

Ambition - Innovation - Effort

Stronger Character. Stronger Culture. Better Results.

Character Development Guide

By

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1st Edition

Section 1 - The Colorado River Mentality

Focused Energy, over significant amounts of time, shapes landscapes. The Grand Canyon is a massive land feature that has been sculpted into the Earth over the last 5-6 million years. The culprit? The Colorado River. Millions of years, focused on the same task. No deviation. No being something that it's not. You can't tempt the Colorado River to turn into ice. You can't make it have an emotional breakdown. It's consistent and reliable. That focused energy over time has produced a massive outcome, the Grand Canyon. As human beings, we don't have the luxury of not having emotions. We can be tempted and we often find ourselves devoting massive amounts of effort to be someone we are not. However, if we are going to chase our dreams and have the strength of character to sustain our dreams, it's going to take focused energy over significant amounts of time. We have to become very intentional, everyday, at every moment, about our motives, values, and vision. This creates big outcomes in our lives.

Intentionality is the big goal behind this process. We want to be intentional about cultivating thoughts and environments that align with what we want out of life and the impact we want to make. In order to get there we have to treat our minds as a tool. With time and practice we want to become more skilled at using that tool. When we become active in the way we think, I believe we start to have positive influence on our environment as opposed to our environment having negative influence on us. We start to create cultures.

We go to the Grand Canyon. It doesn't come to us. A culture has grown up around it.

In order to be intentional we have to know what outcomes we desire. I break life down into four fundamental areas:

- **Health** - Exercise and Eating Habits, Sleep Quality, Rest and Recreation
- **Resources** - Money Management, Management of Material Possessions, Management of Physical Space (Home, Office, Classroom, Locker, any place you or your possessions occupy)
- **Relationships** - Spirituality, Significant Others, Family, Friends, Coworkers and Human interaction in general.
- **Work** - Actively pursuing endeavors which give us a deep sense of purpose/fulfillment and a sense of contribution to the greater good of society.

Later on we'll talk about the outcomes we'd like to see in these areas. Now, what I need you to understand is the fact that your decisions in one area affect the others. You have to take into account the total picture of life as the context for your moment to moment decision making. In short, you need a **future** goal/vision to be intentional about **present** thoughts/behavior patterns.

Critical Thinking Exercise:

What does it mean to you, to intentionally change your thought patterns? How much effort will it take? How can you begin adjusting your environment to begin helping you focus on the vision you have for your life? What are the things in your life that have the most profound influence on your thoughts? What can you do to filter out negative/pessimistic/opposing thoughts?

Section 2 - The Mastery of 3 Selves - Self Worth, Self Awareness, Self Discipline:

As human beings we have intrinsic value that is of no greater or lesser magnitude than any other human being. That value can't be taken away regardless of past, present, or future conditions or decisions. It has been my experience that as I grow in my understanding of this intrinsic **Self Worth**, that I am able to be more objective about my life and behavior (greater levels of **Self Awareness**). Essentially, when we learn not to value ourselves based on external factors (status, money, looks, relationship status, work, approval etc.) then we become more willing to take critical looks at our own behavior and acknowledge shortcomings. However, it's not enough to just acknowledge shortcomings. The follow on step is to submit ourselves to the process of Character Development and this means adjusting our behavior toward the goals and vision that we articulate. This is **Self Discipline**. It's struggling to shift our behavior patterns into rhythms that align with our motives, values, and produce what we believe we want (vision). Understand, this isn't a switch we flip. We will be mastering these things for the rest of our lives. The hope is that you would buy into these ideas and grow in self worth, self awareness, and self discipline as you move through the process of life and pursue your vision.

Critical Thinking Exercise:

Honesty with yourself will be critical to the efficacy of this entire exercise. Be brave enough to be honest with yourself. Love yourself enough to face reality.

On what things do you base the value or quality of your life? If these things changed, how would your view of yourself change? If you believed 100% that your worth as a person was completely intrinsic and based on no external factors, what would change in your day to day behavior? What would you stop doing? What would you begin? What would you stop being afraid of?

Section 3 - Self Assessment - Adversity:

Again, honesty is the best policy! Remember, our self worth is secure. We should work to convince ourselves of this everyday. Over the next few exercises I will try to get you to articulate 3 things:

1. How do you respond to adversity?
2. What brings you a sense of joy, purpose, and/or fulfillment? What are you passionate about?
3. What is your overall level of satisfaction with life right now?

Answering these 3 questions will help you to create an informed vision for your future and set reasonable goals for getting there.

Critical Thinking Exercise:

Think about how you have responded to adversity in the past (of any degree and type). Use the 4 fundamental areas of life as a guide and list at least one event from each area (Health, Resources, Relationships, Work). List more if you feel the need to. Think through how those events have shaped your behavior over time. It's been said that adverse scenarios have one of three results:

- They break us - crippling our ability to move forward in a particular area of life or all of life.
- We survive - we simply get through the event and go back to life as normal.
- We Thrive - this becomes a defining moment where we gain depth out of a painful experience. We become stronger.

In each of the experiences that you name, categorize your response based on these 3 definitions and state the specifics of the event and your mental/behavioral responses that cause you to categorize it as such.

Section 4 - Self Assessment - Fulfillment:

Think about the times in life where you felt a sustained sense of purpose, joy, fulfillment, and/or satisfaction. Everyone has talents and gifts. Everyone has unique experiences. Everyone has something that they are passionate about.

- For example, I'm a talented speaker and communicator. I derive great joy and fulfillment from being able to teach and speak on the topics I'm passionate about.
- An example of experience for me was the process/goal of paying off \$60,000 of debt during my first 3 years in the military. I had to sacrifice quite a bit to move at that pace, but every month that I saw the numbers going down there was a deep sense of satisfaction and joy in knowing I was moving towards financial freedom and achieving a big goal. The process wasn't inherently 'fun' but it helped to break down my desire for material things which has proven to be a huge asset in my journey as an entrepreneur. It has also given me the confidence to know that I can save for big goals like long term savings for retirement and purchasing a home outright.

Critical Thinking Exercise:

Here we are trying to put our unique talents and experiences on paper so that we have a greater sense of the value that we bring to the table of life.

Think about 3-5 times in life where you felt a sustained sense of purpose, joy, fulfillment, and/or satisfaction. Try to articulate why each of these individual moments had such purpose, joy, fulfillment and/or satisfaction attached. Remember to think about Talents, Skills, and Experiences.

Section 5 - Self Assessment - Real Talk:

One of the most profound moments of my life happened not long after I graduated college and I was working fulltime as an Engineer for a Major Oil and Gas Company. I was completely depressed and for a brief moment I was blaming the Public School System, my parents, and society for my depressed state at the time. “Why did they sell me this lie that everything would be so wonderful once I got a good paying job with benefits?! Why didn’t anyone encourage me to follow my interests?!” People, one of the best gifts that the Creator can give you is the ability to catch yourself in the middle of a ridiculous thought. ‘Why did **they**...’ ‘Why didn’t **they** give me...’ Who are ‘**THEY**’ and why do ‘**THEY**’ have so much power and control over what I choose to do with my life? No one held a gun to my head at any point and forced me into Engineering. I could have switched majors anytime but I chose to cave into societal pressure, and please people, and conform to THEIR beliefs, as opposed to following what was in my heart and holding fast to what I believed in. The depression was too much to overcome and I quit engineering and immediately went into financial ruin. I had to give up a car for repossession, credit cards went into default, and I eventually got evicted from my apartment. When I stopped blaming others, I looked myself in the mirror and said, “Travis, your choices have gotten you in this mess and your future choices will get you out. This situation is no one else’s fault but your own and you are going to have to take complete responsibility for fixing it!”

One word: **PISSED!**

I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I worked so hard to get a degree in a field that I didn’t want to be in and then I ended up \$60K in debt. It was time to deal in reality. I’ve made many decisions since that time that have been contrary to popular opinion but that’s the point. Do what everybody else does and get what everybody else gets. Most people won’t look at themselves critically. Chose to lie to yourself about where you are in life and you’ll wake up one day, completely lost and upset at people who have no control over your actions. It’s time for you to be honest with yourself!

Critical Thinking Exercise:

HONESTY! Think about the present condition of your life and be honest about your level of satisfaction in each of the the four fundamental areas. Currently, in each individual area, what is going right? What’s going wrong or moving in an undesirable direction? What seems to be stagnant? Of course with each of these you want to justify why its right, wrong, or stagnant.

Note: Again, I believe that it helps to have a healthy dose of frustration/anger with certain issues in our lives. Sometimes the problems that we have been ignoring need to piss us off enough to actually face them. Emotions, when channeled properly, help catalyze us into action.

Section 6 - Motives:

What's your motive? Why do you want your life to produce certain results? Here I assert something as fundamentally true (Meaning, this what your motive should be!): The only motive that produces the greatest amount of commitment is when we are driven by the service to a greater good. Another way of saying this is, Love. We want our actions to be driven out of love.

Who are you executing for and **Why**?

- This encompasses a higher power, if you are a person of faith (As we learn a deep sense of gratitude for the life we've been given, we want seek/walk in the purpose we were made for).
- It means learning greater levels of Self Worth. As individuals we are a part of the greater good. (How we value ourselves, is how we will value others).
- It means thinking about how our moment to moment actions affect the people we engage directly on a regular basis (Significant other, family, friends, Coworkers etc.).
- It means thinking about our contribution to the whole of humanity.

This is something that is relatively easy to articulate. But as commitment waxes and wanes in pursuit of a goal we have to constantly assess why we are acting in the moment. Weak Motive. Weak Commitment. An example of this is fitness. Many people make New Year's Resolutions to lose weight and the problem rests in the fact that the motive is purely aesthetics driven. When life gets hard (and it most certainly will) will the desire to lose a few pounds keep an individual moving forward in that goal? What if everyday that same person thinks about how their health either limits or expands their own ability to thrive in life and the effect that they have on those that they encounter regularly? It's no guarantee of success but it's certainly a stronger impetus for execution than simply 'losing ten pounds'.

From a societal standpoint, we are very materialistic and we often judge ourselves and one another based on external appearances or performance metrics. Often it's not an overt judgment. Remember, Self Worth. How we value ourselves is how we will value others. Everybody knows the right answer to the motivation question but it takes becoming more and more self aware to know what the real answer is in the moment and then make adjustments. **We have to practice operating from the right motive. It's a mental exercise.**

Critical Thinking Exercise:

- The first thing we want to do in terms of our motivations starts with practicing gratitude. We want to express gratitude for the lives that we've been given with the hope that out of that gratitude, we become motivated to be good stewards in all areas of life. We don't optimize what we minimize ie. we don't care well for things we don't appreciate. How often do we meditate upon and verbally express thankfulness for simple things: food in our stomachs, clothes on our backs, a place to sleep at night, etc. However humble our existence, whatever simple gifts we've been given (Even just the breath of life), whatever

pains we've experienced (The ability to have empathy and compassion start with being healed from wounds. We need pain.) it's ours and in order to get the most out of it, at a fundamental level, we have to believe that surpassing value exists in our current state. This bridges right into self worth. An expression of gratitude for what we've been given leads us to greater value in what we have intrinsically in our experiences and in who we are as a person. List 5 things you are grateful for and state why.

- Next is a simple statement around self worth. Do you believe you are valuable enough to fight for a better existence, for yourself? I believe you are, but it's not about what I believe. It's about what you believe. Do you value yourself enough to believe that you haven't reached your full potential and you deserve to see it? (It might help to review the definition I gave of self worth - as human beings, we have intrinsic value apart from past, present, or future condition, of no greater or lesser than any other human being) Do you believe you have intrinsic value? The follow on question to this is where do I get my value from (job title, money, possessions, looks, other people opinion of me, etc.) Knowing that self worth is misplaced in certain contexts helps us begin to adjust our viewpoint in those areas.
- Think about the people you encounter on a regular basis. This is everyone from family, friends, significant others, and co workers etc. Anyone you engage directly on a regular basis. It can be the barista at the coffee shop or the cashier at the grocery store. How does your health/mood affect those individuals?
- What legacy do you want to leave behind? What do you want said about you when you are gone?

These things represent your motive. My recommendation is that you turn the answers to these four bullet point statements into a concise 3-5 sentence statement for ease of memory. We want to remember **why** we are executing in the moment and **who** our lives affect. We want to execute based on our plans and principles, over and above our current emotional state. Again, everyone knows the 'right' answer to the motive question, but what will cause us to make the 'hard right' when the moments of temptation come to take our focus off of the task at hand. Consistent behavior over long periods of time is what moves the metaphorical mountain. Is your motive big enough to keep you moving forward when life gets tough?

Section 7 - Values:

This may be the most difficult part of this process and I certainly have not perfected it but we have to start somewhere. What are your values? What are the principles that you want to embody in your behavior patterns? Pick 2-3 words and have a definition for each and state why these values are at the apex of your list. The idea is to keep the list small so that it is easy to remember at all times. Especially when we take an emotional hit. As an example I'm going to give you my big two:

Ownership - Learning to focus on the things in life that we can control and working to conform our behavior in those areas into alignment with our motive and allowing our values to shape our vision.

Effort - Learning to give wholehearted effort in the moment to whatever we are engaged in. Spirituality, cultivating a positive mentality, health, wealth, relationships, work, rest etc.

Why ownership and effort? - My life has taught me that taking ownership transforms the way we look at our existence. It helps us own poor behavior patterns and begin making adjustments. It helps us avoid the victim mentality as we discover how much control we actually have in our lives and with that it helps us to have gratitude as we learn the richness of opportunity that we've been given when we become creative with the things that we can control (Innovation). Effort follows right behind this. We can take control but if it's half-hearted then we'll be leaving something on the table. I've never seen anything good come from giving a halfway effort at something. I can accept failing at something when I know I gave it everything that I had but it's gut wrenching to think that I lost and I know my effort was poor. We put forth effort in everything we do: Changing the way we think takes effort, loving our significant others and families takes effort, caring for our bodies takes effort, cultivating our spirituality takes effort, finding and doing work that we are passionate about takes effort etc. I want to display wholeheartedness in all things and if I can't it's an indicator that adjustments need to be made. In all of the four big endeavors I list on my website (Losing a 100lbs, becoming an Engineer, Paying off \$60K of debt, and becoming a Special Forces Soldier), complete ownership and maximal effort were the keys to success. Phenomenal things happen when these two values meet each other on a consistent basis.

Values represent a set of checks and balances on our behavior. The key is using adversity to become more rooted in our values. Defining them is incredibly important because when adversity hits, the immediate aftermath is emotional distress of some sort (anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, depression etc.). Knowing where we are going (vision), how we are going to get there (values), and why (motive) at a minimum gives us a direction of travel (known as an **Azimuth** in Navigation). As opposed to letting our actions simply follow our emotions and lead us into volatile, inconsistent behavior. Essentially, when unforeseen and uncontrollable events present themselves, we want to respond in principle as opposed to react purely in emotion.

Critical Thinking Exercise:

What are your values? What are the principles that you want to embody in your behavior patterns? It may help to first write down 10 words that represent character traits that resonate with you and then narrow it down to the most important 2-3 words. Create a definition for each and state why these values are at the apex of your list (review the example I gave). The idea is to keep the list small so that it is easy to remember at all times.

Section 8 - Self Assessment - Effective Goal Setting:

So far we have done some Self Assessment, articulated our motives, and began to define values. Here we will Self-Assess more relative to goal setting. This is going to help us set attainable short term goals in pursuit of long term vision. I believe that there are 3 major reasons why we don't accomplish our goals:

- As I said, Weak Motive: When driven by shallow things our commitment to consistent action over time will be shallow.
- Poor value alignment: There are times in life when we just can't agree with a process we are being asked to place ourselves in. It can happen in any area of life. Something just doesn't seem, right. Or, the end products of a process are not worth the effort. Sometimes, goals that we thought were a major priority (the literal value), actually aren't when we engage the process.
- Finally, there are capacity issues: This means that we simply don't have the space (mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and/or physically), skills, talents, resources etc. to facilitate continuing in a process.

Critical Thinking Exercise:

List 1-2 major goals that you have had in the past that you have not been able to accomplish. Try to categorize each one of these efforts with one or more of the labels above and articulate why you believe that is so. If you find this helpful, list more.

List 1-2 major goals that you have accomplished in the past. Does the success you achieved in those areas align with the motive/values you've stated? State why or why not. If you find this helpful, list more.

Section 9 - Vision:

Look 10 years into the future and decide on some tangible things you want to see come to fruition. Again, be honest and be brave. What do you want each of the four fundamental areas to look like in your life? You want to do your best to ensure that your vision is in alignment with your motive and values but understand that this process is iterative and therefore we adjust as we take action and review results.

For review:

- **Health** - Exercise and Eating Habits, Sleep Quality, Rest and Recreation
- **Resources** - Money Management, Management of Material Possessions, Management of Physical Space (Home, Office, Classroom, Locker, any place you or your possessions occupy)
- **Relationships** - Spirituality, Significant Others, Family, Friends, Coworkers and Human interaction in general.
- **Work** - Actively pursuing endeavors which give us a deep sense of purpose/fulfillment and a sense of contribution to the greater good of society.

Critical Thinking Exercise:

In the next 10 years, where do you want to be with each of the four areas listed. This task can sometimes be difficult especially for those of you struggling to figure out what you want to do for work in the future. It may help to name characteristics as opposed to specifics in certain areas. For instance, with work: Instead of saying, "I want to be a Social Worker and Founder of a Non-Profit that helps the homeless." You might say, "I want to work with people who have lots of tangible need and I want to be in charge of the Group that helps deliver that need." Leadership and Helping the needy are less specific and more like traits of the work you might want to do. Even if it's not specific, **it's something** and that's where we start.

Section 10 - Vision - Short Term:

Critical Thinking Exercise:

Relative to the vision you created from the last exercise, what are some simple/specific/measurable goals that you can reasonably achieve in the next 6-12 months to move you toward the vision in each area. Small wins on a day to day basis are critical to generating psychological momentum. Make sure to take into account what you learned about yourself in the previous self assessment sections: reaction to adversity, what brings fulfillment, current satisfaction with life, and goal setting. Something that is critically important to think about here is assessing what you need to learn about. I'm willing to bet that many of us don't have a robust plan for our personal finances. No budget. No long term savings. Swimming in debt. The first step is probably reading a book on personal finance. There are also some great blogs/youtube channels that cover the topic in depth, for free. **Learning is a critical part of this process.**

What are some simple/specific/measurable goals that you can set in each of the four fundamental areas? Don't overwhelm yourself, it's okay to set one goal and focus on it for the foreseeable future. One goal achieved is better than 4 goals fallen short of.

Section 11 - Execution - Refine and Repeat:

“Innovation is rewarded! Execution is Worshipped!” - Eric Thomas

Let this guide act as a form of personal accountability. When I was ten years old I made a promise to myself, “I don’t care how long it takes or what I have to do, I will figure out a way to lose this weight. If I don’t, I will die trying!” If you read the about page on my website (<https://TravisDaigleCDC.wordpress.com/about>), then you know I grew up significantly overweight. I spent the next 7 years trying and failing until I finally hit paydirt my senior year in highschool. I still had much to learn about health but something finally moved. That 7 years taught me two things:

- Learning is critical to achieving big goals. I had to take responsibility for understanding how my body worked. Trial and Error was my primary learning tool at the time.
- Quitting is not an option. Wake up everyday and fight your way to the target.

From age 10 to 17, I worked tirelessly to beat obesity. The hardest thing to endure in the process was the bullying and teasing I experienced from my peers and even from adults during that time period. It felt like my effort counted for nothing. Let me be clear: **Maximal Effort in Execution always counts!**

It is not enough to ‘know’, you must ‘do’. Long before I knew what to do about diet and exercise, I learned how to approach it. This is what I mean by adversity. There was nothing I could do to make the verbal abuse stop. I had done nothing to deserve it. Not to sound cliché, but it would either ‘break’ or ‘make’ me. I chose the latter. I chose to keep going even when I wasn’t getting what I wanted. I chose to let pain and failure push me into focus and action, daily, consistently, for years. Lots of people lose weight and gain it right back. Maybe worse. I’m 35 years old at the time of writing this. I’m in the best overall shape of my life. Even compared to the military. Why? I’ve not stopped learning and I’ve not stopped executing. No matter what life gives me, I keep executing with what I have. That process has served to develop my level of grit, patience, endurance, determination... my Character. The Strength of my Character helps to sustain and improve my results. In all areas of life.

All that’s left is execution. What steps are you taking every day to begin knocking down the goals that you’ve created? That’s the question to be asked daily. Again, we want to begin generating some momentum. Nothing that I present here is hard to understand. The ideas are simple to process mentally but continuous execution over time is difficult in a world filled with distractions and ‘good’ ideas. Like I said, this is an iterative process so we have to get to a place where we are able to instantly weigh our moment to moment actions against the motives, values, and vision we have expressed in the previous exercises. As we take steps we’ll get results. We then have to refine our statements and make adjustments as we get feedback from life. We should be continuously reviewing these things at least 2-4x/month basis. We want our

motive, values, and vision etched on our memories. We want to regularly assess whether or not the goals we are chasing are truly in alignment with our value system.

Set regular time aside to assess answers to these questions and refine as you gain new understanding about your capacities and what you deem valuable in life.