

Self-discipline is Freedom...From Yourself

Some people equate “a disciplined life of structure” to feelings of entrapment. Before I get into my thoughts on the topic, I want to tell you a story.

So it's a hot sunny day and there's this bee and her name is Bertha. Bertha is buzzing by her hive with some other bees, just relaxing and having a good time. Suddenly, a bear starts to approach her hive. The bear is hungry for some honey and bee eggs. In an attempt to save her hive, Bertha stings the bear. But its skin is so thick that once she tries to pull her stinger out, she dismembers herself and dies. The sad part about the story is that Bertha had no choice. Through years of evolutionary wiring, she is evolved to sting threats. It's a biological reaction to dangerous situation. She has no idea that her stinger will get stuck and that she'll die. If she had known she would have died, she might have flown away and saved her own life. Bees are prisoners to their own biology.

Unlike bees, humans have the ability to override their biology. Through self-discipline. Let's say that someone has long-term desires to be in a deep and loving relationship, to create a meaningful career that they love and have a healthy body. Along each step of that journey they are tempted by short term pleasures, such as junk food or video games.

Deep down they really want the life that comes in the long term. Yet they keep succumbing to short-term pleasures. The only difference between these two positions is self-discipline. We're lucky that as humans, we have the ability to practice self-discipline. It gives us the freedom to achieve what we truly want in life and allows us to break free of the biological or societal cages around us. And I think that is a pretty amazing and powerful thought. But it's not so simple.

Companies are aware of our natural, biological reactions and use this against us by using supernormal stimuli. An example of supernormal stimuli is junk food. Our ancestors were wired to seek out and enjoy fat and salty food, because it was so rare at the time. But now companies have genetically engineered

foods to include more fats and salts than ever before in order to make us desire it even more.

Social media and the Internet as a whole is another form of supernatural stimuli. Humans are biologically wired to seek out novelty. For our ancestors, novelty could lead to more knowledge about the world, which could lead to more wisdom, which helped us thrive as a species. It has its usefulness. However, the Internet has been designed to take advantage of this desire for novelty by showing you more novelty than you can ever dream of. Every page links out to more pages, with more novelty, and every video to a new video with even more novelty. Video games do the same thing. Some evolutionary psychologists believe that video games, like first-person shooters and massively multiplayer online role-playing games imitate environments that would be similar to the ones that our ancestors navigated in the past, but supernormal versions of them. Yet we can get greater feelings of accomplishment in video games with a lot less work. The advent of constant achievements showing up on the screen in video games is good evidence that companies are aware that it will motivate players to keep playing.

So not only are we sabotaged by our own biologies, but we are being targeted by corporations seeking to take advantage of us and make a profit. On the plus side, you and I are not like the bee, because we are not caged by our own biology. With self-discipline, we can live the life we truly want. We have the choice to be free.