

Seek Continuous Improvement

Dedicate some attention to thinking about how you can optimize whatever you're doing in the long run.

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Seldom are we ever completely happy and satisfied with our routines and habits. If we stop and think about what we are doing, we will find numerous opportunities to improve—we could be more productive, we could enjoy our workouts more, we could tweak our diets, we could have deeper conversations, and so on. The first step to optimization is opening ourselves up to thinking about the bigger picture and ways to improve it, rather than acting mindlessly.

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- Awareness allows you to take a step back and improve things.
- Even small changes, when compounded, have a significant impact.

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- Over-optimizing can make you lose focus on what you're doing.
- It can be hard to split your attention between present activities and ways you could act more effectively.

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There are two primary ways to adopt the concept of continuous improvement. The first is to dedicate some time specifically to optimization when you're otherwise unoccupied. The second is to think about how you can do things better as you do them, keeping a part of your brain focused on the task and another on how you can perform the task better next time.

When you're free to zoom out from the day-to-day tasks and challenges in your life and apply yourself to optimization, you can search for and identify the patterns of problems and annoyances, large and small, that occupy your life. This could be anything from always bumping against that desk at night on your way to the bathroom, to always forgetting to charge your headset, to deep issues in your marriage.

As you scan through whatever is troubling you, try to explore behaviors you could change, either practically or theoretically, to improve the situation. Break your behaviors down into concrete, actionable steps that can bring the desired improvement. It may take time and effort to execute these steps, and you may wish to consider whether the rewards are worth it. However, if the pattern of problems stretches over a sufficient time period or causes enough distress, you may decide that it's worth making a significant effort to improve the situation.

Once you begin this process, you can apply the changes, then review the effects as needed and course correct where appropriate.

A complementary way to apply this tool is in action, while you're doing an activity. The principle is

the same; the difference is that you're looking for improvement in real time, as opposed to taking time out of your day in search of it. Whatever you are doing—sorting your laundry to prepare it for washing, working out at the gym, doing research for your work, etc.—try to place a portion of your attention on the next fifty, one hundred, or 500 times you will perform the same action. Ask yourself whether there is a way you can optimize something in the present that will make it easier or better the next time you do it. Even if no solution comes to mind, spotting problems and noting them for later thought can often be helpful.

For example, let's say you pack a bag with both your laptop and a change of clothes so that when you're finished at the gym, you can shower and work at a café. If the bag is too small, you may find that you're squeezing sweaty gym clothes in with your laptop or having to bring an extra bag. (This is fine if you drive a car, but not so great if you're on a bike.) What's the solution? Perhaps, as you struggle to force everything into the bag, you realize that it's as simple as purchasing a larger bag, with separate compartments, so that you can keep your clothes and your laptop separate and carry them both with ease.

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Tools—specifically the tools in this book—are a method of making things better. Without tools, humankind would never have evolved to the level of complexity that we have. At heart, every tool in this book is intended to offer you a suggestion you can use to improve your life.

You're invited to pick a chapter that you're interested in, scan the list of tools, and find one that piques your interest. Read it and see if you want to try it out. If not, keep going—there are plenty of other tools available to try.