



The Mindset that Brings Unlimited Willpower

A) Warm up

1. How would you define willpower?
2. How would you rate your own levels of willpower?
3. Can you think of a situation when your willpower was strongly tested?

B) Adapted Text - The Mindset that Brings Unlimited Willpower

The Mindset that Brings Unlimited Willpower

By David Robson

Adapted from an article published in 2023 by BBC Worklife

We all face demanding days that seem designed to test our self-control. Perhaps you work in a restaurant, and you have some particularly rude and demanding customers, but you manage to keep smiling throughout. Or maybe you are finishing an important project and you have to remain in quiet concentration, without letting your attention shift to other distractions. If you are on a diet, you might have spent the past few hours resisting the cookie jar.

In each case, you needed to rely on your willpower, which psychologists define as the ability to avoid short-term temptations and suppress unwanted thoughts, feelings or impulses. Some people seem to have much more of it than others: they find it easier to control their emotions, avoid **procrastination** and stick to their goals. Indeed, you may know some lucky people who, after a hard day at work, still have the strength to do something productive like a workout – while you give up on your fitness goals and enjoy junk food and trash TV.

Our reserves of self-control and mental focus appear to be shaped by **mindsets**. And new studies suggest that there are powerful strategies that you can **employ** in order **to foster** greater willpower – resulting in huge benefits for your health, productivity and happiness.

The depleted ego

Until recently, the **prevailing** psychological theory proposed that willpower was similar to a battery. You might start the day with full strength, but each time you have to control your thoughts, feelings or behaviour, you reduce that battery's energy. Without the chance to rest and recharge, those resources run dangerously low, making it far harder to maintain your patience and concentration, and to resist temptation.

Laboratory tests appeared to provide evidence for this process. In one experiment, participants were asked to resist eating cookies left on a table. They showed less

resistance to the cookies after they had solved a mathematical problem, because their reserves of willpower had been **depleted**. This theory is known as “ego depletion”, because the “ego” is the part of our mind which can control our impulses.

In 2010, however, the psychologist Veronika Job published a study that questioned the foundations of this theory, with some **intriguing** evidence that ego depletion depended on people’s **underlying** beliefs.

Job, who is a professor of motivation psychology at the University of Vienna, first designed a questionnaire, which asked participants to rate a series of statements on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). They included:

“When situations accumulate that challenge you with temptations, it gets more and more difficult to resist temptations.”

“If you have just resisted a strong temptation, you feel strengthened and you can withstand new temptations.”

If you agree more with the first statement, you are considered to have a “limited” view of willpower and believe in the “ego depletion” theory. If you agree more with the second statement, you are considered to have a “non-limited” view of willpower.

Job next gave the participants some standard laboratory tests examining mental focus, which is considered to depend on willpower. In the laboratory tests, participants had to do 2 difficult tasks. On the first occasion they carried out a task after a period of rest; on the second occasion they they performed a task after making some difficult grammar corrections to a very boring piece of writing. Job found that people with the limited mindset found it much harder to pay attention to a following activity after they had been making grammar corrections to a text. The people with the non-limited view, however, performed equally well in the second activity after making grammar corrections to a text.

It seems then, that if you believe that your willpower can be easily **depleted**, then your ability to resist temptation and distraction will **dwindle** significantly after a challenging task. If you believe the opposite, then you will maintain your mental strength.

Further studies have shown that different willpower mindsets influence students’ **procrastination** levels in the run-up to exams – those with the non-limited views wasted less time when studying, and they were also better at resisting fast food or excessive shopping during the exam period. Those who believed that their willpower was easily **depleted** by their work, in contrast, were much less likely to resist those temptations. This has since been proven again in further studies on students.

Galvanising your willpower

Job’s studies suggest that simply learning about this **cutting-edge** science – through short, accessible texts – can help shift people’s beliefs. By simply reading this article you might have already started **to galvanise** your mental stamina. You could **enhance** this by telling others about what you have learnt; the research suggests that sharing information helps to solidify your own shift in mindset, a phenomenon known as the “saying-is-believing effect”, while also helping to spread the positive attitudes to others.

One useful strategy to change your mindset may be to remember a time when you worked on a mentally demanding task purely for enjoyment. There might be a job at work, for example, that others find difficult but you find satisfying. Or maybe it's a hobby – such as learning a new piece on the piano – that demands intense concentration but feels effortless for you. A recent study found that engaging in this kind of activity naturally shifts people's beliefs to the non-limited mindset, as they see proof of their own mental stamina.

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20230103-how-to-strengthen-willpower>

C) Key Words from Context

Based on the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

to enhance	to galvanize	intriguing	to deplete	procrastination
cutting-edge	To foster	mindset	underlying	to dwindle

1. Your way of thinking about a topic: _____
“We need to adopt a more positive _____ if we want to be successful.”
2. To improve the quality or value of something: _____
“I aim to _____ my English language skills.”
3. Really interesting and curious: _____
“I was reading about her life story. It is really _____”
4. A term to describe a situation when you delay doing something until a later time, especially through laziness or a lack of concentration: _____
“_____ is very common among people who work from home.”
5. The latest or most advanced stage in the development of something: _____
“Our company uses _____ technology to provide you with the fastest internet speeds.”
6. To use up all of the resources of something: _____
“We _____ many of the earth's natural resources.”
7. To decrease slowly in amount or strength: _____

"The company's popularity has been _____ slowly over the past few years."

8. To shock or excite someone into taking decisive action: _____

"The recent positive sales figures have really _____ the team. We are feeling much more positive about a dynamic future."

9. Real but not obvious: _____

"The poor performance of the company is a result of _____ power struggles between some of the managers."

10. To encourage the development of something: _____

"We have managed to _____ a really positive mindset within the team."

D) Comprehension

Can you answer the questions below about the text?

1. How do psychologists define willpower?

2. Until recently, what was the main theory behind how willpower works, and how did it explain willpower?

3. What did Veronika Job's questionnaire determine?

4. What conclusions can we draw from Veronika Job's study?

5. What are students with a limited view of willpower more likely to do during the exam period?

6. What 2 things can a person do in order to shift their mindset towards a non-limited view of willpower?

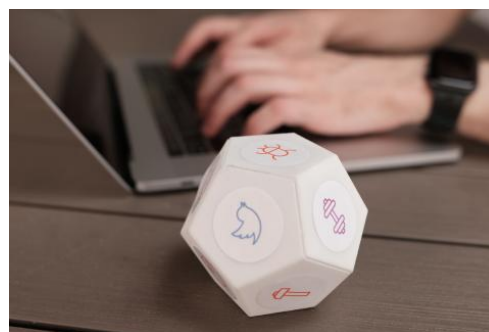
E) Key Words in a New Context

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

to enhance	to galvanize	intriguing	to deplete
cutting-edge	To foster	mindset	underlying
			to dwindle

The TIMEFLIP2 Interactive Time Tracker - Our Saviour in the Battle against Procrastination, or Just a Dice?

The TIMEFLIP2 Interactive Timetracker is a _____ (new) smart dice aiming to boost your productivity. Simply stick stickers to each side of the dice to correspond to a task which you need to do during that day. Then, you input each activity onto the app on your smartphone, along with the number of minutes that you wish to allocate to that activity. Then, simply roll the dice and the timer will start running for that activity. The idea is that you will remain concentrated on each task because the app is counting down the time allocated to the activity. When the time for that activity is nearly over, the dice will flash in order to _____ you to put in some extra effort into the last few minutes of the task.



When the time has run out for that task, simply turn the dice to whichever task you want to do next. Alternatively, if you want to add a bit of chance and make your day a little bit more interesting, roll the dice and randomize your next task.

Some believe that this concept is certain to _____ (improve) your performance and productivity at work. Also, in the long term it can help to _____ a more productive _____ when you are trying to work, and leave you less prone to procrastination.

Others, however, are not so positive about this concept. One user claimed that the process of sticking stickers on to each side of the dice, and then inputting each activity into the app took so long that her energy and enthusiasm had already been _____ (used up completely) before she even started the first task! Another user said that his interest in the device soon started to _____ after completing a few tasks, and then his _____ (below the surface) desire to procrastinate soon kicked in and he gave up on using the dice.

So, is this really a cutting-edge device with the power to transform your willpower to complete tasks, or is it just a dice with some stickers on it? For those who find the concept _____ (very interesting), the timetracker and app cost around \$60.