

Key Benefits of Structured Routine

Structured routine relates to psychology through the bridge of high performance – and our emphasis on psychology is creating high performance.

It's a connected chain:

- High performance requires consistent high quality output
- Consistent high quality output requires maximized productivity
- Maximized productivity requires structured routine
- Psychological control creates guardrails for routine

Routine is a means to an end – day in and day out productivity – which is another means to an end – high performance – which is yet another means to an end – achievement of high performance goals.

This is especially true for goal or objectives where the attainment is measured in years.

Say, for example, you wanted to become a black belt from scratch.

This is feasible at almost any age by the way... Dr. Harlan Van Over started martial arts training at age 59. Earlier this year he achieved his sixth degree black belt ranking – at age 94.

If you wanted to do this – attain a black belt – your measurement cycle would be in units of “years.”

No matter how much you tried to speed up the process, it would take X years to get there. So “years” would be the fundamental unit.

Contrast to the goal of, say, losing 5 pounds.

That is a goal measurable in units of weeks. If it is water weight, it is a goal measurable in days.

When your goal is measured in years, daily productivity becomes even more important, because of the compound gains that accrue from incremental efficiency over time.

For instance: If you have a journey that will last anywhere from, say, one thousand to five thousand days... how much difference would it make to be just ten percent more efficient, on average, *every single day*?

A whole lot of difference. And if the goal is ambitious and challenging, that difference could possibly be the threshold of success or failure.

The other challenge with goal sets measured in years is that, without a certain amount of consistent forward movement – a minimum baseline speed – it's possible the goal is never achieved at all.

An extraordinary long range goal requires a minimum of modest-but-sustained focus, on a routine basis, without fail, over a very long window of time. Gaps in this focus are like gaps in going to the dojo.

The gaps get bigger and bigger... it gets easier and easier to skip a session... until the goal melts away. Then demoralization sets in and goal is subconsciously abandoned.

Structured routine is a safeguard against this, in both providing the necessary productivity to make forward progress – which maintains a positive attitude – and in reducing the odds of abandoning the quest.

Another way to look at it is this: Whatever your long range goal is, it is too far away to be reached by short-term enthusiasm alone. Emotional fervor is a nitro booster, not a long-range fuel pack.

If you set out on a long enough journey, there will always be points on the road where morale is low... and where temptation is strong enough to turn back... especially if you can do so easily.

Enthusiasm alone can kick off a journey... and give turbo boost along the way... but it is guaranteed that, with a long enough time line, there are points on the path where enthusiasm alone will fail.

(This is also true of infatuation in the context of personal relationships, which is why some people can break the twelve month barrier. They run out of infatuation fuel and have no concept of a more meaningful tank.)

So routine and discipline and other forms of behavioral commitment can act as safeguards and bridges when enthusiasm falls short.

The stronger the power of habit and structure working in your favor, the more likely you are to maintain a long range pursuit even at low emotional ebb.

The reward for this, too, is that enthusiasm and passion are cyclical -- if you love what you are doing and the goal is worthy, then low ebb will come back round again, and enthusiasm will routinely replenish itself.

Routine also has another very important benefit – the profit margin increases over time, which in turn strengthens psychology by increasing the rate of psychic return.

In the beginning, implementing a routine bears a high time and energy and psychology cost. This is why most people don't do it, or try it and don't stick with it. Developing a structured routine is an expensive upfront investment.

As the routine lasts, though, it becomes easier and easier to implement through the power of habit. When you've been doing something like clockwork for long enough, you no longer fight it, you just do it.

And at that point, the psychology of the routine may have flipped from negative to positive, as practice gains start to be reaped, even as the cost of discipline falls (with low-cost habit taking over).

There is a momentum factor here. In the beginning the desired routine is like a giant, heavy flywheel – a resting concrete disk weighing hundreds of pounds. To get the flywheel turning is a pain in the ass, taking grunt work and sustained effort of will.

But then, once it is turning, and passes a tipping point, inertia starts to kick in. Gravity starts being overcome by inertia forces, as the object in motion shows an intent to stay in motion. It then becomes easy to turn this fast spinning wheel, to keep it going, with significantly less effort. Friction succumbs to rising momentum.

Just as gravity, friction, inertia and momentum are basic forces in the context of physics, they are basic forces in the context of self-transformation and the pursuit of goals.

This is why, when talking about psychology in a high performance context, we have to talk about things like productivity and efficiency and routine. It isn't clear where one starts and the other stops.

We cultivate Mushin for high performance in a trading context, but Mushin is not psychology alone – it doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is psychology and habit and routine combined, in that optimal blend to produce the emergent property we want.