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The Trader's Curriculum

by Dr Vee

Insights · Practice · Growth

Weekly evidence-based insights to become the trader you're meant to be

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"Dear Journal"

Five years ago this month, a friend introduced me to trading. I didn't start trading until April 2022, and on April 25th of that year, I opened a journal and wrote my f entry about it. This week, I went back and read it.

My why was financial independence. More freedom to spend time with my fam More travel. And next to it, my goal in plain numbers: make an average of $500 a w on top of my clinical practice. Reading that number again was a real eye-opener.

Trading has a way of messing with how our brain handles numbers. Profits and los show up as ticks, points, R-multiples, green and red on a screen. Little by little, forget the value of money. $500 starts to feel small. Ordinary. Not enough. And tha exactly where greed slips in, quietly, without ever announcing itself.

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Don't get me wrong. We cannot think about money while we trade. We follo process. We repeat particular habits. Money follows how we behave, never the ot way around. But rereading that page showed me how hard I can be on myself whe comes to my trading performance. The woman who wrote that entry would have b thrilled with where I am today. The woman who trades every day sometimes forget notice.

It also made me proud. Proud that I didn't quit through the drawdowns, the doul and the weeks when nothing made sense. And proud that, four years later, I am liv what I wrote on that page.

So this issue is a little different. It's about the why behind our trading, why our bra can drift away from it, and how to come back to it.

1. LEARN

Why the number shrinks, and why that matters

1. Your brain recalibrates every reward.

Dopamine neurons don't simply respond to rewards. They respond to rewards that better than expected. Once a reward becomes predictable, the signal fades and sh to whatever predicts it (Schultz, Dayan & Montague, 1997). Psychologists call broader version of this hedonic adaptation: yesterday's gain becomes today's basel (Brickman & Campbell, 1971).

In practice: the goal that once felt life-changing becomes "expected," so the br stops celebrating it and starts reaching for more. That is not ambition talking. neurobiology. Naming it is the first step to not obeying it.

2. Trading money doesn't feel like money.

Richard Thaler's work on mental accounting shows we don't treat all dollars equa we file them in mental accounts and spend them by different rules (Thaler, 1999). C

of the best-known effects: after a gain, people take more risk with what feels l
“house money” (Thaler & Johnson, 1990). On a trading screen, where P&L is expres
in ticks and points, money is even further removed from what it actually buys.

In practice: never translate P&L into real life during the session; that’s noise for y
execution. But do it once a week, outside market hours. What did this week’s res
mean for your family, your time, your plans? That keeps money real without lettin
into your trades.

3. Outcome goals give direction. Process goals protect you.

Specific, challenging goals improve performance when they come with feedback a
commitment (Locke & Latham, 2002). But narrow, aggressive outcome goals hav
dark side: they can narrow attention and increase risk-taking (Ordóñez, Schweit
Galinsky & Bazerman, 2009). For a trader, that’s the recipe for forcing trades to “m
the week.”

In practice: keep your money goal as a compass on a larger scale, the reason you
here. Grade yourself daily on process: did I follow my plan, my levels, my stop,
routine?

4. Self-criticism doesn’t make you better. Self-compassion does.

Many traders believe being hard on themselves keeps them sharp. The resea
disagrees. In a series of experiments, people who responded to a failure with s
compassion were more motivated to improve, and studied longer for a retest, th
those who simply boosted their self-esteem (Breines & Chen, 2012). Self-compassi
as defined by Kristin Neff (2003), has three parts: kindness toward yours
recognizing that struggle is part of the shared human experience, and noticing pain
feelings without getting swept away by them.

In practice: harsh self-talk activates the brain’s threat system, and a brain under thr
narrows its focus and reacts. That’s the opposite of what clean execution needs.

5. Your journal is proof that you changed.

Writing about our experiences helps us process and make sense of them (Penneba & Beall, 1986). And there's a quieter benefit. People readily admit they've changed a over the past ten years, yet predict they'll change very little in the next t researchers call it the end-of-history illusion (Quoidbach, Gilbert & Wilson, 2013). old journal entry breaks that illusion. It's written evidence of how far you've come, a a reminder that you're still becoming someone.

Finally, why your why matters at all: motivation rooted in values that are truly yo (freedom, family, growth) sustains effort far better than motivation driven by press or external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000). On the hard weeks, the why is what keeps y at the desk.

2. TRAIN

The First Page exercise · 20 minutes, this week

Find your first page. Open your earliest trading journal entry. Never wrote one? W it today: why you started, the number you hoped for, and the life you hoped it wo buy. Compare then and now. Fill in the table below with three to five lines.

Write to November 2027**.** A short letter to your future self: your why, and the proc habits you commit to. No P&L targets in this letter.

What I wrote then	Where I am now	What I had stopped noticing
e.g. My why: more time with family	*e.g. I trade mornings, afternoons are mine*	*e.g. That I already have th*

The lesson doesn't end here. Dive into this week's scientific references supporting th findings on our website

→ Dive Deeper

3. THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

If the person who wrote your first trading journal entry could see you today, w would they be proud of that you've stopped noticing?



Win or lose, everybody gets what they want out of the market.

- Ed Seykota in Jack Schwager's *Market Wizards*

THE WEEKLY ROADMAP

With this week's topic in mind, it's time to prepare for execution. Explore my high time frame decision points guiding our Adepts' trading focus throughout the weel

→ Explore Here

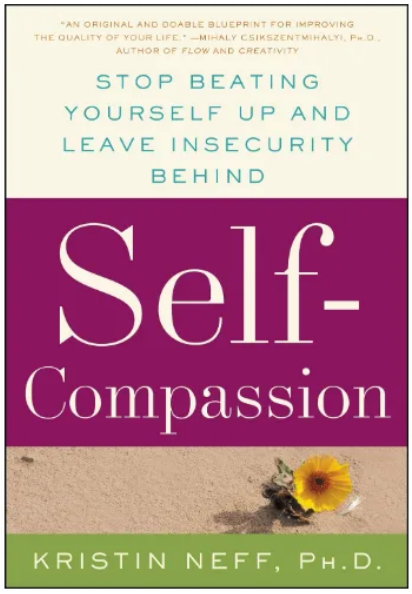
The alchemists had a name for the moment two separated parts come back togeti conjunction. For me, this month, it was the trader I am today meeting the woman u wrote that first page. I hope you find yours.

See you next Sunday,

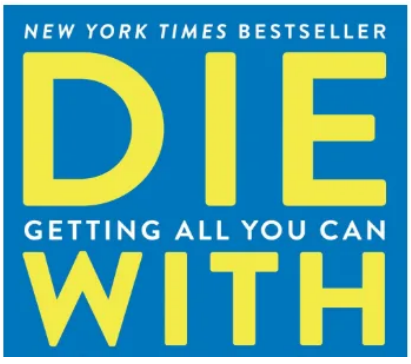
Dr. Vanessa Charland, PhD
Trading Science Communicator & Human Performance Specialist
Co-Founder of *Market Alchemists*

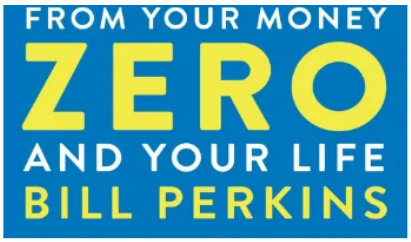
THIS WEEK'S BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Self-Compassion.** Why kindness toward yourself builds resilience rath than complacency.



2. **Die with Zero.** Money is only worth the life experiences it buys, and th those experiences have an expiry date.





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