

Workout 1 ▪ Striving to Be the Best

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for *Aretē* (Excellence or Virtue)

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"Virtue is a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul." —Plato

"Virtue is a weapon that cannot be taken away." —Antisthenes

"Happiness is an activity of the soul that accords with perfect virtue." —Aristotle

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THIS WORKOUT CENTERS on being the best—striving to be *our* best.

As it is for us, the struggle to be the best was very much an ancient Greek concern going back some 2,700 years. In the words of Nestor, the son of Neleus, "Old Peleus enjoined his child Achilles to always be the best and to stand out among other men." Similarly, Glaucus, the son of Hippolochus, reports that his father "sent me to Troy and insistently ordered me to always be the best and to stand out among other men."

The imperative? Be the best! Be outstanding!

The struggle to be the best shows up in every area of Greek life. It is there relative to the body and the mind—to feeling, thinking, speaking, and acting. And to sports and the arts. And to war and peace. Really—no exaggeration—it's there relative to *everything*.

Being the best was tied to a larger project—living a life in accord with excellence or virtue (*aretē*). It's what we'll read about in the Cave's *Aretē: Excellence or Virtue—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Aretē*.

For now, let's see if we can get a better understanding of what it means to be the best—what it means to be *our* best

Greek & English ▪ The Greek word for "best" is *aristos*.

PROMPT ▪ With the help of the following **questions**, explore **what it means to be the best**.

What does it mean to be *the* best at anything? We may call this the **objective or absolute best** (*the* best). In answering the question, consider the various dimensions of human life, from human appearance and ability (for example, beauty, strength, intelligence—including emotional intelligence—, creativity, and so on), to the great variety of human activities (for example, relationships, school, work, hobbies, sports, the arts, business, politics, spirituality, and so on).

WORKOUT 1 • STRIVING TO BE THE BEST

What does it mean to be *your* best at anything? We may call this the **subjective or relative best** (a person's individual best or "my" best). Choose one or two specific areas of life to consider.

If they are, how are the **two kinds of best** (objective-absolute and subjective-relative) **related**? Explain.

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EXERCISE ▪ With the difference between the above two kinds of best in mind, **find** and **describe** one example of an **objective-absolute best** (*the* best) and one example of a **subjective-relative best** (a person's individual best or *my* best) from **two areas** of human life. Need some **ideas**? Think "bests" from sports, entertainment, the arts, writing, non-profit (charity) work, business, politics, education, friendship, science, religion, spirituality, life as a whole (a well-lived life), and so on. **Fill in the boxes below** related to the following: **Area** of human life. **Who** is the best? **How** are they best? The **process**—how did the person become the best? **What else**? The **goal** here is not only to identify the best but also to figure out what produces the best and how (the process).

The Objective-Absolute Best

Area of human life	
Who is the best?	
How best?	
The process?	
What else?	

The Subjective-Relative Best

Area of human life	
Who is the best?	
How best?	
The process?	
What else?	

WORKOUT 1 ▪ STRIVING TO BE THE BEST

PRACTICE ▪ MY MICRO BEST ▪ Being the best at something involves the whole of that something (say, playing tennis or playing the guitar or relating to others well) and the various parts that go into making up the whole (say, serving the ball or fingering guitar chords or listening to others well). The latter parts are often made up of even smaller parts (say, tossing the ball up or sliding rather than fully lifting the fingers or maintaining eye contact). The goal with this practice (“My Micro Best”) is to practice one of these smaller parts in some area of your life that you’d like to be best—or better—at. So first, **choose something** (some activity or way of being) you’d like to be best at. Second, **choose one element or part** of that activity or way of being that you’d like to focus on. Finally, **choose a small or micro part** of that element or part to practice. Then **practice** doing it well again and again over the next week. As always, **evaluate** how your practice is going. (By the way, can you get better at practicing? How?)

The general activity or way of being _____

Examples: Playing tennis or playing the guitar or relating to others well

The element or part _____

Examples: Serving the ball or fingering guitar chords or listening to others well

The small or micro part _____

Examples: Tossing the ball up or sliding rather than fully lifting the fingers or maintaining eye contact

Practice ▪ Now that you’ve identified the small or micro part, practice it over the course of the next week.

PRACTICE - - - - - PRACTICE - - - - - PRACTICE

Evaluation ▪ How is my practice going? Is there something I need to change? If so, what? If all is going well, what is going well? Why?

3 ACTION POINTS

- **Explore** what it means to be the best—both the objective (absolute) and subjective (relative) best.
- **Identify** examples of excellence (being the best). **Consider** how these examples achieve excellence or become the best (the process).
- **Practice** being the best (or your best) in one activity. Specifically, practice one micro element that contributes to being excellent or the best in one activity.

Extra Space for Answers and Journaling

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