



Quora

Best Answers Of 2015

By Top Writer, Nicolas Cole

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By Top Writer, Nicolas Cole

Q: Can Quora Help One Become A Better Writer? If so, how?

I studied creative writing at Columbia College Chicago, and one of my teachers senior year (Joe Meno, a successful author himself) said, "Writers are behind. Writers don't know how to use social media and digital mediums in order to promote themselves and their work. But the writers that can figure this out are the ones that will succeed."

His saying that stuck with me immediately. Why? Because he was basically saying "There is an open lane for you. Go figure it out."

Since my beginning to write seriously here on Quora (started January, 2015), here is what has manifested as a result:

- I have acquired over 6 million views on my Quora writing.
- One of my answers was published in Quora's 2014 print anthology (a noteworthy feat for publishers when I'm ready to pitch my book).
- Dozens of my answers have been republished in TIME, Forbes, Fortune, Inc Magazine, The Huffington Post, Popsugar, Observer, and Business Insider. (As a writer, I can now say "I have been published in TIME, Forbes," etc...)
- I have sold eBooks in over 30 different countries, the majority of my website traffic and readers coming from Quora.
- I have received hundreds of personal emails and messages from people thanking me for writing here on Quora and/or sharing their experiences.
- My clout here on Quora as a "Top Writer" has given me the ability to connect and talk to other successful individuals/writers, as well as thought leaders in various fields.

I guess you could say, by definition, Quora has given me all the credentials to at the ripe young age of 25 call myself a "successful writer."

But are numbers all that matters? Do any of the above really mean anything when it comes to becoming a BETTER writer? Honestly, not really. They VALIDATE you as a writer, but credentials aren't what make you a better writer. PRACTICE is what makes you a better writer.

So how has Quora made me a BETTER writer?

In the past year I have written (at the time of writing this) 270 answers. That's 270 times I sat down at the computer and didn't give up on my writing. That's 270 moments where I spoke my mind, shared an idea, expressed myself. That's 270 opportunities to get better. That's 270 real, tangible, proven efforts that 270 times I

sat down to practice being a better writer.

...and the great thing about Quora is, all that practice wasn't kept in a notebook on my desk, hidden from the world. It actually did the hard work of promoting my name as a writer and getting my ideas in front of real people.

If I go back and look at some of my earliest Quora answers, I cringe a bit. I see the mistakes I made, or how my writing style has grown since then. It's as if I can hear a younger version of myself (we change a lot in a year, don't we?) practicing the craft. This fear of seeing yourself in a rougher form is what often times discourages even the best artists, never content with putting something out into the world. I see it differently. I think looking back at your earlier work is the coolest part about being an artist, a writer. You (and everyone else) can see where you started. You, as a writer, are brought back down to earth and reminded that you have improved (don't worry!). And aspiring writers are given a behind-the-scenes look into your process, and are reminded themselves that nobody starts out "perfect."

Quora is nothing more than a public practice arena. Sure, we share important thoughts. We share valuable information. In fact, I think as a self-development or nonfiction writer of sorts, Quora is one of the best places to practice your craft, period. You are constantly reading and writing in that voice, and you can get feedback on your work. We aren't writing novels here. We are using our voices—and as long as we use them with intention, we might as well call it Practice.

So, can Quora help you become a better writer? Yes.

But not by just sitting there reading what other people post.

Only by writing.

Get to writing.

Q: Is It Possible To Change Your Mentality So Much That You Cannot Recognize Yourself Anymore?

I am not the same person I used to be.



I use the above image to reinforce my point, but the physical changes alone hardly scratch the surface.

On the left is me at 15 years old. I weighed less than 90lbs. I was sick just about every day (undiagnosed with Celiac Disease). I was missing 2-3 days of school a week. I was a straight C student, at best. I played World of Warcraft relentlessly. I didn't have many friends, and the ones I did have lived in my computer and my gaming headset. I was lonely and depressed—an insomniac, no doubt exacerbated by my late night gaming sessions. I viewed the world through an extremely pessimistic lens and I often contemplated suicide or at the very least leaving home.

On the right (photo was taken last year) is me at 23 years old. I don't drink, don't

smoke, and eat extremely healthfully to keep my Celiac in check. I rarely miss a day of work. I graduated college at the top of my class with a near-perfect GPA and with honors credits. (For those hating on WoW, I did so even while playing the game.) I made friends with the big guys at my local gym and joined their inner circle of bodybuilders and powerlifters. I currently work at an advertising agency and a huge part of my job is to be out and about, social. I meditate daily and sleep soundly. I see the world and the self as something we all hold the power to create. And I strive every day to share my story and help others realize the depth of their own potential, and become the person they know they can be.

When I look at that skinny kid on the left, I remember a lot of pain. I remember certain stories and certain feelings, but I do not recognize him. I have changed so much since then that he is more a distant memory I must remind myself is real, otherwise he will fade into the distance all together.

And you know what?

That's a beautiful thing.

Q: How Can I As A Teen Improve My Life The Most In A Single Day?

As a teenager, I spent 95% of my free time (as in, time outside of school) playing World of Warcraft.

First response, I'm sure, is that you're thinking, "Wow, so you wasted a lot of time."

Actually, no. Not at all.

I learned the most important lesson of my entire life.

Every single person I knew, parents, friends, siblings, and teachers that found out (word got around school that among them was a pro gamer—at 17 I was one of the highest ranked WoW players in North America), they all insisted that I was wasting my life and that I would look back in regret.

They were wrong. Every single one of them.

World of Warcraft taught me what it means to be disciplined.

For those that don't know the game, let me give you some background. While I was competing (this was when 2v2/3v3/5v5 arenas had first been released), the system was based on a compounding algorithm. Meaning that each week, I needed to sustain my rating for at least 10 games, otherwise my rating would drop—significantly. The amount I would be able to earn in points (usable for new gear, which was ESSENTIAL) would plummet, and it would take me weeks to get back to where I was.

For players competing at an extremely high level, falling 2 weeks behind was not an option.

My parents, frustrated that their oldest child was spending too much time on the computer, enrolled me in a series of summer camps and music lessons to keep me busy. This tightened my schedule, forcing me to stay up some nights until 4 or 5 in the morning, get 3 hours of sleep, and then wake up at 7 for a summer camp.

While I was at camp, I would use my bathroom breaks and lunches to call up a friend, who was going to play my account for me while I was away—he was another top player, so I knew I was in good hands. He would ensure I hit the necessary amount of games for the week, at the very least.

I have example after example of stories like this. Stories that, on the surface, scream obsession, addiction, etc. But to me, they were the opposite. I was disciplined beyond common understanding. I possessed a quality that many my age had failed to demand of themselves.

And it wasn't because I was extraordinary. I wasn't born some gaming genius. In fact, I'd never played an MMORPG before in my life, before World of Warcraft.

I simply loved the game.

I loved competition.

And I believed that if I worked harder than anyone else, I would become the best—doing what I loved.

By the time I graduated high school, I was being offered sponsorships, I had the most popular Mage blog on the Internet, I was offered a paid salary position on the blogging platform I was using, and I was a household name to any and every top World of Warcraft player in 2007-2008.

Why I quit is another story. Actually, it'll be a memoir. Confessions of a Teenage Gamer coming soon...

The point I'm trying to make here is that it doesn't matter what you DO. You could write code, you could take up meditation and yoga, you could buy a bunch of books and read them front to back and test yourself on the knowledge until you're blue in the face. At 17 years old, the most important thing you need to learn is DISCIPLINE.

Let me say that again.

AS A TEENAGER, THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU NEED TO LEARN IS DISCIPLINE.

Take a look around you. How many kids are ADD? How many kids set huge goals and then can't get themselves off the couch? How many kids say one thing and do another?

School doesn't teach you discipline. School teaches you how to bullshit your way through complacency.

If you want to be successful at anything, you need to learn discipline.

So how do you learn discipline?

Take what you love.

Do it relentlessly.

Push yourself to know more, learn more, create challenges, overcome those challenges—at the very least, set a time to work on your craft every day, and stick to that time NO MATTER WHAT. If you don't feel like doing it, good. Sit with that

feeling. It'll come back again in the future about 10 billion times. Sit there for 2 hours with that feeling—however long your designated craft time is. Eventually you'll get so bored that your subconscious will say, "Eh, screw it," and it'll start working. And the next time you "don't feel like doing it," your subconscious will know it will be put in time-out and be bored to death if it doesn't, so it just dives in.

Discipline is a practice. It is an art. It is not a talent, it is not something you're born with. It is a piece of wood meant for you to whittle.

Get to whittling.

Q: What Are Some Tricks To Prevent Laziness And Procrastination?

Bodybuilding taught me something very important about this idea of "wasted time."

In order to successfully put on muscle, one must eat a certain amount of food. And in order to eat that much food, one must divide their day up accordingly into 5 or 6 sections. In each section is a meal, and that meal must be eaten in order to fuel you for that night's lift. For example:

8:30 am - Meal 1

10:30 am - Meal 2

12:30 pm - Meal 3

3 pm - Meal 4

5:30 pm - Meal 5

LIFT

9 pm - Meal 6

Now, let's say I procrastinated. Let's say I just "don't feel like eating my first meal right now. I'll eat it later."

Meal 1 is big in itself. Meal 2 is big as well. If I don't eat meal 1 and try to eat it along with meal 2, that's a disgusting amount of food, and when I say disgusting I mean you'll have to stop half-way through, go to the bathroom, come back, and force-feed the rest.

Let's say I'm just having a super lazy day though. "God, I don't want to do anything right now! I'll do it later. I promise." So then Meal 3 approaches and I still haven't eaten. By that point, it's too much. No normal human being could possibly eat that much food. I'm down, I'm depressed, I'm starting to regret not having forced myself to eat Meals 1 and 2. Why? Well, because I can't eat them now—it's too late—but more importantly, my lift is starting to near and since I haven't eaten any of my meals, I'm going to be walking into the lift exhausted.

My meals are my energy.

So think of it this way:

Say you have a test tomorrow night. The test is like the lift. To prepare for this test, you have 5 meals to eat. You have to review the chapter on chemical bonds, you have to read through the study guide, you have to finish that volcano project, you

have to write 5 questions for your in-class Trivial Pursuit game, and you have to complete 10 practice questions from the back of the book.

You know what you have to do but "ughhhhhh! I am just feeling so lazy right now!" So you decide to watch Netflix instead of getting started the day prior (meal 1). 3 episodes of Scandal later (meal 2) and you're all, "Omg but what happens to Olivia Pope! I have to know!" You decide you'll get started after 2 more episodes, just 2 more! (Meal 3) By now, it's 10pm at night, you have to be up early in the morning for school, the sun is down, it's dark outside, the whole house is quiet, you're actually more tired than you thought, so you go to bed. You wake up the next morning (meal 4), no time. There's no way you're going to get everything done in the 30 minutes you have before school—despite your best efforts at convincing yourself otherwise. You try to get it done in the first few periods of school (Meal 5) but it's shit, it's all shit, you know it, your teacher is going to know it, your classmates, everyone will know. "Damnit," you say to yourself, probably in the bathroom mirror. You show up for the test empty-handed. You curse yourself for procrastinating.

Lather, rinse, repeat.

This is how most people live their lives. Parkinson's Law states that "work expands to fit the time allotted," meaning that if you give yourself a week to do something, it will take you the entire week to complete the task. If you were to give yourself that same task, however, with a deadline of 3 days, you would get it done in 3 days. It's not the work's fault it took a week. It's your own.

I like using fitness analogies to prove my point because it's one of the few things you can point at in life when discussing work ethic to show "this is where you start, and this is where you end." People see it, they get it, it makes sense.

If you want to fix procrastination, divide your day up into 5-6 meals. Eat all meals, every day. If you do this, you too can achieve your end goal. If not, good luck getting shredded eating 2 haphazard meals a day. (Or becoming a lawyer, or a doctor, or launching your start-up, or etc. etc. etc.)

Q: In What Ways Do You Work Smarter Rather Than Harder?

My bosses say it all the time: "We don't want you to work hard, we want you to work smart." (I work at an ad agency and innovative Think Tank called Idea Booth)

I'm going to start big picture here and work backwards.

1. At the end of every year, reflect on what goals you accomplished, what goals you fell short on, and what goals you want to set for the next year.
2. At the end of every month, reflect on what goals you accomplished, what goals you fell short on, and what goals you want to set for the next month.
3. At the end of every week, reflect on what goals you accomplished, what goals you fell short on, and what goals you want to set for the next week.
4. Every night before bed, write down what you have to do tomorrow that will get you closer to your goals for the week.
5. Divide your day up based on your productivity patterns. For example, I know that between 1-3 pm I tend to have the most trouble focusing. Same with 5-7ish. So I choose to do my hardest tasks in the morning, late afternoon, and at night.
6. Remove distractions when you're doing your work, and do not try to multitask. If for 1 hour you're going to work on X, then only work on X. Nothing else, unless absolutely necessary.
7. Delegate what you can. There's no dignity in doing everything yourself. Use other people as resources.
8. Don't recreate the wheel. If you have already written copy for this somewhere else, reuse it. If you've already created a similar graphic for an old project, try to repurpose it instead of starting from scratch. These little decisions save big time.
9. Slow down to speed up. I'll use an egg analogy here. You save more time by carefully placing the egg in the garbage than throwing it from across the kitchen and hoping it'll go in—and if not, wasting five minutes wiping it off the floor.
10. Positive thoughts. Work gets done faster when you aren't fighting yourself in the process.

Q: What Should You Do Immediately When You Realize Your Life Has Hit The Supremely Best Moment To Make A Change?

In my case, my supremely best moment to make a change was rock bottom.

I was living on my friend's couch. I hadn't spoken to my family for about 3 months. The last time I saw them was right before they left for church, and while they were gone I loaded up my friend's Acura with all my music equipment and a hockey bag full of clothes, and we drove 6 and a 1/2 hours to the University of Missouri. I spent the entirety of that summer smoking weed and popping Adderall, waking up at 5 am to mulch the school grounds part-time, and spending the rest of the day making hip-hop and rap instrumentals in a run-down fraternity house hoping to "make it" as a music producer. We made a lot of great music that summer. I also lost myself entirely and reached a very low point of depression.

When school started back up, I obviously couldn't attend. I could barely scrounge together bus fare to make it on campus each morning and perform my part-time duties. One of my friends said he had gotten hold of some DMT and asked if I wanted to smoke it. I was hesitant about delving into other drugs, but alas I gave in. We went and sat atop a cliff off campus, and I packed a bowl of weed with the DMT powder sprinkled on top. Within seconds it kicked in, and for 15 minutes I vanished from this reality and saw this world as a spiral of oneness, connected energy, and paths. In front of me, I was shown two:

Both paths would lead me to my final destination. Except one would be filled with inner turmoil and distress, frustration, anger, resentment, and a broken relationship with my family that would never be repaired. The other, a path of equal hardship but with lessons of forgiveness, love, compassion, understanding, and most of all, self-awareness.

It was as though, for the first time ever, I was able to step back far enough to see the entirety of life's journey—and more important, how my choices would ultimately define my path.

When I came back down, I slept for the rest of the day (my bed being my friend's couch). And when I woke up the next, I knew in my heart which path I wanted to walk.

I called my mom and dad immediately, apologized, and returned home less than a week later.

To answer your question: I am not saying you need to go smoke DMT. It's an experience that, in all honesty, I originally chose out of desperation to escape further from my reality, and only by chance gave me the glimpse that it did. What is important here is the moment at which I realized I needed to DRASTICALLY shift my life path, otherwise I would wind up walking towards an end I did not actually

desire.

As soon as you see that same opportunity present itself, you have to take it. You have to take it because now you know—you are aware—that you have a choice. And once you have that awareness, it won't stop nagging you. Every day you will be reminded that you have a choice of where you end up, and which path you decide to choose.

I wish there was a better answer I could give you, but the truth is, you just have to DO IT. If you have to leap, you leap. In my case, I knew that as soon as I made the leap and went home, I would be faced with a long and arduous path of repairing the relationships I had damaged. For the first few months I was home, I lived in the basement, didn't speak to anyone in my family, was kept there like a caged animal without freedom. I was sent to two different therapists, twice a week. I was taken to a doctor for medical testing to decide whether or not I had something chemically wrong with me. Around the 6 month mark, I was sent to Florida on a rehabilitation trip (by now I'd been long sober) to canoe 320 miles down into the Gulf of Mexico. When I returned, I was "allowed" to return to school—financed by my trusting parents. The first day I was back on campus, I got high. The second day, I got high. The third day, I realized I was headed down the same path, and at the end of the semester transferred schools to an art school in Chicago to start over. I've been sober since.

Just remember: The leap is only the beginning.

Q: What Are The Most Difficult And Useful Things People Have To Learn In Their 20s?

Here's a [growing] list of things I've learned so far in my 20's:

1. Nobody Knows

If you don't speak up, nobody will hear you. If you don't introduce yourself, no one will know you. There are no more "class introduction" days. There are no more teachers to call on you even when you're shy. The real world is a scrappy place, and it's on you to make yourself known.

2. Time

Your time is your most valuable commodity. Everyone will try to take it from you. Bosses will ask you to stay late. Friends will ask you to come out. Parents will tell you to call more. Siblings will want to Skype. Significant Others will want you to spend a little more time. Time is all you have, and your time is going to go fast. So spend your time wisely—even if that means getting greedy with it.

3. Get To Grinding

It's 2015. We have the Internet and it has matured vastly since the 90s. If you're tired of your job, quit. If you want to start your own company, do it. If you want to connect with someone across the world, you can. If you have a dream, pursue it. There are no more excuses. Every tool you need is right here. Get to grinding.

4. Stop Trying To Figure It Out

The 20s syndrome is everywhere. Most 20-29 year olds (and many even after that) spend all their time worrying or wondering who they're going to be. Who they should be. Who they're going to become. Meanwhile, they miss moment after moment to practice skills and learn what they need to learn in order to become that "future self" right now, today.

5. Chores

Nobody is going to wash your dishes. Nobody is going to clean your apartment. If you don't pick that piece of pepperoni up off the floor, nobody else will, and it'll sit there for as long as it takes you to do the deed.

6. Make Good Choices

It sounds cliché, but the people who become "successful" in their 30s are the ones who made good choices in their 20s (usually). For some it takes longer to figure out than others, but at some point you're going to have to call it quits on the Thirsty

Thursdays, you probably shouldn't binge-watch Netflix for 72 hours in a row (unless dying of sickness), and you should work to surround yourself with people who inspire and motivate you, instead of those who have settled and stopped improving. This is the hardest part for most people—knowing when to let go and move forward.

7. Develop Your Talents

This gets taken so much for granted, but it's far easier to learn something in your 20s (especially when you're motivated by your lack of funds), than when you're moderately comfortable and in your 30s, 40s, or 50s. Spend your time learning and harnessing your skill-sets.

8. Learn To Manage Your Money

This is something nobody teaches you in school, and it's sort of on you to figure out. (Personally, I've reached out to family friends who I knew were investors/traders and asked them to kindly explain to me the basics—which they did, willingly.) This means opening up an IRA and socking away 10% of every paycheck. This means paying your taxes. This means withholding the urge to spend money frivolously so that you can save for more important things. Learn the skill of saving and money management now, because it's only going to get tougher. As my dad says, "Expenses rise to meet income."

9. Build Your Network

Now is the time to build your network. Everyone your age is struggling just like you. They're all broke, like you (even if they appear not to be). Find the ones who are passionate about what they do and connect with them. These are the people who will be successful 10 years from now, and just like how you would invest in an early start-up or a stock, invest in your relationships to keep doors open in the future. Remember, your network is your net worth.

10. Enjoy

I'll speak for myself here in that some days I feel like I'm moving so fast that I can't see what's going on around me. I'm so focused on where I want to go that I start to tunnel-vision, and I forget that my 20s are also meant to be enjoyed. These are the young years. We're full of energy. We have big dreams and see no reason why they can't become our reality. To my fellow peers, remember to take time to enjoy yourself and bask in the fact that you are still very much a child in the world. Stop saying you're getting old. Stop thinking you're "all grown up." You're not. You just got out of tutorial mode (school) and you JUST started playing the game of life. You have the rest of your life to "be an adult." There's no rush.

Q: What Does A Video Game Teach You?

When I was seventeen years old, I became one of the highest ranked World of Warcraft players in North America. Below are some of the most powerful lessons I learned on my quest for Internet fame and success:

1. PEOPLE DISCREDIT WHAT THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND

I grew up in a very successful family. My dad is a renowned spine surgeon whose work is studied all over the world, and my mom is a well-respected performer and voice teacher at a college. Our suburb is one of the top 100 wealthiest suburbs in the nation. As an adolescent I was given every privilege known to mankind. The best schools, any summer camp I wanted, the best music teachers, sports teams, etc. No expense was to be spared for my future success.

But I wanted to play video games. I don't mean "I just want to sit in front of my computer and do nothing with my life." I was hungry and competitive. After I fractured my spine playing hockey at 14, I sat up in my room wearing a velcro back brace and spent the 6 months it took for me to heal playing World of Warcraft. But by the time my back pain had gone away, I didn't want to go back to playing hockey. I wanted to become a pro gamer.

For the four years I played WoW in high school, my family, friends, peers, teachers, everyone looked down upon what I was trying to do. They said you couldn't build a future on gaming or blogging. They said, "There aren't any jobs where you just sit in front of the computer all day, Cole." (I think here is where we laugh at that assumption—Twitch bought by Amazon for a billion, YouTubers making six figure salaries, etc.)

My parents constantly told me, "Do what you love, Cole. Do what you love." So I said I wanted to play video games because I loved video games. They told me to "pick something more legitimate."

That taught me at a very young age that people say they want you to do what you love, they say they support you, but really what they're saying is, "Do what we love too."

2. THE CARROT OF SUCCESS IS ELUSIVE

I will never forget the day I reached the pinnacle of my success. I logged online after school to find that my team had been awarded the title of Gladiator for the season—the most esteemed title you could have in the game. I was now considered a celebrity. I had the title to prove my mastery. I was awarded an epic flying dragon to ride around in the game. I had reached the very top.

30 seconds later, I logged off and didn't play for the rest of the day.

I had nothing left to accomplish, and had traded all of my friends in the process for better servers, better teams, better competition, just to reach this point.

And here I thought that becoming a Gladiator would be the greatest feeling ever! But it wasn't. It was actually quite sad. Because the real joy had been in the 3 years it had taken for me to get there. All the friends I had made along the way. All the late nights I had poured into mastering the game.

I looked around my wealthy suburb and realized that I was surrounded by real life Gladiators—men and women who had "beaten the game of life," but traded a lot in the process. These were men with seven figure bank accounts and no relationships with their children, wives with shimmering rings on their fingers and Martini addictions. I didn't want to end up like them.

Becoming a Gladiator taught me that the joy is not in the end, but in the journey.

3. I CAN TYPE FASTER THAN YOU

If there is one simple skill gaming taught me that has taken me farther than anything else, it's typing. Everything we do now is on a computer. I watch people finger their way through sentences, meanwhile I'm 3 paragraphs deep.

I can easily type 120 words per minute. Thanks, World of Warcraft.

4. YOU CAN LEARN SOMETHING FROM EVERYONE

Over the course of my gaming career, I've played alongside and against kids, adults, moms, dads, lawyers, fraternity presidents, computer programmers, cancer patients, army veterans, American soldiers, racist rednecks, catholic purists, life-long bachelors, hopeful widows, and adolescents that all too perfectly reminded me of myself.

As a teenager, this was very opposite my town and my school where the only choices of friends were a few different peer groups: jocks, nerds, popular kids, unpopular kids, skaters, druggies, and Asian exchange students. While my peers were busy listening to what James, the football star, said every day in math class, I was talking to a guy in Hawaii through my headset and he was telling me he had moved there with his wife a few years ago, that she suffered from post-partem depression, and one day he came home and found her and their newborn baby girl dead on the floor of his living room, bathing in their own blood. She had killed herself and taken their child with her. (True story, he provided me news clippings.)

I was exposed to SO MUCH MORE online than my current surroundings provided. During raids, I had stockbrokers talking wall street in my ear; gamer moms making jokes about parenting, their kid screaming in the background; 27 year

olds that had been working in a cubicle for 5 years, warning the rest of us of corporate life.

World of Warcraft taught me that when you put everyone on an even playing field (like say, an online game), we are all equal—and you can learn something from everyone.

5. YOU LEARN BY HAVING FUN

I was a terrible student. Really. Straight C's. B's sometimes. I couldn't even get an A in English, and I loved writing! School, for me, just didn't make sense. I felt like I was being tested on my ability to memorize, not my ability to understand and then make my own.

World of Warcraft taught me the opposite. It taught me the basics, and then encouraged my innovation. I could mix different gear sets and combine different stats to lean my character more towards survivability, or more towards pure damage. It taught me that the best players were the ones that came up with new play styles different from the rest. It taught me that it is ASTOUNDING how much you can learn and understand when what you're learning has applicable value and you find it enjoyable.

Now, I am an Associate Creative Director at an ad agency in Chicago called Idea Booth. And I am so, so glad that I never let formal education rob me of my curiosity and imagination.

6. THE ONLY THING HOLDING YOU BACK IS YOU

This is a bit existential, so bear with me.

When you play a video game, you control your character. If you want your character to cast a fireball, you hit the Fireball key on your keyboard and your character begins casting a fireball. Right?

Ok, now think about how your soul, your heart, your consciousness is the player behind the keyboard, and your body is the character.

If your deepest desire wants you to go apply for that new position, go talk to that girl, go take a chance and leap off the edge of the cliff, and you're mashing that button as hard as you can but you're not moving, what does that tell you?

You are not connected to yourself. You are ignoring yourself. You are not listening to yourself.

This is the single most important lesson gaming taught me:

You are in control of your own reality.

If you want to cast a fireball, you hit the fireball button and your character just does it—no questions asked. If you want to go talk to that girl, you hit the "go talk to her" button and you just do it, no questions asked.

The difference between people who live the life they've always dreamed and the people who don't is this, right here. You have to listen to yourself. You have to trust yourself. The body is the character. Your consciousness is the hand that controls the keyboard.

I've learned infinite lessons from gaming, but the above are my favorites.

Q: How Do I Regain My Fitness Motivation?

Let me tell you a story, and at the end you will understand why I am telling you this.

When I was a teenager, I was extremely sick—I didn't know I had Celiac Disease until I turned 18. Every single day, I was in the bathroom with a stomachache, all because I was eating bread. I looked like a skeleton.

When I found out the cause of my sickness, I felt like overnight I was introduced to a new life. A "fresh start."

Of course, this was daunting. I had, quite literally, spent the first 18 years of my life believing that I would never be healthy, that I would forever have to deal with sudden gut-wrenching stomachaches, that I would forever be depressed and lonely, that nobody would ever want to marry me, let alone date me, and that whatever I achieved in life would have to be achieved from the bathroom.

When my life "restarted," I had no idea how to handle the newfound responsibility that came with the realization that I **COULD** become healthy, that I **COULD** live a normal life, that I **COULD** make friends, that I **COULD** have a girlfriend, that I **COULD** be happy.

At the same time, I was still recovering from a spinal fracture from hockey, and my dad (a spine surgeon, oddly enough) suggested that I start to strengthen the muscles in my back by going to the gym.

Gluten free diet + going to the gym = the foundation of the life of a bodybuilder.

Oh, it was a slow beginning. The above photo is deceiving. It's easy to look like you have more muscle than you do when you have extremely low body fat—one part, metabolism, another part, years of starving myself because I was afraid to eat and get sick.

Still, I kept at it. I had this image in my head that one day I would look like someone who deserved respect. Someone who resembled a "man." I wanted to be all the things nobody said I ever was or ever would be. And slowly but surely, as I began to put on size and keep my discipline in the gym, all these things began to manifest.

(Me at 21 years old)

When I transferred to Columbia College downtown Chicago, that's when I started to take my training a lot more seriously. And do you know what started to happen? People said I was "intimidating." Me! The skinny, shy, awkward kid who used to get made fun of for looking like a holocaust victim. Suddenly, I was intimidating! I didn't understand it.

Girls started paying attention to me. Teachers gave me more respect than they did other students. Guys asked me what my training routines were, invited me to parties, assumed I was just like them—a jock. In the gym, people would constantly ask me if I was training for a competition, if I was sponsored, what supplements I took, what my meal plan was like. I made friends with a few of the more serious lifters there, and eventually was brought into their "inner circle." Every night, we would all show up at 5pm—about twelve massive 200lb+ black guys and then me, the trying-to-be-big-one-day Caucasian. They would throw around 315, 405, 525 on the bar like it was nothing, and then I'd step up, put on 135, struggle, scream, and all 12 of them would stand around in a half moon screaming even louder GET IT UP COLE, GET IT UP. THIS IS HOW YOU GROW, FIGHT THAT SHIT. Every single person in that gym would stop and watch me struggle, struggle, struggle, until my set was over and I'd broken through another plateau.

130lbs...

140lbs...

150lbs...

160lbs...

My weight kept going up and up, and with it, the amount of attention I received. I started posting on Instagram. Photographers started reaching out. I walked into my science class senior year and noticed a pretty brunette sitting behind me. Still that scared adolescent inside, I decided to take a chance and strike up a conversation with her. 2 weeks later and we were dating—a girl I would quickly discover to be a runway model studying here from Costa Rica. Soon as the guys from the gym found out about that, I crowned "The Aesthetic King" of Xsport Fitness on State & 8th. I'd gone from nobody to somebody. I had the girl. I was about to graduate. At the ripe age of 22, I had achieved what I had set out to achieve.

(Me at 22 years old)

So why am I telling you all of this?

Just like you, I struggle from time to time with my own gym motivation. There isn't a lifter on this planet who goes to the gym every single day gung-ho to be there. I have become fairly connected now to the fitness community here in Chicago and I have many friends who are professional bodybuilders/fitness models/trainers, etc. And if you ask any of them how they're doing at the gym, 9/10 times they will answer with a sigh and say, "Shit man, just another day." They love it, that's why they do it, but that doesn't mean it's not exhausting, repetitive, and even sometimes boring.

What's important to remember is why you started.

If I look back at my life 8 years ago, I was a completely different. 100%. I have changed in so many more ways than just my body. However if I look at the things that have remained a constant in those 8 years, the gym is one of the few variables

that I can say "yes, I did this, and this contributed to my growth." Sure, other things played a part—as my confidence increased, so did my luck with girls; as I became more mature, more people were willing to teach me, etc. But the gym, in a sense, is what walked me through that process. It taught me a lot of those things, intentionally or not.

When you struggle with motivation, I encourage you to imagine your life without the gym. For a second, take it away. Pretend you never went back to the gym again in your life. Who then are you? What does your day to day look like? And is that someone you're proud of—if so, why; and if not, why?

I can tell you that as exhausting as the 2 hours of lifting every day can be, and the meal prep, and the never-ending cycle of meals, I go because to NOT go would take me away from a community of people that have become some of my closest friends. The gym has introduced me to so many great people—and it's also a valued door of connection to people outside that group of "serious lifters" but are just everyday people who want to get healthy. We're all human beings, we all want to live longer and be at the top of our game, and staying fit and healthy is part of that process.

You can either be the person who says "I go to the gym every day and sure, I'd love to catch a lift sometime." Or you can be the person who says, "Ugh, I haven't been to the gym in forever. I really need to get back into it."

When you imagine those two choices, it becomes pretty easy to get yourself back in there and put in the work you need to do.

And P.S - If you're struggling to hit your own goals, find a friend. I enjoy lifting by myself, I'm great lifting by myself, but I still train with other people because it forces me to keep improving. And if you say you don't know anyone, guess what: Your gym is full of potential lifting buddies. Go introduce yourself. You're all there for the same reason.

Q: How Do You Eat For Nutrition Instead Of Just For Pleasure?

I have a unique story.

For the first 18 years of my life, I didn't know I was allergic to bread. Every day, I would wake up, run to the bathroom, and sit in there for about 45 minutes. My mom would eventually come knocking, "Cole, come on, you're going to be late for school!"

"Mom, I don't feel well!"

"Cole, you've missed too much school already this week, you have to try."

"Mom, I can't."

"Yes you can. I'll meet you downstairs in ten minutes."

I would go the entire school day without eating (afraid of getting a stomachache), then go to hockey practice, and then come home and eat a massive dinner (usually wheat). Halfway through dinner I'd have to sprint to the bathroom, which is where I would stay for another hour, pledging to never eat another thing ever again.

And then I'd wake up the next day and go through the same routine.

7 years later and I'm much different. As soon as I figured out what my food allergy was, my entire life changed overnight. I was finally able to survive like a normal human being. I was able to lift weights and put on some size. I was able to go out with friends. I wasn't depressed. I wasn't sick. Finally, I felt good.

When people ask me what my diet is like today, I tell them:

- Rice, potatoes
- Vegetables
- Meats and fish
- Fruits
- Nuts

I get asked all the time how I can do that. I get asked how I can go without pizza, ice cream, donuts, sandwiches. I get told that I'M LUCKY! I AM SO LUCKY! I'm lucky because the hard choice of denying unhealthy food is made for me.

Trust me, if I could trade my Celiac, I would. HOWEVER....

It has taught me to eat for nutrition instead of pleasure, because I've learned (the hard way) that food can be as damaging as it can be nourishing. At first, it was difficult, but over time I started to care more about how I felt after the meal, rather than how I felt while eating the meal. The pleasure while eating only lasts a

few minutes. The feeling after the meal can last hours. Once you start eating healthy, you realize that food is your fuel, and when you feel better you can do more.

Healthy eating is really only the beginning. It is the slow awakening that everything you "consume" can have an affect on you—and this includes the media you ingest, the music you listen to, the books you read, the people you surround yourself with. And it's then that you see all these things you "take in" are "foods" for yourself, and the more you ingest the "good stuff," the more you will grow, the longer you'll live, the better you'll feel.

Pleasure is temporary.

Q: What Are The Top 10 Good Habits That I Should Follow Daily To Have A Beautiful Life?

These 10 habits have helped me transform my life from that of frustration, anxiety, anger, and helplessness, to one of empowerment, ambition, purpose, and joy.

1. Wake Up When You Say You're Going To Wake Up

Aside from the occasional "I'm going to sleep in until 11am on a Saturday because I'm visiting my parents house and I'm sleeping in my old bed and I haven't done this in forever," it behooves you to wake up early. But more importantly, to wake up when you say you're going to wake up. That means if you set the alarm for 6:30am, you get out of bed at 6:30am. Why? Because this is your first promise to yourself of the day. The night before, you set that alarm at that time because you were making a promise to yourself to get up at that time. Starting your day with a broken promise is the same as getting out of bed on the wrong foot. Keep your promise. Wake up.

2. Have A Clean Morning Routine (And Dress The Part)

There are very few things in life that can start your day off as well as a morning routine that has built in triggers to get your head in the game. Shower. Brush your teeth. Do your hair. Etc. But more importantly, choose clothes that force you to rise to the occasion. It's hard to feel lazy in a suit. Now, I'm not saying wear a suit, but even wearing some jeans with a pair of nice brown dress shoes and a light blue button down is going to make you feel like you're ready to tackle the day. T-shirt and sweats feels more like "I'm going to stay home, binge on Netflix, and eat potato chips in bed." Your morning routine should be more than just the things you have to do to be a functioning human being. It should get you mentally ready for what you have to do that day—whatever that is.

3. A Moment Of Mindfulness

In addition to the above, meditate. This is best done in the morning but after the shower (so you're slightly more awake). Take 5 or 10 minutes and just sit in silence. Listen to where you are. This helps you understand if you're starting your day in a good place, or if you've woken up frustrated, or if something is stressing you out, or if there's something you're really excited about—and from there, you will better understand how you can best approach the day to work with yourself as you currently are. This is so important.

4. Regular Meals

I am a bodybuilder so this rings a bit more true to me personally, but I think there is something to be said about having regular meal times with meals that are prepared and ready to go. This helps you ensure that something as important as remembering to eat doesn't get skipped over or replaced with more work

throughout the day. If you plan ahead, this also helps you stay healthy. Eating is already habit, so the more you can prepare for that habit with healthy, pre-cooked choices, the more effective you will be at maintaining your health even with a busy schedule.

5. The Little Moments

We all have 5 minutes here, 10 minutes there. However with technology we have become accustomed to filling those little time periods with social media on our phones, watching videos on YouTube, etc. Take all those mindless apps and put them in a folder on your phone called "Wasting My Life Away." On the front page, replace the spaces with productive apps—for me: Duolingo (to learn a foreign language), CNNmoney, iBooks, etc. Make those little moments count with the habit of learning, instead of just consuming.

6. Free Time Means FREE TIME!

This habit is for the workaholics and entrepreneurs out there like myself who forget that "free time" doesn't mean "freely working on more new projects." Free time literally means free time. Time spent on nothing. Go for a walk in the park. Go meet an old friend for coffee. Go sit around and play Cards Against Humanity with a bunch of friends. Go call your Grandma. Go watch an entire movie without getting up halfway through because you feel like you're being unproductive. Go lie in the grass and look at the sky for an hour. This free time as a scheduled habit will reset your brain and help you return to the work later with revitalized enthusiasm.

7. Manage Your Money

A lot of stress and anxiety stems from finances. However, it's not usually the mere existence of money and finances that causes the stress, but rather the misunderstanding of how to effectively manage it. Take the time to learn the basics about taxes, stocks, investing, saving, etc. And once every week, two weeks, or month, go through your finances and look at where your money went. Learn to work with money so that you can master money. Unless you have plans of moving into the middle of the wilderness and joining a far-out civilization that barter with fruits, nuts, and wild game, money is going to be part of your life forever. Make it a habit to learn how to use it to your advantage, instead of being defeated by it.

8. Meet Someone New

I'm fortunate that I've learned this through my job, but meeting new people fuels so much inspiration that it is as worthwhile of a habit as anything else. Does someone have a blog you read regularly? Shoot them an email. Is there a local business owner you'd like to learn from? See if they'd be up to meet you for coffee. The more people you reach out to and meet, the more valuable you will become because of your network, but also the more inspired you will be to continue your own

development. It will also help put things in perspective whenever you are down and feeling like you're not getting anywhere. You'll meet someone new and realize that you aren't alone and you are getting somewhere, it just takes time.

9. Indulge and Explore

Part of life is pleasure. No matter how important discipline is, there comes a tipping point when discipline is no longer productive and you start to become too rigid to find your flow. You are not a monk. Go outside your comfort zone and indulge a little, and with that, explore someone or something new. Ask someone out. Go to a coffee shop on the outskirts of the city. Check out that new museum exhibit you've been seeing ads for. Eat so much cheesecake that you fall asleep at the restaurant table. Sit by the lake with your feet dangling off the pier, skimming in the water. These little moments are so easy to ignore, especially if you are a goal driven person. But they are the moments you remember the most, and they fuel the emotion inside you to be happier, to live deeply, and to create something of true, emotional value with your life.

10. Journal Before Bed

This has been a habit of mine ever since I was a little kid, and I believe it is the reason why I love writing so much. Every night before bed, I take a moment to write in my journal. Sometimes I write about what I learned that day. Sometimes I write about what I hope to do the next day. Sometimes I write poems, sometimes I write songs, sometimes I write down all the things that are bothering me and then I write out how I can change them. But no matter what, I write something. And I write from the heart. It helps me remember that life is just a story, we are the main character, and if I want tomorrow to be different then I simply have to write that into our script.

Bonus 11. Sleep

This should go without saying but sleep is an important habit. It's ok to have those 4 hour nights every once in a while—usually it's a girl or an MMORPG release to blame. But in general, getting 7ish hours of sleep a night will do you good.

Q: Should We Ban World of Warcraft Since So Many Teenagers Were Addicted To It And Had Their Lives Ruined?

Let me tell you a story:

When I was 14 years old, I fractured my spine playing hockey. It wasn't bad enough for surgery, but it was a fracture nonetheless that required me to take a year off the sport, wear an itchy Velcro back brace to school, and when the pain got really bad, I was given Vicodin.

I had nothing to do for about 6 months except sit around. At the end of 8th grade, me and my closest friends (about 7 of us) had had a falling out. I hadn't made any new friends yet. I started high school a loner, and with this injury happening near the beginning of the school year, I was pretty much stuck in my bedroom with nothing to do.

I started playing World of Warcraft.

In addition to this, it wasn't until I turned 18 that I found out that I have Celiac Disease. So every single day, I would wake up, run to the bathroom, stay there for about 45 minutes, come out, try to eat breakfast (wheat), feel sick again, run back to the bathroom, my mom would come by, "Cole, we have to leave for school!" / "Mom, I don't feel well!" She would urge me to come out, I would yell no. Some days, I made it to school. Most days, I didn't. I was constantly behind on my work. I was always the kid who had to take the make-up test. I felt sick all the time. I weighed less than 100 pounds all the way until I was a senior in high school, and even then I capped out around 105. I saw doctors monthly. I had every exam under the sun done—"He probably just has Irritable Bowel Syndrome." Research shows that Celiac Disease left untreated also ignites feelings of depression. I wandered around my school most days wishing I were someone else, often times wondering if I should just save myself the trouble and end it all.

And then I'd log online to play World of Warcraft and one of my gamer friends would say, "Cole stop being an emo pussy bitch, realize that high school sucks for everyone, sack the fuck up, hit Level 60, and let's go pwn some Alliance players. Life isn't that bad."

My relationship with my parents and family throughout high school was extremely strained. They often attributed it to my playing World of Warcraft. Since no doctor could figure out why I was so sick all the time, they assumed that my behavior was entirely the result of this video game—not, in fact, the chemical issues that were the result of my eating an "All American diet" that was subsequently making me very, very sick. They blamed everything on the game. Poor attitude? World of Warcraft. Bad grades? World of Warcraft. Not doing exactly as I'm told? World of Warcraft. My parents insisted that this video game was nothing but a distraction and poor use of my time. They refused to acknowledge my dreams of becoming a game developer

or a professional gamer. They said it would never turn into anything of value.

When I was 17 years old, I became one of the highest ranked World of Warcraft players in North America. I had the most-read Mage strategy and entertainment blog on the Internet with ~10,000 daily readers. I was a freelance writer for a World of Warcraft walkthrough guide website making \$50/article. I was in talks with the owner of the blogging site I used called GameRiot about becoming a salaried writer (before they went bankrupt, RIP) since I was responsible for so much of their traffic. My guild leader offered to sponsor my team and me so that we could go compete on the big stage in 3v3 arenas. All the kids you see today making money as video game entertainers, vloggers, live streamers, etc., that was me in 2007 when nobody believed that one day this would become a huge thing, and a way to make money doing what you loved. I was an entrepreneur.

My parents didn't agree, and made me get a job working at the local ice cream store Coldstone for minimum wage. I made 3x more writing about World of Warcraft as I did scooping ice cream.

To say that World of Warcraft has destroyed so many kids lives is a faulty statement. I met a lot of people playing that game, and I can tell you first-hand that their reasons for playing far outweighed whatever the game was doing to their lives. My guild leader Sik played all day because his parents were Orthodox Christians and wouldn't let him play on the school's football team. My friend Neophyte played because his parents had abandoned him as a kid and he lived in a foster home, and had a lot of trouble making friends. My friend Teeku played because he was an outcast at school and didn't know where he fit in. My friend Cachexic played because he had social anxiety and felt more comfortable socializing with people online (Cachexic was my mentor and one of the most talented players to ever play the game.) My friend Ez played because, although he was the captain of his hockey team and extremely popular, he found greater satisfaction in making friends online and working towards the same goal (his guild was the first guild on Wildhammer to clear the dungeon Blackwing Lair). My friend Maull came back to the game when he got injured during basic training for the army. My friend Relt played because he was dealing with cancer and going through chemotherapy. My friend Swampcamp played because he had a family, worked all day as a programmer, and wanted something of his own to play before bed every night. My friend Zeal played because he'd moved to Hawaii with his wife and newborn baby daughter, and one day came home and found them both dead on the floor of his living room—the wife had taken both lives out of postpartum depression. Zeal said he'd rather fight for something online than join the rest of the bums at the local bar and drink himself to death.

That said, yes, many of us took the game way too far, but if you look at our society, that's how we treat everything. We want our violinists in the practice room for 8 hours a day. We want our athletes training non-stop. We want our students studying as much as possible. We want all A's, top scores, bigger, faster, stronger. We want everyone to be the best—and then at the same time, when someone close to us

actually tries to walk that path, we get upset. We tell them they're addicted, they're obsessed. We tell them they need to find "balance." We tell them not to kill themselves for it.

I treated the World of Warcraft the same way my parents asked that I treat my studies, classical piano, hockey. And what happened? I became one of the best. But since it was in a video game and not a more socially-acceptable medium, nobody cared.

To say that World of Warcraft ruins lives is to, quite honestly, not know anything about the game or the community. This game is the reason I made it through high school. This game brought millions of kids out of their shells (for better or worse). This game introduced me to people I'd never have met in my white, wealthy, suburban bubble.

This game expanded my view of the world, and made me realize that I wasn't alone.

Q: How Should A 24 Year Old Invest Time?

I see myself as an investment fund. The more I put in, the more I can potentially accrue. I define my "worth" by how much I grow, similar to how a stock can increase or decrease over time.

At 24 years old, you are a hot stock. You are the speculative start-up that everyone is betting on will one day make millions—maybe billions—of dollars. You are young, you aren't quite profitable yet, but you have a promising future. And just like a hot new stock in a ripe market, the more you invest in yourself, the larger the pay off will be in the end.

Not every 24 year old however is a hot stock. We all have the potential to be, but based on the market we've chosen, based on who we surround ourselves with, based on how we spend our time ultimately defines how much others choose to invest in us as well. The more you invest in yourself, the more your value will increase. But too, the more others see you invest in yourself, the more they will want to invest as well. This creates a multiplication effect, and helps your growth exponentially.

So what's the difference between a 24-year-old hot stock and a 24-year-old ball-buster?

How you spend your time.

As a 24 year old determined to increase my value, here is how I spend my time:

1. Every morning, I eat a healthy breakfast and prep my meals for the day—which I carry in Tupperware with me to work.
2. On the train to work, I read. My commute is about 45 minutes so I crank through books by putting this time to good use.
3. Every day when working, I keep a detailed list of things I need To Do. I even put down little things like "Don't forget to wish Emily happy birthday" just so that I make sure I stay on top of every aspect of my life. (Balance is key)
4. After work, no matter how tired I am, I grab a second cup of coffee (or chug some preworkout) and hit the gym for about 2 hours. At my gym, I make a concerted effort to meet and know every person there. I've made quite a few business contacts this way. I've been nicknamed "The Mayor."
5. After my workout, I answer any texts or emails I've ignored over the past few hours and make myself dinner. Once dinner is ready, I turn off my phone and Internet and begin to prepare myself for a night of writing.
6. From 10pm to 12pm, I write. This is when I work on my book, music, any big

project, forcing myself to make time to continue practicing my craft(s).

7. Just before bed, I take 5-10 minutes to write a page in my journal and then meditate.

8. On the weekends, I allow myself to sleep in for an extra hour or so to catch up from the week. I hit the gym in the afternoon and the grocery store after, then do my meal prep for the week.

9. Friday/Saturday night is when I typically "go out." (I usually pick one or the other). When I go out, I don't drink. I don't smoke. I still go to bars with my friends, events, have no problem talking to women, but when asked to take shots, I decline. I have to explain myself, of course, but I know that the next morning I'm going to want to be up early. I don't have time for a hangover.

10. I introduce myself to everyone. If I'm out with people and there's someone I don't know, I strike up a conversation. You never know who you're going to meet.

11. In my "free time," I invest in new skills. I teach myself things that will compliment my primary crafts, like photography or design, or digital marketing. I read relentlessly, usually a book every 2 weeks or so.

12. I don't watch TV.

13. I offer to do free work constantly. If I meet someone whom I feel would be a good person to know, I'll offer to help them out in any way I can, pro bono. Usually, they never ask for much, but when they do, I make sure to nail it out of the park. (I've gotten a lot of business this way.)

14. I've turned myself into an influencer. I know how much value social media has, and there's no easier way to prove value than to flash a number. I spend 15 minutes a day working on an Instagram post, and over the past 2 years have accumulated almost 20k followers @NicolasCole77. I've had a lot of business meetings take an interesting turn as soon as I drop that number into the conversation.

15. I am always on the lookout for what I'm bad at. If I lack a skill, I focus on it. As soon as I realize something is holding me back, I prioritize focusing on it and improving it.

16. My circle of friends (the people I spend the most time with) looks like this:

- Boss and mentor, emmy-nominated Creative Director and entrepreneur
- Friend, pursuing doctorate in psychology
- Friend, manager of several extremely successful music artists
- Gym friends, professional bodybuilders/trainers
- Mentor and friend, successful stock trader and real estate mogul

-Friend, pilot and entrepreneur

^ The above is very small, but these are the people I prioritize seeing. The theme between them is they are all looking to or have already done something great with their lives. And this aura about them influences me in a positive way.

17. I don't spend my money on liquor or tables at clubs so that I can appear to be "rich and cool." I save it and reinvest it—either in stocks or in myself and further knowledge.

And this is the hardest one....

18. I don't waste my time chasing females. If I'm interested in you, I'll test the waters, but I won't wait around at a bar until 5 in the morning hoping to take you home. And I won't spend time with you simply for the sake of sleeping with you. Oo much time is wasted playing that game.

It's not an easy road, but it's the most rewarding. And the more you invest in yourself, the more you will grow, the more your value will increase, and the more good things will come to you over and over again—including, ironically, women (for all the guys wincing at #18, don't worry).

Q: What Does It Feel Like To Go From Physically Unattractive To Attractive?

I suppose I'm fit to answer this question (no pun intended):

All growing up, I was extremely sick—undiagnosed with Celiac Disease.

At school, I think the worst insult I ever heard was, "Hey Cole, the holocaust called and they want one of their bodies back." That's how skinny I was.

I lacked any and all confidence, and had no peer group to call my own—my group of friends lived on the Internet in the World of Warcraft.

I didn't attend a single dance or high school event until my senior year prom, and I took a girl from another school—a girl who I tried very hard to keep from realizing that my social capital was next to nothing.

I think the above photo on the left sort of speaks for itself. I was not quite what many would deem "attractive."

Fast forward 7 years...

I now resemble society's definition of "attractive." Horrah. I finally did it.

The girls that never paid any attention to me suddenly started crawling out of the woodwork.

The guys who made fun of me started asking for my help, wanting to know how they could get bigger too, praising me and my achievements.

Teachers, family friends, work associates started placing value on my physique, many of them assuming life for me has always been this way—I grew up that star athlete who could get any girl he wanted.

And with all of that I began to realize just how few people knew the real me.

This transformation taught me a lot about society and who we are as humans. I think there is absolutely something to be said for presenting your best self—that's why we're told to dress well for job interviews, to "look the part." It makes sense why people would endear the fact that I have achieved something for myself physically.

The hard part (and this is more of an internal thing within myself) is coming to terms with the fact that a lot of the pain I felt growing up was the result of something as trivial as my body. It's sad that as a scrawny kid, playing World of Warcraft made me a nerd, but as a shredded bodybuilder, playing World of Warcraft makes me "sort of kinky/a hot nerd" (direct quote from females).

It's sad that we high-five and praise the football players and the athletes, but condemn the chess players or the artists.

It's sad that nobody recognized my intelligence until I gained something that had very little to do with my intelligence.

And it's sad how many people think that this is what defines me. They talk about my biceps as if they're detached from my body, someone else—an entity we can discuss objectively. I'm taunted to take my shirt off in public and entertain the crowd. They ask me why I'm out right now, shouldn't I be in the gym, aren't I obsessed, lololol. They ridicule my work ethic and at the same time ask for my help.

So I embraced it. And decided I wanted to do something positive with it.

I want to support the kid who wants to become a professional gamer or an artist or a chess player. I want to help others improve their bodies so that people will take them seriously. I want to do something positive with the knowledge I've gained, instead of parroting the same script society tells us is the end goal: "get shredded, fuck bitches."

As Nas said: "By the time you can afford it / the car ain't important."

By the time you've changed into the person you want to become, you'll realize that it's no longer for other people's benefit.

I can't knock the rewards I've gained with such a drastic transformation, but I also want it to be known that I think it's absurd what we truly value in life. But if it takes being 170lbs and "shredded" for people to hear what you have to say, then I would like to be that voice for all the outcasts and misfits out there, quiet and shy, made fun of for who they are.

Instead of putting them down, I would like to give them a high-five.

Because I was one of them.

Q: What Are The Best Tips And Hacks For Speaking With Eloquence And Sophistication?

I've been very fortunate to have been given various opportunities at the young age of 25 to learn from some very successful businessmen, innovators, creatives, millionaires, and even a billionaire—yes, last year I met my first billionaire.

Here are 5 things I've learned when speaking, as you say, with eloquence and sophistication (while also remembering the goal of the conversation):

1. Know The Power Of Silence

Whenever you hear people speak, you hear music. Language is sound. And if you've ever heard a beautiful piano sonata or a violin concerto, a bad note in the middle of a stirring melody can really ruin the mood. The same goes for someone who says "uhhh, uhmmm" before and after every sentence. These are people who are, in some sense, afraid of there being silence in the conversation.

The people who speak with eloquence know the power of silence, and if forced to pause, use that silence to their advantage. Silence creates suspense, and can either be seen as "uncomfortable" or as an opportunity to make the next statement that much more poignant. There is power here, and the greatest speakers know how to use it to their advantage.

2. Eliminate uhm, uhh, etc. Replace with "Well; you see; now..."

Going off the above, people tend to stutter and fill silence when they are nervous, uncomfortable, don't know what they're talking about, etc. We all learned this in middle school. The fastest way to make your teacher believe you didn't do the work was to stand there with your hands in your pockets saying "Uhhh...."

Whether or not you actually are nervous or if you have no idea what you're talking about is besides the point. It's what your audience BELIEVES that matters, and these things can be easily concealed with words like "Well; you see; now...". Instead of saying "Uhm, I was thinking..." you say, "Well, I was thinking..." Very different sounding, yes? These little words, especially "Now" is a filler word that can help you extend silence if you need time to think. Take a moment to pause, say "Now..." pause again, and then move on with what you were going to say. That's 2 whole seconds you get to formulate your next thought.

3. Jargon Isn't Impressive

The best talkers leave the jargon at home. Want to know the difference between a new salesman and a seasoned salesman? The new salesman leaves you confused. The seasoned salesman makes you feel like you know more than you had originally thought!

Jargon is pointless. It's meant for people at your office, people you work with to get more done faster. It's not intended to be flashed around to make people feel impressed. It usually doesn't impress them. It just makes them confused and feel left out of what the conversation really should be about, which is how you can provide value. Think more poetry, less endless prose.

4. Eliminate Curses

The sophisticated don't use words like fuck, shit, ass, bitch, etc. They just don't—at least, not in a business setting. I myself have a sailor's mouth, but I also know there's a time and place for it. The fastest way to earning the trust and respect of those around you is to speak well, and that means eliminating the "gutter" words.

5. Be Descriptive and To The Point

Somewhat in line with jargon usage, get to the point and don't talk around it. There's no point. Nobody wants to sit through your stream of consciousness. Say what you mean to say in the least amount of words, and then when you get to the meat of what you're saying, describe it in such detail that the person you're talking to can envision it with perfect clarity.

Details are everything. They're what wet our senses and are ultimately what draw us in. It's the reason why some people are terrific storytellers and others put you to sleep. This is not to be confused with saying "a lot." It's not about length. It's about saying what you mean to say, and saying it well.

Q: How Do I Strike Up An Interesting Conversation With People Who Mean Business When I Have Nothing That Interests Them But They Have Something That Interests Me?

When I was in college, I worked as a Barista for Argo Tea on the ground floor of the Sears Tower (whatever, Willis Tower).

My shift was the 5 AM to 9 AM shift, before my 10 AM class. I'd get there around 4:45 AM, make myself a cup of coffee, and then wheel my little cart over to the elevators to go upstairs to do another tasting event. Upstairs was American Airlines.

In my wrinkled brown apron with my Argo TEAm brown shirt and raggy black hat (brown and black, horrible color scheme...), I rode up 30 stories to wheel myself to their offices. The janitor (the only person there at this hour) let me in, and I set up shop in the kitchen. I put out all my little plastic cups, setup the two jugs of coffee and flavored tea, and eventually the place started to populate with workers.

One of the ladies came by multiple times, for multiple refills of coffee. We got to talking. She asked where I went to school, what I honestly thought of the tea, etc. I, being horrifically bored and extremely overtired (while at the same time cracked out on my unlimited supply of coffee) asked her questions right back. How long have you been working for American Airlines? Do you like what you do? What's your favorite part about your job?

I did quite a few of these tastings, and every time I ended up having a great conversation with her. I walked away feeling like I'd learned something (and killed 20 minutes in the process) and she enjoyed having someone basically interview her with interest.

I later found out that she was fairly high up the food chain at American Airlines and made more money in a single day than most people do over the course of 10 years.

Did I have anything that interested her? Not really. I was a 19 year old college kid wearing a dinky Argo Tea uniform.

I did have coffee though.

If you want to learn from someone in a much higher place than you, all you really need are two things:

- 1) A true interest in who they are and what they do
- 2) Coffee

Q: What Are The Most Bizarre Reasons For Breaking Up A Relationship?

I'm not sure if this falls under the "bizarre" category but it certainly threw me for a loop.

When I was a senior in college I started dating this girl who sat behind me in science class. For the first few weeks of the semester she always showed up to class late, and in an attempt to get her attention I poked fun and assumed a variety of reasons as to why she simply couldn't show up on time. But when I asked her, "No really, why are you always late?" she would beat around the bush and refused to tell me.

Turns out, she was a model downtown Chicago running to class between castings and shoots, but she didn't want anyone to know.

To make a long story short, we started dating. I suppose you can say it made sense, right, the bodybuilder dating the 6ft beautiful brunette model. Whatever. The real reason we connected was the first night we hung out, she asked what I was studying and I told her creative writing. She ran over to her bookshelf and pulled down her favorite book, Shantaram, and we proceeded to read a chapter aloud together, trading off pages. I then, fearful I'll admit, told her I had just started working on my first book. Beside herself, so excited (she loved reading), she asked what it was about.

Sigh. Of course, the gorgeous girl who wants to fall in love with a writer, and I'm writing about...

"It's about my life as a teenager, growing up with Celiac Disease and basically living in the bathroom with nonstop diarrhea but at the same time playing World of Warcraft and eventually I got pretty good, one of the best actually, so yeah, I'm writing about that."

Her jaw dropped and her hands clasped the side of her cheeks and she said, "That sounds like an incredible story!"

I leaned in to kiss her. Our lips touched and every single sound on earth paused in that breath. She pulled away and asked, "Is this a date?"

"I don't know," I said. "I guess this is our first date."

"I don't know either," she said. "I'm not from here."

We fell in love.

I wish there was a better way to say it. She was quiet and humble and wore non-revealing clothes, and spent her Friday and Saturday nights reading alone in her apartment. She was studying abroad from Costa Rica and was fluent in Spanish and

English. She didn't drink, didn't smoke, ate vegetables, loved fresh fish, and we shared an affinity for hot tea. I was the gym rat and writer-in-hiding, spending my Friday and Saturday nights doing almost the exact same thing—working on my craft while eating my brown rice, broccoli, and chicken. Except while she read, I would write. That's what brought us together.

For nine months, we dated. She even started lifting at my gym just so we could spend more time together, since we both had extremely busy schedules. Together we would read books, sometimes my manuscript. She would laugh at the funny parts and go quiet at the sad parts. She would hug me tight when something happened suddenly, and she would shoot up and stare me down when something dramatic happened. She picked apart my work and she helped me make it better, and with her I shared everything.

She was my reader.

Within six months of our dating we started having "the talk." We connected in a way I'd never found before, and we both admitted that we had started wondering if we'd, you know, found "the one." We discussed moving in together the following year. I met her parents when they visited Chicago, and a few times she would join me for a train ride back to the suburbs to visit my family. Everything was moving in that direction. I'd never loved a girl like I loved her.

And then as school let out and I graduated from college, she returned to Costa Rica for the summer. I knew it was her home and I supported her seeing her family and community. After all, she was a beach girl. She came from a tiny town called Montezuma, and she told me often what it meant to her. I told her she could stay for the whole summer if she wanted—as long as it made her happy.

"What if you come with me?" she said.

"Are you sure?" I said, half of me wanting so badly to see her country, the other half of me apprehensive of what that would entail.

"I want you to see where I'm from," she said.

I told her I couldn't afford it. I'd just started my new job. Plane tickets were expensive. A week later she handed me my ticket. She had bought one for me.

As I set out to join her in her country that summer for 10 days, I thought back on my life and the road less traveled I'd taken to get to where I was. How I had grown up very sick and an outcast, girls hardly even knowing I existed. How I had fallen into bad situations, drug abuse, rehab. How I had somehow pulled myself out and rebuilt myself in Chicago. How I had floated through a series of majors before finding my love for writing again. How I had found bodybuilding and a group of friends through the gym. And how, after all that, I had ended up with a girl more beautiful than I could put into words, not just on the outside, but one who loved the most honest part of me—the writer.

When I landed in Costa Rica, I expected this to be the beginning of my next chapter. I even considered leaving everything behind, packing my bags and moving to her foreign land with her. I would live a humble life and write—I thought that would be enough. And with her, I would be happy.

But when she met me at the airport, we looked at each other in this way like we'd never known the other person. It was like for the first time, she saw me as a foreigner. In the car on the way to the ferry, we didn't speak much. When we got on the ferry to cross over to Montezuma, she was joined by guys from her community—shirtless, grungy, poor English. In Spanish, they mocked me to my face. The only word I recognized was "gringo." In silence, she sat, and didn't say a word back.

The 10 days that unfolded thereafter were a slow and painful untwisting of our relationship. Where she came from was essentially a third world country. The houses on the side of the road were four walls and a hose. The "grocery store" was a local spot where people who grew vegetables would go and trade. There was 1 bar and every night she would go there and dance merengue. Every guy in town was her "older brother," and they all looked at me with murderous eyes. I stuck out like a sore thumb, and it was made very clear by everyone there that I did not belong. One of her closest "brothers," high on coke (the country is nicknamed Coca Rica for a reason) and drunk, disrupted our first dinner date by slamming his bottle down on the table and asking me to explain to him why I deserved to date his "sister." It didn't help my case that his best friend had been her previous boyfriend for 7 years.

Every morning I would wake hoping that things would return to normal, and every night I would go to bed beside her in silence, realizing that something had shifted and things would never be the same. I wasn't from there, I didn't know the language, I knew nothing of their way of life—I was a city boy who had spent his adolescence growing up playing video games; I attended art school; I was a bodybuilder, a computer nerd, and now, an entry-level employee at an advertising agency. And as each day passed, it became more and more clear that she had to make a choice. If she stood with me, her entire community would ridicule her for being with a "gringo." And if she didn't stand with me, then our relationship would vanish.

When we returned to the states, we tried to make it work. We lasted about two more months, and then began a slow 6 months of breaking apart. It has been 2 years and it still feels like yesterday.

I would classify this as "bizarre" because never in a million years would I have thought that such cultural differences would end what I considered to be one of the most intimate and special connections I've ever found in my life. We broke up, in a sense, over where I was from.

And I wasn't from there.

Q: Where Can I Find A Mentor Who Is Very Well Rounded, Intelligent, And Just Wants To Share His Knowledge And Offer New Insight?

In my life, I have been fortunate to study alongside some truly incredible mentors. Each one of them propelled me to success in said individual field. First, I'll outline my experiences, and then I'll explain what you can do to find a mentor for yourself.

Ages 5 - 18: Piano Mentor

My parents were fortunate to have gotten the name of a quiet man at the local church who taught piano lessons. He charged more than the going rate, but all my mom's friends insisted he was "the best." She brought me to my first lesson, and I remember him very patiently—although with a stern tone—walking me through chords and scales. I wanted nothing to do with them. I wanted to learn SONGS. He said, "Cole, you have to learn the basics first."

Needless to say, this set the stage for the rest of our relationship. He nicknamed me "the madman," never wanting to practice with a metronome, playing every piece at hyper-speed. He told me that if I didn't sit myself down and practice my assignments that he'd tell my parents to ducttape me to the piano bench. He became one of my closest friends and my mentor in my teenage years. I was, in many ways, the karate kid and he was the wise one, always telling me to slow down and take each thing as it came.

By the time I was 18, I was prepared to audition to be a classical piano major in college. He was the only mentor that I did not find myself, but instead was brought to me—like I said, by my parents. He was an incredible friend and taught me much about the art of music.

Ages 15-18: World of Warcraft Mentor

After a year or so of playing World of Warcraft recreationally (this was back in 2004-2005), I decided I wanted to make the leap and pursue competitive gaming. I had just fractured my spine playing hockey, was out of the sport with no real foreseeable future in a comeback, and so I poured all my time and energy into mastering the World of Warcraft.

There was a website (that's still around) called Warcraft Movies, where players would create videos of themselves playing the game and then post for others to watch. In the WoW community, these so-called "PvP Videos" were notorious for being a representation of the player, and launched many players to gaming stardom—some videos accumulating over a million views.

There was one player whose videos I loved. His name was Cachexic. He played the same class as me (a Mage) and the way he approached the game was an art. I wanted to play just like him.

I made a level 1 character on his server and asked him if he'd teach me. At the time, you couldn't transfer your character between servers, so in order for me to actually play with him, I needed to level a character on his server. He said sure, half-joking and assuming I would never actually level ANOTHER character to 60 (months of work) just to play with him. I did.

4 months later, I messaged him again at Level 60 and asked that our training begin. He upheld his promise and, seeing how serious I was about wanting to learn, took me under his wing and initiated me into his "highly selective inner group of gamers." We spent every day together online, and for many hours he would sit with me off in the plains of our digital world and duel me, 1v1. I lost over and over and over again, him carefully instructing me on where I could improve and how I could fix my mistakes.

2 years later, I became one of the highest ranked World of Warcraft players in North America, and had surpassed even Cachexic in terms of skill and in-game rating.

Ages 19-23: Bodybuilding Mentor(s)

When I was in college, I signed up for a gym membership at the Xsport across the street. At first, I went because I needed something to fill my time, and I wanted to get back into being physically active—I'd quit the World of Warcraft and I hadn't played hockey in years.

After a few weeks of lifting there, I kept noticing the same big guys show up to the gym every night. When they arrived, the show began. They were loud, they dapped each other up, and they commandeered all the benches and all the weights. Skinny guys like me looked at them in admiration, girls looked at them with doe eyes. As a skinny kid who rarely had had a girl look twice at my scrawny frame, I wanted to be just like them.

I kept purposefully lifting near one of the guys who seemingly knew everyone in the gym. When he showed up, the whole gym practically cheered and called out his name. He was truly the "Mayor of Xsport."

Well one day he was curling next to me, and for some reason he looked up and said, "Hey, nice form." This, to me, was an open door. I put down the weights and bombarded him with questions. How can I get bigger? What can I do for triceps? He saw my hunger to learn and invited me to lift with him the next day.

We ended up training together for almost 3 years, and are still great friends. His name is Chris, better known as C3. (Look him up @c3muscle on Instagram.)

About halfway through my time training with Chris, I met another bodybuilder in the gym (same name, ironically—Chris) who approached me and said he was

impressed with my growth over the months. He too, took me under his wing and taught me about food, meal prep, competitions, posing, the whole 9 yards. I trained with him for about a year as well, and we're still great friends this many years later.

Ages 23 - Present: Business Mentor

During my senior year of college, I got an internship at an ad agency in Chicago called Idea Booth.

To be perfectly honest with you, when I walked in I was not fit for the job. I was a good writer, but I knew nothing about marketing or advertising, knew none of the lingo. I had long hair, I'd gone to art school, and I often found it acceptable to show up to work in sweatpants and a Nike t-shirt—as the office was small and I figured it didn't really matter. But, I was hungry to learn, and I asked to help out every chance I could.

Over the past 2 years, my boss and mentor has expanded my vision of what I thought was possible for myself—not just with my work, but with how I approach life. He pushed me to learn new skills, skills I'd never really cared to know—like research and market analysis and design and even technical skills like web building, SEO, etc.

More importantly, and I say this with the utmost respect, he taught me how to be a Man. He also showed me how to dress (he took me out shopping and helped me learn about how to find my own style). He brought me along to meetings, meetings I was in no way qualified to sit in on, and let me listen and learn and watch him talk to CEOs, well-known entrepreneurs, true leaders in the world. He took me to events in the city I wouldn't have otherwise been able to attend. He introduced me to rooms full of smoking hot women, models, actresses, female entrepreneurs, etc., and taught me how to not be afraid to talk to any of them (me, the once-shy, scrawny adolescent!). He gave me books to read and took the time to explain the concepts to me, and always said, "I will never be disappointed in you if you fail. I will only be disappointed if you hesitate and doubt yourself."

So, what does this mean for you? How can YOU find a mentor?

The common thread between my mentors is this: I asked. Whether the mentor was someone I sought out specifically, or someone in my proximity, I asked. I asked to learn one thing. Then another thing. Then another thing. And a year or two later, that person had become my mentor.

Mentors are attracted to students that want to learn. Students are attracted to mentors that want to teach. The greatest gift a student can give a mentor is to actually listen and embody that which he/she teaches you. If you don't, the mentor gets bored. Why? Because they're investing in you. Investing knowledge and time. And they want to see that investment come to fruition.

As a student, it is IMPERATIVE that you place trust in your mentor. You have to trust that no matter how frustrated you get, or how difficult the challenge, it is being presented to you for a reason. Mentors are a gift no student should ever take for granted, because they are allowing you to see into the future. A mentor gives you the opportunity to live as you wish to become, not as you currently are. They are you in the future, pulling you towards that goal. It is an exhilarating experience, and not one to be taken lightly.

So again, how do you find a mentor?

Place yourself in the proximity of where you want to learn. If you want to become an advertising executive, get a job, any job, in an ad agency and work your ass off. If you want to become a pro gamer, make a character on the most competitive server and surround yourself with players that far exceed your current skill level. If you want to become a pro bodybuilder, go to the gym when all the other big guys go to the gym. Ask them questions. Make friends.

Will all mentors say yes? No. But many will say yes for a single question, or two questions. And if you add enough of those up, you get a bunch of knowledge. And once you hit enough knowledge, the right mentor will say, "Hey, this kid knows a lot, and I can teach him even more."

You, as the student, attract your mentor. You attract them by the ambition you radiate and put out into the universe, what you are willing to sacrifice for knowledge. In all of the above examples, I pushed everything aside to learn. I had no real relationship with a significant other. I had a very, very small group of friends. I was 100% devoted to the process of learning.

The more committed you are, the more you will receive, the more the mentor will teach, and the farther you will go.

Start with proximity.

Q: What Learning Strategies Do Quick Learners Follow?

I would consider myself a fairly quick learner in the sense that in my brief 24 years here on this planet called earth, I have "mastered" a variety of skills and crafts.

I attribute much of this to the way I approach my work, not necessarily my inherent talent or IQ.

Here are some of the things I do:

1. Memory Tricks

Based on what we know about memory, we know that it's easier to remember something when it's tied to a piece of knowledge we know deeply, than to try memorizing it in its solitude. Case in point: If I tell you to memorize this series of objects in order (pig, bicycle, red hat, banana cream pie) and you try to memorize it with no rooting in a place you know very well, or to a "thing" you can recall at any time, you're going to have a hard time—especially if I expand the list to more than 4 objects. But if you imagine your childhood home, and at the end of the driveway lays a dead pig, and in front of the front door is your old bicycle, and as soon as you walk in there's a red hat on the banister, and at the top of the stairs there is a glowing banana cream pie, well then suddenly it's very hard to not see these objects every time you think about your childhood home. This is a memory trick, and very useful when you're learning a ton of new information all at once.

2. Dig In

When you're learning something new, you HAVE to be willing to fail. You HAVE to be willing to create a lot of garbage. And you HAVE to be ok with the process of what it takes to go from awful to average to good to great.

Quick learners are the first ones to fall and the first ones to get back up again. One thing I've always done when learning something new is I've thrown myself into it with total disregard to the consequences and/or potential outcomes. This will end up teaching you the hard stuff first, and give you a better foundation to build on.

3. Practice

I think there is a huge misconception out there about what it takes to actually learn something—and it always seems like the other guy is just "smarter" or has a knack for "picking things up quickly." I hate to break it to you, but that's rarely the case. The honest answer is that in order to learn, you have to practice, and the ones who learn faster are the ones who practice more.

Practice, practice, practice. It's an input/output game. The more you put in, the more you get out.

4. Teachers

Finding a teacher or mentor is one of the quickest ways to get exposed to mass amounts of golden knowledge in the shortest amount of time. Why? Because they allow you to see the world through their eyes, and expose you to lessons that would otherwise take you years to discover, let alone understand.

That said, another huge part of learning is surrounding yourself with people like yourself, hungry to learn and in search of knowledge. You will all end up teaching each other, and benefit greatly from the exposure of each individual's unique approach to the craft.

5. Draw Parallels

This, I believe, is the root of all learning. If you do it once, you can do it again and again and again.

For example: When I was very, very young, I started playing hockey and the piano. These two things taught me the building blocks of a few very important skills—practice, discipline, routines, etc. When I was in high school, I applied these building blocks to video games and began to "master" them—becoming one of the highest ranked World of Warcraft players in North America. When I graduated high school and took up music production, I applied what I'd learned playing competitive video games and forced myself to write and produce a song a day for a year straight. When I picked up bodybuilding, I applied those same skills to my lifting routines and nutrition plans. While the rest of my peers in college were whining about "not feeling creative" and "having trouble writing" (I was studying creative writing) I was churning out endless material because, again, I applied that same work ethic to my craft—I didn't write when I felt like it, I wrote every day no matter what.

Over and over again, I applied the same principles I'd learned to different and seemingly unrelated crafts, and each time found a path towards mastery.

That said: The quick learners always bring their own unique expertise to each new undertaking. This is what allows them to "learn" so quickly—because they aren't learning EVERYTHING from scratch all over again. They're applying what they know deeply and just changing the variables.

Q: How Can I Be In The Top 1% Of The World?

When I was 17 years old, I was in the top 1% of World of Warcraft players in the world.

So your question is: How do you get there. Right? You want to know how to go from the big pool of people who start at the beginning of the racetrack, and how do you end up at the finish line among the few?

OK. It's not an easy road, but I'll lay it out step by step for you. Here are the 10 things you need to do in order to be in the top 1% of the world:

1) Start With What You Love

Before you head off to the races, you need to get to the heart of what you love—you will never be part of the 1% unless you are doing something you are deeply, madly, obsessively in love with. And sometimes you won't know this right off the bat. To give you some perspective, in the World of Warcraft there are a bunch of different classes you can play (and there are studies out there done to show how different personalities choose different classes). For the first year of my playing the game, I played what is called a Shaman. The Shaman class is no expert in any single domain, but rather a "jack of all trades." As a result, I wasn't that great of a healer, I wasn't that great of a damage class, and I wasn't really fit to tank—but I could do all 3, so at best I was a support class.

After a year of playing I realized that even though my class was a hybrid, I was playing it as if I were a 100% focused damage class. And I realized that I would never truly be a successful damage class as long as I stayed a Shaman. So what did I do? I deleted my character and started over. I now had a clear grasp of who I wanted to be and what I loved doing—in the World of Warcraft, I loved doing "damage."

START WITH WHAT YOU LOVE.

2) Explore Your Potential

Before you can find your "sweet spot" of talent, you have to explore the extremes. Sticking with gaming here, I had to explore my new class (a Mage) and understand just how far I could take it, both offensively and defensively. I had to know how long I could survive playing very aggressively, and how long I could survive playing very timidly and defensively. And once I knew those two extremes, I could begin to create a style of play that blended the two.

The only way you're going to find this is to ignore the concept of "mistakes" and explore, explore, explore. Try new things. Test your skills, combine strategies, do anything and everything that comes to mind so you can better understand the frame

of your own potential.

Another great way of putting this is, as a musician, you have to know the dynamics of your voice when you're screaming at the top of your lungs, and when you're wispily whispering. Once you know where those extremes lie, you can begin to shape your voice within the two and float in that space in order to create emotion and dynamics.

Never mistakes, always lessons.

3) "Starting Over"

Everyone thinks the path to mastery is a clear shot. It's not. At any moment, you have to be willing to throw everything out the window and start over again. But the more times you are willing to do this, the more times you can "reinvent" yourself, the more you will know and the better you will be.

To give you a sense of what it took for me to truly learn and understand my World of Warcraft class, a Mage, I leveled three (3!) separate characters to level 60 within my second year of playing. My reason for doing so was because back then you couldn't pay to move your character to different servers, so in search of better competition I would have to level a new character every time. Each character, 1-60, probably took me a few hundred hours—especially back then when the game was still "hard." And every time I started over, I learned something new about the class. It was never something big or flashy or monumental, but rather a simple understanding, a small fix, that allowed me deeper control over my character and to have a more profound sense of the game and how I could maneuver myself within it.

4) Find A Mentor

Nothing, nothing, NOTHING will make you grow as fast as learning beside someone who double, triple, quadruples you in skill. I swear to you, the learning doesn't even come from direct "now do this, now do this." It comes from being beside someone bigger, faster, smarter than you, and you soaking up their knowledge—like a growing tree beside an aged oak, learning how to reach towards the sun.

When I turned 16, I decided I wanted to take World of Warcraft seriously. I was starting to see signs that the game was going to be bigger than anyone had ever anticipated, and I wanted to be part of whatever it was going to become.

There was a Mage on another server named Cachexic who had made some gameplay videos that I absolutely loved, and I wanted to play just like him. His style was the style that I wanted for myself. So I made a character on his server and asked if he would teach me. Thinking I was just some fanboy, he said, "Sure kid. If you level a character here, I will teach you. But I doubt you'll make it to level 60 without giving up."

I was so motivated by the prospect of getting to learn from such a talented gamer that that day, I created a character on his server, and I deleted my Level 60 Mage on another server—a character I had poured probably 1,000 hours into. I knew that as long as that character was still around, I would probably give up like Cachexic had said and resort to what was "easy." So I removed that option. I deleted that character and leveled a new one on Cachexic's server. When I hit level 60 4 months later, he was shocked. He went on to become my mentor and best friend for the following 2 years, and I attribute my success in that game largely to our friendship.

5) Be The Small Fish In The Big Pond, Not The Big Fish In The Small Pond

The prelude to the story in #4 is that the server I was on prior to playing with Cachexic, I was the big fish. I was known as the #1 Mage on the server and every single player knew my name—I was a mini celebrity. But was I really all that good? Nah, not at all, actually. I was the best Mage on that server, but that server wasn't really full of top-tier players. When I saw videos of players on other servers, I could tell that they played quicker than me, they were faster and more intuitive. Those were the players I needed to learn from and play against.

This involves letting go of your ego. I could have stayed on that server (Wildhammer) and sat at the top, but then I wouldn't have gotten any better. Cachexic's server, by contrast, was a top tier server. Some of the best players and best guilds in the world played there, and the day I hit level 60 and entered their arena I realized how little I knew and how talented I wasn't. But after I made that move, I forever saw the importance. After becoming friends, Cachexic and I made it a habit to move servers every few months, always in search of better players and better competition. This principle is what allowed us to stay in a constant state of growth.

6) Practice, Practice, Practice

Look, I cannot say this any more clearly: You have to practice more than you think about practice.

A lot of people think about practice. I remember I used to download dozens of Mage videos made by other players and watch them, study them, trying to figure out how I could be like them. But one day, it clicked: I was never going to get better by watching. I had to DO. Again, I made the sharp pivot. I replaced all the hours I spent watching other players with simply playing myself.

Building off that: Do you know how much I practiced that game as a teenager? I practiced, minimum, four hours per day. MINIMUM. And that wasn't 4 hours after school when the sun is still out. I wasn't allowed to play on my computer during the week because that was the family rule. So I would pretend to go to sleep at 10pm, then sneak back to my computer and play until 2 or 3 in the morning, get a few hours of sleep, go to school, literally hold my eyes open through every single class,

sleep through study hall, take a nap after school, barrel through my homework with my dad after dinner, and then repeat the cycle.

I had to violate so many family rules in order to play that game. I had to practice at odd hours. I had to play with guilds and teams that were in Australia because those were the only players awake and online consistently in the middle of the night. I had to live in a constant state of fear, afraid that at any moment my mother or father would peek into my bedroom and see me playing at my computer in the pitch black. But that is what it took for me to hit my goals in that game. I was willing to do WHATEVER IT TOOK to get back to my computer and practice.

Practice like your life depends on it, because if you want to be in the top 1%, it does.

7) The SKILL

My goal was to be the best Mage in the game—skill. I didn't care about the epic items. I didn't care about how much gold I had. I didn't care about being in a prestigious guild or raiding the high-end dungeons or how many quests I completed in the game. The ONLY thing I cared about was how skilled I was against another player.

In order to do that, I had to give up everything else. I was poor and rarely had gold to spend on cool, rare items. I didn't have the best gear because I didn't spend time raiding or killing bosses. I didn't really have that big of a "friend" group in the game because I kept largely to myself and my close, competitive friends who shared a similar goal. And do you see the real life parallels here? If you want something specific, you have to be willing to let go of the other stuff. You have to give up chasing the money, chasing the validation, chasing the rewards, etc., and you have to focus on the SKILL. You have to spend ALL of your time (95%+) on developing your SKILL. I cannot stress how important this is. I gave up instant gratification and validation to invest in myself and my talents as a player for the long-term benefit.

No matter what you want, whether it's money, a title, status, it doesn't matter. Don't focus on the END, focus on the PROCESS—the SKILL. SKILL is what will get you to the 1%.

8) Walk Your Own Path

If you've made it this far, you are now in the top 15%. Congrats. That's pretty good! But in order to get past the next 14% and into the top 1%, you have to be prepared for war and to fight your way through.

The entire time I played World of Warcraft, I was attacked by the real world. I was told that I was wasting my life. I was told that I wasn't going to amount to anything. I was told that nothing could be gained from playing a video game, that I was on the path to destruction, that I was "an addict." So as hard as the path to mastery already

is, it is made harder by all the voices telling you that you should give up, that you can't do it, and not just that, but telling you that you're WRONG and a sub-par human being for doing so.

I didn't listen.

If you want to be in the top 1%, be prepared to trust your inner voice and no one else. This is where mentors are extremely helpful, because they help make that voice stronger by adding their own. They help remind you of your dream and stand by your side to make it happen. That's what Cachexic was for me.

Walk your own path. Stay true to your goal. And every time someone tells you to give up or not to press forward, use that as fuel to launch yourself further. Channel your anger and frustration. Turn it into inspiration.

9) Be Relentless

When you get close to the top 1%, you will be able to feel it. It will be just outside your grasp and it will tickle your fingertips, taunting you to stretch just a little bit further.

In the World of Warcraft, this was the title of "Gladiator." At the end of the season, it is awarded to the top .5% of players in the 2v2, 3v3, and 5v5 brackets. (No longer 2v2, but it was back when I played.) I wanted this title more than I wanted to get into college, more than I wanted to lose my virginity. I had worked so hard to get to where I was and I wanted to enter that top 1%. I wanted every single person in that game to know that I was the best.

A few weeks before the season ended and the titles were handed out, one of teammates on our 3v3 team got banned—he got caught using a bot in the game to get gold or something. So we quickly required a new 3rd player and played RELENTLESSLY over the next few weeks to get our team back up into the top .5%. The day before the season ended, we were the #1 3v3 team on the server and were guaranteed not just the title of Gladiator, but Merciless Gladiator—meaning that we were the #1 team on the server, and well beyond the top .5% in the world.

The night before the season ended, our new 3rd player went nuts and disbanded the team.

I had nothing.

I WAS RIGHT THERE. IT WAS WITHIN MY GRASP.

Did I give up and accept defeat?

The next morning, me and my longtime teammate made a quick 2v2 team and

played for 7 hours straight (it should be noted that he was living in his mom's basement and was a coke addict, and much cocaine was consumed that day on his end). We lost something like 5 games in 7 hours and in one straight shot went from a brand new team to being one of the top 20 2v2 teams on the server.

The next morning, we both logged in to find our Gladiator titles. We had achieved the top .5% title after all.

10) "Anybody Can Get It / The Hard Part Is Keeping It"

Ah, so now you have made it. The top 1%—and a title to match! Every single person in the world knows that you are among the most talented, the most successful. In real life, this would be the mansion, the Ferrari, the dapper suit and the beautiful blonde, the fitting title of CEO or your name in the big lights. You have it all.

Now the question becomes: Do you have what it takes to stay there?

This was the most fascinating part of the journey for me. As soon as I had that title of Gladiator, I changed as a player—and not for the better. I was instantly offered everything. I had sponsorship requests. I had the top players around the world asking me to play with them. My gaming blog was being read by thousands of people. But along with that, I started getting complacent. If I made a mistake in a match, everybody would laugh and say, "Man, that was so funny! We'll get them next time no problem," not wanting to call me out and always assuming that I was, in some sense, a perfect player—all because of my title.

Over time, this made it easier and easier to make mistakes and not be hard on myself. It made it easier to get rewards and external approval without having to work all that hard. And sure enough, the next kid who was grinding and putting in work started to catch up to me, until I was no longer the best. I had stopped putting in the tough work. I had stopped focusing on the SKILL.

As much work as it takes to get into the top 1%, it takes even more work to stay there.

Q: How Do I Get My Quora Answers Published On Media Sites?

Here is exactly how I got my articles published in TIME, Huffington Post, Forbes, Fortune, Inc Magazine, Popsugar, Thought Catalog, etc.

1. Research

When I first started writing on Quora, I wrote lots of articles with no real rhyme or reason. Then one of them got picked up by The Huffington Post. I thought that was pretty cool. But what about all my other articles? Why did just that one get picked up?

I went and started researching what articles were getting picked up each week by all these publications. For the most part, I saw three themes: Either someone high profile wrote something fairly interesting and it got published, or someone wrote something very specific with an insane amount of detail that only an expert would know, or someone wrote "5 Ways You Can....".

Now, I'm not really all that high profile (yet!), but I realized that the article of mine that got chosen was one of those very detailed articles that you can't really just churn out over and over again. That level of detail is not only difficult to produce, but it's also sort of one and done.

So I decided to start experimenting with the third category: writing list articles that contained strong, solid information, but were incredibly easy to digest.

2. Write

The majority of my publication features have come from this list. Here are some titles, just to give you a sense of what I mean:

- 10 Ways to Work Smarter Instead of Harder
- 6 Life Lessons Your Gamer Children Can Learn From Playing Video Games
- These Uncommon Habits Will Help You Work Smarter
- 5 Strategies for Picking Up New Skills
- 3 Hot Marketing Tips That Can Light A Fire Under Your Startup

As I'm sure you can see, there is a theme here. So why do these types of articles get picked up by publications? Because they are quick and easy reads that still contain value. You'll see these same types of lists on BuzzFeed, Mashable, etc. They're popular all across the board. So if you know what's popular and you want to become popular, then create what is popular.

3. Contact

After my first article got published, I learned that Emily Nakano Co was the one who had chosen it and passed it along to The Huffington Post. Once I knew that, I started sending her links to articles I thought would be good fits. Not all of them were chosen, obviously, but it helps to get your content in front of the right person. There are a few people here on Quora who pass along good content.

4. Repeat

It should be stated that I've written over 250 answers and less than 20 of them have been published. The key here is consistency.

Again, to recap, here are the 3 types of articles most likely to get published.

1. Articles written by someone high profile (so, if you're famous, make that known)
2. Detailed, specialty knowledge. Could be an extremely personal story, or it could be a step by step guide explaining how to utilize string theory to make the perfect bowl of pasta. Whatever it is, share the depth of your knowledge and make it comprehensive and enriching.
3. Lists. "How To Master Any Craft In 5 Easy Steps." "7 Ways To Wake Up Happier Every Morning." "15 Reasons Why You Shouldn't Want To Be An Entrepreneur, and 1 Reason Why You Should." Etc.