

Video 9: Investing in Yourself

1. Why is it important to invest in yourself? (Education, health, emotional well-being)

There is nothing else as important to invest in as yourself. You are only as good as the time and energy you spend investing in yourself. How you act, what you think, how you treat yourself and others, how you carry yourself and how you handle yourself during stressful times all have serious and powerful implications on what your future holds for you.

This idea of investing in yourself reminds me of a story I heard long ago which goes something like this:

A Native American elder was teaching his grandson about life. He said, "A fight is going on inside of me, it's a terrible fight and is between these two wolves. One of the wolves is evil; he is angry, envious, regretful, greedy, arrogant, full of guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, and self-pity."

He went on and said, "The other wolf is good, he is very peaceful, loving, hopeful, serene, humble, kind, benevolent, empathetic, sees the best in people, generous, honest, and faithful."

He looked at his grandson and said, "The same fight is going on inside of you and inside of every other person as well."

The little boy thought about it for a few moments and with wide eyes said, "Well, which wolf will win, Grandpa?"

To which the wise elder responded, "The one you feed."

Your education, your health, your emotional well-being... all these things are worth feeding. The time and energy you spend becoming the best investing in yourself is always a wise decision. Let's break this idea of investing in yourself up into the three categories:

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Education: education has become for me one of life's greatest gift. It hasn't always been this way. I spoke earlier about how difficult school is for me. It wasn't that I couldn't do it, I simply didn't know how to do it I didn't apply myself during grade school or high school.

In the course companion book called LeadershipYOU I wrote about tinkering. I think of myself as a lifelong tinkerer. While I may not have excelled in school during my early years, I always did want to try everything. I loved to learn through exploration and experimentation and reading. Although I've learned a great deal and profound lessons from my time spent in the classroom, learning and education goes far beyond classroom time or any formal schooling.

Traveling, reading, talking to people from different backgrounds are all phenomenal ways to continue to learn and grow. I always joke, the day I become stagnant will mark my day that I start walking to my grave.

Okay so for number two, let's talk about health. Practicing emergency medicine I see all sorts of ways people completely screw up their body.

Recently, I reviewed a chart of the patient we transported across the country in this aero-medical jet. Super tragic. She was a 16-year-old girl who somehow got involved with the wrong people and was drinking a significant amount of vodka every day (like a bottle). If she survived, she was going to be evaluated for a liver transplant. If she even survived, her life would be forever changed at sixteen years old. Now how sad is that?!

But not everything is this dramatic, but not exercising, obesity, smoking, and drug use are all ways to take years off your life. I literally see this every day I work and could tell you countless, incredibly sad stories about people permanently screwing up their body. You only have one body to . Take care of it.

Finally, let's talk about emotional well-being. Taking time off for yourself, doing things you enjoy, making a difference in the lives of others, and checking in with yourself are all great ways to stay balanced and moving forward. If you struggle with depression or mood swings or other forms of mental illness, remember like physical illness, it is an illness and illnesses needs to be treated.



There are plenty of ways to help people who temporarily are having challenges with mental illness. If you know someone who struggles with this, support and love them and encourage them to seek help, because help is absolutely out there and it will help them to get back on their path.

2. Was it ever a sacrifice to go back to school every 10 years? How so?

I would actually characterize it as a blessing to be able to go back to school every 10 years. I'm absolutely passionate about learning new subjects and meeting new people. Going back to school has allowed me to stay relevant. In other words, it's allowed me to keep up with our changing society.

One entire chapter in the book leadership you is about knowledge seeking and there's a reason for that. Self-leaders cannot afford to become stagnant. Being stagnant means doing things the same way thinking things the same way and believing in the same things. When you do this, you lose an opportunity to grow and evolve.

Sometimes being stagnant is comfortable. You know exactly what you're getting and you know exactly what you know. However, when you fall into this trap you cheat yourself out of becoming the best version of yourself. The sad part is, you'll never even know about what you're missing out on because you won't expose yourself to these new ideas and thoughts.

If you commit to a lifetime of learning you'll be amazed at the rewards you will get and if you're like me you'll wonder how you ever got along without knowing whatever new bit of knowledge you assimilated.

3. What do you do to put yourself in the best frame of mind?

A few years ago, I spent time with a neuropsychologist. I wanted to up my game and become more productive and more balanced. I had an amazing year and learned all sorts of techniques for self-improvement and mindfulness.



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One of things I learned from the neuropsychologist was that when you engage with people or in a meeting or even on the phone you want to be the best possible version of yourself and be fully invested in whatever task you are doing.

Honestly, I struggle with this one.

I always seem to have a lot going on (and this is an excuse and it sounds like one), so I really have to commit to be intentional about being mindful. Here's one technique I learned to be the best version of myself: the neuropsychologist had me close my eyes and remember a time when I performed my absolute best.

I knew exactly the time, and sadly there was only one. I had just given a eulogy for a very dear friend of mine who had recently died after a long battle with ovarian cancer. I wrote about her in the book *Ingredients of Outliers*. Her name is Colleen and I learned more from her about life and death than I ever learned in the classroom or in the emergency department.

During her eulogy, I talked about all the ways Colleen touched everyone's lives. When I walked off the stage I had one of those very rare moments when I knew I made Colleen proud and that I could not have done better. It's odd, because I never think that about myself.

Anyway, the neuropsychologist told me to remember that feeling close my eyes and couple it with the physical sensation. The physical sensation I used was pinching my thumb and index finger together. He had me repeat it three times. Close my eyes, feel those feelings, and pinched my thumb and index finger together.

Now, before I engage in an important task or conversation I pinch my thumb and index finger together and that feeling of being the best I could possibly be flooded back into my consciousness. It sounds crazy I know but it also really works. It's something I do almost every day.

Something I always say is that you can always tell a person's true character is how they act when they are stressed, tired, or drunk. Be mindful of how you react and treat others when you're on the edge.

You can practice this. Imagine things in your past that have really pushed you the limits of your tolerance and replay them in your mind and think about the best possible way you can react in the future when it or something equally challenging happens again as it surely will.

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Your ability to handle stressed can be practiced and honed so that when the time comes for you to react calmly under pressure you are absolutely at your absolute best.



Video 10: Redefine How You Think about Failure

1. How do you define failure?

There've been countless times when the task I set out to do was not completed or accomplished in the matter I originally planned. Generally, this is because I course corrected along the way and followed an entirely different path or achieved an entirely different or maybe even an unexpected outcome. These are rarely failures.

My definition of failure is pretty straightforward. I define failure this way: Failure is simply not trying. It's that simple-remember that quote from Theodore Roosevelt. Don't catch yourself living in that gray twilight; that is my definition of failure.

2. Why do you think people are afraid of failure?

I learned about failure early in my life. I fail often and at a myriad of activities. Failure, when I was growing up was just something else that happened to me during the day. Sounds odd but I kind of use to it. Not that I accepted it, or enjoyed it or wanted it to happen again, but it just became not that big of a deal to me.

In chapter 1 of the book *LeadershipYOU*, I discuss humility. Something I learned over the years and something that was evident in the outliers I have interviewed is that humility allows you to take risks. Let me explain.

I witnessed this again and again the people of large egos who are arrogant are afraid to be involved in or do anything at which they may fail because they felt if they failed, it may expose this and other people may judge them for it. I've noticed again and again the people of large egos tend to be very insecure and that any failure cracks right through the veneer of arrogance allowing others to see them for who they really are and they're afraid of that. Thus, people of large egos are generally risk-averse because of this fear of failure.

Conversely, humility allows you to experiment and explore new areas without the fear of failure because unlike the arrogant you don't fear that you will somehow be exposed if things don't work out. The take-home point is this: if you can stay humble you will be exposed to an experience and many more adventures than someone who is arrogant.



Here's how to stay humble: read books and stories about really amazing people. The highest achievers that I've met are all humble and it's awfully easy for me to have the reality check of humility since I've accomplished and will accomplish far less than any of them.

3. Why do you think failure needs to be redefined?

A long time ago I read a quote by Thomas Edison who, while being interviewed about developing the light bulb told the reporter, "I haven't failed, I know 10,000 ways not to make a light bulb."

This is how I try to approach failure. I throw my ego aside, acknowledge the mistakes I've made along the way, make course corrections to accommodate for what I've learned and simply move on. It sounds easy and actually is. Once you get your head around this and start approaching life in this manner, you'll see that it's incredibly liberating.

Here's what I've learned over the years about failure:

1. You learn something-if you keep your eyes open you will learn early on what not to do the next time. So, it's basically just a learning opportunity. Since I love to learn, failure is not that bad.
2. If you fail fast you waste less money because early failures are often less costly than later ones and since I hate wasting money failure is not that bad.
3. When I fail I do with some panache - speaking plainly I do it in such a way that generally makes for a good story and since I love good stories where I'm the butt of a joke failure is not that bad.
4. Finally and probably most importantly I learned again and again that if you keep your eyes open more often than not there's always something awaiting right around the corner that would not have happened to you but for the failure. Thus, if something better is coming along the path, then failure is not that bad.



Video 11: How to Lead Yourself into and Through Challenges

1. Why do people talk themselves out of going for what they want?

I often hear people talking themselves out of what they hope to accomplish long before they try to accomplish it. There's that old saying that goes like this, "he's all talk." Or, "she talks a good game." Maybe these people are just verbally processing what may be a potential game plan but through that processing, they realized that in fact they don't want to pursue it at all. This is of course fine if that's the case.

Frequently, I hear people espouse what they could've done if only fill in the blank is. As I mentioned, I bought a long time ago not to be a "if only" person. Coupled with not fearing failure, that promise I made to myself about not being an "if only" person leads me to moving past the starting line.

That's not to say I just run blindly after every new opportunity. Once evaluated, however, and once you have your written or mental plan delineated and the benefits outweigh the risks, then nothing should stop you from moving forward.

I recently talked to a group of physicians who all are interested in starting their own practice, and they were going to do it together. They had some great ideas and if executed properly, I think they had a winner. They asked me if I would help them synthesize their ideas into a workable plan.

I realized early in our discussion that although they all wanted to do it, none of them would individually or collectively move it forward. They were too afraid of the unknown, they were at least comfortable (if not happy) in their own practices and none of them want to rock the proverbial boat.

I pointed this out to them and encouraged them to press on, but none of them stepped up to the plate. All expected someone else to do it. Unfortunately, for both these physicians and their would-be future patients, none of their fantastic ideas will ever happen and at some point, I know the physicians will look back and regret it-this I'm sure.

So why do people talk themselves out of going for it? Like these physicians demonstrated ideas for number reasons. People are comfortable enough where they are in don't want to risk losing that comfort. Others don't have the drive or work ethic or stamina or money to pursue their dreams. Finally others fear failure. I



suspect many of the physicians with whom I was speaking hadn't failed at much in their life so going out on a limb with the potential for failure was a deal breaker.

Don't let this be you. Self-leaders need to go for it, and once they decide what that "it" is, they need to go for it with full force.

1. What can a person do to become more confident when going after something they want?

First, believe in yourself.

I have seen people do some incredibly amazing things and if you ask them before they started if they thought they could do it they would've said not a chance. Thus, we are capable of doing far more than we think possible.

I love airplanes and I thought I'd love to fly. When I was in medical school, I went for a couple flights with a fellow classmate who just received his pilot's license. Looking back, I probably should've never gotten in the plane with this guy-he was a bit of a maniac and his flying skills were consistent with his past history.

Frankly, he scared the crap out of me. Couple this with my parents preaching to me while growing up not to get in small planes pretty much sealed my non-flying state.

But I really loved the thought of flying. So, what could I do? After residency, I started flying lessons. Somehow I was always paired with the beginning instructor who thought they were the present-day version of Tom Cruise and top gun replete with aviator sunglasses and a leather flying jacket.

I hated my first 10 lessons. I felt airsick and nearly threw up every time and I hated doing all the variety of stall sequences when you feel like the plane stops flying and you pitch nose down and accelerate towards the earth. Oh wait, that's exactly what a stall is the plane actually does stop flying.

Couple that with my inability to get the site picture right on landing I would end up either to nose low or to nose high but never with the correct angle of attack necessary. Thus my landings even with the help of the flight instructor were more like a controlled crash-what wasn't it like? For some reason I pressed on.

At one point, I was doing my solo cross-country flight. It was about 90°F out with 95% humidity and I had been working all night in the emergency department and



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this is before the days of headsets worn while flying, and the plane certainly wasn't air conditioned, and the only navigation I had was a few instruments: a compass and map.

The plane had no autopilot no air-conditioning and in those days, we didn't wear headsets which were a luxury. All of a sudden, I startled awake and realize that I've been sleeping while flying. I didn't know how long I was out nor where I was when I woke up.

When you're flying over farmland in central Illinois in the summer, everything looks the same. In those days we did dead reckoning meaning you flew from point-to-point with a chart on your lap and tried to pick out landmarks. It wasn't so I bottled the water tower of a small farm town that I realized my exact location.

By this point, I was on my third flight instructor and when I recounted the story to her I figured I'd be on my fourth. Somehow she hung with me I managed to complete the course and other requirements and pass my check ride I've never looked back.

I learned this experience (and others like it) that if you continually move forward, even if only by small increments you will eventually reach your goal.

When I was in seventh grade, I was on a football team with older and bigger kids. I was new to the area didn't know anyone and wasn't welcomed into a group who been playing together for years.

After two weeks of two-a-day practices (where I got my butt kicked day in and day out), I quit. I regretted quitting the football team for years. I went back out for the next year and did fine but quitting always hung over my head.

Looking back, and this will sound odd, but I'm glad I quit because quitting the seventh grade football team convinced me of one thing: I'll never quit again when the going gets tough-I will always press on.

There's a sign that hangs over my head as I walked down the stairs to my office it's part of a quote that Winston Churchill said during one of his addresses it's simply this: "never give up." I don't need to be reminded of this anymore, but I'm glad it's there because it is a constant reminder to me to never give up.

2. What can self-leaders do to lead themselves through challenges?

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I was fortunate to learn about quitting when the going gets rough early. It absolutely galvanized and steeled my ability to confront and work through challenges. I tell myself frequently that if it was easy everyone would do it. With that mindset you start to appreciate the fact that things are difficult and that nothing rewarding comes easily.

History is replete with inventors, explorers, and high achievers on the verge of giving up when they finally realize they reach their goal and moments before were about ready to quit.

History is also replete with people giving up only to discover later they were incredibly close to their goal and have to live with that knowledge that they gave up right at the final moment.

It doesn't take much work to discover how hard some people have it or what they've gone through to accomplish their goals. Reading stories about Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, or Louise Zamparini or Ernest Shackleton made me realize that my challenges are absolutely trivial compared to what others have done before me and that I need to get off my rear and start working and quit whining.

Video 12: Be Mindful of How You Present Yourself

1. Do self-leaders need to be mindful of how they carry themselves?

It's important to be cognizant of how you appear to others in the manner in which you conduct yourself. I'll be the first to admit that I'm not always perfect in this regard.

Sometimes, I'm alone in thinking that I'm humorous or funny and find myself to be the only one laughing at my jokes. Also, I don't change my approach to fit the audience. When I'm in the emergency department or my office or out with friends my demeanor stays about the same.

Sometimes, I suspect that my lack of formality troubles some patients. For example, before doing a spinal tap, which involves putting this long, thin needle in someone's back to get some spinal fluid out, and you put it right next to the spinal cord, I'll often quip, "Try to hold still this is the first time I've done this."

When they turn around with a shocked look on their face (which they almost always do) I'll add, "This morning," to which they laugh and I laugh and wink and then start the procedure.

I always endeavor and I tried to impart this to my children who are now adults, always be the calmest one in the room.

I love that poem by Rudyard Kipling called *If*.

The first line goes:

*If you can keep your head when all about you
are losing theirs and blaming it on you-*

And further goes on to say,

*If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
and treat those two imposters just the same;*



And goes on,

*If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
to serve your turn long after they are gone,*

And ends with,

*Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
and -which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!*

A few years ago, I was in a plane crash. I was a passenger in the front seat of a small single-engine aircraft. The pilot lost control on takeoff and we crashed into a hanger. The plane caught fire quickly and but for the presence of mind of a friend of mine who was sitting next to the only door in the aircraft we would've burned to death.

Just before we flew into the hanger, my friend opened the door thus preventing the door being jammed shut when the frame bent on impact.

Presence of mind and the ability to stay calm despite your surroundings will save your life and possibly the lives of others. Thus, how you carry yourself an act during times of crisis are Windows into your character and temperament.

2. How can one go about making a solid first impression?

There's an old saying you only have one chance to make a good first impression. I think about often when I meet people for the first time. When I meet people for the first time, I like to stand up smile the moment we make eye contact walk over to them and shake hands and introduce myself using my first name.

If they try to call me Dr. I will say, "I'll be your doctor if you're sick or injured otherwise please call me John." While shaking hands, I sometimes touched their right shoulder with my left hand. When interviewing applicants, I closely watch how they walk into the room and how they introduce themselves.

Studies have shown (and I would tend to agree) that interviews are made or lost within the first 30 seconds. The same is true with introducing myself to patients in the emergency department.



Patients are often scared or intimidated, so I do my best to greet them with warm, gentle humor. Putting patients at ease I consider to be part of my job.

When my kids are growing up, we taught them to shake hands firmly and looked directly in the people's eyes not looking away or looking down. They both mastered this.

I have had the opportunity to watch them both recently at a reception after my daughter's graduation ceremony and after my son finished Air Force flight school. They both moved around the room shaking people's hands, smiling warmly, and projecting a quiet confidence. And candidly, I cannot have been more proud.

The take-home point is this: be cognizant of first impressions you truly do only have one shot at it, so just absolutely nail it.

3. What are some things that self-leaders should never say?

I often marvel at what people say about others to people they don't really know. Now, I'm sure I'm not perfect, however, I try to not speak negatively about other people, particularly when I'm with people I don't know extremely well. When this happens I've always thought about, "If they're talking this negatively about someone they say is a friend how they talk about me when I walk away?"

A long time ago, we had some friends over and were sitting down to dinner. I just told the story about my best friend's girlfriend who he brought along on a ski trip. I was telling my other friends what a nut and how high maintenance his girlfriend was and she did all of these dumb, funny things.

A woman at dinner turned around pointed to her in a picture where we were all standing together in our skis. My friend turned around look to the picture and said, "Oh my God, that's my best friend's sister." I felt like a total jerk and that experience, to the best of my ability, forever shut me up on saying anything out of school.

What I learned from this experience is that you're speaking negatively about others you're really saying more about yourself than you are of the person about whom you're talking.