

A flock of birds, likely swallows, is flying in a V-formation against a clear, bright blue sky. The birds are silhouetted against the light, showing their wings and tails. They are arranged in a loose V-shape, with some birds leading and others following.

# **Self-Leadership Workbook**

Self-motivation... when  
*Just Do It* won't do it

**Serge Prengel**

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whether you like the book before you buy it.**

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Published by Proactive Change, New York, NY.

There's a lot to be said for making things simple.

If you know what you want, go do it.

Don't let excuses distract you from your goal.

Don't get discouraged.

Keep at it.

Be purposeful, focused, persistent.

Self-discipline is a wonderful thing.

But what if it doesn't work?

What if you've been trying your hardest, and getting nowhere.

What if, even with the best of intentions,

you keep not doing what you say you want to do?

What can do you do when "Just Do It" won't do it?



Chances are you're getting very frustrated, and maybe scared, about what's happening. It feels like you've encountered a roadblock.

Let's, for a moment, take a different perspective.



Let's consider the obstacle, not as a barrier, but as a pause that allows you to reconsider what you're doing, and to find a better way.

So, how can you describe your situation?

On the one hand, you want to do something. That's pretty clear.  
And you're pushing toward this goal.

But, on the other hand, you're not moving.  
So it feels like another part of you is pushing in the opposite direction.



Try pushing both fists equally hard against each other:  
You're exerting a lot of effort, but there is no movement.

Let's pursue this analogy—two parts of you pushing against each other. Let's try a little exercise. We're going to pretend, for a moment, that there are actually two people involved – one called *Boss*, and another called *Flunky*. And we're going to let them have a dialogue.

Here's how we're going to do this.

Get 2 chairs.

Have them face each other.

One chair will be the chair you sit in when you speak as *Boss*, and the other chair will be the one you sit in when you speak as *Flunky*.



Let's assume you start by sitting in the *Boss* chair. Make the case for more productivity. Talk about the need to set goals, and to do what it takes to make things happen.

Now that you've done that, move to the other chair, the *Flunky* chair.

You've heard what *Boss* had to say, what do you have to say?

Maybe you're a bit tongue-tied: What could you say, really?

*Boss* probably made the case in a very clear, logical way.

So you probably mumble something along the lines of: "*It makes sense*".





You now switch chairs again, and you're back on the *Boss* side. And you're probably feeling righteous indignation as you ask: *"Well, if it makes sense, why aren't you doing it? It's pretty clear what's expected of you, and you know it makes sense for you to do it... so just do it!"*

It's time for an answer. You switch chairs, to the *Flunky* side. You feel awkward, not knowing quite what to say. It's hard to say what you want to say because it doesn't seem to quite make sense. But you finally blurt it out anyway: *"What's in it for me?"*





You go back to the *Boss* chair. And now, in that role, you're really indignant.

*“What’s in it for you? Don’t you understand? If you don’t do the work, we all go down the drain. You too! You first!”*

!!



Now, let's step out of this scene for a moment. Instead of sitting in either of the 2 chairs, let's assume that you're an outside observer.



Let's say you're a *Consultant* brought in to give an outside perspective on the situation.

What do you think? As the *Consultant*, you're not just looking at the issues per se (work and productivity). You're also very aware of *the way the argument is unfolding*.

What you notice is that *Boss* is trying to motivate *Flunky* through fear, guilt, shame.

Now, fear, guilt and shame are very powerful levers indeed. But they have their limitations. When you manage employees (as opposed to serfs) it's good to have other tools in your repertoire.

If you were dealing with real employees instead of your own *Flunky*, wouldn't you try to motivate them more effectively?

**The beatings  
will continue  
until morale  
improves**

Wouldn't you be paying attention to whatever else motivates them, whatever makes the job more fulfilling for them?

If you were dealing with real employees, you'd be listening when *Flunky* keeps asking: "What's in it for me?"

But when it comes to managing yourself, it's harder to be conscious of the conflict. *Boss* and *Flunky* are the same person – yourself.

*Boss*'s goals are for your own good, aren't they? If this is the case, then it is good that *Boss* resists *Flunky*'s demands so doggedly. Except that it seems to make *Flunky* act even more doggedly!

So we're stuck, aren't we?

OK. Let me stop here for a minute to tell you a story.

## The story of the oak tree and the reed:



A reed got into an argument with an oak tree.

The oak tree marveled at her own strength, boasting that she could stand her own in a battle against the winds.

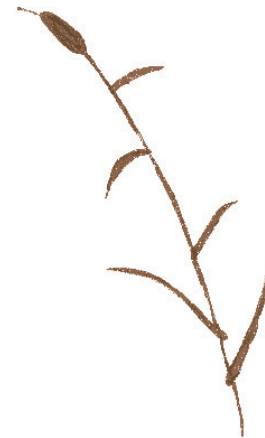
Meanwhile, she condemned the reed for being weak, since he was naturally inclined to yield to every breeze.

The wind then began to blow very fiercely.



The oak tree  
was torn up by  
her roots and  
toppled over,

while the reed was left bent but unharmed.



Source: Aesop's Fables. A new translation by Laura Gibbs.  
Oxford University Press (World's Classics): Oxford, 2002.

Does this mean that behaving like an oak tree is always bad, and behaving like a reed is always good? No, this would make no sense at all.

We're talking about self-leadership. Being a leader means making choices. These choices are sometimes difficult. The point here is not that you should always be a reed. But there are times when it makes sense to use the reed approach.

This is especially appropriate when you have an internal conflict, when you've already been trying to push, and it hasn't worked. Trying harder at this point will only make the struggle more entrenched.

This is where it is good to call on the flexibility of the reed.

How do you do that?



For a start, you're going to admit you've encountered a roadblock. It's time to change direction.

You need to stop pushing. You're going to be listening.

Let *Consultant* manage the process.





*Consultant* invites *Boss* and *Flunky* to speak up. Now, if these two are allowed to interact the way they usually do, they're going to each make demands, and the conflict will probably escalate.



So, instead of asking them what they want, *Consultant* asks them each what they're afraid of.

## **Boss, what are you afraid of?**

If *Boss* can't come up with any fear, start with the following and see what comes up afterwards:

“Well, I'm afraid that, if I give in to *Flunky's* demands, there will be no end to it. I won't do be able to get anything done...”

(Fill in more of the specifics)



***Flunky*, what are you afraid of?**

If *Flunky* can't come up with any fear, start with the following and see what comes up afterwards:

“Well, I'm afraid that, if I give in to *Boss*, there will be no end to it. I will keep being pushed and pushed, with no end in sight...”

(Fill in more of the specifics)



What next?

Now, we all know what *Boss* and *Flunky* are scared of. But the point is not to assign blame to anyone for *Boss* and *Flunky*'s fears.



*Consultant* is not a judge.

*Consultant*'s assignment is to mediate between two parties who need to work together even though they're not getting along at this moment.

*Consultant*'s assignment is to lessen the impact of fear on these two parties.

So *Consultant* asks:

What can *Boss* do today to alleviate *Flunky*'s fears?

And what can *Flunky* do today to alleviate *Boss*'s fears?

For instance:

*Flunky* agrees to work for a specified amount of time,  
after which *Boss* agrees it's OK to call it a day.

So what can we learn from this



You may remember that, earlier, *Flunky* had asked *Boss*: “What’s in it for me?”

*Boss*, all flustered, had launched into a fear-based vision of how things would go horribly wrong if *Flunky* didn’t give in...

When *Boss* and *Flunky* were focused on their fears, all they could do was say no to each other. The result was a standstill, a Lose-Lose situation.

Consultant got them to a Win-Win situation by alleviating their fears through a give-and-take approach.

As you keep doing this every time you encounter a roadblock, you change what a roadblock feels like.

Instead of being a roadblock, it becomes an opportunity to listen to your internal dialogue.

As you take the habit of paying attention to all parts of yourself, something happens: you start to notice that you are 100% behind what you do.

**That's self-leadership.**

## **About the author**

Serge Prengel helps people make the changes they want, in their life, career and relationships.  
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