

Mark Twain's Top 7 Tips for a Simple and Successful Life

by Henrik Edberg

"The man who doesn't read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them."

"Name the greatest of all inventors. Accident."

"Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society."

One of my favorite people of all time to find timeless tips from must be the always witty and perceptive Mark Twain.

Twain was an American lecturer, satirist, humorist and the author of classic books like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

And this week I'd like to share 7 of my favorite tips from him for living both a simpler life but also a more successful one.

I hope you'll find these tips and strategies as helpful as I've found them to be over the years.

1. The secret of getting ahead...

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one."

When you start to look too far into the future any task or project can seem close to impossible. And so you shut down because you become overwhelmed or fearful (of success or failure) and you start surfing the internet aimlessly.

So instead:

- **Break that task down** into small and practical steps.
- **Then just focus on taking the first step today.** That is all you need to focus on, nothing else. By taking the first step you change your mental state from resistant to "hey, I'm doing this, cool".

You put yourself in state where you become more positive and open, a state where you may not be enthusiastic about taking the next step after this first one but you are at least accepting it.

And so you can take the next step. And the next one after that.

Until you have arrived at your destination and at completion.

2. Less talking, more doing.

"Action speaks louder than words but not nearly as often"

"There are basically two types of people. People who accomplish things, and people who claim to have accomplished things. The first group is less crowded."

It's often easy to talk but developing the habit of being a person of action is quite a bit harder.

Being in the habit of breaking down your task into smaller pieces is one of the most effective things you can do to take more consistent action.

Two other habits that work very well for me are to:

- **Start your day with a positive morning routine.** A good start often leads to a good day. A bad or indecisive start often leads to a pretty mediocre day. So create your own morning routine that reliably gets you off to a good or great start. Mine includes a good breakfast, positive information as I eat my first meal of the day and getting started with my most important task of the day right away when I start working.
- **Block out the distractions.** Before you take one of those small steps forward make sure you have created a zone where you are a lot less likely to be distracted or disturbed. So shut down your internet or [use a blocker program](#) for your most visited websites. Put your phone in silent mode and somewhere where you can't see it for a while. Close the door to your room. Then get to work.

3. Be courageous in the face of fear.

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear – not absence of fear.”

Being courageous can be difficult but if you want to live the life you want to live then sometimes you have look into the face of fear and get going or keep going anyway.

And although it is rarely easy to be courageous I have found a few ways to make it easier.

- **Ask yourself: what is the worst that could happen?** Don't just think about it for a few seconds. Sit down with a pen and piece of paper or your laptop. Write it all out as you think about what the realistic worst-case scenario would be. Then write down a plan for how you can come back from such a scenario.
This brings clarity, defuses fuzzy fears and helps you realize that you can most often bounce back pretty quickly even if the worst-case scenario somehow becomes reality.
- **Share your fear with someone.** By just keeping it on the inside it's easy to build a fear up into this massive nightmare and extremely dangerous thing. By sharing and by getting some input from a levelheaded friend or family member he or she can help you to alleviate the fear and inner pressure. And you can gain a much healthier perspective on things again.
- **Accept the fear.** It is a natural impulse to try to deny the fear when shows up in your life. Perhaps you try to not think about it, you try to push it away. I have found that in many cases it is actually better to just accept that fear is here right now.
After a few minutes of fully taking in this uncomfortable feeling and accepting it then it starts to lose steam. You have stopped feeding more energy into the fear. And it just seems to float away – or at least becomes smaller – and you feel more open and centered.

4. A good compliment is a wonderful thing.

“I can live for two months on a good compliment.”

Compliments are awesome. But make sure you make it:

- **A genuine one.** Make sure you really mean it or it may have the opposite effect as your insincerity shines through.
- **Something a bit unexpected.** Like a great taste in old soul music rather than something the other person has heard a hundred times like for example about looks.
- **Something that is important** to the other person.

5. Keep positive company.

“Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.”

I have mentioned this many times. But it bears repeating.

Spend more time with positive people, books, music, movies, podcasts and websites.

Spend your time in an environment that lifts you up.

And spend less time or no time with the negative sources out there.

Make a conscious choice and start to shape your environment instead of just going along and reading, listening to, watching what people in general or people around you may be in the habit of consuming.

6. Focus on what is truly important for YOU.

“Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising.”

Make a conscious choice to focus on what is most important in YOUR life. And not on the things that various companies – or other people – may tell you are the most important things.

Like I mentioned last week, a note with the 4 most important things in your life smartly placed where you will see it every day – in your workspace etc. – helps you to keep your mind consistently on your top priorities.

And if you want a couple of practical tips that will help you to declutter your ad/information intake then:

- **Ask yourself: is this useful?** If for instance a TV-show or magazine isn't bringing me anything useful – fun, fascination, useful tips etc. – then why am I spending my time on it? It's kinda easy to just fall into a habit of doing stuff or consuming things without really having much of a reason for doing so.
- **Find out what you really like to do.** That will probably be more interesting than surfing the internet or TV-channels randomly. And so these less exciting things just tend to fall away from your life as you find – or spend more time with – things that you really like to do, like for instance a new hobby.

7. When emotions are exploding... wait.

“Time cools, time clarifies; no mood can be maintained quite unaltered through the course of hours.”

It's easy to make bad decisions when you are full of negative emotions. And it is very easy to become riled up, angry or defensive when you, for instance, receive some criticism or when someone is attacking you verbally.

This is not a good position to be in to fire away a reply if you don't want to wind up making the situation worse.

And to lash back at this person or [to not be the better person here can really hurt your self-esteem](#). It might feel good for a while to do so but it is a dirty high that comes with a hangover of feeling worse about yourself and subtle or not so subtle self-destructiveness.

But how do you control the impulse to attack, overreact or make a hasty decision?

- **Remind yourself of the potential consequences.** I don't want to hurt myself, my self-esteem or make bad decisions with negative consequences. By repeatedly reminding myself of these potential consequences then they will also often pop up automatically when I receive criticism or when I am angry.
- **Count to at least 10 and take a few belly breaths.** Then respond. This simple way of calming yourself down and regaining some perspective can save you a lot of trouble and help you avoid saying something you can't take back.
- **Accept how you feel.** If you have a little more time than under a minute then take a look at tip #3 again and try to accept how you feel to lessen the big emotions more quickly.
- **If possible, wait until tomorrow or at least later today.** By then the most negative feelings will most likely have lost their steam and you can see things with more clarity and cool. And take action in a better and smarter way.

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