TRIBE OF MENTORS

SHORT LIFE ADVICE FROM THE BEST IN THE WORLD

TIMOTHY FERRISS

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“In order to ‘have’ you must ‘do,’ and in order to ‘do’ you must ‘be.’”

TERRY CREWS is an actor and former NFL player (Los Angeles Rams, San Diego Chargers, Washington Redskins, and Philadelphia Eagles). His wide-ranging credits include the original viral Old Spice commercials, television series such as The Newsroom, Arrested Development, and Everybody Hates Chris, and films including White Chicks, the Expendables franchise, Bridesmaids, and The Longest Yard. He now stars on the Golden Globe Award–winning Fox sitcom Brooklyn Nine-Nine. In 2014, Terry released his autobiography, Manhood: How to Be a Better Man — or Just Live with One.
What is the book (or books) you’ve given most as a gift, and why? Or what are one to three books that have greatly influenced your life?

The Master Key System by Charles F. Haanel. I have read hundreds of personal development books, but this is the one that clearly showed me how to visualize, contemplate, and focus on what it was I truly wanted. It revealed to me that we only get what we desire most, and to apply myself with a laserlike focus upon a goal, task, or project. That in order to “have” you must “do,” and in order to “do” you must “be” — and this process is immediate. Although it takes time for these desires to manifest in our material world, you must see the thing you desire as completed, finished, and real, now. The better you can do this, the more you can accomplish. I have bought several copies of this book and distributed it to family and friends. I also reread it probably once a month to keep my vision clear.

Two more are Viktor E. Frankl’s incredible Man’s Search for Meaning and David McRaney’s You Are Not So Smart. Both books are absolutely essential to me in order to keep my perspectives correct in a changing world.

How has a failure, or apparent failure, set you up for later success? Do you have a “favorite failure” of yours?

1986. It was my senior year in high school at Flint Academy in Flint, Michigan. I was the starting center for our class C basketball team. We had a great team that year, and we were expected to go very far, if not all the way, in the state playoffs. We faced Burton Atherton in the district final, and we were expected to trounce them, but they tried something we’d never seen before. They didn’t play. They would bring the ball down the court and just pass it back and forth at the top of the key. There was no shot clock, so they did this forever. The only time we scored was when we managed to steal the ball. But our coach, for some reason, decided we were going to let them do it. I remember standing there, with my hands raised in zone defense, watching them hold the ball without even attempting to shoot. I was frustrated, and every attempt I made to step out of the zone was rebuffed by our coach. This method was working for them, because with only five seconds left on the game clock, they were up 47-45.
One of their players made a mistake and tried a long pass cross court and I stole the ball. I desperately dribbled the entire length of the court... 5, 4, 3, 2, 1... for our only chance to win. I missed. Their fans go crazy, as it was the biggest upset of the year, and I collapse in a heap, thinking my life is over. The coach afterward told the whole team that I had no business taking that shot and I should have passed it to our star player. It was in the paper the next day that I failed, and I was ridiculed by students and teachers alike. I was beyond crushed. A dark cloud covered me everywhere I went as I internalized the loss.

A few days later, as the fog of failure began to lift, I remember having a rare time alone in my room (I usually shared it with my brother). As I sat in the silence, another thought pierced through my sadness. “I took the shot.” It was invigorating, even exciting. “Hey, when all the chips were on the line, you didn’t leave your future up to others, YOU TOOK YOUR SHOT!” Instantly I felt free and in control. I knew from then on that I could have the courage to fail on my own terms. From that moment, I decided that if I was going to succeed or fail, it was going to be up to me. I was changed forever.

If you could have a gigantic billboard anywhere with anything on it, what would it say and why?

“God will not have his work made manifest by cowards.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

I love this quote because it is all about defeating fear. Every great and extraordinary accomplishment in this world was done through courage. Hell, you don’t even get to be born unless your mother has the courage to have you. I repeat this phrase when I’m anxious or nervous about something. I ask myself, what’s the worst that can happen. Usually, the answer is, “You can die.” Then I answer back, “I’d rather die doing something I feel is great and amazing rather than be safe and comfortable living a life I hate.” I talk to myself a lot, and this quote helps me sort out my fears and deal with them. The more you run from your fears, the bigger they get, but the more you go into them, the more they tend to vanish like a mirage.
What advice would you give to a smart, driven college student about to enter the “real world”? What advice should they ignore?

There is a big difference between intelligence and wisdom. Many are fooled into thinking they are the same thing, but they are not. I have seen intelligent serial killers, but I’ve never seen a wise one. Intelligent human beings have been given this trumped-up position in society where, just because they’re intelligent, they are to be listened to, and I have found this is extremely dangerous. I was in a Christian cult along with other very intelligent people but, looking back, if I had heeded wisdom, I would have seen we were all on the wrong path. Intelligence is like following a GPS route right into a body of water until you drown. Wisdom looks at the route but, when it takes a turn into the ocean, decides not to follow it, then finds a new, better way. Wisdom reigns supreme.

Ignore any advice that tells you you are going to miss something. Every mistake I have ever made in business, marriage, and personal conduct was because I thought if I didn’t do or get this now, it was never going to happen. It’s like most clubs in LA. The trick is to keep the line long at the door, while the club itself is empty. The “aura of exclusivity” is really code for “bad atmosphere.” To do what you desire to do, you have all you need.

What are bad recommendations you hear in your profession or area of expertise?

“Work hard to beat the competition.” The truth is that competition is the opposite of creativity. If I am working hard to beat the competition, it actually prevents me from thinking creatively to make all concepts of competition obsolete. As a football player, I was told to work hard to compete against the other team, some perceived future threat (new draftees, age, or injury), and even my current teammates. As an actor, you are told to look a certain way or do things you don’t agree with in order to “compete.” This competitive mindset destroys people. It’s the scorched-earth way of thinking, and everyone is burned.

The truth is that you need the success of everyone in your field in order to achieve your own success. Creativity operates differently. You work hard because you’re inspired to, not because you have to. Work becomes fun, and you have energy for days because this life is not a “young man’s game.” It is an “inspired person’s game.” The keys belong to whoever is inspired, and no specific age, sex, gender, or cultural background has a monopoly on inspiration. When
you're creative, you render competition obsolete, because there is only one you, and no one can do things exactly the way you do. Never worry about the competition. When you're creative, you can, in fact, cheer others on with the full knowledge that their success will undoubtedly be your own.

In the last five years, what have you become better at saying no to? What new realizations and/or approaches helped?
I realized that I had to let people leave my life, never to return. Every relationship I have in my life, from family and friends to business partners, must be a voluntary relationship. My wife can leave at any time. Family members can call me or not. Business partners can decide to move on, and it's all okay. But the same is true on my end. If I say I'm ready to move on and someone doesn't accept that, now we have a problem. I remember trying to move on from a very close friend because he was displaying behaviors I wasn't comfortable with. Soon after, I received a letter by certified mail, threatening me with a lawsuit for over a million dollars because of the demise of our “friendship.” It was ridiculous and it still is, so I actually framed the letter as a reminder of the necessity of letting people go and moving on. One approach I use is imaginary great-grandchildren. I talk to them all the time. I ask them about decisions and relationships and whether or not to continue them. They tend to speak loud and clear. “Grandpa, you shouldn’t do this, or you need to leave these people alone because we will be affected negatively, or worse, we won’t exist.” Those moments show me that this whole thing is bigger than me. It's the realization that there is a “will to pleasure,” a “will to power” and, in the words of Viktor Frankl, a “will to meaning.” You won't take a bullet for pleasure or power, but you will for meaning. So you sometimes have to do what I call a “crowd-thinner.” One wrong person in your circle can destroy your whole future. It's that important.