

## Lesson 7: Habits of Excellence: Self-determination

### PURPOSE

To help students understand and practice habits of excellence, and especially the habit of self-determination in their daily lives.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

1. Understand what habits of excellence are as well as their characteristics.
2. Understand the habit of self-determination.
3. Practice self-determination in their lives.

### VOCABULARY

- Habits of excellence: behaviors acquired through regular practice which help people achieve excellence as persons
- Self-determination: to take charge of one's emotions and behaviors in order to strive for human excellence in both actions and decisions

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- [Video](#): Matt Cutts - Try something new for 30 days
- Seven Days Challenge worksheet
- [Video](#) "I Quit Social Media For 1 Month — And It Was The Best Choice I Ever Made"
- [Video](#) of The speech "Quit social media" by Dr. Cal Newport
- [Video](#): Marshmallow test

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Review the previous lesson. Discuss once more the three types of friendship according to Aristotle along with their defining characteristics. Remind the students of the story of William Wilberforce and the Clapham circle as an example of friendship of excellence. Finish by highlighting the importance of developing friendships of excellence in daily life.

Remind the students of the definitions of habit and freedom for excellence that they learned in earlier lessons.

**Step 2:** Ask students if they can name some excellent and non-excellent habits. Write a table with two columns on the board, one for excellent and one for non-excellent habits. Write down the students' examples.

Write the definition on the board.

Habits of excellence: behaviors acquired through regular practice which help people achieve excellence as persons.

Highlight that these are the excellences of a person as a person, not skills, abilities or gifts. For example, some important habits to develop are:

- self-determination
- courage
- wisdom
- justice
- truthfulness
- kindness
- generosity
- humility

Mention some of the characteristics of habits of excellence:

They lead to excellence of the person as *person*.

While being good at sports, arts or science is indeed great, it is even more important to develop habits of excellence as a person. Each person is first and foremost a human being and should primarily become excellent as a person.

Since habits of excellence are excellent for the whole person, they are reflected in all aspects of one's life: study, friendship, work, love, career, athletics and more. A wise person can make better career choices, a generous person will be a better friend, a person with self-determination will be better at studying or sports, etc.

**They can be acquired through practice and learning.**

No one is born with any of these habits of excellence. One can acquire them over the course of a lifetime. It is possible to do this by using one's powers to think and choose in an excellent way, for example, by always choosing what is excellent.

It is also the case with these habits that at first it is hard to develop them, but through regular practice, living them becomes easier. People need effort and patience to develop these habits, so many give up early. However, with more and more practice, they become natural and one can achieve them with less and less effort.

**They are all connected.**

All habits of excellence are connected, so by developing one of them, one also develops the others. The person who is generous will find it easier to be kind; the truthful person will be more wise; the person who is genuinely courageous will be more humble.

After highlighting each of the characteristics, ask the students to give examples of how they play out in daily life.

**Step 3:** Explain that in this class, the main focus is one of the habits of excellence: self-determination. Write the definition of self-determination on the board:

**Self-determination: to take charge of one's emotions and behaviors, in order to strive for human excellence in our actions and decisions.**

If time permits and you consider it beneficial, add the [Supplementary activity](#) no. 1.

Highlight that self-determination is a habit of excellence that drives all other habits of excellence. Since each habit is acquired through regular practice, which is often difficult, self-determination is necessary to be able to persevere through difficulties. Often, one wants to choose what is excellent, but fails to actually choose it. Self-determination helps people to strive for excellence when it is difficult.

Ask students if they can think of examples of people who embody self-determination in their surroundings. Ask them to explain how these people live by self-determination.

**Step 4:** Show the [video](#) and explain the idea behind it: the research shows that it takes 30 days of repeating some practice to develop or change a habit.

Suggest that students start with a small goal and try a “seven days challenge”. [Give a Seven days challenge worksheet](#) to each student and have them fill it out. Explain that they should think of a daily practice which can help them to develop self-determination. Provide an example of the “seven days challenge” by showing the [video](#) “I Quit Social Media For 1 Month – And It Was The Best Choice I Ever Made” and discuss the benefits which can come from a “social media fast” to inspire them with reasons for why it could be helpful.

If the time permits, consider adding the [Supplementary activity](#) no. 2.

To take on the challenge effectively, it is important to think about the motive or the reason why they should develop self-determination. Having sight of a higher purpose will help them stay set in their goals when things get hard. It is helpful to think ahead of time about the challenges which may await them and brainstorm ways to overcome them.

Finally, having a friend, teacher, or family member who can support them in their goals will make it easier for them to overcome obstacles. Each student should think of one person who can support them and the ways in which this person could support them.

Explain that the students should not worry about struggling or failing, and that the only problem is if they do not struggle, if they give up, or if they choose not to try at all. Tell the students that with greater challenges come greater potential benefits, but also a greater likelihood of failure. Smaller challenges are easier to achieve, but they bring smaller potential benefits.

**Step 5:** Summarize. Recall the definition of habits of excellence and their most important characteristics. Highlight the importance of self-determination and motivate students to persist in their “seven days challenge”. Note that in the next class, there will be a discussion on how everyone did.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY**

1. Show the [video](#) explaining the Marshmallow test from Stanford University and ask students about their conclusions. Explain that the purpose of the Marshmallow test is to show that the power to delay gratification for a greater future benefit is an important predictor of one’s ability to self-determine. And self-determination is necessary for achieving one’s goals in life.
2. For a longer discussion on the issue of “social media fast” you can also show the [speech](#) “Quit social media” by Dr. Cal Newport on TEDxTysons, where he elaborates in more depth on its benefits.

**Seven days challenge: Self-determination**

1. In order to develop the habit of self-determination, every day I will practice:

2. My main motive or the reason why I want to develop self-determination is:

3. Challenges I will likely face:

4. How I will counteract the challenges:

5. Overcoming challenges is easier with support. My support person (friend, family member, teacher, etc.) will be:

6. This person will support me by: (e.g. checking up on me every day, asking if I need help, sending me motivational videos, etc.)

**Seven days challenge - example 1**

- a) In order to develop the habit of self-determination, every day I will practice:

Getting up in the morning on the first ring of the alarm.

- b) My main motive or the reason why I want to develop self-determination is:

To be better at school and to be more successful later in life.

- c) Likely challenges I will face:

Snoozing the alarm  
Trying to give up  
Wanting to skip some days

- d) How I will counteract the challenges:

Disabling snooze option  
Talk to my brother if I want to give up  
Write a note in my room not to give up

- e) Overcoming challenges is easier with support. My support person (friend, family member, teacher, etc.) will be:

My brother

- f) This person will support me by: (e.g. checking up on me every day, asking if I need help, sending me motivational videos, etc.)

By not letting me give up or skip some days. Asking me if I'm thinking about it.



**Seven days challenge - example 2**

- a) In order to develop the habit of self-determination, every day I will practice:

Not checking my social media accounts (FB, Insta, Snapchat) by deleting them.

- b) My main motive or the reason why I want to develop self-determination is:

To have more time for studying and spending time with my family. To be more focused.

- c) Likely challenges I will face:

Trying to reactivate the account.  
Checking social media for school assignments.  
Being bored in the evening and wanting to reconnect.

- d) How I will counteract the challenges:

Use Block page software.  
Transfer school communication to Whatsapp/e-mail.  
Give the password to my best friend and ask them to change it.

- e) Overcoming challenges is easier with support. My support person (friend, family member, teacher, etc.) will be:

My best friend Kate.

- f) This person will support me by: (e.g. checking up on me every day, asking if I need help, sending me motivational videos, etc.)

By changing my password and not telling me my new one. By helping me to find out about school assignments. Talking to me in the evening when I'm bored.

**Seven days challenge Checklist**

Challenge:

Support person:

Day	Tick box if challenge was accomplished*	Message
1		"What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?" - Vincent Van Gogh
2		"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time." - Thomas Edison
3		"Perseverance, the secret to all triumphs." - Victor Hugo
4		"You must do the things you think you cannot do." - Eleanor Roosevelt
5		"It's hard to beat the person who never gives up." - Babe Ruth
6		"The best view comes after the hardest climb."
7		"As long as we live, we fight, and as long as we are fighting, that is a sign that we are not defeated. And if death does not find you as a victor, he should find you as a warrior." - Augustine

\*The support person by its signature verifies that the ticked boxes are true: