

# SUMMARY

13

## THINGS MENTALLY STRONG PEOPLE DON'T DO

AMY MORIN



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# **Summary of “13 Things Mentally Strong People Don’t Do” by Amy Morin**

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Take back your power, embrace change, face your fears, and train your brain for happiness and success.



# QuickRead

F R E E B O O K S U M M A R I E S

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# Introduction

Amy Morin worked for more than a decade as a psychotherapist, helping clients identify their talents, skills, and support systems. She would then address her client's struggles through expanding on their strengths, it was an optimistic method, but it seemed to work. All that changed, however, when she experienced tragedy firsthand. Losing three people close to her in less than a decade, Morin found herself healing from grief, only to be pushed back even further, and going through a vicious cycle of grief once again. In the midst of these cycles, Morin realized that focusing on her strengths and ignoring her weaknesses was actually hindering her more than helping her. If she wanted to emerge a stronger, better person, she needed to pay attention to the bad habits that held her back.

Her hardships taught her that just a few bad habits can become a major setback and stall progress. So if you want to reach your greatest potential, you should learn to work smarter, not harder. Eliminate routines and habits that break down your mental strength, and learn the 13 things that mentally strong people don't do.

# Waste Time Feeling Sorry for Themselves

It's inevitable that life throws us curveballs. At times, those curveballs become so devastating that it seems as if you'll never recover. Tragedies like illness and death are incredibly hard to bounce back from; however, mentally strong people don't let those moments hold them back. When life knocks you down, you need to learn how to get back up.

For instance, author Amy Morin unexpectedly lost her mother in 2003. Then, two days before the third anniversary of her death, Morin's 26-year-old husband suffered a fatal heart attack, and just seven years later, she lost her father-in-law. With three deaths within a decade, Morin could've easily thrown herself a pity party. She could've let herself fall victim to her circumstances, but Morin realized that wallowing in her problems or exaggerating her misfortune would be detrimental to her mental health. That's because self-pity keeps you focused on the problem and holds you back from developing a solution.

Instead, mentally strong people focus on gratitude versus self-pity. The inspiring example of Marla Runyan shows how gratitude and mental strength are important when life hands you a bad deal. At the young age of nine, Runyan was diagnosed with Stargardt's disease, a degenerative disease that affects the eyes. Eventually becoming legally blind, Runyan turned to her passion for running and went on to set world records at the 1992 and 1996 Paralympics. Runyan refused to view her disease as a disability; instead, she viewed it as a gift that allowed her to become a world-class athlete.

Many people dwell on what life takes away from them instead of being grateful for what life has given them. But did you know that gratitude can improve your physical health? The *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* published a study in 2003 that found that people who express gratitude have healthier immune systems and suffer less from aches and

pains. Additionally, these people also exercise more, sleep better, and overall live a healthier life than those who are ungrateful.

## Give Away Their Power

How often do you say something like, “My boss makes me feel inadequate” or “My mother-in-law makes me crazy?” When you allow your boss or your mother-in-law to make you feel a certain way, you are giving others power over the way you think, feel, or even behave. No one should have power over your feelings, instead, you should change your daily vocabulary to recognize that the choices you make are yours.

Avoid phrases like “He *made* me mad,” or “I *have* to work late today.” Remember, only you control your emotions and choices, so say instead, “I’m *choosing* to stay late.” You see, mentally strong people don’t allow others to control how they think or act. An inspiring example of mental strength is the famous Oprah Winfrey. Raised in poverty and the victim of repeated sexual abuse, Winfrey became pregnant at the young age of 14, only for the child to die shortly after birth.

Wanting to grow up and change her circumstances, she worked and studied hard which led to a job as a TV news anchor. However, Winfrey still experienced failure when she was fired for being considered “unsuitable” to be on air. Had Winfrey listened to the opinions of others, she would’ve never accomplished all that she has today. Today, Oprah Winfrey has become a household name and developed one of the most successful talk-shows to date. But how did she do it?

One of the biggest factors in taking control of your feelings is forgiveness. When you hold onto anger and resentment, you allow others to limit your ability and disrupt your life. Therefore, it’s important to forgive others for their transgressions and place your focus back on you. Similar to how gratitude improves your health, those who practice forgiveness see psychological benefits as well. For instance, when people forgive others, their blood pressure decreases and their hearts beat more calmly. Additionally, those who practice unconditional forgiveness are likely to live longer lives.

# Shy Away From Change

How do you view change? Do you embrace the way the world changes or do you find that you're simply stuck in your old ways? The way you view change can play a significant role in your mental strength. If you make excuses to avoid change, you will find that your life stays stagnant and progress will never be made. Instead, it's important to mentally embrace change, prepare for the challenges, and commit to change to find success.

An incredible example of a mentally strong person who embraced change is that of Judge Greg Mathis. As a teenager, Mathis was problematic and found himself in and out of jail; however, when he learned that his mother was dying, he promised her that he would turn his life around. Once he was released from jail, he got a job at the local McDonald's and worked towards getting accepted to Eastern Michigan University. After graduation, he worked towards law school, but he was barred from working as a lawyer because of his criminal past.

Many people may accept this and simply find a new path or give up. Mathis, however, didn't let this obstacle stand in his way. Instead, he sought change and found other ways to serve the city of Detroit. After working as a manager for Detroit Neighborhood City Hall, Mathis and his wife founded a nonprofit organization that aimed to help young people find work. Soon, Mathis was elected to become a judge by the people of Detroit despite his criminal past. Mathis believed that anything was possible and he embraced the change that came his way.

Morin believes that once you realize that your past does not control you, you can then begin to make your way through the five steps of change:

- **Precontemplation:** At this stage, people become introduced to the need for change. They might not recognize the consequences of staying the same themselves and must be convinced by others. For example, a doctor might convince a pre-contemplative person to

develop an exercise routine by explaining the health risks and consequences of keeping their current habits.

- **Contemplation:** In stage two, a person begins to recognize the need to change themselves, but won't yet fully commit to change. For example, an employee may recognize the risk of becoming fired if he doesn't increase his sales, but he may still resist trying a new sales technique because he's not sure if the risk is worth the benefit.
- **Preparation:** During this stage, a plan for creating change is implemented. An entrepreneur, for example, may find himself unable to pay the bills. Therefore, he will create a plan to address the problem by deciding to sell equipment, change his marketing plan, or find a new strategy to increase revenue.
- **Action:** At this stage, the steps from the preparation stage are put into action. For example, a person committed to losing weight will begin to exercise and change his eating habits during this stage.
- **Maintenance:** During this stage, you must learn how to maintain this change long-term. It's important to monitor your progress and plan ahead for possible obstacles and pitfalls that may lead you to go back to your old ways. For example, a person who wants to maintain a healthy lifestyle must plan before eating out and before the holiday season to prevent themselves from indulging in high-calorie foods.

# Focus on Things They Can't Control

Some of us may suffer from a “superhero complex” in which we feel the need to fix everything, if we want something done correctly, then we do it ourselves. There are many reasons why this way of thinking is unhealthy. Not only does this increase your anxiety, but it damages your relationships and undermines trust. Simply worrying about things out of your control is a waste of energy; therefore, it's important to let things go and stop worrying about events outside of your control.

A great example of this is Terry Fox who was diagnosed with a severe type of bone cancer at just 18 years old. As a result of the disease, Fox had one of his legs amputated and was told that he only had a 15 percent chance of beating the illness. However, the night before his surgery, Fox became inspired by a person with a prosthetic leg who ran the New York marathon. After the operation, Fox began running and soon completed his first marathon.

Eventually, Fox decided to raise money for cancer research by finding sponsors to fund a race of all races. Fox planned to race across Canada, running the equivalent of one marathon every day. Unfortunately, half-way through his journey, Fox was forced to quit for health reasons. His cancer had returned, and though he didn't complete his race across Canada, sponsorship money continued to pour in as people became inspired by his story. Just months later, Fox lost his battle to cancer, but he raised \$23 million for cancer research in the months leading up to his death.

You see, Fox didn't focus on the events that were outside his control. Instead, he focused on what he did have control over, which was raising millions of dollars for charity. Of course, changing your attitude about circumstances in life increases your health too. A 2012 study showed that those who are less controlling lead happier lives and have better relationships.

## **Worry About Pleasing Everyone**

While someone that focuses on making everyone happy may have good intentions, pleasing everyone can negatively impact that person's mental strength. People who exhibit excessive people-pleasing qualities attempt to control how others feel, wasting time and energy because controlling other people's feelings is impossible. If you find that you worry too much about pleasing everyone, you should learn to make choices that align with your values and act accordingly, even if that means disappointing or upsetting others.

For instance, Morin recalls a woman named Angela who aimed to please the men she dated by taking on personality types that weren't authentic to herself. For instance, when a man expressed he enjoyed humor, Angela would try to tell jokes. If he liked spontaneity, Angela would embellish stories of her life to make them seem more spontaneous. By trying to make herself more attractive, she began to lose her true self. In the end, she prioritized the feelings of others over her own and only said what she thought others wanted to hear. Living your life this way makes you mentally weak, whereas when you accept that you won't please everyone, you become stronger and build courage when you anticipate displeasing others.

# Fear Taking Calculated Risks

A major fear in many people is the fear of taking risks. Whether it's risks in business or chasing dreams, people fear that risks far outweigh the benefits. However, it's not enough to simply quit your job and follow your passion. Instead, big life decisions should be carefully thought-out and risks should be closely assessed. If you do end up quitting that job to follow your passion, there is certainly a possibility of failure. If you fail, you may be too scared to ever take risks again.

Therefore, it's important to learn how to minimize risks and figure out which risks are worth the benefits. Calculate risks by asking yourself "What are the potential costs? Benefits?" "How will this affect my goals?" "What are the alternatives?" "What is the best thing and the worst thing that can happen?" "How much will this matter in five years?" If you write down the answers to these questions, you can review and examine them carefully to help you calculate the risks and make a decision.

Of course, taking risks doesn't have to be making life decisions. We can look at the example of a famous psychologist, Albert Ellis, who was terrified of talking to women because of the embarrassing risk of rejection. After giving some thought about the consequences of rejection, he concluded that it's not that bad to be rejected, so he started talking to women.

Every day, Ellis would travel to the local botanical garden and sit next to women who were sitting alone. Out of the 130 women he sat next to, 30 of them left as soon as he sat down. For the remaining women, however, Ellis would engage in conversation and then invite them on a date. Out of those 100 women, only one woman accepted his offer to go on a date. That woman didn't even show up for the date, but Ellis realized this didn't matter. Instead, Ellis discovered that he had no reason to fear rejection and he let his irrational fear prevent him from talking to women for far too long.

Taking risks and stepping outside of your comfort zone makes you stronger, so if you're looking to build your mental strength, look at what is holding you back. Perhaps those risks aren't as scary as you once imagined. Additionally, begin to practice taking risks and facing your fears. If you are scared of flying, get on that plane. If you fear to speak in public, sign up for a class and just do it. Open yourself up to new opportunities and start facing your fears.

## Dwell on the Past

There are many ways that people dwell on the past. Some ruminate about bad experiences that they believe are holding them back while others romanticize about the good ole' days. Both of which keep people from enjoying the present and living life to the fullest. Your past doesn't have to haunt you as we learn from the story of Wynona Ward.

Now an activist and social worker, Ward was born in a small village in Vermont where she grew up with a sexually and physically abusive father. Ward didn't tell anyone about the abuse, and at seventeen-years-old, she got married and worked with her husband as a truck driver. She worked to free herself from her past; however, not all of her family members were as successful. She discovered later in life that one of her brothers was now abusing his own children. Ward knew she had to do something to help make a change and break this cycle of abuse.

So she went back to university in Vermont and earned a law degree. She went on to found the organization, Have Justice Will Travel, a mobile legal service for families who are dealing with domestic abuse problems. In the end, Ward didn't allow her past to get the best of her, instead, she used her experience to learn, grow, and help others.

The first step in moving forward from your past is to give yourself permission to enjoy your life. A traumatic past doesn't mean that you need to suffer forever. Additionally, when dealing with negative memories, try to remember the lesson that you learned from the experience. Finally, aim to look at the situation objectively, forgive past actions, and even forgive yourself to relieve the burden of carrying those negative emotions.

# Make The Same Mistakes

Growing up, many of us are either embarrassed or even scolded when we make mistakes. We may feel embarrassed when we answer a question incorrectly or we are punished when we bring home a bad grade. Therefore, we typically believe making a mistake is a sign of failure; however, mistakes are simply an opportunity for growth. A characteristic of those that are mentally strong is that they learn from their mistakes and take steps to ensure they don't repeat them in the future.

You can look at the inspiring example of Rowland Macy, who in the mid-nineteenth century opened up a dry-goods store in a small town of Massachusetts. Macy, however, made the mistake of choosing a quiet location which meant he struggled to get customers in the door. So, he decided to take action and organize a large parade through the town. Unfortunately, the day of the parade saw such torrential rain that nobody showed up and Macy was forced to close his business.

Macy vowed he wouldn't make the same mistake again, so the next time he opened a "Macy Dry Goods" store, he chose a prime location in downtown New York. The store became a huge hit and Macy's now has locations all over the world. Every year, the massive chain holds the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade which is one of the most popular, highly anticipated parades of the year. In the end, Rowland Macy learned from his mistakes which allowed him to create one of the most successful department store chains in the world.

Morin advises that to avoid making the same mistake, study it. Ask yourself, "What went wrong?" "What could I have done better? And what can I do differently next time?" Additionally, it's important to acknowledge your mistakes and accept responsibility. In the end, you'll put yourself in control and begin building your mental strength.

## **Resent Other People's Success**

When you see a colleague receive a promotion or see a family member buy a house you can't afford, feelings of envy may come to the surface. While this may be normal, feeling jealous of other's success eventually leads to resentment which can distract you from your own path, making you feel as if you are a failure. And while envy is a common trait, it is far from healthy.

Instead, overcome your envy of other people's success and learn how to use their success to your benefit. Let's take the example of Milton Hershey whose employee, H.B. Reese, began building a rival candy company in the same city while still working in Hershey's chocolate factory. Hershey, however, didn't become angry or resentful. Instead, he gave Reese his full support and allowed Reese to use Hershey's milk chocolate for his experiments. Throughout those experiments, Reese created a peanut butter cup surrounded by Hershey's milk chocolate.

Instead of viewing each other's company as competition, the two men celebrated their successes and used one another's power to their advantage. They supported their strengths, and in the end, they both built incredibly successful businesses. Throughout their lives, the two men continued collaborating, and after their death, the two companies finally merged. So what can you learn from the story of Hershey and Reese? When people enjoy and celebrate success, they attract other successful people which then creates opportunities for collaboration and continued success.

# Give Up After First Failure

A major fear that many people experience is the fear of failure. Many will avoid failure at all costs, so they fear taking risks. However, almost every story of success begins with a long road of failure and perseverance. Simply put, those who succeed simply view their failures as stepping stones for improvement.

One of the best examples of never giving up is, perhaps, that of Thomas Edison. One of the greatest inventors in history, Edison is best known for inventing the light bulb. However, did you know that Edison had many other inventions that were complete failures? There was also an electric pen and even a ghost machine! Of course, you've probably never heard of these, that's because they were absolute failures. However, Edison didn't view his unsuccessful inventions as failures, instead, he saw them as learning opportunities and each one was just one step closer to success.

Research suggests that hard work is more important than talent when it comes to success. For example, people who practiced consistently for ten years and never gave up honed their skills and eventually became better than those who seemed naturally talented. This held true when it came to chess players, athletes, musicians, and visual artists. After 20 years of hard work and commitment, individuals with seemingly no talent could reach high levels of success and achieve world-class standards.

Failure is simply a part of becoming a success and is a sign that you are being challenged. You can choose to overcome failure, but how? Begin by creating a plan to learn from your failures and to avoid repeating them. Additionally, you should prepare to fail. A lot. If you get used to failure, it no longer becomes frightening and you're likely to continue working hard and eventually find success.

# Fear Alone Time

Many days, you are likely surrounded by noise. If you live in a big city, for example, your commute to work is filled with the noise of public transportation or even the sound of the radio in your car. Once at work, you may engage in conversations, have meetings, etc. There isn't much downtime where your life is filled with complete silence. So when we get home from work, how do you cope? Many seek to maintain those noise levels by turning on the television. They aim to fill those uncomfortable silences, but when you fill your life with noise, you miss out on a powerful opportunity.

Research shows that spending time alone quietly results in renewal, rejuvenation, inspiration, and reflection. Avoid drowning your thoughts with technology or sounds. Instead, build your mental strength by designating ten minutes each day to do nothing but be with your emotions. During these ten minutes, you can think about your life goals and determine if you are on track to achieving them. You can also use the opportunity to think about new goals or dreams and use visualization techniques to imagine the life you want to have. Don't forget these thoughts by writing them all down in a journal.

Additionally, try implementing small daily habits like turning off the radio in the car or the television when you aren't watching. Or perhaps try going on a walk without your phone. These small daily activities have shown to decrease both anxiety and depression. Becoming mindful raises awareness and causes you to accept yourself at the moment.

You can even take your mindfulness a step further and turn to meditation to become comfortable in silence. Studies have shown that meditation positively alters the structure of the brain by regulating both cognition and emotion. Even more, meditation has been proven to have positive effects on those who struggle with breathing difficulties, tumors, insomnia, chronic pain, and cardiological problems. Learning meditation and mindfulness

increases both your quality of life and helps you become comfortable with solitude.

# Feel the World Owes Them Anything

Many children nowadays grow up with parents praising them for every small success. Of course, it's natural for parents to put their children on a pedestal; however, when parents fail to teach their children to accept responsibility, those children grow up to become entitled and believe the world owes them something.

You can look at the example of Ethan Couch, who in 2013 killed four people while driving under the influence. At the time, Couch was a teenager living in Texas with wealthy parents who coddled him rather than teaching him responsibility. Therefore, his lawyers actually argued in court that Couch suffered from "affluenza" a condition in which he was too privileged and therefore couldn't take responsibility for his actions. Shockingly, the lawyer's defense worked and Couch simply received probation and a rehabilitation sentence versus prison time.

However, it's not just wealthy parents who teach their children this sense of entitlement. You, too, have probably found yourself giving advice to your friends that sounds like, "Don't worry something better will come your way," or "You deserve something good to happen after everything you've been through." Instead, you should focus your advice on what your friends can do for themselves rather than simply expecting the universe to give them something.

Mentally strong people refuse to believe the world owes them anything and focus on giving, not taking. Activist Sarah Robinson, for instance, was diagnosed with a brain tumor when she was just in her early twenties. During the year and a half that she battled cancer, she spoke with many cancer patients and realized that many drove hours a day to receive their treatment. She knew she needed to help, so she ended up founding an overnight house near the medical facilities. Despite Sarah's death just a year and a half after her diagnosis, "Sarah's house" continues to house those that need a place to stay after treatment.

## **Expect Immediate Results**

Patience is certainly a virtue when it comes to finding success. However, many people become frustrated when success doesn't happen right away. This can be proven through a study completed in 1972 that looked into how successful people were at keeping up with their New Year's resolutions. Turns out, 25 percent of participants abandoned their resolutions after just 15 weeks. In a study in 1989, that number went down to just one week! So why can't we maintain our resolutions?

First, we tend to set unrealistic expectations which makes us more likely to quit when those expectations aren't met. Next, we must accept that change is not easy, that it will take hard work and dedication to reach your goal. Additionally, avoid creating a fixed deadline to reach your goal. It's nice to have an approximate idea, but when we fail to reach a goal in the predicted eight weeks, for example, we get discouraged and give up. If something that is supposed to take eight weeks actually takes you twelve, twenty, or fifty weeks, you need to be okay with that too.

Success won't come immediately and even progress is not always easily recognized. Improvements might be well-hidden, so it's important to continue working hard even if you can't immediately see the benefits. In fact, good things might actually come to those who wait.

## **Final Summary**

Mentally strong people refrain from feeling sorry for themselves, they never give their power away to others, they embrace change and they avoid worrying over things they can't control. They understand that pleasing everyone is impossible and they aren't afraid to take risks, of course, they calculate their risks carefully before jumping fully in. They also avoid dwelling and romanticizing the past, they never make the same mistake twice, and they celebrate other people's success rather than resenting them. Additionally, successful people never give up in the face of failure, they face fears of being alone, and they don't feel as if the world owes them anything. Lastly, successful people never expect immediate results and they understand that success doesn't come overnight. So, if you're serious about becoming mentally strong, you should begin by monitoring your behavior, paying attention to your feelings, and examining your thoughts. By looking inward, you can determine where your weaknesses lie and work on strengthening yourself and your mind.



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