

## Getting There

Forgetting to talk to your headmates? Or maybe just not spending much time with them? Perhaps you would like to do something fancy together, but you never really feel like it? What time exactly do you decide to learn that new skill, but abandon the practice soon after? Many of us have been there, and perhaps most still deal with such things on an everyday basis. In all reality, self-discipline is something that very few people nowadays can say they don't struggle with, but why exactly does this occur and how do people deal with it?

*Disclaimer: I'll say that I myself am no scientist nor have I been making a living on coaching. Everything I'll describe here is the knowledge I've acquired through reading and trying out different things. I do not claim that my advice will give you the same results, but I'll say that it did work for me despite my initial distrust for some of the techniques and methods. So, I encourage you to analyze everything I've written here, possibly do your own research, and then experiment with this stuff yourself.*

Most often than not people tend to think that if they can't deal with something as well as others can, even when they are seemingly trying their best, then they must be inherently flawed and incapable of putting up a decent enough fight. But I strongly believe that that's not the case and that the problem lies always in the approach and the awareness of how our brains function. Everything in this universe follows certain logical rules, and so does the brain, its processes and our behavior.

Despite the fact that most people think they're the only one in control and hence responsible for the outcome of their actions, the reality is that **you are not your brain**. You as a consciousness are but a part of its toolset that so happened to be convenient to keep around for survival, but there are many more "gears" in it that make things roll.

The relation between consciousness and the things that happen in the brain without us knowing are very complex, but it would be fair to say that you're both in control of each other. You can affect your brain in the long run by being aware of its nature and predicting what you should do for a certain outcome, and at the same time, under certain circumstances, the brain can affect you on a fundamental level, as is the case with various substances that can greatly influence our character (for example certain medicine can make you more religious or open to gambling). If you want to be more efficient in controlling your behavior this is a crucial concept to keep in mind.

It is crucial because this means that "you" and your "will" is not the sole thing that your behavior and development depends on. In fact, there are many more things that can be at fault of you not achieving your goals which an unknowing person would usually blame on themselves (so please, don't call yourself a bad host/tulpa/person if something is not working out, because it

won't do you any good and will only make you and people around upset). From here emerge what I see to be the three main leverages of staying in control: habits, willpower and mindset.

## Habits

The first leverage, habits, is one of the main building blocks that construct your behavior. It is also the most significant one since it's deeply rooted into your brain. Habits are well established patterns that, since they are well established, require very little effort to perform. Fundamentally, their development can be divided into four stages, or at least so it is divided by James Clear in his book Atomic Habits. These stages are - cue, craving, process, and reward. Habits only form and can only be sustained if all four components are well balanced. If there's no cue, if you don't crave it, if the process is too hard and if it's not worth the reward - you are unlikely to initiate a habit.

This simple principle applies to everything you do, both on a large and micro scale. Even to the way you talk. This is also why certain things, like social media, video games, alcohol, smoking, and drugs, are so addictive. On the example of social media, it provides you with plentiful of cues (notifications), enough craving, because as a social creature you do want to communicate and receive new information, the process of interaction with social media is also simplified as much as possible, and in the end you successfully satisfy your craving for social interaction by talking to friends and scrolling through the feed.

Of course, this principle applies to tulpamancy, too. In its case, the cue is anything that reminds you of your headmate or the practice you planned, the craving is your reasoning to proceed with the practice, the process is the practice itself, and the reward is what you get out of it. If you want to do something more often and consistently without having to spend your limited willpower on it you need to develop a habit, a positive feedback loop that would logically make you want to engage in a certain behavior again and again. Now let's review each stage of the habit forming/execution process and how it can be approached in the context of 'mancing.

- **Cue.** Habits become associated/attached to places, objects, smells and even behaviors (linked habits, when one is engaged as a result of another). If you have developed a bad habit, you'll find it most difficult to resist it in the environment where you're used to doing it.

An example of this could be the common occurrence of people bringing their phones with them into the restroom. To demonstrate the effect of this, if you have such a habit (or a conceptually similar one), try holding a locked phone in your hand both in the restroom and then in any other room. The strength of the urge to unlock the phone and check notifications will likely be a lot stronger in the restroom.

Similar thing happens when a smoker senses a familiar smell. If there's someone

smoking nearby, the urge to smoke will be a lot harder to resist. What you want specifically to be productive at 'mancing (or any other goal for that matter) is a careful management of cues.

First, you'll need to spot all of the things that usually prevent you from doing the thing you planned to do, like "Hey, I know we wanted to hang out in wonderland, but I really wanted to watch that YouTube video/finish the show I've been watching". Then, you'll have to find what exactly initiates the thought about that activity, reminds you of it. The knowledge of things which you could be doing instead of the right thing is a powerful negative cue that you'll want to limit or remove completely.

For example, if you spend too much time watching YouTube videos, try installing an extension that hides your home feed, suggested videos, or even the Watch Later playlist altogether ([here's the one that I myself currently use](#)).

If you use desktop Discord app and find yourself constantly switching between servers checking for messages then another thing I'd highly recommend you do is to group all such unimportant servers under a single folder, hit Ctrl+Shift+I, select the folder with the element selection tool (the most top left corner of the menu you just opened) and delete that folder element completely by right-clicking on it. This way you remove the distraction without having to leave those servers, since they'll be gone only visually. Should someone ping you or be there a need to check a specific one, just hit Ctrl+R to reload the app and it will bring that folder back.

If you spend too much time playing and often find yourself doing that instead of dedicating time to your headmates then that's another thing you should deal with. Don't just uninstall everything at once, but try to uninstall one game every day until you're satisfied with how much you've reduced your everyday exposure to them.

To set up positive cues, write your headmate's name on something you often interact with, set up their picture (if you have one) as your wallpapers, carry around an object that is associated with them, set up an alarm clock, etc.

- **Craving.** When the habit is just beginning to form, the craving will often come in the shape of your expectations of the reward. You have probably already experienced this before, when reading about other people's progress gets you all hyped to try it out yourself. This can make a good source of craving, just be careful not to overuse it, because it can as easily become a bad habit of its own that will result in you retreating into reading other people's stories over working on creating your own.

Eventually, if the reward is sufficient, the craving will be naturally replaced with good memories of previous rewards for that habit execution.

- **Process.** How easy is it to perform a task? It would better be easy, lest it become a burden. While this stage can be played around and finely tuned with other kinds of tasks, the reality of tulpamancy is that the vast majority of practices come down to grind, so there isn't much room for making the habit easy to perform aside from reducing the number of steps it takes or taking a comfortable position. It might be more reasonable to try and balance it out with craving and reward.

If there's something that distracts you from the practice though then there are numerous ways you can deal with that. One would be to either set up a very long password on your PC/phone that could only be typed in from a note, or log out of your social media accounts each time you close the tab to prevent you from easily opening it again and scrolling through the feed uncontrollably. This will make it harder and therefore less enticing to use your PC/phone for unnecessary things. Alternatively, you can go as far as to block distracting websites completely with the use of apps and extensions like Cold Turkey.

- **Reward.** When you've had a good time with your friends you're likely to seek to repeat that interaction, inviting your friends to the same place or playing the same game with them. If you can make your 'mancing sessions fun you'll struggle a lot less with finding the time or "motivation". For example, you can reward yourself with a favorite snack or drink at the end of each session.

I encourage you to try and analyze your current habits and see what their cue, craving, process and reward is. This will make it easier to apply the concept on practice.

## Willpower

The second leverage, willpower, is the next in significance. It's not as consistent as habits, but is just as important. Some people tend to disregard this concept, calling it a useless idea that self-help books authors came up with to have something to write about. And rightfully so, because there indeed is a seemingly unending supply of books that will give boneless philosophical advice like "Don't compare your success to that of other people".

Despite these books claiming that they will "change your life", such advice does little to improve one's productivity and lifestyle because most often than not the concept of willpower there is ill defined. But that's not the single reason why these books often fail the reader. Indeed, if they're used properly they can benefit you greatly, and I'll talk about this more in the mindset section. Now back to the subject of this one.

Willpower is not quite a mental thing. You cannot affect it by simply changing your mindset. It's a very factual thing that sometimes gets compared to a muscle. It's a resource, and a finite one. Now, if you were in a perfect environment and each habit of yours was perfectly balanced there

would be no need for anything else. Execution of those behaviors would require little to no mental effort, like with turning a light switch or drinking water from a glass. There's no need to think about how it should be done anymore since it was repeated for so many times. But if there's a need to change or deviate from a habit, or engage in an activity that hasn't yet or possibly can't become one then you'll have to apply some effort. That's where willpower comes into play, that's the thing that overrides our brain's impulsive nature in favor of a conscious and (although not always) reasonable choice. What you want to pay your attention to the most is how you use up your willpower and how you replenish it.

### - **Willpower roadblocks**

Reasonably though, before you start distributing your willpower you need to define how much of it you have. And what I mean exactly is that you need to take into account the things that can influence your capability to use it. For example, you probably know very well how hard it can be to get yourself to do something when you're sleepy, especially if it's a hard task. All you can think of during such moments is how to get through the day without falling asleep while already coming up with a plan on when and where you could get some rest. Naturally, there's little room left for thoughts like how you should invest your time and money or how refraining from a bad habit will influence your life in the long run.

Aside from being sleep deprived, such willpower hindering states include being drunk, distracted by something, or hungry. Being drunk will, well... You know what it does to people. Distractions will occupy your mind and use up your brain resources leaving you the more defenseless before impulsive choices the more distracted you are, while hunger in itself will work as a distraction, too, except a much stronger one since it plays on your internal instincts of survival (evolution didn't quite catch up yet on the fact that we have grocery stores outside and refrigerators at home). So, if you want to feel less tempted to avoid your 'mancing practices then make sure to stay sober, full, and have enough sleep every day (ideally at least 8 hours without distractions). I can't stress enough just how important a healthy sleeping schedule is.

Another great willpower waster is stress. Be it arguing with relatives, a hard day at work, lots of homework to take care of or an upcoming exam; whatever is the source of that stress it can easily be one of the main reasons you don't feel like spending time with your headmates despite knowing it would be a wise choice. The best quick fix would be to try and get rid of those stress sources, but you can never eliminate all of them. The other option will be to become more resilient to it, and luckily, that comes on its own as a result of exercising your willpower.

### - **Willpower boosters**

Willpower hindering factors aside, how do you improve your ability to resist temptations both short and long term? There are numerous ways to go about this. I mentioned previously how

willpower sometimes gets compared to a muscle, and it's entirely true that it does function like one. It can be exhausted if you use it too much, but it can also be trained the more you use it in a reasonable fashion (since overworking your muscles won't do you any good either). It's just like imposition; the more you practice it the better you'll get, while practicing it too much will kill your motivation. Here are a few techniques that can help you grow that muscle.

- Everyday meditation sessions. The longer you can meditate the more you'll benefit from it, but these sessions needn't be long for a sensible change. Even 5 minutes of meditation where you fully relax your mind will help you make better decisions. The most important thing here is that you do it every day.
- Slowing down your breath down to 4-6 breaths per minute. It generally gives you a moment to estimate the situation, but its greatest effect, same as with meditation, is that it increases your heart rate variability, the thing that mostly predicts how likely you are to resist temptation. Hence why this technique works best if you practice it right before you think you'll need to use your willpower. And just like with meditation, you'll want to practice this technique regularly.

*Side note: I won't go too much into details on how heart rate variability works since it's a rather complex subject, but I'd encourage you to do your own research. The first book in the recommended reads section explains it very well.*

- Physical exercise, too, can help you train your willpower muscle. No need to hit the gym for it, all you really need is that the exercise requires some kind of movement. Doing a couple push-ups or going for a short walk around the house will do the trick. Given that it doesn't exhaust you, doing physical exercise will help you clear your mind and increase your heart rate variability. As well as with previous techniques, consistency is the key here.
- Willpower challenges. Or in other words a controlled use of it. Intentionally setting up a distraction which you could regularly bump into and resist will slowly but steadily improve your ability to resist other distractions.

#### - **Willpower exhaustion**

When it's poorly distributed, you might find yourself unable to make the right decision when you need it the most. It's a good thing to exercise your willpower, but just like with habits you can't rely on it alone. We're humans, not machines, and it is virtually impossible to never give in to temptation. For that, you better try and use it only when it's really needed so that there's always some of it left.

As you go through the day your willpower level and therefore commitment will steadily decrease, which is precisely why you can sometimes hear people recommend that one begins

tackling the hardest task first. And so in case of tulpamancing it is also advised that you schedule your practices earlier instead of putting them off till the last moment when you'll logically have the least mental power for it left.

## Mindset

This last leverage, which is the third in significance, implies your attitude towards things. These are the boneless advice a coach might give you, your thoughts, and pretty much everything else that is perceived through human language as opposed to chemical relations and physical changes in the brain. Mindset is the least significant of these three leverages precisely because it's the most inconsistent and fleeting. One moment you read an inspirational quote, and the next instant another person's unpleasant comment ruins your entire motivation.

I mentioned previously how the vast majority of self-help books misunderstood what willpower actually is and how it works, and what I meant exactly is that they mistake mindset for it. The reason why most of the people who read such books get temporarily inspired and then return to their bad habits is that they rely on the mindset without giving much thought to everything else. And you must **never** depend on your mindset alone, because our habits and the lack of willpower have significantly more say in how you'll end up acting.

But despite it being fleeting and inconsistent, mindset is still a very valid tool you can use. While it won't make as big of a difference as the previous two aspects of self-control, it can work very well as an "amplifier" to your willpower and as a metaphorical shield against stress. The exact implication of your mindset here that I mean is giving yourself false hopes, haha! That's something your conscious mind is particularly good at. If you think about it, motivation in itself is a false hope because it doesn't guarantee anything, but gives you a slight willpower boost to act.

In her book on willpower Kelly McGonigal mentions a fascinating detail of how our brain doesn't in fact signal us that the body is exhausted when it actually is. Instead, it does so when it's afraid that it soon will be. As an example she provides the case of an athlete runner who was running a triathlon and found herself exhausted too soon. But although her body felt numb like it was about to give up, she nonetheless was able to finish the run. Reportedly, whenever she thought that "she can't" finish the run, she told herself that "she's doing it" already. Her desire to finish carried her through the hardship all the way to the finish line.

And it doesn't only work with physical exhaustion, it can help with your willpower, too. There isn't even a need to do any research, because I'm sure you yourself have been in these situations many times. When you thought that there isn't possibly a way you were going to do something, but then, after you were promised a better reward, you suddenly felt a lot more inspired to go and deal with the task.

Your dreams are another form of false hopes. Dreaming them does not get you any closer to those things becoming a reality, but it can help you find the mental power to move in that direction. And that's what self-help books and stories about other people's success can be used for, to build a vision, a dream that would provide you with extra willpower when you lack some.

If you can develop an attachment to your headmate, committing to their development will become a lot easier. Whenever you struggle to get on with the practice, all that may be missing is just once going through your reasoning for why you're doing this in the first place. Try to vividly picture your dream and really get inspired by it. If that doesn't work, perhaps go and read/watch some motivational books/resources/videos or other people's stories, given they actually inspire you and not make you feel inferior. And most importantly, cultivate the right attitude for the given practice. Teach yourself that failures don't equal the impossibility of change.

## **Closing words**

This concludes my note on the possible ways of improving one's productivity that I'm aware of. I sincerely hope that you found at least some of them useful. I'd like to note once again that the advice here is based solely on the knowledge I've acquired from books/other resources and my personal experience. Our minds and lives can differ greatly, so it would be best if you could run all this info through the lens of your vision before applying it. And if you can find the time and resources I would also highly recommend you to read through the books listed in the section below as the vast majority of my knowledge was acquired from them. On this note, I thank you for reading through my note and I wish you good luck in your endeavours.

## **Recommended reads in order of importance:**

- The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It

*by Kelly McGonigal*

- Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones

*by James Clear*

- Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain

*and*

- The Brain: The Story of You

*by David Eagleman*

- Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise

*by K. Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool -*

- The 1% Rule: How to Fall in Love with the Process and Achieve Your Wildest Dreams  
*by Tommy Baker*