

Video 13: How Do You Know When You've Reached the Finish Line?

1. Do self-leaders need to erase the idea of a finish line from their mind? If so, why?

I pray that I be like Pablo Picasso and work and create right up until the day I die or like Leonardo da Vinci who at 87 years old remarked, "I am still learning." Or like incredible individuals I write about in the Outlier Series who have inspired me with the constant commitment to improving themselves and to their craft.

The idea of continual improvement or constant evolution is one of the themes in almost every interview I've conducted with these high achieving individuals. One outlier in particular is Dr. Robert Cromer, who is one of my favorites.

Dr. Cromer was wounded in World War II then went on to medical school. He was actually inspired to go to medical school because of what happened to him in World War II. While interviewing him, he said, "When your friends are killed and you survive it does something to you. It makes you think your life is been spared and you can't waste it. You owe it to your buddies to do the best you possibly can."

He was a family practice physician for 60 years in Wisconsin and retired two weeks before his passing at the age of 88. I had the privilege of interviewing him 10 months earlier and he was still active, vibrant, and amazingly up-to-date. It was clear that he loved his patients as much as his patients truly loved him.

During the 60 years of practice, he delivered more than 3,000 babies and saw tens of thousands of patients. He delivered the babies of babies of babies during his remarkable career. In his small community, he was The Doctor. He made house calls on Christmas Eve and in all weather.

He had a very successful medical practice he continued to stay abreast of the medical journals. He said that he felt like it never learned enough or that he had ever "arrived." Dr. Cromer was a man of high integrity and a true self-leader who never settled and really until they day he died, knew no finish line.

Here's a take-home point: if you realize that the fun is the journey than you never want the journey to end thus there is no finish line.



2. You've talked about the importance of continual growth, but how does one go about actually doing that?

Continual growth is actually quite easy. Remember the phrase, "a wise man knows he knows nothing" and that Michelangelo said, "I am still learning." If you commit to these statements, then your quest for knowledge should be lifelong. How do you go about doing this?

It's actually very easy.

Think of going back to school. It does not have to be to achieve a degree can simply be to take classes in areas in which you have an interest. These could be things like photography, cooking, public speaking, history or the arts. It can really be anything about what you're passionate. You can also grow by reading, traveling or volunteering. Anything you do to expand your mind and opens you up to new ideas and constructs is growth.

As Galileo once remarked, "I've never met a man so ignorant that I can learn something from him." If you approach the world and everyone in it as prospective teachers and yourself as the open-minded student, your day will be a constant educational experience from which you will never grow bored or tired of learning.

Video 14: Capitalize (or Focus on) What You Can Control

1. Why should self-leaders focus on what they can control? And what are the things they can control?

One of my all-time favorite quotes is by Victor Frankel in a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*. Recall Victor Frankel was an Austrian physician and psychiatrist who along with his family was placed into concentration camp in World War II where he treated his fellow prisoner's physical and mental illnesses. He lost his entire family and all his friends who were also interred along with them.

Despite this horrible tragedy he said this in the book, "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." Now, if he could have that perspective despite the incomprehensible tragedy that he lived through, then I knew I could have it as well because I have lived through nowhere near the tragedy he has.

When someone says to me, "I hope I haven't made you feel fill in the blank," my standard response is you can't make me feel anything, I haven't allowed you to.

This one's a little more hard to get your head around. Think of it this way: if someone punches you in the nose, chances are pretty good that you feel pain, right? Compare that to one of your close friends saying something mean or negative to you. Chances are, because they are your close friend you are going to feel hurt, right?

Now what if someone who you don't know you've never met says or does something to you like gives you an obscene gesture by your driving or says something mean about the way you're dressed. Why on earth would you let that impact you at all?

I use this analogy a lot with resident physicians who get worked up about something some patient said or did. I asked them, "why do you let that bother you?" If someone who couldn't see you said that your shoes didn't match your pants would you care? Of course you wouldn't. So too when someone who has no business or no knowledge about you comments or remarks, why would you ever feel anything other than pity for the person who feels compelled to say something while so uninformed?

It's the same with things you can't control. There's so much in life that is completely out of our control I can't imagine why anyone would spend time worrying about it. I often remark, "it never even hit my cortex." Meaning, I never gave it a moment's thought. Life is so much easier when you only focus on things that you can control. If you can't control it why worry about it since that by definition worrying does not help you control it.

2. How has your role in the ED has taught you that you only have control over the way you react to situations. Why is this important for self-leaders?

I trained in an emergency department that was considered a knife and gun club. It is located on the south side of Chicago in a suburb called Oak Lawn. Much like today, parts of the Southside of Chicago that are extremely violent. Our emergency department received patients who had suffered from all forms of trauma and add all types of penetrating injuries. It was a phenomenal place to train because I saw it all and did it all.

One of my attending physicians at the hospital was Dr. Denise Fligner- she was about 5'3 and weighed 100 pounds soaking wet. She was very bright and very tough. What was so interesting about her is she never lost her cool despite the absolute chaos going on around her.

I compared that to some others who were my seniors. When they were in charge during times of chaos, when there is blood and gore all over everyone, they would shout and scream and raise the anxiety of everyone including the patient if they are conscious. I noticed quickly the patients seemed to do better and the team responded better and more efficiently when Dr. Fligner ran the show.

She spoke in a low soft voice with very measured words in a slow deliberate matter. Everyone had to be quiet to hear her directions and everyone was. No one talked over each other no one yelled and patients seem to do better.

Not long ago, I was in a room taking care of a critically ill patient whose heart stopped unexpectedly. I clapped my hands together once which startled everyone in the room because apparently no one else notices the patient was dead.



My comment was, “Hey gang, unless we are in the movie Princess Bride and he is only mostly dead, we better jump on this.” I thought my remark was incredibly funny everyone else however was so startled that I clap my hand loudly that I think my joke went over there head.

I have this theory that I borrowed from a book by Samuel Sam called *The House of God*. When confronted with an abusive person or patient, I put on my spacesuit. When you are in your spacesuit, nothing can hurt you and nothing gets in and less you allow it.

Over the years, I’ve had some really crazy abusive patients who spit and curse and fight. To date I’ve been able to remain calm and completely unemotionally thereby not escalating the encounter thanks to this imaginary spacesuit I put on and protects me.

3. Talk about the importance of gratefulness and laughter

I spend a lot of my day laughing and generally, at myself. I am my own best comedian in all actuality and probably nowhere near as funny as I think I am.

Let me give a quick example. A few years ago, I signed up to take active lessons from a allegedly famous soap opera star. She was everything you’d imagine; she was tall, strikingly beautiful and very proper. I would go to our small studio and she would give me lines to read and coach me through them sometimes on video.

During what ended up to be my last encounter with her, she had me read different paragraphs using different voices. She’d say, “Read this like you’re a superhero.” The next one was, “Read this like you’re putting a child to bed” and I’d talk in this nice, sing-songy voice and finally, “Like you’re trying to seduce me”, to which I responded using John Voigt’s line from the movies Zoolander, “Dammit Derek, I’m a coalminer, not a professional film or television actor.”

I could barely get the words out without laughing. She looked at me and with a very stern voice said, “You think that’s funny, that’s not funny at all in fact I think you’re incredibly boring. I need to make a pot of coffee just to drive home.”

I still thought we were joking, to which I responded, “Oh how far away do you live?”



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She said, "About a mile." This entire time, I thought we are bantering until she threw me out of her office. I guess the good news is, I didn't have to pay for that last visit.

Practicing emergency medicine makes me incredibly grateful. Everyday work I see patients whose day-to-day existence is incomprehensibly hard. Whether they have a chronic disease, a mental illness, or are homeless or all three, my worst day is 100 times better than their best day and how dare I complain or whine about some trivial inconvenience or malady I may have to endure.

This concept of focusing on gratefulness reminds of the story of the patient who had colon cancer. He came in shorter breath and I was concerned the colon cancer and metastasized to his lungs. Fortunately, the CT scan detected no cancer had spread into his lungs. However, he did have a blood clot in his pulmonary artery, which needed to be emergently treated.

Blood clots in this area can be life-threatening and sometimes fatal. When I shared this news with him he responded, "Thank God. It's only a blood clot- here I thought I had cancer in my lungs and I was dying."

I remembered the time thinking very clearly that perspective is everything. If that had been me I would have been very shaken about the diagnosis and really concerned, but to him, it was a blessing and he was in fact grateful for the good news. If he was grateful for a blood clot in his lungs I can be grateful for pretty much everything.



Video 15: The Power of Mentorship

I didn't really grow up in an era where mentors were widely available. My parents didn't have those sorts of connections and I never thought to ask (and wasn't ever brave enough) anyone to act as a mentor. When I was a freshman in college, I did follow a pediatrician around his office for a day, which was amazing. Despite that experience I do not go any farther seeking a mentor. It simply never dawned on me that that was a smart thing to do.

A long time ago, I promised to help anyone who asked for assistance or mentorship. Over the years, I've helped a large number of students along their path. Hopefully, they received as much for me as I did from them.

Mentoring students who are looking for a career in law or medicine or aviation or business reminds me of how excited I was during that time in my life when I had that much passion in my pursuit. These dynamic people always reinvigorate me and really excite me and make me incredibly grateful that I get to do the things I do.

So when you're out looking for a mentor, remember that they (your mentor) will get as much from you as you from them so don't be shy; this is a two-way street. If someone is not interested, or doesn't have time for you, simply thank them and move on. No harm, no foul, and no emotionx attached.

1. Is mentorship important? If so, why?

Mentorship is incredibly important so much so that I spend a lot of time discussing it in the book *LeadershipYOU*. Mentorship is an important aspect of self-leadership. One of my favorite remarks is that mentors allow you to stand on their shoulders and see things that they cannot see at that time in their life.

There is a famous quote by Isaac Newton who in a letter to Robert Hooke wrote, "if I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

This is what mentorship allows you to do. It makes your trajectory much steeper because you don't make the same mistakes others have made before you. Having a mentor also helps opening doors. There have been countless times when I've been able to simply pick up the phone and connect a colleague of mine and connect them to a mentee who have never known how to get a hold of them without that assistance.

The take-home point is this do your research and find a couple of willing and forward-thinking mentors. It may take a while but that makes finding them that much sweeter.

2. How should one go about finding a mentor?

So how to go about finding a mentor? It's actually quite easy up with a list of potential people who are engaged in the profession or roll about what you're passionate. I would research these people to see if you know anyone in common. When talking to people, I would tell people that you want to interview someone who already has your dream job.

I think most people have an honest desire to help others because, like mentoring, it makes them feel good. Start asking around and say you happen to know or know anyone who may know them. You'll realize quickly how small the world is. If they don't know or can't connect you the person you researched asked them if they know any others who have a similar profession.

If this doesn't work, type the name of your dream job into the search bar on Google and see what comes up. With persistence you will absolutely be able to find a person who has the ability to answer questions or at the very least point you in the right direction.

When it's finally time to contact them, shoot them an email or pick up the phone. Keep it short and to the point explain why you are contacting them and asked them if they could spare a brief amount of time for you to pick the brain. If you found the right person, they will happily be willing to help you. When someone asked me for assistance my common answer is, "I'm absolutely happy to help you, what will you teach me in return?"

When you chat with them, state what your goals are and tell a bit about yourself and what you're hoping to get out of the conversation. Again, chances are, they'll be happy to help or least point you in the right direction. If not, move on. Some of the people will be happy to chat with you just once that's okay keep pursuing someone is comfortable being leaned upon time to time.

Slowly foster these relationships. Don't ask for much at the start and be willing to give as much as you receive or actually even more.



3. What inspired you to write the Outlier Series?

Over the years I've met a number of extraordinary individuals and I started cataloging the traits that these individuals had made them so unique and so talented. I started to notice that many of them share the same traits. Not all of them had all the traits but they did share a large percentage of them.

These are the traits I wrote about in the book ingredients of outliers as well to other books in the series.

The goal of these books was to act as virtual mentors by exposing all of us to these exceptionally talented individuals.

Video 16: Be Relentless in Your Pursuits

Congratulations for being here and welcome to the fourth and final video in the section of the course! In this video, we are going to talk about the absolute necessity of being persistent and indefatigable on your journey towards your most amazing future.

One of my favorite quotes is from President Calvin Coolidge who said, “Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people talent. Genius will not; unreported genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan press on has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”

This quote transcends time, you could be the most honest intelligent and creative person in the world but unless you are willing to get up every time you’re not down and unless you have the ability to be persistent and continue to press on you’ll find yourself either settling or worse becoming stagnant.

Each and every day you must be relentless in your pursuit toward the most amazing future. This means working through the hard times and continuing to work while at times are good. When my favorite books is *1776* by David McCullough. After reading it, I’m amazed that we are all here.

There many times when the United States’ fight for independence hung by a thread and yet we persevered. One of the documents that encouraged the early patriots to press on was called *The American Crisis* written by Thomas Payne. Payne signed his pamphlets, “Common Sense.”

At this time, the colonists needed inspiring words in order to continue the fight. Payne wrote this: “These are the times that try men’s souls: the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.” He went on, “Tyranny like hell is not easily conquered: yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, more glorious the triumph.”



This will to endure is chronicled through the ages as the deciding factor of right over wrong, good versus evil and marks the upper progression of mankind. The ability to persevere takes on many different forms for me and simply head down and continue to move forward despite the perceived threat or hardship.”

1. Are fortitude, resiliency, and steadfastness necessary for self-leadership and success? If so, why?

As Calvin Coolidge noted, the ability to press on has and will always solve the problems of the human race. So too with self-leadership. There will be only plenty of times when you feel utterly alone and outnumbered on your journey to your most amazing future.

Friedrich Nietzsche had this to say, “The individual has always had a struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.”

This is why fortitude and determination are the most important qualities of a self-leader.

2. What other traits would you encourage self-leaders to cultivate?

We very talk about persistence as a crucial trait that self-leaders need to master. In LeadershipYOU, I write about a number of other traits many of which we talked about in this in this course.

Here are the other nine traits that I think are most necessary on your journey toward your most amazing future:

1. Humility
2. Passion
3. Integrity
4. Knowledge-Seeking
5. Kindness
6. Equanimity
7. Risk-Taking
8. Optimism
9. Humor



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Let's recap these traits. Humility allows you the confidence to take risks. You will have to get comfortable taking risks along your path.

Without passion, you will most likely not have the drive or persistence or staying power to continue on your quest. You have to be passionate about the outcome.

Integrity means saying what you do and doing what you say. People have to count on you and know that you are true to your word.

Knowledge seeking, or the pursuit of lifelong learning, is a fuel that once ignited becomes a passion that propels you forward.

Kindness and equanimity are both essential qualities. Warmth and kindness towards all living creatures is an endearing timeless quality that makes life's journey so much more bearable.

Equanimity or the ability to stay calm when those around you aren't is integral to your ability to handle risk.

During many difficult times the only thing that keeps you pressing forward is the optimistic hope and the humorous outlook about the situation.

If you work hard on these qualities I guarantee that you will, as a byproduct, be successful and you will achieve your goals on the path to your most amazing future.

10. What final piece of advice would you like to leave with MOOC participants?

Here's what will I leave you with: YOU have the power within you and all the tools necessary to have an remarkable life. It is simply a choice.

You've taken the first step now take the second and all the rest will come easier as you journey on your path to your most amazing future.

Thank you for sharing this time with me. Now that we are done quit sitting around and get started!