He’s well known for his incredible physique, but actor Joe Manganiello was not born with that *Magic Mike* build. It took discipline and determination, the same kind he applies to his on-screen work and his commitment to stay sober. We talk to him about how he stays motivated and focused.
This approach may explain why Manganiello’s success transcends his enviable physique and recognition by celebrity weeklies as one of the world’s hottest bachelors. (But not for much longer—he’s scheduled to wed Modern Family star Sofia Vergara this fall.)


He also runs a successful production company, 3:59 Inc., with his younger brother Nick. The company’s name was inspired by Roger Bannister, the first human being to run the mile in less than four minutes, long believed to be an impossible goal. The Manganiello brothers share a similar mission: They set high-bar objectives and work to exceed them.

Their first release was the 2014 documentary film, La Barre, a behind-the-scenes look at the real—male stripper scene in Dallas. Big brother Joe was first exposed to this type of near-naked entertainment when he played a character by the name of Big Dick Richie in Magic Mike, director Steven Soderbergh’s 2012 box office smash about Chippendales-like exotic dancers. His interest piqued, Manganiello went on to co-produce and direct La Barre, which he shot in just eight days and premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. 

Formerly trained Shakespearean actor who received his BFA from Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama in Pittsburgh, he says he long aspired to direct a film, an experience he intends to repeat soon. “I’ve only scratched the surface,” Manganiello says. “There is so much I want to do. Directing is a scripted feature is next, hopefully sooner than later.”

But one topic—“male as sex object”—clearly fascinates the star, enough so that he’s reprising his Magic Mike role in the upcoming sequel, Magic Mike XXL, opening in July. Devotees of Soderbergh’s initial outing won’t be disappointed: Manganiello hit the gym hard to flex, glisten, gyrate, and shed his skimpy costumes with the best of ‘em.

**Self-Made Man**

Sneak a peek at Manganiello’s middle school pictures and you might not believe it’s him. You’ll see little hint of the hulking, narrow-shouldered, thin frame, and seriously geeky glasses. While he always excelled athletically—“I played soccer from age 5,“ he says, “then added basketball, football, and volleyball” as the years went on—he looked like, well, your average Joe.

Today, Manganiello’s appearance is anything but average. Soderbergh once described the actor’s body as “walking CGI”—computer-generated imagery. Manganiello wants his fans to understand just how much effort has gone into his transformation. “Most people believe actors they see on screen have that they’re reprising his Magic Mike role in

**“THERE IS NO MAGIC PILL FOR STAYING FIT,”** says chiseled actor Joe Manganiello of True Blood and Magic Mike fame, who has convincingly played the roles of a mythically strong werewolf and a built-like-a-truck male stripper. Goals—in and out of the gym, he says—are achieved through self-control and an unwavering work ethic. It’s that simple.
“People who struggle are forcing themselves,” he explains. “Those who succeed come at a project from an inner joy and excitement. Create inspiring goals, and they will pull you toward them, without you having to push.” Lesser goals, he continues, won’t motivate you. “But if you shoot for the stars and miss, at least you’ll hit the moon.”

Cole agrees with Manganiello that scheduling exercise—or setting aside time for whatever you aim to achieve, from writing a book to switching careers—is key. "Set a reminder to work out at a certain time each day, so you can’t forget. Then turn what you do into bragging rights—I just ran that killerhill yesterday!’—and that will motivate you. Celebrate even incremental gains, he suggests, and “don’t call your workout system a program. Call it a training mission.”

Manganiello follows this same, tiered approach: Aim for fun, cheer on the results, and never, ever blow off taking care of yourself. “There is so much in life that is out of our control,” he says. “I don’t fly the plane. I don’t drive the other cars on the street. I’m not in control in terms of my career. What I am in control of is my physical well-being. I’m not sure there’s anything else that immediately gratifies you for your efforts in the way health and fitness does. Other people see it as a chore, I enjoy it.”

Still, while he often trains at a high level, eating lots of lean protein and mixing “cardio and weight resistance with pull-ups and hanging,” he does so only when his profession demands it. “I’ve only been in this kind of shape for five or six years. Not every role requires it. I put on 25 pounds for one role. For each role I play, I sit down and talk with my trainer about what I want to look like, what the goal is going to be, and how we can alternate my eating and working out—or not working out.” Good things, he insists, are his priority.

Right now Manganiello’s training is light because he’s recovering from a bicep injury to his right arm. It happened last fall on the set of Magic Mike XXL, and it was serious enough to potentially derail production. “My [scene] partner in my finale routine did something unrehearsed on the first take, and the result was that my bicep tore,” the actor says. “There were a thousand extras there. I had to stop the camera. I heard it rip and pop. I couldn’t lift my arm. But what are you going to do? Shut down a studio movie? He scoffs at the thought. “By some miracle the bicep stayed down and looked normal. You couldn’t tell. I finished the movie, came home to LA, and went straight into surgery. If I’d gone into surgery [during the shoot], the movie’s over, done. We wouldn’t have been able to make up that footage.”

The healing process has been slower than he’d like. “I had a cast on for 10 days. Then I wore a brace for six weeks. The bicep is a tricky muscle. Before [my injury], I trained like a professional athlete. Now, it’s three or four months of no resistance after surgery. I’m icing it, heating it, using electrical stimulation. There’s not much else I can do,” he says, but allow it to slowly bounce back.

Another muscle—the one in his brain that flexes self-control—is what drove Manganiello, even through discomfort, to complete the film. “I just powered through,” he says. “All of my sports growing up kicked in. You finish the game.”

Role of a Lifetime
Landing the role as husband to the talented and funny Vergara is his newest aim in life. The actor just hopes his wedding day isn’t crashed by pesky paparazzi hovering in noisy helicopters above the ceremony. “It’s like a CIA operation to keep things quiet so they won’t ruin it,” he says. But unlike some prospective grooms who drip nervous sweat before saying “I do,” Manganiello calmly and swiftly predicts success for their union. “We knew right off the bat, very early on, that this is it,” he says. “You meet that person who you know right away was put here for you. I was put here for her. We’re very good with each other.”

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It won’t take much discipline to kiss the bride. And make no mistake, Manganiello is training hard for it right now.