

An philosophical idiots guide to controlling the uncontrollable,
by Simon Ludford

I was re-reading Ross Edgley's book **The Art of Resilience**, in which he documents his world record swim around the UK. It's one book I would strongly recommend people read, it will have you laughing and crying in equal measures. Ross is a storyteller, and he brilliantly weaves the theory and practical explanations for why he does what he does into the tale of swimming endless miles, and the shenanigans that happen along the way.

Underpinning all the science-y stuff is this idea Ross calls 'Stoic Sports Science', a blend of stoic philosophy and modern-day sports science. I loved this idea. If we go back, way back, back to when Alexandria still had a library, Alexander was just ok, and Marathon was just a town. Philosophers of the time weren't the stuffy old men smoking pipes contemplating contemplation, they were as physically active as they were mentally active.

Anyway, back to little Ross and his book. There's a part within the book about accepting the uncontrollable and controlling the controllables. This at its core is a very stoic concept. Take the weather as an example. You have absolutely no control over the weather on race day: no matter how much you think or worry about it, Mother Nature will do what she does. You do, however, have control over how you think about it. Will you worry too much and allow it to ruin your day? Or will you accept it's not ideal and look to manage it?

If you remember back to my ramblings about self-talk and the science behind controlling it, the two ideas go hand in hand, how and what we use energy thinking about, is as important as how and why we train the way we train.

The stoics talk about the inner citadel, a fortress around the mind and soul. We may become physically vulnerable and often at the mercy of events outside our control (the uncontrollable), but the inner citadel cannot be conquered without our consent. "You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realise this and you will find strength". Marcus Aurelius said this over 2000 years ago. Now I would imagine the Roman Empire had bigger issues than the weather?

Regulating the things that we allow ourselves to think and worry about can be the difference between success and failure, the proverbial self-fulfilling prophecy if you will.

In summary, don't try to control the uncontrollable. Suffering arises from trying to control what is uncontrollable, or from neglecting what is within our power. I hope my ramblings help somewhat. It's worth mentioning I'm not a philosopher. The best I've ever come up with is "run fast or die trying" and "show me how brave you are". One is a rip on a 50 Cent film and the other is something my mates would say to each other before trying to chat girls up. I'm just a guy who reads and runs.

I'll leave you with two quotes that I think sum this up brilliantly.

"We suffer more in imagination than reality" Epictetus

"The desire for a more positive experience is itself a negative one, and paradoxically the acceptance of one's negative experience is itself a positive experience" Mark Manson