



Dr. Steven Williams Of Tri Valley Plastic Surgery On The Morning Routines and Habits Of Highly Successful People

Jake Frankel | November 28, 2025



Persistence. Surgery taught me persistence in ways few jobs can. During residency, I once operated for 26 hours straight to save a patient's arm. It wasn't glamorous — it was exhausting — but it showed me that some challenges only yield if you're willing to keep grinding long after others stop. That same persistence has carried me through building a career, leading organizations, and tackling new frontiers in tech.

Beginnings are a Genesis. That means that not only are they a start, but they are also the origin of all that follows. This means that the way we start something, the way we start our day, for example, creates a trajectory for all that follows. How do highly successful leaders start their day in a way that creates a positive trajectory for a successful, effective, productive, and efficient day? How do you create habits that make these routines permanent? How do you get inspired to develop the discipline necessary for such a lifestyle? In this new series, called Morning Routines and Habits Of Highly Successful People, we are talking to successful leaders who can share the morning routines and habits that have helped them to achieve success.

*As a part of this series, I had the pleasure of interviewing **Dr. Steven Williams**. Dr. Steven Williams is a Board-Certified plastic & reconstructive surgeon, past president of The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), founder of Tri Valley Plastic Surgery in Dublin, Calif, and a pioneer for the greater agendas of the plastic surgery realm. Ivy League educated — Dartmouth College for undergrad and Yale University for medical school and residency — Dr. Williams has become one of the most sought-after plastic surgeons. His technology background makes him a key opinion*

leader with a uniquely relevant perspective on modern-day plastic surgery. He not only occupies leadership roles at the local, state, and national level, but he is also frequently sought for his expertise, having been seen on “Good Morning America,” “ABC News,” Allure, Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar, ELLE, InStyle, Glamour, RealSelf, NBC News, Fox News, Bloomberg, CNN, Newsweek, Essence, NewBeauty, Forbes, and the Los Angeles Times, among many others. With an ethical approach, Dr. Williams takes great interest in social issues related to plastic surgery, access to care for those needing cosmetic reconstructive surgery, and giving a voice to African American patients — leading him to form a committee for diversity within ASPS.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive into the main focus of our interview, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your childhood backstory?

In my house, education wasn’t an option — it was oxygen. My parents didn’t just talk about it; they lived it. They didn’t have substantial financial resources but they recognized the opportunities that education created. My father earned a PhD and joined the space program, chasing ideas that touched the edge of the universe. When he realized his research was being bent toward building weapons, he did something most people wouldn’t: he walked away from prestige and started over. He enrolled at Yale Medical School because he wanted his work to heal, not harm. Years later, I followed him to Yale, carrying that same conviction that purpose matters more than titles. My mother was a teacher with multiple master’s degrees. For her, education was a calling. She believed it was the great equalizer, the one force that could outlast injustice, poverty, or circumstance. She poured that belief into us every single day.

So my childhood wasn’t built on wealth or connections. It was built on watching two people devote themselves, almost religiously, to the idea that knowledge is power — not as a bumper sticker, but as a way of life. That shaped me. It’s why I became a surgeon. It’s why I’ve led in medicine. And it’s why I’ve built in tech. When you grow up in a household where education is treated as sacred, you learn early that the surest way to change the world is to keep learning, and then use that learning to build.

What or who inspired you to pursue your career? We’d love to hear the story.

What inspired me to pursue this career wasn’t one moment — it was being surrounded by people who embodied excellence. At home, it was my parents. My father walked away from the space program at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California when he realized his research was being used for weapons of mass destruction and started over at Yale Medical School (I’m pretty sure he was the oldest person in his class!). My mother earned multiple master’s degrees and built a career as an educator. In our house, education wasn’t just important, it was the baseline. At Yale, I trained under leaders like John Persing, MD, and Stephen Ariyan, MD. They weren’t just surgeons — they were craftsmen and visionaries. Watching them, I learned a truth I’ve carried throughout my career: you become the sum of the people you emulate. And I’ll admit — a lot of my drive came from insecurity. As a young Black man in medicine, I rarely saw anyone who looked like me. The way I processed that was simple: I’d prove I belonged. So I stacked up the credentials — Ivy League undergraduate, Ivy League medical school, Ivy League residency. Not out of vanity, but out of a quiet obsession to be undeniable in any room I walked into.

That insecurity became fuel. It pushed me from student, to surgeon, to ultimately becoming the first African American president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. What began as wanting to prove myself evolved into something more powerful: the responsibility to lead, to mentor, and to make space for others.

None of us can achieve success without some help along the way. Was there a particular person who you feel gave you the most help or encouragement to be who you are today? Can you share a story about that?

At home, it was my parents. My father walked away from the space program at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California when he realized his research was being used for weapons of mass destruction and started over at Yale Medical School (I'm pretty sure he was the oldest person in his class!). My mother earned multiple master's degrees and built a career as an educator. In our house, education wasn't just important, it was the baseline. At Yale, I trained under leaders like John Persing, MD, and Stephen Ariyan, MD. They weren't just surgeons — they were craftsmen and visionaries. Watching them, I learned a truth I've carried throughout my career: you become the sum of the people you emulate.

Can you share the funniest or most interesting mistake that occurred to you in the course of your career? What lesson or take away did you learn from that?

I remember once, as a medical student, accidentally walking into an operating room fully clothed, and the look of shock and dismay from the nurses and from the surgeon. And then I remember the yelling.



You are a successful leader. Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

Persistence. Surgery taught me persistence in ways few jobs can. During residency, I once operated for 26 hours straight to save a patient's arm. It wasn't glamorous — it was exhausting — but it showed me that some challenges only yield if you're willing to keep grinding long after others stop. That same persistence has carried me through building a career, leading organizations, and tackling new frontiers in tech.

Resilience. Setbacks are part of the deal — in medicine, in leadership, in life. I've been told "no," faced criticism, and worked through plenty of failures. It is not a unique event. What mattered wasn't avoiding the hits; it was absorbing them and moving forward anyway. And in a world where social media amplifies every misstep and magnifies doubt, resilience is harder to maintain — but also more valuable than ever.

The ability to connect. This one gets underestimated. Whether you're teaching a student, building a business, or raising a family, your ability to connect with people determines your impact. Social media has made this harder by rewarding noise over nuance, but genuine connection still matters most. If you can understand someone's aspirations, fears, or goals — and meet them there — you can educate more effectively, lead more authentically, and inspire more deeply.

I'm an author and I believe that books have the power to change lives. Do you have a book in your life that impacted you and inspired you to be an effective leader? Can you share a story?

The book that's stayed with me is *Catch-22*. Odd choice for a plastic surgeon and tech entrepreneur? Maybe. But it's the perfect manual for anyone navigating paradoxes and bureaucracy — which is basically medicine, leadership, and innovation rolled together. In Heller's world, you're trapped in a no-win loop: damned if you do, damned if you don't. That's leadership. Push for change and you're reckless. Play it safe and you're irrelevant. *Catch-22* taught me to live in that tension — to see paradox as the terrain, not the problem. The book also nails the absurdity of systems. In surgery, tech, and organized medicine, I've seen plenty of "rules behind the rules" that made no sense until you questioned them. That's where progress starts. And finally, the humanity. Even in Heller's absurd world, characters fight for dignity and meaning. That's the core of what I do: beyond the policies, the surgeries, the technology — it's about people. Patients. Colleagues. Trainees. So while most folks might pick a leadership manual or a tech manifesto, my blueprint came from satire. *Catch-22* reminds me daily: the world is messy, contradictory, and sometimes absurd. But if you can navigate that with clarity and empathy, you can lead anywhere.

What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now? How do you think that might help people?

Right now, I'm in a unique lane. I've built a career as a leader in aesthetic surgery, but because of my background in technology, I've also found myself on stages around the world talking about AI and its role in the future of medicine. Plastic surgery might not be the first field you think of when it comes to technology, but it's actually the perfect test case and plastic surgeons are innovators.

Patients want safer procedures, better outcomes, and more personalized care. AI can help with all of that — from matching patients with the right procedures, to improving safety protocols in the OR, to educating people in ways that scale far beyond what one surgeon can do alone. The exciting part is that this isn't theoretical. I've seen firsthand how technology can extend expertise, lower barriers, and democratize access to knowledge that used to be locked away in journals or academic centers. And that doesn't just help surgeons — it helps patients everywhere. So the projects I'm most energized about right now are the ones that sit at the intersection of medicine and technology. Because when you combine surgical skill with digital scale, you stop thinking about impacting hundreds of people in your lifetime — and start thinking about millions.

OK, thank you for all of that. Let's now shift to the core focus of our interview. This will be intuitive to you but it will be helpful to spell this out directly. Can you help explain to our readers why it is important to have a consistent morning routine?

People fetishize the “morning routine” like there's a universal recipe — wake up at 5, meditate, drink green juice, conquer the world. The truth? It's not about mornings. It's about consistency. For me, mornings work (the green juice doesn't). I wake up energized, my head is buzzing with ideas, and I've got a window of time that's mine before the rest of the world comes knocking. That's when I tackle the problems that need creativity and focus. But here's the important part: the power isn't in the sunrise. It's in carving out protected, repeatable space — whenever that is for you — to think, create, and act without distraction. For some, that's 5 a.m. For others, it's 11 p.m. What matters is building the habit.

Consistency beats intensity. A routine is less about optimizing your morning and more about training your brain to show up on schedule. That discipline compounds over time — and that's where the leverage is.

Can you please share your optimal morning routine that can create a positive trajectory for a successful, effective, productive, and efficient day. If you can, please share some stories or examples.

For me, mornings work. I wake up energized, my head is buzzing with ideas, and I've got a window of time that's mine before the rest of the world comes knocking. That's when I tackle the problems that need creativity and focus.

Speaking in general, what is the best way to develop good habits? Conversely, how can one stop bad habits?

Good habits aren't built on inspiration. They're built on infrastructure. People think habits come from willpower. That's wrong. Willpower is a sugar high — it spikes, then it crashes. Systems are what last. When I was grinding through Yale, I didn't “feel motivated” at 3 a.m. to study or show up in the OR after 20 hours awake. I had routines and expectations baked so deep that showing up wasn't a decision, it was muscle memory. The second piece: reduce friction. Want to work out more? Put the shoes by the bed. Want to read more? Delete the apps off your phone.

Success is less about discipline and more about designing your environment so the good choice is the default. And here's the uncomfortable truth: insecurity is a hell of a motivator. Early in my career, I didn't just want to succeed — I needed to prove I belonged. That chip on my shoulder made showing up and executing non-negotiable. Over time, the habits I built out of insecurity became the foundation for confidence. So how do you build good habits? Stop relying on willpower. Build systems. Remove friction. And, if you're lucky, let a little bit of your fear or insecurity fuel you — because comfort never built anything great.

Doing something consistently “day in and day out” can be hard. Where did you get your motivation from? What do you use to motivate you now?

Like I said above, early in my career, I didn't just want to succeed — I needed to prove I belonged. That chip on my shoulder made showing up and executing non-negotiable. When I was grinding through Yale, I didn't “feel motivated” at 3 a.m. to study or show up in the OR after 20 hours awake, but I developed habits. Over time, the habits I built out of insecurity became the foundation for confidence. So, today, I have that muscle memory and same discipline for my practice or anything I am working on.

What other resources would you suggest to our readers?

There are endless resources — podcasts, books, courses, mentors. Each can be valuable, but here's the truth: they land differently depending on where you are in your life. What changed mine might do nothing for you, and vice versa. The most underrated resource is time — specifically, time spent in honest introspection. Not scrolling, not reacting, but listening to that uncomfortable, quiet voice inside you. That voice is inconvenient. It tells you where you're falling short and where you need to grow. Most of us drown it out with noise.

Ok, we are nearly done. You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good for the greatest number of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger.

Here's the math: populations are aging, costs are rising, and demand for care will outstrip the number of providers we can train. You can't fix that with more doctors alone. You fix it with technology. Tech is the only lever that scales — it can deliver education, diagnostics, and even elements of care to millions of people simultaneously, at a fraction of the cost. Medicine tends to worship the one-to-one interaction: a doctor in front of a patient. That's sacred, but it's also a bottleneck. Technology doesn't replace the physician — it extends them. AI can help triage. Digital platforms can educate patients before they ever walk into an exam room. Robotics can increase precision and shorten recovery. All of it compounds into more access, better outcomes, and lower costs. As a surgeon and a leader, I've seen that the real power of technology isn't just cool tools — it's improved access, improved outcomes and a healthier patient. The same innovation that helps someone in Silicon Valley can also reach someone in a rural community with limited access to specialists. That's impact at scale. Because the future of medicine isn't about building bigger hospitals; it's about building smarter systems that can meet people where they are. That's how we make the world not just healthier, but better. If your readers find this inspiring...call me.

We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US, whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we both tag them :-)

If I could sit down with anyone, it would be Sam Altman. The uncomfortable truth is this: the next great medical breakthrough won't come from a lab coat — it will come from code. AI is already showing us it can accelerate research, triage patients, and make information accessible at scale. That's not just efficiency; that's survival in a system buckling under the weight of cost and demand. Altman is at the center of that shift. He's not tinkering on the margins; he's building the platforms that will determine how billions of people interact with knowledge, and by extension, their health. What I'd want to explore with him is simple: how do we take the same tools that power search and conversation today and point them at the world's biggest unsolved problem — accessible, affordable healthcare? Especially in a space where giants like Amazon, Microsoft and Berkshire Hathaway have made a small impact. Because if AI can flatten costs and scale expertise, it won't just change medicine. It will change what it means to age, to live, and to thrive.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

<https://www.trivalleyplasticsurgery.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/surgeoninblack/>

<https://medium.com/authority-magazine/dr-steven-williams-of-tri-valley-plastic-surgery-on-the-morning-routines-and-habits-of-highly-831db5b63f45>