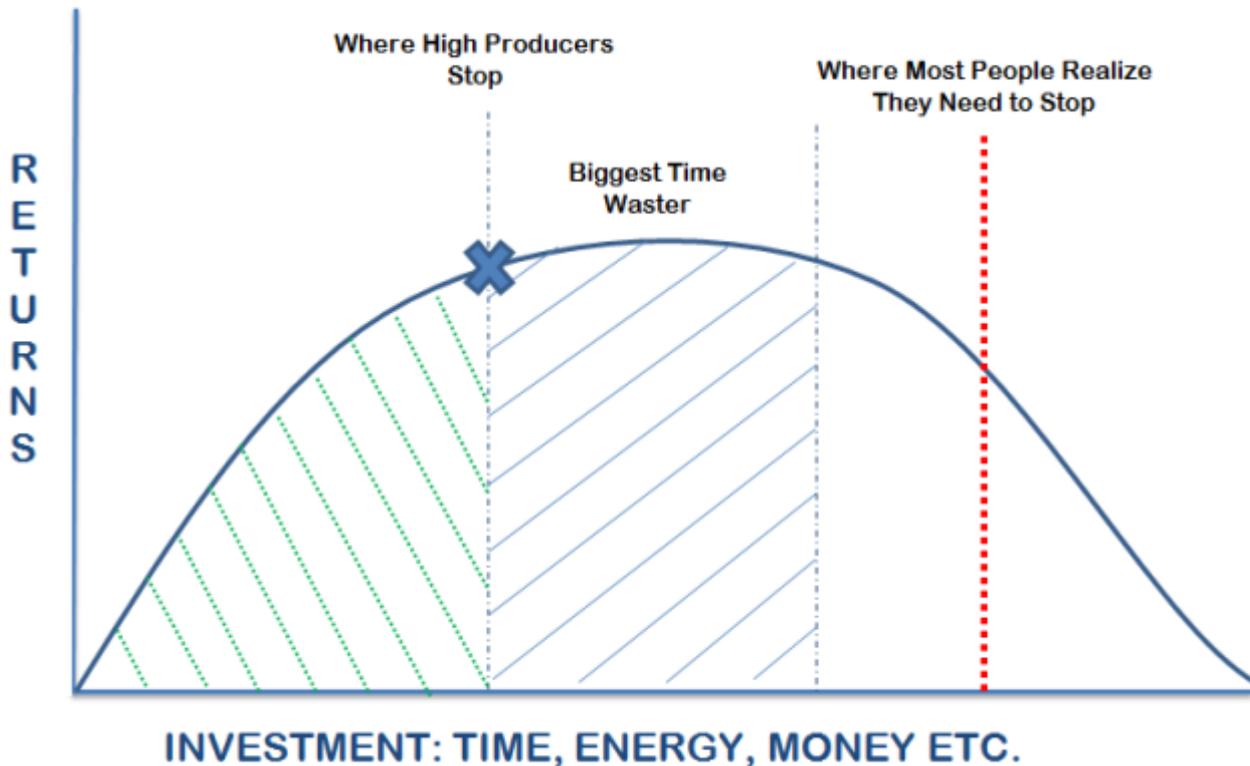


# The Mathematics of Self-Improvement

Black Label Logic | 4 May, 2018 | by Black Label Logic

## Law of Diminishing Returns



One

of my major areas of focus is in self-improvement. Every year around my birthday I sit down with a tumbler of good scotch and close the books on the preceding year. This means that I'll look at where I was last year, look at where I am now, and use that to make decisions about where I want to be next year. This is in essence breaking down the "[past, present and future](#)" paradigm into smaller chunks that can be measured. A major principle I tend to adhere to is the old statement by management guru Peter Drucker, "*What gets measured gets managed*", now some things are very difficult to create metrics for such as level of confidence, anxiety or depression. Other things are very suited for measurements such as number of workouts, lifting progress in volume or intensity, sleep, diet and many others.

One reason of the reasons why I implement such metrics is simply because it keeps me accountable and I find that I do better if I schedule and plan things out in advance. It's very easy to fall into "*I'm tired today, I'll get to the gym tomorrow*", "*I should do some work, but I had a 14 hour day yesterday*" and similar traps. If you've got everything planned out and made into habits, you will feel antsy if you don't do them. However, the major reason why I track and measure things that I think are important in my life is that if you are not tracking your journey from point A to point Z, how do you know when you've arrived at point Z? How do you know if you are off track, or even heading in the wrong direction? You don't.

I've named this essay, the mathematics of self improvement, because I'm going to be talking about the various mathematical principles that many people misunderstand when it comes to improving their life as a whole or parts of their life.

## Linearity and Consistency

Previously I've stated that many people tend to predict the future in a linear fashion, in a *reductio ad absurdum* formulation I would state it as "*This happened yesterday, therefore it will happen exactly like this for eternity*" stated in this formulation it appears silly, but how many readers have thought to themselves or heard others make statements such as "*It's the way we've always done it*"? This is based on the underlying premise of little or no change to the activity or the context of the activity. If you go back 10 – 15 years, nobody talked about "*online game*" or "*text game*", these days it's a common theme within the seduction community. Game principles didn't change much, but the context within which it exists did.

Likewise, we tend to assume a linear relationship between effort and results. I like to use the statement "*If you'd started saving \$1 every day 12 months ago, you would have \$365 saved up now*" to illustrate that very small efforts can lead to large results. However, as most people hate the journey and love the end, they will often throw themselves into massive, yet unsustainable effort to attempt to reach the destination sooner. A gentleman I know made a new years resolution to fix his health, so he was quitting caffeine, alcohol, smoking, processed foods, carbs, and implementing a 6 times a week workout program. He was able to sustain that for about 3 weeks before he went on a 2 week binge that left him in worse shape and consuming more of the very things he was trying to quit.

In essence, he fell victim to the "*More is better*" mindset.

## More is Always Better

This is in part a symptom of the "*Always be grinding*" culture that exists in certain groups or societies. If you are not putting in superhuman efforts, you are being lazy. Get up at 4 AM, hammer out a 2 hour workout, eat breakfast, be at work from 7 to 7, hammer out a second workout, work on your side-business(es), go to bed at midnight and still have time to swoop beautiful women, party and travel the world. This is just as bad as the "*too much, too soon*" situation it means cutting out something that is vitally important but is viewed as non-productive. Usually it ends up being sleep, or other forms of recovery. The trouble with the "*Always be grinding*" principle is that it's very easy to end up in a situation where one expends constant effort without reflection or adjustment.

Back in the day the "*100 approaches*" was a recommendation not for getting good at game, but for getting over approach anxiety. A recommendation would be something like going up to a girl, or another stranger and asking them for the time, or directions, to slowly work through anxiety related to interacting with strangers. Once you had become desensitized to "*opening*" strangers, you could move on to running actual game. These days "*100 approaches*" is sometimes treated as a magical number for getting good at game the same way 12 reps for 3 sets is treated as a magical number for hypertrophy.  $3 \times 12$  is not a magical number, 45 – 60 seconds time under tension is correlated with higher hypertrophy, and if you spend 4 seconds per rep you spend 48 seconds per set. In the same way, if you hammer out 100 approaches in a day on a busy street or a crowded club scene, but do not take the time to reflect on each approach, in-set effects and interactions, alter a few variables, take note of reactions and so on, you won't grow.

If you walk up to strangers 100 times and ask "*Excuse me, do you have the time*" the first 20 – 30 will mostly fix approach anxiety related to opening a stranger and anything after that you are hitting diminishing returns.

## Diminishing Returns

Most efforts end up hitting diminishing returns sooner or later. What diminishing returns really means is that over time you have to increase effort to get the same results. This is often concealed when dealing with securities by using percentages rather than raw numbers. In order for a security to increase 1% in value, it means that its market cap has to increase by 1% (stock price x number of shares). If a company already has a market cap of \$1b, a 10% increase is \$100 million, if a company has a market cap of \$100.000 a 1% increase in market cap is \$10.000. The percentage increase is 1%, but it generally will take a lot more effort to get \$100m as opposed to \$10k.

Diminishing returns is generally a function of time and progress. Malcolm Gladwell, outlined a requirement for 10.000 hours of deliberate practice in order to achieve mastery, however one can in many cases argue that 80% of the benefits are gained in the first 20% of effort, and the last 20% of benefits are gained from the other 80% of effort. This is an over-simplification but when you start something new, almost regardless of what it is, you improve very quickly early on with relatively little effort, then as you become more competent the investment requirement for continued progress increase drastically.

Thus, over time the investment you have to make into a given endeavor will increase, while progress within that endeavor will slow down. Therefore you run into additional opportunity costs, and have to calculate the benefits of continuing the existing path with a goal to improve at a given rate, versus the benefits of maintaining your current ability and pursuing something new.

## Fixed Resources and Opportunity Costs

Everything you learn or seek to improve has the time component as the first-order cost. If you're seeking to get an hour extra of sleep every night, this means that you have 7 hours less for other things in a given week. Time is a fixed resource, because you get a certain amount and then you die and everyone has the same 24 hours in a day. Depending on what you are seeking to improve there can be financial costs such as equipment, that also have to be calculated in as hours. For instance, if you decide to go to the gym 3 times a week, the cost is however much time you spend in the gym, plus time spent getting there. However, you also have to add in the time you spend at your job to pay for workout clothes, the gym membership, and possibly a coach. These are variable costs, because if you can increase your income or lower your spending, you will gain time back because you can get away with working less to finance your lifestyle.

An opportunity cost in economics is loosely defined as the alternative benefits you give up by picking a given course of action. One had I had to think about a few years back was the number of hours I spent at the office versus what I could gain by spending extra hours on something else. My decision was to cut back from 60 to 80 hour workweeks, to quite a lot less and to spend the extra time on reading, working out and pursuing other ventures.

This decision was prompted by the realization that the extra 20 – 40 hours a week I spent at the office didn't give me much of a payback, nor would my career prospects be hindered by cutting back. Thus the decision was easy, "no loss and no gain" vs. "Gain and no loss".

## Summary and Conclusions

My intent behind writing this essay, was to outline the 4 major areas where many men make mistakes

when they seek to improve their lives. In the first case, trying to do and change too much too soon is often a function of attempting to undo years of mistakes in a week of effort. In the second, attempting for failures in the first with additional effort instead of reflecting and looking at the process. In the third not realizing that the journey from novice to master is non-linear and highly affected by diminishing returns. Fourth and finally, not paying attention to resource requirements and the costs of the choices they make.

The theme in all of them is costs, expectations and results. When I sit down and do my annual life accounting, I make sure to pay attention to the relationship between costs and results. If I see that the scaling is not optimal, I have to make a choice of whether I want to make a greater investment in the coming year, or if I'm happy with the current results and merely want to maintain them, alternatively if I should give it up in favor of something else. I've ended up giving up quite a few things that I found to be very enjoyable, simply because the time I was willing to invest in the activity was not enough to reach the level of competence I would want in that activity. For instance, I gave up chess well over a decade ago because I realized that to be as good as I wanted to be, I would have to invest much time and energy into the game, which meant eliminating other things I wanted to do.

This is something I fear gets lost in the manosphere focus on self-improvement, you should work out, have your financial house in order, figure out your diet, style, learn game, and many other things, but you have to do this in a way that is achievable, sustainable and consistent. You can't fix a decade or more of poor life management with a flurry of effort over the course of 3 months. You have to prioritize in order of importance and degree of required effort. What areas are most important for you is something only you can decide. What level of achievement you desire within the areas comes next, and whether that can be sustained over time is third.

Once you have those answers you can create a plan and metrics for progress and get to work.

### **A note:**

I recently launched a [Patreon page](#) where I will be posting additional content every month for those who support me and I will do a Google Hangout for the highest tier Patrons (limited to 10 people).

I've also had some requests for consults, which I've declined up until now, but due to demand I've chosen to open up for doing some consults on request. For details please check out my [Consulting and Patreon Page](#)

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