

# KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

©2009, Glenn Campbell, PO Box 30303, Las Vegas 89173  
familycourtguy@gmail.com www.KilroyCafe.com



Issue #43  
May 1, 2009

## “No Pain, No Gain” – *not true!*

By GLENN CAMPBELL

“No pain, no gain.”

You often hear this phrase from people who are fixated on inflexible goals. It's a fallacy. This saying alone has probably caused far more pain than gain in the world.

While it's true that you sometimes have to endure pain to achieve important goals, it doesn't necessarily follow that you will achieve your goals simply by virtue of enduring pain.

For example, take the boxer or other sports addict determined to get to top of his field. Every day he goes through the same grueling regimen, working out for hours and continuously pushing his body to the limit. “No pain, no gain,” he says.

But the chances of him reaching the top are very low, and he'll get little reward if he makes it only part way. He'll succeed only by knocking done countless opponents who are just as determined as he is. And, if he does reach the top, the glory will be fleeting. Sooner or later, he's going to be washed up, a has-been, with no useful skills to fall back on.

Meanwhile, all sorts of real opportunities have probably passed him by, things he could have achieved with relatively little pain. His fixation on one goal and on self-inflicted “discipline” have blocked out all other options.

The world always focuses on the winners: the Tiger Woods and the Lance Armstrongs. It conveniently overlooks the 1000s of losers who were no less determined. All of them are saying “No pain, no gain,” as they try to smash through whatever obstacles get in their way.

Underneath that phrase is a narcissistic assumption: “Because I have endured so much pain, the world owes

me a reward.” Not true! The world doesn't owe you anything because you have suffered, because you are virtuous or because you have paid your dues. The world is indifferent and won't give you anything for sacrifice alone.

“No pain, no gain,” is magical thinking. It doesn't make sense. It often results in people deliberately courting pain when easier and more elegant options are available.

That doesn't mean the path to your goals is always easy. You often have to make sacrifices and compromises to get what you want. You always want to look for graceful solutions, though, ones that finesse around an obstacle rather than smashing through it. If you are relying on force to get you through obstacles, you are probably doing things the wrong way, and eventually one of those barriers isn't going to fall.

The “No Painer” usually has a role model of someone famous and successful he is trying to emulate. He has probably studied that person obsessively and thinks if he follows the same pattern he'll achieve the same end result. So he plows ahead, smashing through obstacles, leaving a trail of bodies in his path. But the strategy rarely works. Turns out, the world has changed, and what worked for his hero probably isn't going to work for him.

“No pain, no gain,” is usually spoken by someone with a single, lofty, inflexible goal—to become world champion, a famous author, a pop sensation, the top of the pyramid. He never seriously questions that goal. It's a religious thing. Faith tells him the goal is what he needs, but he never asks himself why he is seeking it or what it is really going to do for him. The biggest letdown is when he gets to the top of the pyramid after a lifetime of hard work, only then realizing that it isn't really what he needed.

A better strategy is “No brain, no gain.”

You can endure pain when necessary, but it's much better to think your way around obstacles rather than smashing through them. A little bit of planning and foresight can often avoid a whole lot of future pain.

Brainpower not only helps you gracefully evade obstacles, it also lets you adjust your goals according to unexpected changes in the environment. No matter who you are, unexpected opportunities are bound to appear in front of you, but you have to have the wisdom to see them and the flexibility to change course.

Often, these opportunities are remarkably easy. If a new path taps into skills you already have, it might feel almost effortless to you, but you have to be willing to change course. The No Painer can't see these opportunities, both because he is committed to his current path and because the new one just doesn't seem painful enough for him.

A No Painer will select a single point on the map, draw a line there and follow that line no matter what. A No Brainer will choose only a general direction. He may have a destination in mind, but once he hits the road, he follows the lay of the land. The map is flat and theoretical, but the land itself has something to say and can't be ignored.

It is good to have goals, but the real world is bound to muck them up. You can try to smash through reality when it stands in your way, or you can listen to it, understand its rules and take advantage of its opportunities.

—G.C.

[www.Glenn-Campbell.com](http://www.Glenn-Campbell.com)