

Book Review: 'The Marshmallow Test' by Walter Mischel

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The Wall Street Journal:

When video of Adm. William H. McRaven's 2014 commencement address at the University of Texas at Austin was posted online, the speech went viral. Millions of viewers will remember the core message summed up in his memorable line: "If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed."

The Navy SEAL veteran recalled that "if you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. And, if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made—that you made—and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better."

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Adm. McRaven's "life lessons" in his speech are, in fact, variations on a theme examined by the legendary psychologist Walter Mischel in "The Marshmallow Test"; the key to being a successful Navy SEAL—or anything else in life—is summed up in the book's subtitle, "Mastering Self-Control." This fast-paced and engaging work is part memoir (Mr. Mischel recounts how he quit his three-pack-a-day smoking habit), part science book (the extensive research on self-control is artfully summarized) and part self-help tome (a chapter provides tips for increasing your willpower).

Mr. Mischel begins by describing how, in the late 1960s, he and his colleagues devised a straightforward experiment to measure self-control at the Bing Nursery School at Stanford University. In its simplest form, children between the ages of 4 and 6 were given a choice between one marshmallow now or two marshmallows if they waited 15 minutes. Some kids ate the marshmallow right away, but most would engage in unintentionally hilarious attempts to overcome temptation.

Read the whole story: [*The Wall Street Journal*](#)