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Chapter 14: The Long Game

Avoiding Stupidity

Charlie Munger is an American investor and billionaire. Beyond his massive wealth, he doesn't seem to be supremely talented in any one field. He *is* a brilliant thinker and writer, but he didn't make his money by writing books. He's not a computer genius, brilliant biochemist, or math wizard. He wasn't successful as a lawyer, so his friend Warren Buffet told him to become an investor. That seemed to work out for both of them.

How did Charlie do it? Did he rapidly sprint from one genius investment to another? Far from it. Munger spent his career making good, stable, long-term, and boring investments. That's where his genius lies. Charlie Munger avoided trying to be a superstar every day. Instead, he chose to make many good decisions over an extended period of time. When asked about his strategy, he often repeats the same line:

“It is remarkable how much long-term advantage people like us have gotten by trying to be consistently not stupid, instead of trying to be very intelligent.”

People with ADHD tend to try and leverage their hyperfocus states into genius solutions as a remedy to all of their problems. Has this ever worked for you? How many rabbit holes did you go down in a frenzy of excitement, only to come up with an abandoned, unfinished project you're ashamed of? Did this burst of genius really accomplish anything in the long-run?

Just like investing or poker, we get tempted by visions of glory and success if only we could maneuver our way through some high stakes, adrenaline-fueled gambit. Charlie has the right mindset. You don't need to find some miraculous trick to be able to focus for 18 hours a day. That's like trying to figure out a way to sprint the full length of a marathon. Instead of overleveraging random bursts of hyperfocus, think about increasing the productivity of your average days.

How do we do this? Start by changing your mindset. Make the conscious decision to be like Charlie and avoid stupidity at all costs. Trying to work 100 hours/week is stupidity. Fix your 40-hour workweek first.

You don't need to make genius, herculean efforts every day to overcome your perceived failures. Likely, your average days just need to be better. Consciously choosing to have better averages is the basis of a good mindset. If you get hyped, let it happen in a controlled way, but don't rely on it.

Don't try to overcome your problems by being very intelligent. Just avoid stupidity.

Play Poker

If you want to be successful at poker, you don't try to win one gigantic, action-packed hand with all your money on the line. Instead, you make rational bets based on how strong you think your cards are. Over time, your good decision making will yield far more winnings than any one-time gamble. Your mindset should be more like a poker player, and your life should be played like a long, successful game of poker. Win small hands often when the odds are in your favor. If you lose because of bad luck, regroup, and try again. You don't have to go all-in on every hand.

Now apply this to your productivity. If you have an unfocused day, you don't need to pay back some magical productivity debt. Try to figure out what caused you to be unfocused in the first place. Was it from no fault of your own? Okay, that's just

bad luck. Was it because you have an inconsistent sleep schedule and played video games all night? If that's the case, then you should avoid stupidity and start sleeping correctly, rather than trying to be a genius and drinking 3 pots of coffee to try and make up for it.

Don't put all your hopes onto one single action or event. Make sound, conscious bets over the long-run. You'll fail sometimes, don't sweat it. If you continue doing the right thing, you'll win in the long run. As Charlie Munger said, don't try to be very intelligent, just try to avoid stupidity.

Accept the Inconsistency

The thing that finally clicked with me was that inconsistency is the only consistency. The sooner I can accept that with myself, the sooner I can stop getting so upset with myself.

— Dani Donovan, founder of Adhddd.com

A good mindset is accepting that your life will never be a straight line. Even if you had a perfect calendar with every single date, time, deadline, and appointment neatly organized, your life (or your brain) would inevitably get in the way. Perfection is a fantasy, *especially* if you have ADHD.

The only way to overcome ADHD is to understand that *you can't overcome ADHD!* For a long time, I kept trying so hard to become this disciplined organizational machine. I was trying to be a genius! If I missed even one single day of some routine, it became a tragedy. Even for the one week that I was able to be a robot, it came at the cost of all my creativity and energy. What's the point of that? I was trying to be a genius rather than making a good-enough plan for my inevitable inconsistency.

Accept that you will never be entirely consistent. For example, after discovering how much meditation benefitted me, I still forget to do it sometimes! Instead of getting upset that I “screwed up” my routine, I forgive myself and just go back to it the next day. Despite being inconsistent on a day-to-day basis, I am consistent in the long run because I consciously avoid trying to be perfect. I don't worry about meditating today or tomorrow. I worry about continuing the practice over the long-term. I think about being someone who meditates rather than someone who mediates every single day. Sometimes I miss a few days in a row or even an entire week. But it doesn't matter. The inconsistency is irrelevant because my mindset towards forgetfulness is just to forgive myself and try again.

Do your best, and accept that you have faults. Sometimes you will miss days, sometimes you will forget to do what you had

planned. But remember, forgetting is fine! ADHD means you have executive dysfunction. Your natural state is to tend to forget things. Just try your best and always continue where you left off. In the long run, it won't matter that you're inconsistent for a few days in a row. All that matters is to make as many good decisions as you can over long periods of time. This is the mindset that grew both Dani Donovan and Charlie Munger's success, and it's the same mindset you should use towards your life.

Make good, long-term decisions, avoid stupidity, and don't try to be a genius.