



Living on the Edge: Making and Keeping Commitments

What's the difference between 99% and 100%?

When it comes to living life on the edge, math warps. In this world, the difference between 100% and 99% is the same as the difference between 100% and 10%; or 100% and 99.9999% — it's infinite. There is only: 100%, and not 100%.

Have you had that experience? For me, 100% was college. From the moment I began, there was never the slightest doubt that I would graduate in June, four years later. The idea of quitting or failing or postponing was never in my head, even for an instant. I saw people quit, I saw some fail, I saw some postpone, and had no criticism of their choices. But never at all did the possibility ever come up for me that I would be anywhere else but graduation on that June day. It just never came up.

It was life on the edge, a peak experience. It made me a different person.

I've had others since then. Grad school. My first engineering design project. My first management post. Nation of Men Chief. Peak experiences defined by the *certainty* of heroic completion.

The technology of commitment

People often look for the magic secret to happiness or success. And the muse always tells us, enigmatically, that the magic secret is that there is no magic secret. Well, sometimes there is. The magic formula for commitment is:

1. Make commitments
2. Honor your commitment: Do your best to keep it but if you fail, clean it up and move on.
3. Repeat step 1.

Step 2 is where a lot of people mess up but step 3 is the critical one.

Defining commitment

Are we in the mood for another magic secret? These are the rules for commitment. Run any commitment you make past these rules and you will know whether this commitment takes you to the edge.

- **A good commitment is doable.** Do you know people who make outlandish, flashy commitments but never land any? This is a way to pretend you're on the edge. When you fail, you can always say that it was impossible.
- **A good commitment is a stretch.** Making a weenie commitment is worse than no commitment at all. It's like arm wrestling a skinny girl: If you win, who cares, and if you lose, you really feel like a loser.

How can you tell if it's a stretch? Think forward and imagine you have done it. If you feel a great win then yes, it's a stretch.

- **It's measurable.** You need an absolute, for sure way to know you have won or lost. Sometimes this is very hard; but apply creative thought. I have never seen a commitment that could not be measured.
- **It's public.** If you want this to be life on the edge, make your commitment public. It's not about motivation, credit, or shame — it's about sharing who you are, sharing your quest, and ultimately, sharing your win to empower those around you.

A way of life

Remember step three: "Repeat step one." By repeating high-quality commitments, you build a life-affirming habit.

And there is really a fourth step, beyond committing again and again. That's to play higher by supporting others to commit. It's an opportunity to make commitment a way of life for me and those around me, and to be supported in it by men I trust. Of course, this means *I* have to live on the edge around the whole subject of commitment.

— Moe Rubenzahl