



Stephen Duneier, an American professional investment manager, strategy consultant, speaker, lecturer, author, artist and Guinness World Record holder (pew!), once relayed a story about his school years at a Ted Talk.

“The power of DISCIPLINED LEISURE”

“I wasn’t doing well at school through the second year of college,” he described, “Instead of approaching studies as a big goal to work on, I decided to make only very slight adjustments. I decided to assume I wouldn’t get focused and settled down for more than 5-10 minutes, and instead, let myself work for just a bit, get up and play videogames or shoot hoops, and then come back again for just a bit.”

That was all it took to make the difference. Not only did he end up being on the Dean’s Honour list in college, Duneier is a polymath of many unique talents — parkour, speaking Deutsch, and flying a helicopter to name a few — even as a Guinness record holder for knitting. Instead of approaching the activity as a giant, complex mountain, he had broken it down into the smallest possible unit of task, and tick that off. And then enjoy the relaxation after it.

“What stands between us and our goals is not magical skills or talent, but how we approach the problem,” described Duneier. This is the power of marginal adjustments. It can discipline leisure as well as get things done in a way that is rewarding and truly relaxing.

This leisure is synonymous to “relaxing,” or “downtime” or just being intentionally lazy. Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, on the other hand took it another step further — the idea of “noble leisure.” Far from being mere passivity/relaxation, true leisure is an activity in which a person finds their greatest fulfilment.

Leisure, unlike mere amusement, involves pleasure, happiness, and living blessedly, he described. And this is not possible for those who are occupied, as occupations aim at some necessary end. So, there should be education with a view to leisure, that is, with a view to things done for their own sake, according to the philosopher. It consists of the activities that are most properly human. To be at leisure is to be free to pursue studies and activities aimed at the cultivation of virtue (such as music, poetry, and philosophy).

When was the last time you chalked in time to paint for fun, or dance alone in a locked room?

We train our children, our employees, and ourselves to be disciplined in our work, in setting and achieving goals, and in pursuing both financial and material surplus. Why not a discipline aimed at leisure? This discipline should not be a boring regimen or a scoreboard (unless you like that), but a slow, deliberate, marginal shift in habits. The main reason things like diets or New Years’ Resolutions don’t usually sustain is because the emphasis is on a timed scoreboard, rather than building habits that last.

If we apply the same discipline that we exhibit in other areas of our life — such as work and family — and use it as a tool to approach leisure, we can actually enjoy the hobbies we long lost. Painting, for example, is a widely used psychological tool to release stress and trauma. Incorporating a painting hobby into your week can help relax, but also be closer to activities that elevate humans, if we are still talking about Aristotle.



from Facebook and finish five pages of your new book.

“I’m still that C-student. All I do is take big ambitious projects people seem to marvel, break them down into its simplest achievable form and then just make marginal adjustments along the way to increase the odds of achieving them,” concluded Duneier.

By Dibarah Mahboob
Model: Efa

To create habits, one first needs discipline. And to change the way we look at discipline — via marginal adjustment to our day or task-span. And by creating these habits, the practice becomes self-fulfilling. Over time, when positive results yield, it further reinforces a renewed discipline to the habit. This includes being able to plug off from Netflix or Instagram while you are practicing said marginal adjustment.

“I learned German by deleting music from my iPod and putting in the Pimsleur programme,” recounted Duneier. “I removed the temptation by removing all temptation — the music. So, when I’d be coming home from work, I had no option but to learn German!”

By removing yourself from tiny distractions, things get easier for those small tasks that’re now ridiculously easy for you (if not, simplify more!). Overtime, you will realise it’s not much, but you are turning into a “disciplined individual” who has the power to step away

