

Invest In You

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I have a proposition for you, a new investment opportunity. Not in the financial sector, nothing to do with real estate or some foreign start-up company. This opportunity is in the market of happiness and living. The only payment is the initial opportunity cost of your time, but after that the returns are infinite and immediate. I am proposing that you invest in this moment, right here, right now. I am proposing that you invest in yourself.

As corny as this opening may sound, there are few things that are more important than this very moment. This moment is all any of us ever have, which is exactly why we need to make it our best moment. It doesn't need to be a moment that is mind blowing or a moment you'll remember forever, but if you can live stress free in this moment with confidence and peace of mind you will be well on your way to living the life you want, and deserve, to live.

So now the goal is set and we know what we are trying to accomplish: inner peace and serenity, self-confidence, and a true love for our own life. The next step is to figure out how to reach that goal, and as much as we would like to blame others for the stress and anxiety we feel in our daily lives, the reality is that this change is totally and completely one hundred percent dependent on your willingness to act and the consistency with which you act. Notice I didn't say your intent to act. We all, for the most part, have great intentions, but rarely do great intentions lead to great actions. Rather, what must be recognized, accepted, practiced, and embraced is the fact that changes must be made, these changes can only be made by you, and these changes can only become commonplace in your life if you fully commit to them and adhere to them every single day.

I know this last statement may seem overwhelming, but rest assured that, regardless of how out of control your life may seem, there are only five very simple steps you will take that will allow you to refocus and enjoy life.

1. Wake up fifteen minutes earlier than you normally would. Every day people wake up and have already lost control of their day because they fall behind from the get go. They rush through their morning routine, completely skipping breakfast in the process, only to get to their place of work or other intended destination to find that they have to continue to rush to meet deadlines or live by everybody else's schedule. All of this leads to nothing but stress, causing poor sleeping patterns and forcing people to sleep in later in the day than they should. Instead, set your alarm to sound fifteen minutes before your traditional wake-up time. Don't use these fifteen minutes to hit the snooze button; rather use them to prepare yourself a decent breakfast and take control of your day from the very beginning. It is remarkable how much smoother the rest of your day will go when you are on top of your tasks from the moment you wake up and you don't feel like you are constantly racing the clock all day.

2. Eat the way your grandmother did.

I heard this phrase while listening to a podcast earlier this week, and I think it sums up very nicely some of the best nutritional advice I can give you: eat a whole-foods diet. Eat foods that have one ingredient, come from the ground, sky, or water, and were eaten and grown at the beginning of the last century. All of the little aches and pains you have, the headaches, the times throughout the day when you just feel “off” or are completely sluggish with low energy levels, so much of that can be taken care of by fueling your body properly. There are definitely fluctuations in the quality of whole-foods (organic vs. non, industrial vs. local), but the bottom line is that if you can structure your diet to incorporate whole foods, you will be living a much healthier life. Yes, there will be prep time involved with consuming these foods; get over it and plan accordingly. Yes, these foods may be more expensive than a box of Chewy bars or a TV dinner; enough with that excuse. If you don’t have the money then you don’t have the money, but almost every time somebody tells me these foods are too expensive they just finished BBMing on their Blackberry or playing with their iPod touch. What you choose to spend your money on is your choice, but for a lot of people it’s not that they don’t have the money, it’s that they don’t have the priorities.

3. Be active.

I’m not telling you to go walk on a treadmill for 30 minutes a day or to go fight for an elliptical at 5:00 PM. I’m saying take the stairs instead of the elevator, play with the kids or the dog, go hiking, do *something*. If you are trying to make compositional changes then the intensity will have to be picked up at some point, but as far as increasing your quality of life you just need to move. The human body is designed for movement and it wants to move, so guess what, when it doesn’t move it’s not going to feel so good and neither will you.

4. Have your personal time every day.

This is another area where I get a lot of excuses. For the most part, people know they should, but they “can’t seem to find the time.” This is the same excuse a lot of people give as to why they aren’t active as well. Maybe your personal time is, in fact, when you are working out; I know that’s how it is with me. But regardless of what you choose to do (read, listen to music, write a letter—not an e-mail—to a friend) you need to have that time every day when nothing else matters except that moment and all of the stress and other demands of the day are pushed to the side. I find one of the best times to do this is in the early morning. Nobody else is awake so nobody is around to bother me. Most mornings I go to the gym, and the other mornings I read. Even if it is just for 30 minutes, every day is started by doing something I enjoy, and that allows me to function and work efficiently throughout the rest of the day.

5. Laugh.

As simple as this sounds, it’s something that needs to be done every day. Every Thursday night at 9:00 I watch *The Office*, and all week long I look forward to that time because I know I am going to laugh for 30 minutes. I don’t think there is anybody that would disagree with me saying that they feel pretty good when they laugh, so why would you not allow yourself that pleasure every day?

So there are my five steps to have you well on your way to getting the most out of every moment and yourself. Although these steps are not revolutionary ideas, they are something that we, as a society, have seemed to lost sight of. By practicing these steps in daily life we can refocus and allow ourselves the opportunity to make significant changes in our lives. However, the common thread between these five steps that must always be kept in mind is that you are the only one who can take these steps for yourself. Stop with the whining and excuses. You *do* have the time. You *do* have the energy. You *don't* have the priorities. Start prioritizing your life like a healthy, happy person should and you will start living you life like a healthy, happy person would. Take the time right now to invest in you.

Get big or die tryin'.

Charlie Cates
Self Made, Owner

Charlie Cates is the owner and head performance coach of Self Made (www.selfmadefitness.com), and is a Certified Personal Trainer and Performance Enhancement Specialist through NASM. He has worked with athletes of all ages and ability levels, from 9-year-old kids to NFL MVP's. He can be reached via e-mail at charlie@selfmadefitness.com.

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