

What are the odds of a boy from a little Austrian village becoming the bodybuilding champion of the world?

One in a million?

And what are the odds of that same boy moving to America, becoming a famous movie star, making millions in real estate and then becoming Governor of California?

One in a billion? One in a trillion?

Arnold Schwarzenegger's story is unique and inspiring and it makes you wonder:

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How did he do it?

- Did he just get lucky over and over and over again?
- Is he secretly a genius under that rough accent?
- Or is he really a machine like the Terminator that works non-stop?

The answer is yes, yes, and yes. Luck, smarts, and hard work all played a part in Arnold's outrageous success. But those are the simple answers.

There are more ideas, lessons, and secrets to success we can learn by looking deeper into Arnold's life and mind. By the time you finish reading this summary of his autobiography **Total Recall**, I hope you'll agree with me that Arnold's success was no accident.

He was able to visualize his future in clear detail and work towards it step by step. He was able to find great role models already successful in whatever industry he was entering. He was able to sell and market himself no matter what he did... all these things are made Arnold successful.

And sure, with some luck as well. The first great idea is...

1. Discipline: Everything is Reps, Reps, Reps

Growing up on a farm with a policeman as a father meant Arnold's childhood had a lot of discipline.

It was the small things his parents made him do every day. Like making him **earn his breakfast by doing sit-ups** before he could eat.

To understand Arnold's mindset about discipline, first you need to know how he grew up...

When Arnold was young, he'd often visit a nearby city called Graz with his friends to see movies. It was from the Hollywood movies that Arnold got the idea that America was a wonderful place. A place he would live one day.

As a teenager, Arnold spent many afternoons and summers hanging out at a big popular park with a lake. In one corner of the park, Arnold saw guys working out. He slowly joined them. **The first workouts Arnold did were in nature, doing push ups in the dirt and pull ups using tree branches.**

Most of the guys were working out as a hobby, but sometimes a real [bodybuilder](#) stopped by the park.

That bodybuilder was Mr. Austria at the time and he became one of Arnold's early role models. Arnold was impressed with his big muscles, flashy sports car, and the girls he often brought with him. It was from meeting Mr. Austria that Arnold started to see bodybuilding as the path to his success. Bodybuilding could be his ticket out of the Austrian farmlands and into America.

How Arnold learned discipline = keeping track

There was a small gym that Arnold started working out at. Well, it was more of a small concrete dungeon than a gym. But it had weights, which is what mattered. The guys in the gym hit the weights hard and pushed each other to new limits every day. It was here that Arnold really started building the body that later won so many trophies.

In that gym, everyone needed to keep track of their exercises on a public board. If you hit a new personal record, everyone would know and be impressed. But if you were lazy and didn't finish your workout, everyone would also know. This made everyone VERY motivated to hit their goals.

Arnold says this little exercise taught him how to successfully achieve goals. It's such a simple thing, but most people don't do this. Most people don't write down their daily targets and keeping track of which ones they finish. Arnold became empowered. Finishing all his daily exercises gave Arnold a huge feeling of accomplishment and lit a fire inside him. Most importantly, he learned that when he writes his goals down and puts in the work he can complete them one by one. And one by one he built his dream life.

I always wrote down my goals, like I'd learned to do in the weight-lifting club back in Graz. It wasn't sufficient just to tell myself something like "My New Year's resolution is to lose twenty pounds and learn better English and read a little bit more."

No. That was only a start. Now I had to make it very specific so that all those fine intentions were not just floating around. I would take out index cards and write that I was going to: get twelve more units in college, earn enough money to save \$5,000, work out five hours a day,

gain seven pounds of solid muscle weight, and find an apartment building to buy and move into.

It might seem like I was handcuffing myself by setting such specific goals, but it was actually just the opposite: I found it liberating. Knowing exactly where I wanted to end up freed me totally to improvise how to get there. (emphasis added)

Later in life, when Arnold was learning how to act or rehearsing a political speech, he carried this lesson with him. He knew **you can become better at anything if you just write down specific goals and repeat the work enough times.**

For example, when Arnold was training to be the Terminator, he had to learn how to reload and shoot without looking at his gun. Because that's how a robot would do it. So he practiced over and over again, until he could reload and use a gun blindfolded. Arnold didn't see acting as a talent, it was **just a skill** that he could build if he put enough time and effort into it.

[As Thomas Sterner says, "With deliberate and repeated effort, progress is inevitable."](#)

Everything is about repetition. If you pick up a heavy weight and put it down enough times, then you will start to grow muscles. Unless you want to be Mr. Olympia, building muscles is not about talent, genetics or steroids. It's just about putting your body through the right work—the right exercise and nutrition. But you have to repeat your workouts and meals again and again and again relentlessly.

SummaryArnold always set very specific goals and wrote them down. Then he tackled his goals one by one with relentless daily repetition. He says that everything is reps, reps, reps.

2. Focus on the Flaws

Most bodybuilders like to keep doing what they are already good at. For example, if a guy's arms are huge, he wants to stare in the mirror doing bicep curls all day. That makes him feel good about himself.

Arnold never fell into that trap. In fact, he did the opposite by deliberately focusing on his flaws.

For example, when Arnold realized his calves were the weak part of his physique, he actually cut all his sweatpants at the knee so everyone at the gym would see the worst part of his body. At the same time, he kept the most impressive parts of his body covered, like his chest and arms. This motivated him like crazy to work on making his calves bigger and stronger.

That's how Arnold won Mr. Olympia six times. By being brutally honest about what his weak points are. He always wanted to know what his weaknesses were so he could improve.

He also tries to find ways to push himself to grow in new ways, instead of staying in a comfortable place. That's why after he became a big action movie star, he tried acting in comedies. It's exactly the opposite of what people expect from the big macho Terminator.

Summary Most people want to keep doing what they are good at, but that eventually brings stagnation and failure. If you want lasting success, then you can't play it safe. You must always focus on your flaws and explore how you can grow in new ways. This will feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar.

3. Vision: Can You See Your Future?

Like most teenagers, Arnold didn't really know what he wanted in life. He was still figuring himself out. What he knew for sure was he was good at lifting weights and he really wanted to go to America.

Then one day he went to see the movie Hercules. The lead actor was a former bodybuilding champion named **Reg Park**. Seeing Reg acting on the big screen, Arnold had an epiphany:

All my dreams suddenly came together and made sense. I'd found the way to get to America: bodybuilding! And I'd found a way to get into movies. They would be the thing that everyone in the world would know me for. Movies would bring money—I was sure that Reg Park was a millionaire—and the best-looking girls, which was a very important aspect.

In weeks that followed, I refined this vision until it was very specific. I was going to go for the Mr. Universe title; I was going to break records in power lifting; I was going to Hollywood; I was going to be like Reg Park. The vision became so clear in my mind that I felt like it had to happen. There was no alternative; it was this or nothing.

Arnold didn't *accidentally* become the best bodybuilder in the world.

He also didn't *accidentally* become a world-famous movie star.

It was his plan all along!

He had the image of himself as a bodybuilding champion and a famous actor in his mind years before he stepped on a stage or in front of a camera. He thought of nothing else but that image for many years.

And it was that image or vision of his future that motivated him to lift weight 4 to 5 hours every day. It was that image that let him endure so many rejections and dead ends before landing his first big movie roles. It was that image that gave him the willpower to come to America with almost nothing, learn English and become a millionaire.

Summary As a teenager, Arnold had a clear image of what he wanted his life to look like. He wanted to be the next Reg Park. This vision inspired him to work relentlessly and that's why today almost everybody knows his name.

4. Role Models: Find People Who've Done What You Want To Do

Arnold always kept an eye out for role models, people he could learn from by copying their behavior.

Mr. Austria was a big early role model for Arnold because he had what most teenage boys want: girls, money, and respect. He often let Arnold and the other boys follow him around all day to see how much work was needed to succeed. Mr. Austria made money by working construction, and he woke up early every day to work. After work, he trained in the gym for 3 hours. Watching him taught Arnold that there were no shortcuts. If he wanted the nice car and huge muscles, then he would need to put in the hours every single day.

Later Arnold met his true hero, Reg Park. Reg had been the top bodybuilder in the world, acted in big movies like Hercules, and now he was running a chain of gyms in South Africa. Arnold had admired Reg for years, and he finally got to meet him by flying to South Africa.

When Arnold met Reg Park, they went to the gym to lift weights. Arnold was amazed to see that Reg Park could do calf exercises up to 1000 pounds. This blew his mind because Arnold could only do 300 pounds on this exercise, and he'd never seen anybody do more than 300 pounds before. Reg explained to Arnold how it was possible. He said *"You weigh 250 pounds, right? So every time you take a step your calf muscle has to lift that much weight. So if you want to train the muscle to make it stronger, then you need to use a weight much higher than 250."*

The limit was in Arnold's mind. After seeing Reg Park do 1000 pounds, it broke some imaginary limit in his mind and he leaped ahead in his training. That's the power of finding a great role model.

So if you want to be successful in something, ask yourself: **Who is already doing what I want to do or something similar?**

When I wanted to know more about business and politics, I used the same approach I did when I wanted to learn about acting: I got to know as many people as I could who were really good at it.

If you can't meet that person today, you can still learn from them. Arnold learned from Reg Park for years by reading his articles in bodybuilding magazines and seeing his movies. It's just like we are learning from Arnold right now.

For example, when I started my first business helping people with social anxiety, one of my role models was [Eben Pagan](#). He'd already built a multi-million dollar online business that

sold digital courses about men's dating. He was clearly a master of online marketing, so I studied everything he did. I took notes on his website design, his sales pages, course pricing, and so on. I learned so much just from watching what he was doing and using the same strategies to build my own business helping people with social anxiety.

This is a common path to success. [The founder of Walmart, Sam Walton](#), spent most of his time studying his competitor's stores so he could use their best ideas in his own stores.

Summary Finding role models is a big shortcut to success. Who is already doing what you want to do or something similar? By learning from successful people and copying their behavior, you can avoid wasting time trying to figure everything out on your own.

5. Excitement is the Difference Between Living and Existing

By now we know Arnold was motivated by his vision and extremely disciplined. He knew what he wanted his life to look like, and he worked **relentlessly** every day to make his vision a reality.

Does that mean he's an emotionless machine like the Terminator? Just painfully grinding through hour after hour of work? Not at all.

Yes, Arnold worked a lot. He was always working on more than one big goal at the same time. For example, soon after he moved to America he was lifting weights 3 hours every day... while selling fitness courses through mail order... while buying his own apartment building... while studying part-time in university... and while taking acting classes...

Just talking about it all makes me feel exhausted!

But for Arnold, there was no problem with work-life balance because any of his work activities could be a hobby for him. He felt passionate about it all. For Arnold, work was just spending his time doing what excited him most. First, it was bodybuilding, then acting, then business, and then politics.

My definition of living is to have excitement always; that's the difference between living and existing.

Also, Arnold doesn't have a line between his personal life and career. He enjoys going into business with his friends, like the time he and his bodybuilding partner Franco opened a bricklaying business. He also loves when he can meet someone through work and then become friends with them. Go hiking, play golf, or smoke a cigar together.

Summary To Arnold the line between work, play and life doesn't really exist. Everything he does is about being excited and growing and expanding. Always.



6. Selling Your Work is Essential

Arnold's definition of [selling is making people aware of what you've done](#). This is the most important part of any work you do, whether you're writing, painting or starting a business.

You could make the greatest movie in the world, but if nobody sees it, then it doesn't really matter how good it is.

That's why Arnold spent so much energy promoting everything he did. Early in his bodybuilding career, he learned from Reg Park that the most loved bodybuilders were the ones who had a personality and knew how to speak to a crowd. You couldn't just stand on stage flexing your muscles like a robot and expect people to become your fan. You had to talk to them. So that's what Arnold learned to do.

Later in his career, Arnold tirelessly spread the word about every new movie or book he released. He flew to dozens of cities, appeared on talk shows and often was personally involved in the marketing strategy for the movie. **Arnold knew if his movies made money, then producers would be very happy to work with him again in the future.**

I saw myself as a businessman first. Too many actors, writers, and artists think that

marketing is beneath them. But no matter what you do in life, selling is part of it. (...)

Same with bodybuilding, same with politics—no matter what I did in life, I was aware that you had to sell it. As Ted Turner said, “Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell, and advertise.”

Later when Arnold was a politician, [he sold his policies to the public](#). For example, Arnold wanted to improve the environment. Many left-wing politicians try to do this by making people feel guilty about driving a car. Arnold knew that approach doesn't work. Instead, he saw that regular people care about keeping their jobs or paying for their kids' educations. **So Arnold talked about the opportunity of creating a whole new industry** in clean energy that would create jobs in California. He sold the public a vision of a prosperous future through environmental policies. That's one reason there are over a million houses with solar panel roofs in California today.

[As the founder of Nike says, “it’s easy to sell something you believe in.”](#)

SummaryThe most important part of any work is sales. Selling is making people aware of what you've done. Because if you create a great book but nobody reads it, then it really doesn't matter how good it is.

7. Success In One Area Leads To More Success

Looking at Arnold Schwarzenegger, it's hard to understand how one person can be so successful in so many different fields.

- Not only was he THE best bodybuilder in the world...
- He was also THE top action movie star...
- And later THE Governor of California which is the wealthiest state in the US.

Someone who achieves any one of those is incredibly successful. **So how did Arnold do all three?** Is he superman? Did he just get lucky? Not exactly.

I believe Arnold used each success like a catapult to launch himself into the next success.

First, Arnold became a successful bodybuilder. That got him a job at an American bodybuilding magazine. Working at the magazine, he learned about advertising and started a mail-order business on the side, selling small courses about bodybuilding. He used the money from his new business to invest in real estate, where he made his first million dollars.

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And his bodybuilding launched his acting career. [Arnold landed his first movie roles like](#)

[Hercules, Conan, Terminator](#) because of how big and strong he looked. Having “Mr. Olympia” on his resume probably impressed the producers, too.

And he became the Governor of California even when he had no political experience because people were already familiar with him from Hollywood movies.

SummaryArnold used each success like a catapult to launch himself into his next success. First, he became really, really good at bodybuilding. As he achieved success in one field, he naturally ran into opportunities to use his skills and credibility to succeed in other fields as well.

8. It's Crowded at the Bottom

Many parents discourage their kids from pursuing a career in art, music or film because they say only a few people “make it.”

Other people spend years thinking about starting a business without doing anything because they worry that most businesses fail.

The bottom line is:

Most people don't go after their REAL goals and dreams because they worry there is too much competition.

Arnold has a totally different mindset:

People were always talking about how few performers there are at the top of the ladder, but I was always convinced there was room for one more. I felt that, because there was so little room, people got intimidated and felt more comfortable staying on the bottom of the ladder. But, in fact, the more people that think that, the more crowded the bottom of the ladder becomes!

And even [Trump said in his book](#) that, “Most people think small, because most people are afraid of success, afraid of making decisions, afraid of winning. And that gives people like me a great advantage.”

In life, the safe and popular path is actually the most competitive! Because that's what most people are doing. The “safe path” usually means getting a degree, then working your way up the corporate ladder. Fifty years ago when only a few people had degrees that really WAS a great path to success. But now with over 60% of people getting degrees, it has become the path of mediocrity. And that's why any good entry-level job opening is now flooded with dozens or hundreds of resumes from fresh graduates. All who were told their degree was the ticket to success.

If the highway is crowded with cars during rush hour, why would you go there? Take a

smaller road instead and you'll get to your destination a lot faster.

Summary Most people avoid their real dreams because they worry there is too much competition. But since *everyone* thinks this way, there is actually just as much competition at the bottom of the ladder!

9. Don't Overthink

Arnold prefers not to know too much about the negatives of something before he jumps into a project.

He says that if he had known all the negatives that came with bodybuilding, movies, politics or marriage beforehand... then he would have done nothing for his whole life!

Instead, Arnold like to jump in headfirst into anything he's excited about and face the problems as they come up. That's a much better strategy than staying frozen your whole life.

Summary Arnold says that "you can overthink anything," and even the best things in life come with negatives. So jump in!

10. Love Your Past: You Never Know If An Event Is Good or Bad

Many people blame their failure on their past. They say "my family was poor, that's why I'm poor too." Or they say "my parents spoiled me, that's why I'm not motivated to succeed now." But sometimes what you think are the worst parts of your past today, can turn into your greatest strengths tomorrow.

Arnold says he felt resentful as a teenager about how strict and unsupportive his father was. When Arnold began lifting weights, his dad told Arnold to "*Do something useful. Go chop some wood.*" Yet now Arnold realizes that his father was the reason he ended up in America. If his dad had been more relaxed and warm, then he might still be living in that small farming village in Austria.

In one of his first movies, Arnold played Conan the Barbarian. As a child, Conan's parents were killed by an evil king and Conan was sold into slavery. His hard life turned him into a fierce warrior, whose biggest goal was to avenge his parent's death. And near the end of the movie, he has the opportunity to do this.

As Conan is about to kill [the evil king] and avenge his parents, Thulsa Doom says, "Who is your father if it is not me? Who gave you the will to live? I am the wellspring from which you flow."

(WARNING: This is a very violent scene!)

What the evil king meant is that if Conan's parents were still living, then Conan would not be a powerful and respected warrior. Instead, he might have become a simple farmer. So by one way of looking at it, the evil king helped Conan sculpt himself into a mighty leader.

So it's not always obvious what you should celebrate. Sometimes you have to appreciate the very people and circumstances that traumatized you.

For example, for over 20 years I suffered from social anxiety. It's a terrible way to live. Just going to the convenience store made my heartbeat go crazy, my armpits would be drenched in sweat and I couldn't make eye contact with anyone. Yet years later my first online business was about helping other people to overcome social anxiety. If I had not suffered from social anxiety, then I would not have been able to launch that business, which now lets me live a life of freedom. So it really was a blessing in disguise.

I'm sure you're now thinking of some ways this insight applies to your own life, too.

Summary Sometimes what you think are the worst parts of your past today, can turn into your greatest strengths tomorrow.

Conclusion

Arnold is an exceptional person. There's no question about that.

There is a fire inside him that led him to succeed tremendously in bodybuilding, acting, real estate and politics. And I know this look into his life and inside his mind will help you succeed as well. Let's do a quick review:

First, create a clear vision of what you want your life to look like. Really see the image in your mind. Then write down **specific goals to get there.** Remember that everything is about daily repetition. The more time you put into doing anything, the better you'll become. There's no shortcut, you just need to do the work. Another lesson is to blur the line between work and play. If you're excited and passionate about what you're doing, then is it really work? It won't feel like it.

Next, remember to **sell your work.** This means making people aware of it. It doesn't matter how good your product or artwork is if nobody knows about it. And once you achieve one success, you can use it as a stepping stone to another success. Don't take the popular path in life, because it's usually crowded at the bottom. And finally, don't overthink or you'll be frozen forever. Just jump in and face problems as they come up.

If you enjoyed this one, I think you'll also like [my notes on the book Shoe Dog, written by the founder of Nike.](#)

I also highly recommend picking up a copy of Arnold's book because his full story is even more inspiring and educational. It's very easy and entertaining to read, too.