failure. It means iterating, failing, and improving. Our capacity to try, try, try is inextricably linked with our ability and tolerance to fail, fail, fail. On the path to successful action, we will fail—possibly many times. Action and failure are two sides of the same coin. One doesn't come without the other. What breaks this critical connection down is when people stop acting because they've taken failure the wrong way.

When failure comes, ask, "What went wrong here? What can be improved? What am I missing?" This helps birth alternative ways of doing what needs to be done, ways that are often much better than what we started with. Failure puts you in corners you have to think your way out of. It is a source of breakthroughs. Being able to see and understand the world this way is part and parcel of overturning obstacles.

**Follow the Process.** Whether it's pursuing the pinnacle of success in your field or simply surviving some awful or trying ordeal, the same approach works. Don't think about the end—think about making it from meal to meal, break to break, checkpoint to checkpoint, paycheck to paycheck, one day at a time. When you really get it right, even the hardest things become manageable because the process is relaxing. Even mammoth tasks become just a series of component parts.

We needn't scramble like we're so often inclined to do when some difficult task sits in front of us. Remember the first time you saw a complicated algebra equation? It was a jumble of symbols and unknowns. Then you stopped, took a deep breath, and broke it down. You isolated the variables, solved for them, and all that was left was the answer. Do that now, for whatever obstacles you come across. When it comes to our actions, disorder and distraction are death. The unordered mind loses track of what matters and gets distracted by thoughts of the future. The process is order. It keeps our perceptions in check and our actions in sync. The process is about doing the right things, right now.

**Do Your Job, Do It Right.** We will be and do many things in our lives. Some are prestigious, some are onerous, but none are beneath us. Whatever we face, our job is to respond with:

- hard work
- honesty
- helping others as best we can

You should never have to ask yourself, "But what am I supposed to do now?" You know: the answer is your job. Whether anyone notices, whether we're paid for it, or whether the project turns out successfully doesn't matter. We can and always should act with those three traits—no matter the obstacle.



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There will never be any obstacles that can ever truly prevent us from carrying out our obligation. Each and every task requires our best. Whether we're facing down bankruptcy and angry customers or raking in money and deciding how to grow from here, if we do our best, we can be proud of our choices and confident they're the right ones. We did our job—whatever it is.

If you see any of this as a burden, you're looking at it the wrong way. All we need to do is try hard, be honest, and help others and ourselves. That's all that's been asked of us. No more and no less. Never forget that each individual instance matters. The whole isn't certain, only the instances are. How you do anything is how you can do everything. We can always act right.

**What's Right is What Works.** We spend a lot of time thinking about how things are supposed to be, or what the rules say we should do. We tell ourselves that we'll get started once the conditions are right, or once we're sure we can trust this or that. It'd be better to focus on making do with what we've got and focusing on results instead of pretty methods.

Start thinking like a radical pragmatist: ambitious, aggressive, and rooted in ideals, but also imminently practical and guided by the possible. Not on everything you would like to have, not on changing the world right at this moment, but ambitious enough to get everything you need. Don't think small but make the distinction between the critical and the extra. Think progress, not perfection. Under this kind of force, obstacles break apart. They have no choice. Since you're going around them or making them irrelevant, there is nothing for them to resist.

**In Praise of the Flank Attack.** What's your first instinct when faced with a challenge? Is it to outspend the competition? Argue with people in an attempt to change long-held opinions? Are you trying to barge through the front door? The back door, side door and windows may have been left wide open. The way that works isn't always the most impressive. Sometimes it even feels like you're taking a shortcut or fighting unfairly. There's a lot of pressure to try to match people move for move, as if sticking with what works for you is somehow cheating. Let me save you the guilt and self-flagellation. It's not.

You're acting like a real strategist. You aren't just throwing your weight around and hoping it works. You're not wasting your energy in battles driven by ego and pride rather than tactical advantage. Believe it or not, this is the hard way. That's why it works. Remember, sometimes the longest way around is the shortest way home.

**Use Obstacles Against Themselves.** We push and push to get a raise, a new client, to prevent some exigency from happening. In fact, the best way to get what we want might be to re-examine those desires in the first place. It might be to aim for something else entirely, and use the impediment as an opportunity to explore a new direction. In doing so, we might end up creating a new venture that replaces our insufficient income entirely. Or we might discover that in ignoring clients, we attract more, finding that they want to work with someone who does not so badly want to work with them.

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Or we rethink that disaster we feared (along with everyone else) and come up with a way to profit from it when and if it happens. We wrongly assume that moving forward is the only way to progress, the only way we can win. Sometimes, staying put, going sideways, or moving backward is actually the best way to eliminate what blocks or impedes your path.

There is a certain humility required in the approach. It means accepting that the way you originally wanted to do things is not possible. You just haven't got it in you to do it the "traditional" way. But so what? What matters is whether a certain approach gets you to where you want to go. Let's be clear, using obstacles against themselves is very different from doing nothing. Passive resistance is incredibly active. Those actions come in the form of discipline, self-control, fearlessness, determination, and grand strategy. We can use the things that block us to our advantage, letting them do the difficult work for us. Sometimes this means leaving the obstacle as is, instead of trying so hard to change it.

**Channel Your Energy.** We all have our own constraints to deal with, including rules and social norms we're required to observe that we'd rather not. Dress codes, protocols, procedures, legal obligations, and company hierarchies are all telling us how we have to behave. Think about it too much and it can start to feel oppressive, even suffocating. If we're not careful, this is likely to throw us off our game.

Instead of giving in to frustration, we can put it to good use. It can power our actions, which, unlike our disposition become stronger and better when loose and bold. While others obsess with observing the rules, we're subtly mining them and subverting them to our advantage. Think water. When dammed by a man-made obstacle, it does not simply sit stagnant. Instead, its energy is stored and deployed, fueling the power plants that run entire cities.

To be physically and mentally loose takes no talent. That's just recklessness. (We want right action, not action period.) To be physically and mentally tight doesn't work, either. Eventually we snap. But physical looseness combined with mental restraint? That is powerful. It's a power that drives our opponents and competitors nuts. They think we're toying with them. It's maddening—like we aren't even trying, like we've tuned out the world, like we're immune to external stressors and limitations on the march toward our goals. That's because we are.

**Seize the Offensive.** It's at the seemingly bad moments, when people least expect it, that we can act swiftly and unexpectedly to pull off a big victory. While others are arrested by discouragement, we are not. We see the moment differently, and act accordingly.

If you look at history, some of our greatest leaders used shocking or negative events to push through much-needed reforms that otherwise would have had little chance of passing. We can apply that in our own lives. You always planned to do something such as write a screenplay, travel, start a business, approach a possible mentor or launch a movement. Well, now something has happened like a failure or an accident or a tragedy. Use it. Perhaps you're stuck in bed recovering. Now you have time to write. Perhaps your emotions are overwhelming and painful; turn it into material. You lost your job

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or a relationship? That's awful, but now you can travel unencumbered. Having a problem? Now you know exactly what to approach that mentor about. Seize this moment to deploy the plan that has long sat dormant in your head. Every chemical reaction requires a catalyst. Let this be yours.

Ordinary people shy away from negative situations, just as they do with failure. They do their best to avoid trouble. What great people do is the opposite. They are their best in these situations. They turn personal tragedy or misfortune to their advantage.

**Prepare for None of it to Work.** All creativity and dedication aside, after we've tried, some obstacles may turn out to be impossible to overcome. Some actions are rendered impossible, some paths impassable. Some things are bigger than us. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because we can turn that obstacle upside down, too, simply by using it as an opportunity to practice some other virtue or skill. It may be just learning to accept that bad things happen or practicing humility.

It's an infinitely elastic formula. In every situation, that which blocks our path actually presents a new path with a new part of us. If someone you love hurts you, there is a chance to practice forgiveness. If your business fails, now you can practice acceptance. If there is nothing else you can do for yourself, at least you can try to help others. We have it within us to be the type of people who try to get things done, try with everything we've got and, whatever verdict comes in, are ready to accept it instantly and move on to whatever is next. Is that you? It can be.

## Part 3: Will

**The Discipline of the Will.** Certain things in life will cut you open like a knife. When that happens the world gets a glimpse of what's truly inside you. So what will be revealed when you're sliced open by tension and pressure? Iron? Or air? Or bullshit?

As such, the will is the critical third discipline. We can think, act, and finally adjust to a world that is inherently unpredictable. The will is what prepares us for this, protects us against it, and allows us to thrive and be happy in spite of it. It is also the most difficult of all the disciplines. It's what allows us to stand undisturbed while others wilt and give in to disorder. We can be confident, calm, and ready to work regardless of the conditions. We can be willing and able to continue, even during the unthinkable, even when our worst nightmares have come true.

It's much easier to control our perceptions and emotions than it is to give up our desire to control other people and events. It's easier to persist in our efforts and actions than to endure the uncomfortable or the painful. It's easier to think and act than it is to practice wisdom. These lessons come harder but are, in the end, the most critical to wresting advantage from adversity. In every situation we can:

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- Always prepare ourselves for more difficult times.
- Always accept what we're unable to change.
- Always manage our expectations.
- Always persevere.
- Always learn to love our fate and what happens to us.
- Always protect our innerself, retreat into ourselves.
- Always submit to a greater, larger cause.
- Always remind ourselves of our own mortality.
- And, of course, prepare to start the cycle once more.

**Build Your Inner Citadel.** The Stoics had a concept called the Inner Citadel, that fortress inside of us that no external adversity can ever break down. We are not born with such a structure; it must be built and actively reinforced. During the good times, we strengthen ourselves and our bodies so that during the difficult times we can depend on it. We protect our inner fortress so it may protect us.

To be great at something takes practice. Obstacles and adversity are no different. Though it would be easier to sit back and enjoy a cushy modern life, the upside of preparation is that we're not disposed to lose all of it when someone or something suddenly messes with our plans.

It's almost a cliché at this point, but the observation that the way to strengthen an arch is to put weight on it—because it binds the stones together, and only with tension does it hold weight—is a great metaphor.

The path of least resistance is a terrible teacher. We can't afford to shy away from the things that intimidate us. We don't need to take our weaknesses for granted.

Things will happen to you. No one knows when or how, but their appearance is certain. Life will demand an answer. You chose this for yourself, a life of doing things. Now you better be prepared for what it entails. It's your armor plating. It doesn't make you invincible, but it helps prepare you for when fortune shifts—and it always does.

**Anticipation (Thinking Negatively).** You have to make concessions for the world around you. We are dependent on other people. Not everyone can be counted on like you can (though, let's be honest, we're all our own worst enemy sometimes). That means people are going to make mistakes and screw up your plans—not always, but a lot of the time.

If this comes as a constant surprise each and every time it occurs, you're not only going to be miserable, you're going to have a much harder time accepting it and moving on to attempts number two, three, and four. The only guarantee, ever, is that things will go wrong. The only thing we can use to mitigate this is anticipation, because the only variable we control completely is ourselves.

The world might call you a pessimist. Who cares? It's far better to seem like a downer than to

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be blindsided or caught off guard. It's better to meditate on what could happen, to probe for weaknesses in our plans, so those inevitable failures can be correctly perceived, appropriately addressed, or simply endured. As a result of our anticipation, we understand the range of potential outcomes and know that they are not all good. We can accommodate ourselves to any of them. We understand that it could possibly all go wrong. Now we can get back to the task at hand.

With anticipation, we have time to raise defenses, or even avoid them entirely. We're ready to be driven off course because we've plotted a way back. We can resist going to pieces if things didn't go as planned. With anticipation, we can endure. We are prepared for failure and ready for success.

***The Art of Acquiescence.*** After you've distinguished between the things that are up to you and the things that aren't, and the break comes down to something you don't control, your only option is acceptance. The shot didn't go in. The stock went to zero. The weather disrupted the shipment. Say it with me, "C'est la vie." It's all fine.

You don't have to like something to master it or to use it to some advantage. When the cause of our problem lies outside of us, we are better for accepting it and moving on, for ceasing to kick and fight against it and coming to terms with it. The Stoics have a beautiful name for this attitude. They call it the Art of Acquiescence. Let's be clear, that is not the same thing as giving up. This has nothing to do with action; this is for the things that are immune to action. It is far easier to talk of the way things should be. It takes toughness, humility, and will to accept them for what they actually are. It takes a real man or woman to face necessity.

All external events can be equally beneficial to us because we can turn them all upside down and make use of them. They can teach us a lesson we were reluctant to otherwise learn.

***Love Everything That Happens: Amor Fati.*** The next step is loving whatever happens to us and facing it with unfailing cheerfulness. It is the act of turning what we must do into what we get to do. We put our energies and emotions and exertions where they will have real impact. This is that place. We will tell ourselves if this is what I've got to do or put up with, I might as well be happy about it. We don't get to choose what happens to us, but we can always choose how we feel about it. Why on earth would you choose to feel anything but good? We can choose to render a good account of ourselves. If the event must occur, Amor fati (a love of fate) is the response. Don't waste a second looking back at your expectations. Face forward, and face it with a smug little grin.

It's a little unnatural, I know, to feel gratitude for things we never wanted to happen in the first place. But we know, at this point, the opportunities and benefits that lie within adversities. We know that in overcoming them, we emerge stronger, sharper, and empowered. There is little reason to delay these feelings. To begrudgingly acknowledge later that it was for the best, when we could have felt that in advance because it was inevitable.

# The Obstacle is the Way

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**Perseverance.** If persistence is attempting to solve some difficult problem with dogged determination and hammering until the break occurs, then plenty of people can be said to be persistent. Perseverance is something larger. It's the long game. It's about what happens not just in round one but in round two and every round after and then the fight after that and the fight after that, until the end. The Germans have a word for it: *Sizfleisch*. It's staying power or winning by sticking your ass to the seat and not leaving until after it's over.

Life is not about one obstacle, but many. What's required of us is not some shortsighted focus on a single facet of a problem, but simply a determination that we will get to where we need to go, somehow, some way, and nothing will stop us. We will overcome every obstacle until we get there. Persistence is an action. Perseverance is a matter of will. One is energy. The other is endurance. Of course, they work in conjunction with each other. Persist and persevere.

**Something Bigger Than Yourself.** Sometimes when we are personally stuck with some intractable or impossible problem, one of the best ways to create opportunities or new avenues for movement is to think, "If I can't solve this for myself, how can I at least make this better for other people?" Take it for granted, for a second, that there is nothing else in it for us, nothing we can do for ourselves. How can we use this situation to benefit others? How can we salvage some good out of this? If not for me, then for my family or the others I'm leading or those who might later find themselves in a similar situation.

What doesn't help anyone is making this all about you, all the time. Why did this happen to me? What am I going to do about this? Stop pretending that what you're going through is somehow special or unfair. Whatever trouble you're having—no matter how difficult—is not some unique misfortune picked especially for you. It just is what it is.

This kind of myopia is what convinces us, to our own detriment, that we're the center of the universe. In reality, there is a world beyond our own personal experience filled with people who have dealt with worse. We're not special or unique simply by virtue of being. We're all, at varying points in our lives, the subject of random and often incomprehensible events. Reminding ourselves of this is another way of being a bit more selfless.

Help your fellow humans thrive and survive, contribute your little bit to the universe before it swallows you up, and be happy with that. Lend a hand to others. Be strong for them, and it will make you stronger.

**Meditate on Your Mortality.** There's no question about it, Death is the most universal of our obstacles. It's the one we can do the least about. At the very best, we can hope to delay it and even then, we'll still succumb eventually. That is not to say it is not without value to us while we are alive. In the shadow of death, prioritization is easier, as are graciousness and appreciation and principles. Everything falls in its proper place and perspective. Why would you do the wrong thing? Why feel



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fear? Why let yourself and others down? Life will be over soon enough; death chides us that we may as well do life right.

We can learn to adjust and come to terms with death and find relief in the understanding that there is nothing else nearly as hard left. If even our own mortality can have some benefit, how dare you say that you can't derive value from each and every other kind of obstacle you encounter?

**Prepare to Start Again.** Knowing that life is a marathon and not a sprint is important. Conserve your energy. Understand that each battle is only one of many and that you can use it to make the next one easier. More important, you must keep them all in real perspective. Passing one obstacle simply says you're worthy of more. The world seems to keep throwing them at you once it knows you can take it. That is good, because we get better with every attempt. Never rattled. Never frantic. Always hustling and acting with creativity. Never anything but deliberate. Never attempting to do the impossible—but everything up to that line. Simply flipping the obstacles that life throws at you by improving in spite of them, and because of them.

Therefore we are no longer afraid but excited, cheerful, and eagerly anticipating the next round.

## Final Thoughts

In mastering these three disciplines we have the tools to flip any obstacle upside down. We are worthy of any and every challenge. It is not enough to simply read this or say it. We must practice these maxims, rolling them over and over in our minds and acting on them until they become muscle memory. Under pressure and trial we get better. We become better people, leaders, and thinkers. Those trials and pressures will inevitably come. They won't ever stop coming.

Don't worry; you're prepared for this now, this life of obstacles and adversity. You know how to handle them, how to brush aside obstacles and even benefit from them. You understand the process. You are schooled in the art of managing your perceptions and impressions.