

Dr. M. Scott Peck tells us that the

most important

contributor to

a successful life

is self-discipline

author of the book that's been on the bestseller list for 386 weeks and sold nearly four million copies



Without discipline, we can't improve ourselves, or solve problems, or be competent, or delay gratification or assume responsibility.

Without discipline we cannot find reality and truth...we never evolve from children into productive adults.

Yet discipline is a trait that's in short supply these days, especially among young people.

To find why this is so—and what we can do about it—*Bottom Line/Personal* asked the best-selling author of *The Road Less Traveled*...

Why is discipline so powerful?

Most people think that the point of life is to be happy. But life is really about self-improvement. We're not born perfect. It's our job to make ourselves as good as we can be.

As Benjamin Franklin once said, those things that hurt, instruct. Yet the concept that life can be difficult is alien to most people.

The only way we can improve ourselves is through discipline. Without it, we can't solve any problems. With some discipline, we can solve some problems. But with total discipline, we can solve all of our problems. Discipline makes us competent.

I used to tell my patients that psychotherapy is not about happiness, it's about personal power and competence. If you get hooked into therapy and go the whole route, I can't guarantee you'll leave one bit happier. But you will leave more competent.

The problem with competence is that there's a vacuum of it in the world. So as soon as people become more competent, either God or life gives them bigger problems to deal with.

There is, however, a certain kind of joy that comes with knowing you're worrying

about the big problems and that you're no longer getting bent out of shape about the little ones.

How can people determine which problems are truly important?

Think about them. Most people don't.

I spend the first hour of each day sitting in my bedroom thinking about my priorities. What should I be working on now? What can be put off until later?

Important problems are ones that affect all of us.

Example: I work with many organizations, businesses and agencies on how to better integrate psychiatry, religion and spirituality. That's a big problem.

It's impossible to think about big problems if you're spending your time worrying about what you're going to watch on TV or what you're going to say to someone. Spending time on that kind of problem is a waste of energy.

Isn't it true that some people think about the little problems to put off working on the important ones?

This relates to one of the main issues of discipline—delayed gratification.

This means doing the things in life that are unpleasant before those that are enjoyable. If you do what you have to do first, you'll be free to enjoy yourself later.

Most people—and I'm not just talking about children—dash to what they want to do, and then feel terrible trying to get around to what they have to do.

Why do so many people, especially young people, have so much trouble delaying gratification?

Gratification is something that must

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, MD. His latest book is *A Bed By The Window, A Novel of Mystery and Redemption*, Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Ave., New York 10103. \$18.95. His big bestseller is, of course, *The Road Less Traveled*. Much of Dr. Peck's time is spent now in management consulting. His office: Bliss Rd., New Preston, Connecticut 06777.

be learned. We rejoice in the spontaneity of small children. But, in truth, children are all born liars, cheats, thieves and manipulators who don't know how to delay gratification.

It's hardly remarkable that many of them grow up to be adult liars, cheats, thieves and manipulators.

What's even harder to explain—but what life is all about—is that some children grow up to be disciplined, God-fearing and honest.

There are many reasons why people grow up undisciplined. Most importantly, many children lack good parenting. Parents are role models. And kids with undisciplined parents have a much harder time growing up to be disciplined.

Discipline also suffers from an image problem in our culture. We think of discipline as something that's imposed by someone else rather than as a form of self-love.

Learning discipline requires real effort. But this is what it takes for people to find the most joy and lead the most productive lives. Delaying gratification means, ultimately, enjoying things *more*.