

# If You Can't Be Disciplined, Be Clever



## **JOE FERGUSON, PhD**

PhD Clinical Psychology, Fielding University  
MBA, Wharton School of Business

**D**iscipline can be very hard, especially if it requires you to do something painful, difficult, or distasteful like sleeping on nails, dieting, or preparing for a colonoscopy. It is an open scientific and philosophical question whether or not survival is possible without any discipline at all. Of course it depends upon the situation. Under my present circumstances I reckon that I could dissipate completely for a couple of decades before my family would let me starve. But this is not my plan because I still have lots of stuff I want to do and I feel the need to somehow ensure that I will do it without relying on my own long-term discipline. Call me an enlightened narcissist if you like.

Experimentally, I have found that I cannot always rely on discipline to get things done because it is sometimes so hard and because the consequences of dissipation in my environment have always been so mild. Fortunately there is an alternative to discipline, which is self-manipulative cleverness. This type of manipulation is perfectly OK. It is often possible to arrange things so that some social or behavioral prosthetic will take the place of discipline. I mean this in the sense of either a physical prosthetic (leg, glasses, hearing aid, artificial heart, *Iron Man* suit) or a cognitive prosthetic (clock, calculator, book, smart phone, Google). You can often set things up so that the situation in which you voluntarily place yourself will take you where you want to go without further discipline; like a bobsled.

When you enroll in a degree program, join the military, get married, post your photo on eHarmony.com, or show up at your first 12-step meeting you are engaging an institutional prosthetic to carry you toward some goal by means of its own independent power. When you make a definite plan of any kind and declare or record it in a public and authoritative way, to some extent you can rely on that authoritative public declaration or record to guide and even compel you going forward. If you come to my office to talk about your life, your circumstances, and your priorities in a serious way then the discourse and reflection you thereby set in motion will take on a life of its own and carry you in some direction. You may prefer to set things up so as to change your life along lines of your own choosing. Trust me. Call me.

## ***Concise Personal Counseling***

\$175 per 70-minute session

Santa Fe, NM ~ (505) 913-7159 ~ [DrJoe@Fergi.com](mailto:DrJoe@Fergi.com) ~ [www.Fergi.com](http://www.Fergi.com)