10 tips to take charge of your life

Navigate through life . . . or let the tides dictate where you'll go. IESE's Luis Huete offers 10 pointers to take the helm and pursue your dreams and ambitions.



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What might your ideal or best life look like? The version where you develop your full potential and pursue your goals? Too often it's hard to figure out the right series of actions, attitudes and habits that can make your dream life achievable.

So how about a little help? IESE's Luis Huete offers constructive advice in a new book. Here

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are 10 tips to being your best self and taking charge of your life:

1. Expand who you are

Everyone has cognitive biases, determined by character and personality. To make progress, working on self-improvement, it's important to know thyself. At the same time, Huete challenges readers to *expand* the possibilities of their characters by connecting with sensibilities beyond their own. This creates a "healthy tension" that generates learning, progress, diversity, contrast and energy. Broadening horizons, over time, allows individuals to acquire new skills and mindsets quite different from those they started with.

2. Activate your reward mechanisms

Behavior is said to be motivated by six types of emotional energy. Four of them are considered "basic desires": security-control, fun-novelty, uniqueness-relevance and connection-empathy. The other two — personal growth and making an impact on others — are deemed "advanced desires." Collectively, these are the factors that energize actions. However, basic desires activate the system of short-term gratification, whereas advanced desires — more noble but less urgent — are about long-term rewards. For true life satisfaction, align these reward mechanisms to move yourself forward.

3. Prioritize long-term rewards

Advanced desires, for personal growth and making an impact on others, require long-term thinking. Be willing to sacrifice short-term gratifications. To use a diet analogy, basic desires are like fast food — they're filling, but at the expense of food that is more nutritious.

4. Deploy mature defenses in the face of adversity

Defense mechanisms that are mature or progressive can help people grow and learn from difficult situations. For example, reckoning with a conflict can lead to more self-knowledge, better anticipation, deeper reasoning, as well as new ways to disconnect, defuse or use humor. But there are also immature defense mechanisms, which should be avoided. These get in the way of growth and they include blaming others, making excuses, refusing to see things as they are, and falling into complacency. Turn to your mature defenses to tackle adversity better.

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5. Use effectiveness to improve your attitude

Being effective means going to sleep most nights feeling that whatever had to get done got done. It's a powerful sentiment that directly bolsters self-esteem and improves one's attitude. You can achieve effectiveness — and its positive side-effects — by working for oneself and taking on an "owner mentality" when working for others.

6. Create a story connecting your past to your future

Just as an architect draws up a set of plans before starting to build a house, you should map out your life before embarking on the journey. The story you tell yourself can keep you moving forward. Make sure your story includes three elements: 1) an idea of the person you want to become (training, habits to develop, defects to correct); 2) ways in which you want to stand out (where you want to focus, professionally and personally); and 3) the rewards you aspire to (which can be both material and emotional). Then, explore and leverage connections between these three realms.

7. Recognize and avoid falling prey to behavioral disorders

Remember to keep an eye on your need for immediate gratification and your reliance on immature defense mechanisms. Those who prioritize short-term satisfaction are more likely to be tempted by perverse incentives or influenced by toxic people. That puts you at greater risk of becoming sociopathic, narcissistic, overly attention-seeking or obsessive.

8. Generate a virtuous circle of personal progress

It's tempting to blame luck when things don't go as planned. But remember that your beliefs and how you interpret reality play a large role in which emotions and behaviors you develop; and these, in turn, affect your contributions and rewards. These three elements (beliefs-interpretation, emotions-behaviors and contribution-rewards) are connected to each other and constitute the virtuous circle of personal progress. Get to know and learn to manage these elements for your own benefit.

9. Find symbiosis in relationships

The quality of your relationships plays a crucial role in your personal story. Aim to reach the

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maximum level of symbiosis, which happens when relationships are mutually beneficial. To improve relationships, you need internal discipline. You also need to learn how to manage conflicts and use your time wisely.

10. Prepare for complex challenges

Don't take the easy road or decide by omission. Aim for higher goals that require the investment of time and effort to enrich your knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. The intersection between your challenges and talents largely determines the nature and intensity of your personal experiences. Do you want to live passionately, or settle for mediocrity, comfort or apathy? It's up to you!

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