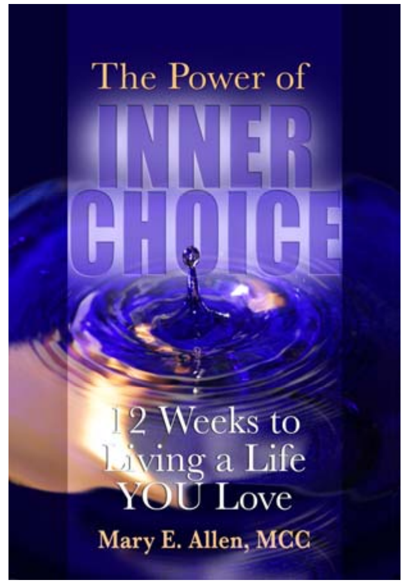


Chapter 3
The Compounding Effect of Choice

Most people are familiar with the compounding effect of money, as it is the key to long-term accumulation of wealth. As you will discover, the principles of compounding also apply to *every* area of life. I encourage you to internalize the simple principles in this chapter and apply them in your life. Doing so will allow you to more easily focus on what is important to you and take the necessary action steps to realize your desires over time.

It's easy to understand the compounding effect on money, because it is clearly measurable. Once you understand the basic elements, you will readily see how this applies to all of your other choices. Whether it is a choice to save money, meditate, read ten pages of a good book, go to the gym, do yoga, meditate, offer a simple act of kindness, say "I love you," or practice present moment awareness, the compounding effect creates an analogous result.

There are four important elements to consider, not only in the following examples with money, but in all of our accumulated choices in life.

1. **Compounding Effect**
2. **Choice**
3. **Interest**
4. **Time**

Note: Some people glaze over when numbers appear. If you're one of those people, it's probably even *more* important for you to absorb the next few pages. While this isn't a book about wealth accumulation, understanding the basic principles of compounding will serve you for a lifetime. The examples I've included are rudimentary and easy to understand with a little attention.

Great things are not done by impulse,
but by a series of small things brought together.
--Vincent Van Gogh

Compounding Effect

Compounding simply means "to add something to another." When interest compounds on money, it means that interest is added onto the amount that has already accumulated thus far. For example, if you have $1,000 earning compounded interest at 10% per year, in the first year you earn ($1,000 + ($1,000 x 10%) = $1,100), for a profit of $100. In year two, you would have ($1,100 + ($1,100 x 10%) = $2,210), for a profit of $210. In year three, the interest would now be calculated on the sum of $2,210. By year ten, your original $1,000 would be worth $2,707.04. In year 20, it would be worth $7,328.07. That is $6,328.07 in profit.

There are *two* key points to understand about the *compounding effect*.

1. Total accumulation. When something is compounded, it is "added to" the *entire amount accumulated* thus far. In monetary terms, this means your accumulated interest also earns interest. As human beings, EVERYTHING we choose is compounded upon all of our previous choices. Whatever your choice, each builds upon or takes away from the accumulated sum.

Let's contrast this to "simple" interest. Simple interest means that you earn interest only on the principle amount and NOT the *accumulated interest*. In this example, you have $1,000, so with simple interest you would only earn $100 of interest each year. It would never be more. In 20 years, you would have accumulated $3,000; $100 x 20 years = $2,000 in profit. The difference between compounding interest and simple interest is $4,328.07! Choosing a compounded savings program over a simple interest program is the better option long-term.

Fortunately for human beings, there is not an analogy to simple interest growth. *Every choice for human beings is compounded.* We will explore this further below.

2. It starts small and grows over time. The second key point to recognize about compounding is the role time plays in the end result. In economics, this is called the "time value of money." In the first few years, the amount of interest being earned each year seems relatively insignificant. This is one of the reasons many people find it challenging to save money in the beginning. In three years, leaving $1,000 in the bank at 10% only grows to $1,348.18. There may be a temptation to pull it out of the bank and spend it on something you can more immediately benefit from. But leaving $1,000 alone for 20 years is worth $7,328.07! Spending $1,348.18 in year three would've **cost** you almost $6,000!

Comparing compounded interest to simple interest also helps in understanding the importance of time in choice. In the first several years, compounding interest does not look much different from the simple interest example. In year one, the interest is exactly the same. In year two, the difference is only $10 and in year three, only $21. In year five, the difference is $145.30, which is still not substantial. The real difference is apparent in year 20. Simple interest earned $2,000 and compounded interest was $4,328.07, more than twice as much. When interest is calculated on accumulated interest, the return in the long run is substantial.

For human beings EVERYTHING is subject to the compounding effect. Education is an excellent example. Everything we have learned throughout our life is built upon everything else we have accumulatively learned thus far. The learning from elementary school, high school, and college all build upon the others. You cannot delete learning once it has happened.

Let's say you want to learn something new, like piano. The first several piano lessons may seem rather insignificant in your progress. However, the accumulation of piano lessons and practice would, over time, enable you to develop your skills. The potency of a lesson in year one may not seem that significant to you, as you desire to play more complex pieces. But it lays the foundation, just as your initial financial investments do. A lesson in year ten would build upon the cumulative knowledge and experience over the years. It's all worthwhile.

The Negative Effect of Compounding in Money

Unfortunately, the power of compounding works in both a positive and negative manner. In the world of economics, accumulating credit card debt is the best way to understand the negative power of compounding. As interest accumulates on savings, the compounding effect works in the same manner with debt. If you are unable to meet all of your expenses each month, you are contributing a little more debt to your financial picture each month. It's like savings in reverse. Saving $100 a month with a compounded interest rate of 12% is only $1,268.25 in one year; after 5 years, the sum is $8,166.96. We love the compounding effect of saving! However, going into debt by just $100 per month at a credit card rate of 12% is $1,268.25 in year one. This may not seem like a big deal in the first year, but in five years the accumulated debt grows to $8,166.96! Yikes! In five years you have all the initial debt **and** you are being *charged interest on the interest* from all the previous months, too.

Example of the Negative Effect of Compounding in Life
Health is a great example to see both the positive and negative effects of compounding as it applies to life. Everything you have eaten and every choice to exercise or not has created a cumulative compounded effect, in the same way your financial choices have created a cumulative compounded effect.

Here is a hypothetical scenario to illustrate this point. Let's say, *in addition to* your regular eating habits, you decided to eat a cheeseburger, a large bag of Doritos and a tub of ice cream and you don't work out that day. While most would agree this is not a great thing to do for your health, it's not a big deal for one day. If you continued to repeat this regimen for one month, it's likely that you would have accumulated a few extra pounds, but your overall health would still be relatively unaffected. However, in just one year, the compounded effect of this program would become quite noticeable with accumulating weight gain. With each day, month, and year this regimen continues, the negative impact on your health would begin to be greater and greater. With additional weight, there would be added demands placed on your organs. As one organ became stressed, it would place additional strain on the others. Your ability to participate in physical activities may become impaired. Your sense of self-esteem may also be affected. Twenty years of this regimen may result in a heart attack. If you were still alive, it is likely you would be considerably obese. You may be bedridden as more and more of your body's organs would struggle. You may even die as a result of this compounding effect. One of the most common reasons for death among the obese is organ failure.

In actuality, I don't know how quickly the negative compounding effect would result in such negative health consequences. It may be earlier or later. In any case, I don't recommend the regimen above. Numerous factors, such as metabolism and your other food intake may either accelerate or slow down the negative impact. The main purpose of this example is to see how the compounding effect can work in our lives.

Example of the Positive Effect of Compounding in Life
Health can also demonstrate a positive compounding effect. Let's say you eat three 100% healthy, well-balanced, nutritious meals and spend one hour working out in one day. Most people wouldn't notice a difference in their life with this one-day program, and neither would you. Let's say you continue this regimen of eating healthfully and you worked out five days a week. After 30 days, you may begin to see some noticeable differences in your body, but your overall health would not seem considerably different than it did day one. After six

months of this regimen, the compounding effect of this healthy practice would likely have more evident results. In three years, the compounded effect of these health habits would be even more significant. Not only would others likely notice an improvement in your physical appearance, your internal organs and overall health would be favorably enhanced. This may result in a host of other benefits. Your self-esteem, success in business, and sense of fulfillment may have improved from this compounding effect. If you continued to exercise five times a week and continued to eat healthfully for *20 years*, it's likely you would be considerably healthier than when you began. If we compared you with someone who had the same eating patterns for 20 years and did not work out at all, your overall health would clearly demonstrate the impact of the compounding effect.

Most people vary their eating and exercise patterns enough that the compounding effect isn't as obvious as it is with money. It may be difficult to determine if a single day contributes positively or negatively to your overall health, since there are numerous factors that influence our health. If every time someone ate a cheeseburger they immediately suffered a heart attack, people would not eat cheeseburgers at all! But our food and exercise choices accumulate slowly over time, creating either positive or detrimental consequences in our lives.

Choice

There are three significant choices related to the compounding effect in saving money and in every area of life.

1. ***Are you in the game?*** The initial choice is whether to invest *some* amount of money or *not* to invest at all. *If you invest nothing, the return is always zero.* This is always the first component with regard to any area of your life. You must start if you want to make progress. You cannot begin to accumulate wealth if you do not save money. You cannot reap the benefits of yoga or meditation if you never begin.
2. ***How much?*** How much are you investing in the activity? In finances, you may choose to save $50, $200, $500 or $2,000 per month. Each *amount*, compounded with the same interest rate, will contribute a different result under the same period of time. The more you choose to invest, the more exponential your return will be over time. In life, the "how much" translates to *EFFORT*.

   If you spend one hour working out each day, you get to choose how much *effort* you will invest in that workout. An effort level of 20%, 50%, or 85% of your maximum capacity will give you significantly different results in your body over the same period of time.

In the table below you can see what it takes for someone to reach a million dollars over time. The table illustrates the radical difference between saving $50, $200, $500, and $2,000 per month. The more you invest, the larger your return and the more *quickly* you can become a millionaire.

Years To Reach One Million Dollars

Monthly Savings	2%	4%	6%	8%	10%	12%	14%	16%
$50	177	105	77	61	51	44	39	35
$100	144	88	66	53	44	39	34	31
$150	125	79	59	48	40	35	31	28
$200	112	72	54	44	38	33	29	26
$250	102	67	51	42	35	31	28	25
$300	94	62	48	39	34	30	26	24
$400	82	56	43	36	31	27	24	22
$500	73	51	40	33	29	25	23	21
$750	58	42	34	29	25	22	20	18
$1,000	49	37	30	25	22	20	18	17
$1,250	42	32	27	23	20	18	17	15
$1,500	37	29	24	21	19	17	16	14
$2,000	30	25	21	18	16	15	14	13
$2,500	26	21	18	16	15	13	12	12
$3,000	22	19	16	15	13	12	11	11
$4,000	17	15	14	12	11	10	10	9
$5,000	14	13	12	11	10	9	9	8

3. ***Frequency.*** How *often* are you investing? Let's compare the frequency factors in saving $1,200 per year. You invest $100 *per month*; John invests $300 *per quarter*; and I invest $1,200 *once a year*. In 20 years, we have all contributed exactly $24,000. However, due to the difference in the *frequency* of our contributions and the compounding effect, our accumulated savings vary. You now have the largest savings account, because you invested *more frequently*. Because you invested monthly, you have $529 more than John and $3,418 more than me! Frequency matters.
    - $100 Monthly - $75,937

- $300 Quarterly - $75,308
- $1200 Annual - $72,519
- No compounded interest - $24,000 ($1,200 x 10 years). Interest matters!

Health and Frequency

In our health example, with all other factors remaining equal, the number of times one works out per week makes a considerable difference. The difference in working out *two* or *three* days a week *consistently* is significant. With each incremental increase of just ONE workout, the impact to your overall health is apparent, especially over time. The differences between working out four, five, or six times per week create a unique net effect on your health.

Is it more effective to work out one day a week for two hours, or four days a week for 30 minutes each time? As you may guess, any trainer would encourage the higher frequency given the same amount of workout time.

Quality Time

Another example that illustrates the impact of time is quality time spent with a child. A mother or father who deliberately spends one hour a day with their child over ten years will have a notably different relationship compared to an aunt, uncle, or grandparent who spends an hour with the child once a month over the same ten-year period of time.

Interest

As you have already seen in the “How To Reach a Million Dollars” table, the *percentage rate* of compounding interest helps determine the number of years it takes to become a millionaire. If you save $100 per year, the difference between an 8% rate and 10% interest is substantial, saving you 9 years when receiving the higher interest. With smaller investments, you can see the interest rate makes a bigger difference.

Interest rate reflects the *demand* for money. It’s a measure of how *valuable* money is at any given point in time. When the demand is high, money is worth more; thus interest rates are higher. Interest rates also reflect how quickly your money will *grow* and how much you will *benefit* from your money accumulating in a savings account.

Interest in Life

In life, the analogy parallels our financial example in a slightly different manner. The interest rate equates to your level of *interest* in any given activity, or how much you *value* it. The more important health is to you, the more an incremental improvement in health will *mean* to you. Essentially, the more you value a particular “choice,” the *greater the sense of fulfillment* you experience when it grows exponentially.

Let’s take another example. I enroll in violin and piano lessons. I discover that I enjoy or *value* playing piano more than violin. I have a higher *interest* in piano. I may become equally adept at playing both instruments. However, I experience greater inner benefits and fulfillment as a result of playing piano. If I split my time equally between violin and piano, I will receive the accumulated value I place on each activity. However, if I were to focus 100% of my time on the piano, my inner benefits and fulfillment would be substantially higher. The lower level of interest in violin wouldn’t be pulling my “fulfillment quotient” down.

Your level of *interest* makes a difference in the level of fulfillment you experience in life. Another way of identifying *interests* is by looking at what you *value most in life*. By investing our time and energy in the activities we value most, we will maximize the benefits or fulfillment.

No profit grows where there is no affection.
– Shakespeare

Note: What I’ve described above is a greatly simplified analogy to interest rates. There are numerous variables that contribute to how an interest rate is determined. This is true for business, and is also true in life.

Time

In compounding, it’s probably already clear that the element of time always plays a role in the net result. In the first few saving contributions or the first few workouts, the return seems relatively insignificant initially. Over time, the activity is compounded and the results become more and more apparent. In 20 years, at 10%, an investment of $1,000 grows to $7,328.07. In 30 years—only 10 additional years—it grows to $19,837.39. At 50 years, that initial $1,000 grows to $145,369.92! Time matters.

Meditation

Time also plays an important role in virtually every activity in life. Let’s use the example of meditation. Through a sophisticated measurement, we’ll also assume we have a baseline measurement of your consciousness (see Ken Wilber’s CD, *Kosmic Consciousness* for more information). If you meditate one time for 20 minutes, it is very likely there *won’t* be a considerable difference in your level of consciousness. If you continue this practice for 90 days, you may begin to experience a greater sense of peace and balance in your life, but the measurements in consciousness would not reflect much growth.

If you continued to meditate for 20 minutes a day for an entire year, the measurements may begin to detect some changes, but again, overall, it would still appear rather insignificant. However, if you continued this practice for 20 years, it is likely the measurement of your brain waves would reflect a significant leap in consciousness. Studies reveal that people who meditate consistently for 20+ years experience these results. Thus far, it is also the only practice that correlates a specific repeated activity with the evolution of consciousness.

Whether we are mastering a musical instrument, sports activity, or business skill, the element of time always reflects the compounding effect over time. The *longer* one invests in any activity, the greater the impact of the compounding effect. The accumulated effect grows with time. This is true in nurturing relationships, learning about philosophy, or taking care of your health.

Instant Gratification

You place an order at your favorite restaurant. Ten minutes later your entrée appears. It is your mother's birthday and she lives 2,500 miles from you. You pick up the phone and are connected. Your tooth aches. You visit your dentist and receive treatment. You want a new look. These days, a visit to a skillful plastic surgeon can transform almost any part of your body.

Products and services add convenience and enjoyment to our lives. They allow us to address pain, improve appearance, connect with others, travel across country, and be more productive. Products even think for us, such as calculators, computers, and software programs. More than any time in history, we expect immediate results for virtually everything we need or desire.

As we've seen above, not all results come quite as instantaneously. Building a profitable business requires *attention* and *action*. Raising children takes *patience, compassion,* and *time*. Completing a work of art requires *inspiration* and *creativity*. Training for a marathon takes *commitment, practice,* and *stamina*. Losing weight takes *exercise*, proper *nutrition,* and *consistency*. Accumulating wealth takes *discipline* and *wisdom*.

> **Mastering the power of inner choice comes through *willingness* and *experience*, and every one of the qualities I just mentioned.**

Anything that requires mastery comes through the combination of these qualities, action, and time. While extraordinary levels of intelligence, natural talents, skills, or physical strength may enhance one's ability to master some things in life, fortunately, these are not the most essential ingredients in mastering your internal navigation system.

Two Essential Ingredients

Willingness and discipline are two essential ingredients to embrace as you engage in the lessons that follow. Willingness and discipline allow you to take advantage of the compounding effect of choice, whether saving money, getting fit, or growing personally.

The man who goes farthest is generally the one who is willing to do and dare.
The sure-thing boat never gets far from shore.
--**Dale Carnegie**

Willingness

Willingness is a powerful resource to access. Willingness is associated with one of the higher energy levels described in Dr. David Hawkins' book *Power vs. Force*. I have included an excerpt from his book describing the characteristics of someone who embraces a high degree of willingness in their life. Because you are reading this book, it is likely that you are living at, or above, this energy level. Dr. Hawkins' book provides a more complete and comprehensive explanation of this subject. Lesson #2 also addresses this notion of energy in greater detail.

> *"**Energy Level 310: Willingness.** This very positive level of energy may be seen as the gateway to the higher levels. For instance, at the Neutral level, jobs are done adequately, but at the level of Willingness, work is done well and success in all endeavors is common. Growth is rapid here; these are people chosen for advancement. Willingness implies that one has overcome inner resistance to life and is committed to participation. Below the 200 calibration, people tend to be close-minded, but level 310, a great opening occurs. At this level, people become genuinely friendly, and social and economic success seems to follow automatically. The Willing aren't*

troubled by unemployment; they'll take any job when they have to, or create a career or self-employment for themselves; they don't feel demeaned by service jobs or by starting at the bottom. They're helpful to others and contribute to the good of society. They're also willing to face inner issues and don't have major learning blocks.

At this level, self-esteem is high and is reinforced by positive feedback from society in the forms of recognition, appreciation, and reward. Willingness is sympathetic and responsive to the needs of others. Willing people are builders of, and contributors to, society. With their capacity to bounce back from adversity and learn from experience, they tend to become self-correcting. Having let go of Pride, they're willing to look at their defects and learn from others. At the level of Willingness, people become excellent students. They're easily trainable and represent a considerable source of power for society."

-- Dr. David Hawkins, *"Power vs. Force"*

Without a sense of willingness, people are more likely to be closed to ideas that can significantly make a difference in their lives; they remain trapped in a set way of being. We have all experienced people with this limiting attitude and witnessed the effect.   Many of the creations and results we value most began initially with the seed of willingness. With willingness there is an openness to learn, take action, and create or experience something new. Where has this already been true in your own life?

Strength does not come from physical capacity.
It comes from an indomitable will.
-- Mahatma Gandhi

Discipline

For many, the word *discipline* has both negative and positive associations. The negative side of discipline is militaristic, which implies force and rigidity. There may be false perceptions of boot-camp trainees being turned into mindless automatons. It may appear that discipline requires one to close their self off to "free-thinking" and self-expression. That is simply not true. Look at the history of any talented performer and you'll see the important role discipline has played in expressing their greatest gifts. Discipline is an *essential* self-improvement tool to cherish.

Discipline is a cousin to willingness: Discipline is simply *willingness in action*. Willingness often provides both the opening and the inspiration to act. Action doesn't necessarily require discipline; however, discipline always requires willingness to some degree.

Applying the Compounding Effect of Choice to *Your* Life

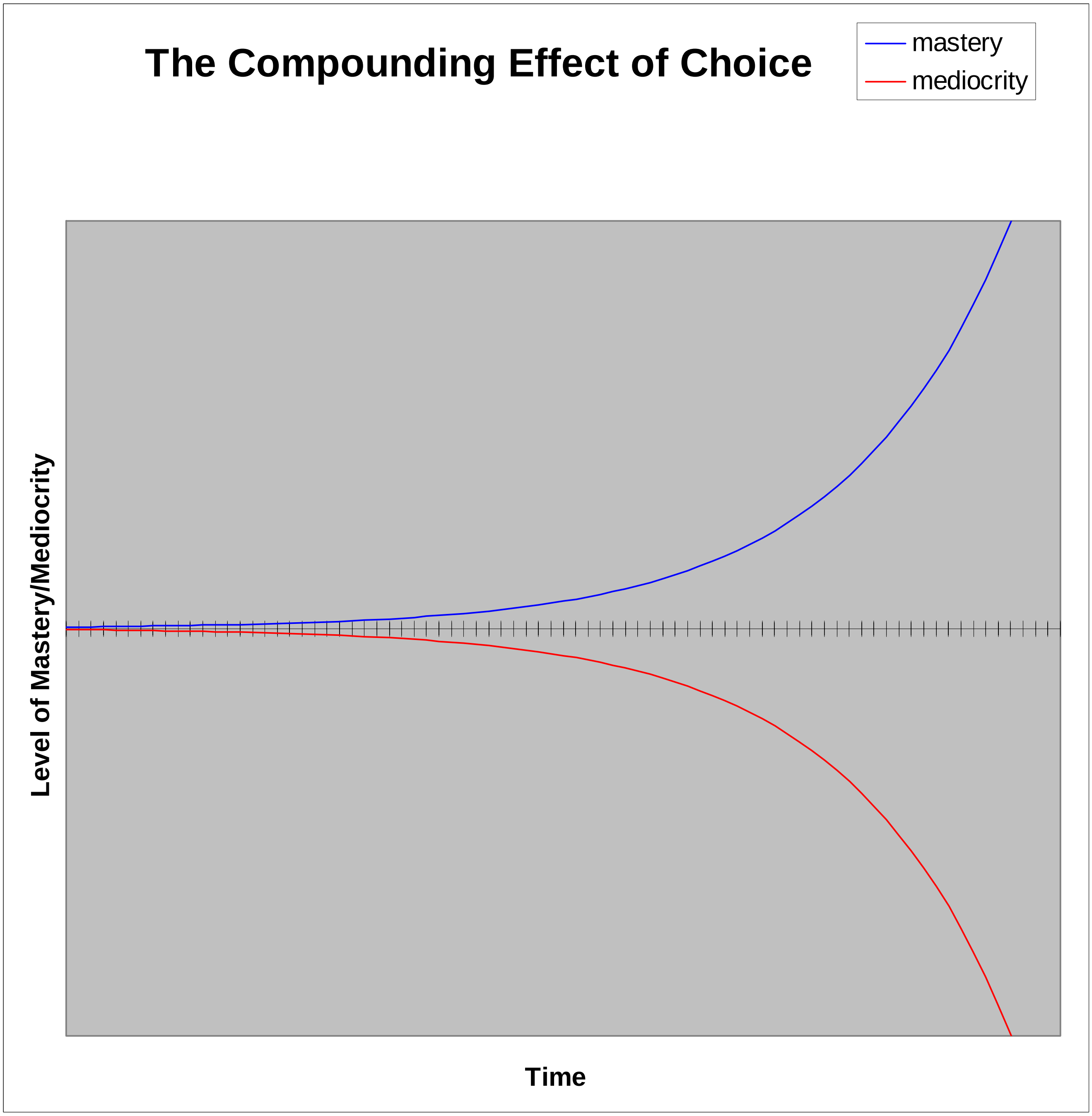
The following two paragraphs capture the essence of everything I have discussed in this chapter. *I encourage you to adopt these simple principles for a lifetime.* You may even want to memorize them for ready access them at various choice points. The Mastery and Mediocrity graph below illustrates the compounded effect of choice over time.

Principle #1

> It is the **simple disciplines (choices)** that don't seem to make any difference at all in the moment. However, **repeated over time**, the compounded effect makes all the difference in the world.

Principle #2

> It is the **simple errors in judgment** that don't seem to make any difference at all in the moment. However, **repeated over time**, the compounded effect makes all the difference in the world.



Principle #1 in Action – "Simple Disciplines"
Focus on the upper side of the graph above. The x-axis depicts the role of *time*, while the y-axis represents the *growth in mastery or success* in something important to you. This could represent growth in your profession, leadership skills, relationships, health, mothering, creative expression, or cultivating a sense of inner peace. It could also represent any one of the principles explored in this book, such as your

ability to “be present,” your Daily Rituals, distinguishing the voices of Spirit vs. Ego, or expanding your ability to receive.

Each tick mark represents one action, which is “one simple discipline” or “one simple choice.” As we saw in the financial examples, choices in the earlier stages don’t reflect much growth for quite a while. Without referencing this graph, it may feel that no progress is being made at all. In fact, there is very little difference between someone who is taking a positive action versus no action. You may become discouraged and choose to quit. However, if you were to continue repeating ***“It’s the simple disciplines (choices) that don’t seem to make any difference at all,”*** but continued to take simple actions, the compounding effect would eventually kick in. You would ultimately experience the growth and success you desire. It would simply be a matter of time. How often do people quit when they are nearing the finish line?

In essence, if we want to direct our lives, we must take control of
our consistent actions.
It's not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives,
but what we do consistently.
-- Anthony Robbins

Remember these elements in the compounding effect of choice.

1. **Compounding Effect** – Your actions will ADD upon the others.
2. **Choice** – ACTING or NOT ACTING is always a choice. Choose consciously. Frequency and your level of *effort* make a difference.
3. **Interest** – The greater you personally VALUE an activity, the greater inner fulfillment will be realized in the process.
4. **Time** – Actions taken over time GROW.

Keep this visual representation in mind. It has proven useful to me throughout the last decade. I first learned about these principles from Jeff Olson in 1995. They continue to support me to stay on track with the objectives I find most important to me. This is one of the ways I used this principle to support my goal of fitness years ago.

> *Personal Story* **–** When I lived in Dallas, I frequented the gym. There were many days that I did NOT feel like going. Once there, oftentimes I didn’t feel like being there. However, I simply repeated the following words in my head, over and over again. ***“It’s the simple disciplines that don’t seem to make any difference at all, in the moment, but the compounded***

effect makes all the difference in the world." Clearly, my one little workout wasn't transforming my body into a Cindy Crawford that day. I could *see* that each time I looked in the mirror. It WAS discouraging in the moment. However, I had faith in the process and these simple words of wisdom. I trusted the compounded effect of *many* workouts *over time*, combined with a matching nutrition regime, WOULD create the desired result. My current level of fitness is a clear reflection that the compounding effect of choice works!

Discipline yourself to do the things you need to do when you need to do them, and the day will come when you will be able to do the things you want to do when you want to do them!
-- **Zig Ziglar**

Ultimately, the habit of working out became second-nature, and as long as I remain open and willing, it is easy to maintain my health regimen. I rarely need to repeat, ***"It's the simple disciplines that don't seem to make any difference at all, in the moment, but the compounded effect makes all the difference in the world."*** However, in the early days, I used it almost every day!

Brand this principle into your being, and use it any time you feel discouraged or uninspired to act upon something important to you. It's a great reminder of the bigger picture. Learn to love the simple disciplines. They create the path to everything you desire.

Note: In the example above, one could falsely assume that going to the gym consistently is sufficient to become fit. There is numerous variables influencing one's overall level of health, as in life or business. Nutrition, meal portion and frequency, inner beliefs, attitudes, genetic make-up, metabolism and others all contribute a compounding effect. It is always the accumulation of choices that creates the final result.

<u>Simple Disciplines – Simple Choices</u>
Reflect upon the compounding effect for each of the following simple disciplines. The principle applies well in health, relationships, business success, money, self-care, self-esteem, and in evolving one's consciousness. The principle also applies well in cultivating internal emotions and states of being, such as love, joy, and inner peace. Anything repeated over time ultimately creates a compounded result. What results in your life would you like to compound? What other simple disciplines would you add to this list?

- Reading 10 pages of a good book

- Eating healthfully
- Spending quality time with your children
- Working out
- A simple act of kindness
- Saying, “I love you” to a loved one
- Yoga or stretching
- Meditating
- Writing “appreciations”
- Avoiding sugar or caffeine
- Drinking a gallon of water
- Saving money
- Attending seminars
- Listening to educational CD’s
- Getting up early
- Being present with a loved one
- Cleaning off your desk each day
- Volunteering
- Listening closely to others
- One extra hour of work
- Asking for what you want
- Being honest
- *NOW* Practices (more about these in Lesson #1)
- Daily Rituals (more about these in Lesson #2)
- Listening to Spirit (more about this in Lesson #3)
- Loving yourself
- Practicing Inquiry (more about this in Lesson #9)
- Being on time
- Pursuing a dream
- Living your values

Principle #2 in Action – “Simple Errors in Judgment”
If you want to successfully boil a frog, it’s best to turn the heat up over time or the frog will jump out and escape. I wish no ill will to frogs; I’m making a point about “simple errors in judgment.” Such little actions or non-actions seem relatively harmless initially and for a period of time. However, the compounding effect leads us to less pleasant results in our lives. This is the model of mediocrity.

> *It is the **SIMPLE ERRORS in judgment** that don’t seem to make any difference at all in the moment. However, **repeated over time**, the compounded effect makes all the difference in the world.*

This principle is clearly illustrated in the lower portion of the graph above. Again, the x-axis depicts the role of *time*, the y-axis represents the *negative accumulated impact or atrophy* resulting from specific habits. The results range from mediocrity to disaster. This graph may depict the negative compounding effect of actions or non-action in any of the categories named above. I find it most useful to apply this principle to the habits I would like to change.

Each tick mark represents one **"simple error in judgment."** As is the case in accumulating credit card debt, a little each month doesn't seem like a big deal. The negative consequences don't reflect much impact for quite a while. Without referencing this graph, it may seem that watching two hours of mindless television each night isn't hurting you in any way. You may simply continue watching every day, while complaining about needing more time to pursue an important dream. Independently, two hours of television is relatively harmless. However, the compounded effect of this "simple error in judgment" translates to 728 hours of television per year! That is over 30 full 24-hour days in a year! This is like investing in a 1% savings bond. The level of fulfillment returned is small. How else could you have invested your time?

Remember these elements in the negative compounding effect of choice.

1. **Compounding Effect** – Negative actions and non-actions ADD upon the others and create a cumulative effect.
2. **Choice** – ACTING or NOT ACTING is always a choice. Choose consciously. Frequency and lack of effort make a difference.
3. **Interest** – The more you avoid something you VALUE greatly, the greater the cost of inner fulfillment to you in the long run.
4. **Time** – "Simple errors in judgment" create ATROPHY and MEDIOCRITY over time.

We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.
-- Aristotle

Examples of "Simple Errors in Judgment"
Reflect upon the impact of the various items I've included in the list below. Some of these may initially appear harmless. ***What consequences could result over time in compounding these "simple errors in judgment"?*** What other "simple errors of judgment" would you add? This list is not intended to elicit feelings of

guilt or remorse, but merely to give you a variety of illustrations to reflect upon. We have all exercised “simple errors in judgment.” Use it to stimulate *awareness*. In later chapters, you may or may not consciously decide to address something from this list.

- Watching mindless television
- Not saving money
- Spending more than you earn
- Being late
- Complaining
- Gossiping
- Eating a cheeseburger or French fries
- Overeating
- Spending time with negative people
- Dwelling on negative thoughts
- Interrupting others
- Not being fully present when listening
- Speeding
- Smoking or using drugs
- Disorganization
- Unprotected sex
- Listening to loud, abrasive music
- Sleeping in or staying up late excessively
- Excessive time on the internet
- Laziness, performing below your capacity
- Not working out
- Not being friendly to others
- Criticizing yourself or others
- Daydreaming
- Procrastination
- Not appreciating your partner
- Maintaining a stressful lifestyle
- Not taking personal time for yourself
- Too many desserts or candy
- Time in a dead-end job
- Arguing

It is the **simple errors in judgment** that don’t seem to make any difference at all in the moment. However, repeated over time, the compounded effect makes all the difference in the world.

"There is little difference in people
but that little difference makes a big difference.
The little difference is attitude.
The big difference is whether it is positive or negative."
--W. Clement Stone.

<u>Contrast and Compare</u>

Another way to use this model is to compare a simple discipline or "simple error in judgment" with another.

- If you read 10 pages of a good book today, and I don't, the difference between you and me on that day is pretty negligible. In fact, after a month, the difference is still not that great. However, if you continue to read 10 pages of a good book each day for the next ten years, the difference between you and me will be considerable. If you focused your attention in a specific area of focus over that ten-year period, it's likely that you would be an expert in your field!

- If I eat one ice cream bar today, and you don't, the difference in our level of health is not very significant. However, if I eat an ice cream bar every day for one year, or five years—and you don't—*all things being equal,* there will likely be a considerable difference in our health.

I hope these varied examples have left a lasting impression in your mind. The application of these principles is endless.

Awareness as a Discipline

Perhaps the most challenging, yet simple, discipline to consistently repeat over time is "awareness." However, it comes with some of the highest rewards. I notice how frequently I catch myself "checking out" for a moment here and there. Sometimes I am not present for long periods of time. Think about the negative compounding effect of "non-awareness" over time. What would your life be like if you were only consciously aware of yourself sporadically throughout your life? Awareness allows us to learn, grow, enjoy life, and to make conscious choices.

The compounding effect of awareness may be the single most important "simple discipline" to repeat over time. Observe yourself, your thoughts, your feelings, your reactions and the connection to yourself. Awareness creates the opportunity to choose.

The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather in a lack of will.
-- Vincent Lombardi

Cumulative Discipline

It's not just about ONE single discipline or ONE simple error in judgment. Some of our choices support our growth, and some don't. Becoming aware of these choices is the first step. Seeing a visual representation of their respective impact is also useful in fine-tuning our choice points. There will be numerous simple disciplines you'll apply over and over again on your path of growth.

Let's begin now.

Taken from *The Power of Inner Choice: 12 Weeks to Living a Life YOU Love* by Mary E. Allen, MCC.

www.lifecoachmary.com and **www.powerofinnerchoice.com**