There are all sorts of ways to take charge of your life. Eight of them stand out as universal keys to living an excellent life, with more chances to be proud of yourself and get your best results.

**The 8 Keys of Excellence**

- **Integrity** – your behavior lines up with your values so you feel authentic and sincere
- **Failure Leads to Success** – you learn from things that don’t go well the first time
- **Speak with Good Purpose** – you talk with positive intent in a direct and honest way
- **This Is It!** – you focus your attention on the moment to get the most out of it
- **Commitment** – you follow through on goals and dreams you make important in your life
- **Ownership** – you take responsibility for your actions
- **Flexibility** – you shift your thinking and make changes to get better results
- **Balance** – you spend time on the most important things in your life
Living and learning are not orderly step-by-step processes and neither are the keys to living an excellent life. That’s why they’re so powerful – they fit your life. They help run your life in a way that is true to who you are and what you want. **Here’s how they work:**

Live your life every moment with **Integrity**. Living with integrity means that your behaviors line up with your values. Values can be as simple as being honest with your friends. When your behavior reflects this value, you’re living with integrity. For example, let’s say you tell a friend that they should try out for a play, but you mention to someone else that you don’t think they will get the part. That’s not living with integrity. Your values and behavior are not in synch.

Because life is full of learning opportunities, there will be times when you fail. How you respond to this failure is the key to refocusing your energy. When you fail, it’s important to know that **Failure Leads to Success**. Let’s say you failed to be selected as a writer for your school newsletter because you turned in old stories and were afraid to write anything new. You can turn this experience into a future success by realizing that you need to give your best effort even when you’re in the learning zone to get something you really want. In other words, use your failure as feedback. Think about what you’ll do differently to get better results.
Let’s say you’re losing interest in learning because one of your teachers only calls on the boys in the class and seems to ignore you. You can be effective telling someone about something that’s bothering you if you *Speak with Good Purpose*. Let your teacher know that there is something he can do to help you do even better in class. Tell him that you come to class every day ready to participate but class time is short and he seems to call on other people and not get around to you. Be honest and direct about what you want.

Life is made up of little moments when we choose to pay attention to what we can take charge of, or not. *This Is It!* is your take-charge attitude for focusing all your attention on the present moment. So if you’re feeling like you’re having a bad day and things are out of your control, reach for your *This Is It!* attitude and make more moments turn out the way you want them to.

Have you ever committed to something and then lost interest and not followed through? Have you let others down? Have you let yourself down? Think of each *Commitment* you make as a promise to yourself or to someone else, and don’t make it unless you’re 100% into doing it. Commitment is about doing *whatever it takes* (WIT) to keep your word and achieve your goals.
If you tell a friend you’ll meet him at a certain time but you’re two hours late because you were hanging out with another friend, don’t make excuses. Take ownership by saying, “I was wrong not to meet you as planned or call you.” Ownership is about being someone who can be counted on and taking responsibility for the choices you make.

Flexibility is a key to your sanity. It’s about not getting locked in to only one way. If you’re trying to achieve something (like getting up on time in the morning) and it’s just not working, try another way (move the alarm clock to the other side of the room so you have to get up to shut it off). Changing what you’re doing can give you a better outcome, but you’ll never know until you try.

Some people say that you shouldn’t make a big decision when you’re standing on one leg. They mean you need both feet planted firmly so you are thinking and acting from a place of Balance. Think about your daily schedule of school, other lessons, family, friends and interests. Now think about how you prioritize what matters most to you. Then focus on doing what’s important in your life every day to get the results you want. This will keep your feet planted and your energy in balance.
You can take these 8 Keys with you wherever you go. When you do, you’ll take responsibility for everything that happens to you.

Checking in with yourself by using these 8 Keys is a lifelong way to be your own best friend, build yourself up, and take charge of what happens next in your life.