

THE 7 STEPS GUIDE
TO CONTROLLING YOUR
PERCEPTIONS LIKE A STOIC





The obstacles we face in life make us emotional. The only way we'll overcome them is by keeping those emotions in check—if we can keep steady no matter what happens, no matter how much external events may fluctuate.

The ancient Stoics had a word for this state: *apatheia*.

It's the kind of calm equanimity that comes with the absence of irrational or extreme emotions.

What follows are the 7 steps you can take to achieve this state, so you can focus on [overcoming your obstacles](https://www.dailystoic.com/overcoming-your-obstacles/), rather than reacting to them.

Step 1: Steady Your Nerves

“ *What such a man needs is not courage but nerve control, cool headedness. This he can only get by practice.*

—Theodore Roosevelt

During the Civil war troops were unloading a steamer when it exploded. Everyone hit the dirt except [Ulysses S. Grant](#), who instead ran towards the scene.

That is nerve.

Like Grant, we must prepare ourselves for the realities of our situation, steadying our nerves so we can throw our best at it.

Step 2: Control Your Emotions

“ *Would you have a great empire? Rule over yourself.*”

—Publius Syrus

When America first sent astronauts into space, they trained them in one skill more than any other: the art of not panicking.

Here on Earth, when something goes wrong we trade in our plan for a good ol' emotional freak-out.

As Nassim Taleb put it, real strength lies in the domestication of one's emotions, not in pretending they don't exist.

Step 3: Practice Objectivity

“ *Don't let the force of an impression when it first hit you knock you off your feet; just say to it: Hold on a moment; let me see who you are and what you represent. Let me put you to the test.*

—Epictetus

In our lives, how many problems seem to come from applying judgments to things we don't control?

Perceptions give us information at the exact moment when it would be better to focus on what is immediately in front of us.

We must question our animalistic impulse to immediately perceive what happens. But this takes strength and is a muscle that must be developed.

Step 4: Practice Contemptuous Expressions

The Stoics used contempt to lay things bare and “strip away the legend that encrusts them.”

Roasted meat is a dead animal. Vintage wine is old, fermented grapes.

We can do this for anything that stands in our way, seeing things as they truly, actually are, not as we’ve made them in our minds.

Step 5: Alter Your Perspective

“ *Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become the next moment. By the same token, every human being has the freedom to change at any instant.*”

—Viktor Frankl

Remember: We choose how we’ll look at things.

What we must do is limit and expand our perspective to whatever will keep us calmest and most ready for the task at hand.

Think of it as selective editing—not to deceive others, but to properly orient ourselves.

Step 6: Live in the Present Moment

“ *The trick to forgetting the big picture is to look at everything close up.*”

—Chuck Palahniuk

It doesn't matter whether this is the worst time to be alive or the best, whether you're in a good job market or a bad one.

What matters right now is right now.

Focus on the moment, on what you can control right now. Not what may or may not be ahead.

Step 7: Look for the Opportunity

“ *A good person dyes events with his own color...and turns whatever happens to his own benefit.*”

—Seneca

The reality is every situation, no matter how negative, provides us with a positive, exposed benefit we can act on, if only we look for it.



Maybe you were injured recently and are laid up in bed recovering. Now you have the [time to start the book](#) or the screenplay you've been meaning to write.

That [business decision](#) that turned out to be a mistake? See it as a hypothesis that was wrong. Like scientist you can learn from it and use it in your next experiment.

Remember: This a complete flip. Seeing through the negative, past its underside, and into its corollary: the positive.

Another way of putting it: Does getting upset provide you with more options?

Sometimes it does. But in this instance? No, I suppose not.