wake up

31 days & actions to take charge of your life

Matt Frazier
Introduction

It’s time to wake up.

If Thoreau had it right when over 150 years ago he asserted that most people “lead lives of quiet desperation, and go to the grave with the song still in them,” what would he think now?

The choice to sleepwalk through life is an easy one, and the constant stream of distraction and escape at our fingertips and in the digital cloud makes that option all the more convenient nowadays. To be awake enough to even consider that there could be a better way takes a special (and increasingly rare) kind of person.

You wouldn’t have gotten here if you weren’t that special kind of person. I’m glad you made it.

Almost 10 years ago, it was a 30-day audio program (Anthony Robbins’ Personal Power) that convinced a 4:53 marathoner like myself to write down a goal as ambitious as “I will own a Boston Marathon finisher’s certificate with my name on it.” No big deal for some runners, perhaps, but for me — who had been trying for three years just to finish a second marathon after that 4:53 debut — a 3:10 Boston-qualifying marathon was almost unthinkable.

I still have the journal I first wrote that goal in, and it’s even more valuable to me today than
that finisher’s certificate — which, with a lot of work, I did eventually earn — is.

Years later, it was another month-long program, Darren Rowse’s 31 Days to Build a Better Blog, that led me to the breakthroughs that ultimately resulted in my building a six-month old blog with a few hundred readers into a means of earning a living by sharing my passion with the world — something that eventually led to a book deal and so much more. If I hadn’t found that program, who knows where No Meat Athlete would be now.

Wake Up is my homage to the two daily-action programs that have had such a profound impact on my life — not by giving me all the answers, but by drawing out the potential for massive, focused action that I had inside me to create change. Potential, of course, which resides in you, too.

Wake Up is a one-month push of activity to upgrade your thinking about possibility, and your actions to turn it into reality. It’ll take some work, but it should be exhilarating, not difficult or painful.

As part of this program, you’ll be setting big, exciting goals (and you’ll know they’re big and exciting enough if action flows from them!). But just because No Meat Athlete is about health and fitness, don’t assume that all or any of your goals need to be health and fitness related — I’ve designed this program to be general, so that you can use it to conquer whatever goals you decide on for yourself (and I’ll offer plenty of guidance on how to choose them on goal-setting day).

You can come back to this program again and again, if at any point in the future you feel you’ve fallen back into “sleepwalking” and could
use a wake-up call. However, my experience with programs like this one is that the first time through is always the most powerful, so do yourself a favor and give it everything you’ve got this time!

Congratulations on choosing do something with that potential inside you, and to sing your song to the world, when the alternative — to sleepwalk your way through that life of quiet desperation — would be so much easier.

**How to Use this Program**

*Wake Up* is composed of daily chapters and associated actions, with weekend actions grouped into what I call Mini-Projects, which are slightly more involved than the weekday actions. If you don’t have a typical Monday-Friday schedule, you may want to choose your start date so that the Mini-Projects align with whatever days make up your “weekend” — or you can simply ignore the weekday/weekend structure entirely and treat the program as 31 equal, individual days of activity.

In general, I’ve assumed that you will start this program on a Sunday, so that Day 1 is a Sunday, Day 2 is a Monday, and the first weekend Mini-Project comprises Day 7 (Saturday) and Day 8 (Sunday).

Of course I realize you may not want to wait for a Sunday to begin the program, so in that case, I suggest you do Day 1 of the program immediately, then focus on strengthening and enjoying that day’s action (starting an “anchor” habit) until Monday comes around, when you move onto Day 2 and then continue with the program from there.
This program is about action, not reading. Some of the concepts will certainly be familiar, but even in those cases, please do not skip any action steps! A huge part of the power in a 31-day program like this is the momentum you build by making a commitment to yourself to actually take action, every day for an entire month.

Similarly, I implore you to adhere to the following rules:

✦ Do not read more than one section per day.
✦ Further, do not go on to the next section until you’ve completed the action step for a given section.

Trust me, I’ve ignored this advice plenty of times in the past, and I’ve regretted it every time. The problem with reading ahead is that it’s too easy to say, “I’ll just keep on reading and come back to do all the exercises at the end.” You know what happens next, right? Right. You never come back to do the exercises, and you might as well have spent your money on some pinwheels and big, foam cowboy hats.

Let’s make sure that doesn’t happen this time. Read one chapter a day, do the associated exercise that same day, then repeat. If you miss a day, or something else comes up and you fail to do the action step after you read one day, it’s okay to take an extra day to make sure you get the action done. Just don’t miss two days — it’s well documented that two misses in a row dramatically decreases the chances you’ll ever come back.

If two days pass without any action on your part, then there’s something about that particular exercise that’s challenging you. In that case, I give you full permission (and encourage you) to
shorten or simplify the exercise to something that’s more approachable.

One more tip before we get started: If you live with a significant other or a family, let them know what you’re up to. Explain that you’re doing something that’s going to make you happier and more fulfilled, and that they’ll benefit as a result. Even better, have them do the program along with you. The point here is to make sure they know what’s up, so that you don’t feel badly and they’re not caught off guard when you carve out 30 minutes for yourself on a Saturday to complete that day’s action.

Got it? Great. Let’s get started!
Day 1: Create Your ‘Anchor’ Habit

“Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.”
— Jim Ryun, American runner and politician

All of us have an activity that brings us deep joy and fulfillment when we do it. And most of us, quite frankly, don’t do that activity.

Ask yourself, “What activity would I love to do every day, but just can’t seem to make the time for?”

Don’t think too hard; just go with the first thing that comes to mind, or list a few.

My guess is that whatever you thought of falls under the time-management category of “important but not urgent.” The activities that bring us the most joy — and today I’m going to ask you focus on just one such activity — are usually of this type. Important because they nourish the soul (and without something like that in your life, what’s the point?). Yet not urgent, because nothing’s going to blow up if you fail to carve out the time for yourself today … in the short run, that is.

Your job today is to give yourself the gift of developing that important, but not urgent, daily habit that would fulfill you the most. Not just because it’s good for you or because you think it would make someone else happy, but because it’s something you love to do.

Your new habit doesn’t have to take much time — in fact, it shouldn’t, especially not at first. And
whatever time it does take is an investment in yourself. That’s why it’s called an “anchor” habit — it’s a habit that, no matter what storms the day brings, ensures that for at least a short period of time you’re doing something that fulfills you. And by doing this one great thing for yourself every day, you improve your mindset, energy levels, and outlook, so that you’ll eventually have the power to build on the habit and make other changes as well.

How to Choose Your Habit

This should be easy! Pick something you love to do, but that for whatever reason, you never actually find the time for. Make sure it’s something you’re excited about, not a chore — if you hate reading fiction, don’t make yourself do it just because it seems like you ought to. A habit like that would never last, and besides, even if it did it wouldn’t serve our purpose. You want something that will give you more energy, not drain you of it.

Don’t worry about what other people would think of your habit — do what feels right to you. Just don’t choose something that’s potentially destructive (remember, we want this habit to energize and empower you to make other changes), but I think that goes without saying. Along the same lines, don’t try to quit a bad habit yet — that’s much more difficult than starting a new good one, and usually less exciting too. There will be time for that later, and a strong anchor habit that you love will be your ally then.

My anchor habit is reading (nonfiction). Examples of some common anchor habits are:

✦ Running
✦ Going for a slow walk
✦ Writing, painting, or some other form of art
✦ Yoga
✦ Meditation
✦ Drinking a cup of coffee or tea with your spouse, and no distractions
✦ Journaling or blogging
✦ Playing a musical instrument
✦ Cleaning your home while you listen to an audiobook
✦ Brainstorming new business ideas

How to Start Your New Habit

My advice is that you use today to plan your new habit, and wait until tomorrow to actually start.

The waiting will give your brain the sense that it’s important, and since many people do their anchor habits in the morning, it will also let you start it at the right time.

And that’s important — you want to do your habit at about the same time each day following a precise trigger, an activity that already happens every day that will serve as a signal to your brain that it’s time to do your anchor habit.

So if you drink a cup of coffee or tea every single morning, without fail, that could make a good trigger. Simply waking up and getting out of bed can be a trigger, as can brushing your teeth, eating lunch, or walking your dog. Just make sure it’s something that happens automatically, so that you don’t skip your new anchor habit because the trigger failed to happen.
Two final but hugely important keys to creating your new habit:

1. **Start really, really small** — I’d suggest five minutes each day for the first week, and then increasing in five minute increments each week thereafter until you hit the point that feels right. Leave yourself wanting just a little bit more time, so you’re excited to come back the next day. What you don’t want is for this fun, exciting new habit to become something that causes you to procrastinate because you start out expecting too much. Remember, there’s a reason that up until now you haven’t made this a habit, and in most cases, that’s because you’ve made it into a huge endeavor in your mind. Have patience and start really small.

2. **Take on only one new habit at a time** — Trust me on this one. Starting a new habit takes a lot of effort, even when it’s a fun one, and by attempting to change two or three things at once, you’re doubling or tripling that effort. Make it very easy to succeed and let things snowball. My favorite advice for fostering this patience in yourself comes from Leo Babauta of the blog [Zen Habits](http://zenhabits.net), who reminds us that if you changed just one habit a month for the next three years, you’d have 36 new habits! Take your time.

You can go much deeper into the topic of engineering habits to last, and the links below will get you started.

**Today’s action:** Create your anchor habit, commit to a start date, and set the conditions for success.

**Helpful hints:** Be specific about what it is you’ll do and for how much time each day (remember, start small!). Identify a trigger, post reminders, add some accountability, and do whatever else
will destroy the barriers to your getting started. (For example, if your anchor habit is running as soon as you wake up, then figure out where you’re going to run, dig out your workout clothes and put them by your bed, etc.) Then, tomorrow — or today, if you just can’t wait — start your new habit, and do it each day after that.

Further reading

✦ The Habit Change Cheatsheet (Zen Habits)
✦ How I’ve Begun Changing My Life, One Habit at a Time (No Meat Athlete)
Day 2:
Find and Start a Success Journal

“A life worth living is a life worth recording.”
— Jim Rohn

Though it’s better than “diary,” the word “journal” still reminds me of what a twelve-year-old girl would use to record the daily tribulations of middle school. So if you’ve got a better term — success journal, captain’s log, whatever — by all means use that. I’ll still call it a journal and try to avoid thoughts of lockers and pre-teen drama and Jonathan Taylor Thomas.

Kidding aside, keeping a journal is an immensely valuable habit. Among other things, it:

✦ Can be your place to record each time you successfully do a habit
✦ Lets you keep all the work we’ll do in this program in one place, so that you can refer back to goals you set, plans you create, and commitments you make
✦ Gives you a place to jot down memorable quotes, insights, and ideas as they happen, so you don’t have to trust your memory
✦ Is a written record you can share with your children one day
Provides mental clarity and sparks new ideas when you distill your thoughts into words

For this program, you’ll be doing a fair amount of writing. You will want to keep it in one place, so for that, you need a journal (or whatever you want to call it).

Your journal can be electronic — a Google Doc, an Evernote note, a text file on your tablet or computer — or physical, whichever you prefer. Some people find that actually writing by hand helps to create emotion and “drive the grooves deeper,” but for practicality I prefer the electronic version for daily journaling, especially a Google Doc or Evernote note so that it automatically syncs across your devices and you can access it from anywhere.

The trick to keeping a daily journal is to keep entries short, and to do it at roughly the same time each day or following the same daily trigger. If you feel like you need to write a whole page every time you sit down, you’ll procrastinate and eventually give up. Instead, be satisfied with writing short entries like:

“Did my reading habit today, 35 minutes from *The Icarus Deception* by Seth Godin. His idea of ‘picking yourself’ keeps coming up in my life, and while I wouldn’t say I’ve changed my behavior yet, the awareness is there.”

My suggestion, if you’ve never succeeded at keeping a journal before: Each day, after you do your anchor habit, record it in the journal. If you have no time, just write something like, “1/4/14: Did my anchor habit. Nice job!” On days when you have more time, add a thought or two like in the above example. And a few times a week,
when you’re feeling inspired and have more time, let yourself write a paragraph or two or more about some changes you’re noticing or some obstacles you’re facing.

When I ask you to do other written actions in this program, use the same journal. Just put them above or below that day’s habit check-in — don’t get too hung up on order or neatness or rules.

And use your journal for other things too, whatever inspires you! Set up a page (or a different Evernote file) for business ideas, habits you want to start someday, or fun things to do with your family or friends, and add them as you think of them. Use it for brainstorms or sketches or anything else. (I tend to do temporary, “throwaway” work like the outline for a new blog post or idea brainstorms by hand in a physical journal, and keep anything that I’ll want to continually revisit in the more orderly electronic journal.)

**Today’s action:** Find or set up a journal, and write the first entry. That first entry can be as simple as a note that you did your habit today, but even better would be a short, written commitment to yourself that you’re going to do all 31 days of this program, no matter what, and why that’s so important to you.

**Helpful hints:**

✦ While journaling is technically a habit (and I just said yesterday that you shouldn’t try to create multiple new habits at once!) don’t think of it that way. Just consider your journal your place to log your habit each day and do the exercises from this program. To reiterate, I suggest using your new
anchor habit as the trigger for journaling: record the habit immediately after you’re finished. But when you want to write more, feel free!

✦ Setting up a new text file on your computer is the quickest way to start. You can password-protect it with most programs. But Google Docs (drive.google.com) is almost as fast and has the advantage of being something you can update from anywhere.

✦ If you prefer a physical journal, most bookstores and office supply stores have a section of journals with blank pages. Or just get a simple spiral-bound notebook. If you’re going to go the physical route, spending a few extra dollars for a nice journal and a pen that you enjoy writing with will give you more joy and make you more likely to keep this habit going.

Further reading

✦ 8 Reasons Keeping a Journal Can Help You Reach Your Goals (Becoming Minimalist)

✦ An Exceedingly Simple Guide to Keeping a Journal (Zen Habits)
Day 3: Make a Victories List

“Success is most often achieved by those who don’t know that failure is inevitable.”
— Coco Chanel

Alright, so you’ve started your anchor habit and your journal ... right? Remember, the reading is not what’s most important with this program; it’s the action that matters. So if you haven’t done the first two actions, please do them before you continue.

Okay, with your anchor habit in place to build some initial momentum and keep you on course, and your journal there to record it, we want to start working towards setting a big, exciting, energizing goal. But we’re not just going to jump right into that — instead, we’ll spend a few days “preparing the ground” of your mind so that when it comes time to set and commit to a massive goal, you’re doing it from a place of confidence and certainty that you can make it happen.

Today’s task is a fun one: Make a list of your life’s greatest victories. And I’m being liberal with my use of the word “greatest” — I want you to come up with a list of as many wins as you possibly can, hopefully 50 or more! Don’t just include the big stuff; make sure you also get the minor things like that time your inbox hit zero, the plaque you won at work that you
shoved in your desk and forgot about, and the night you were the big winner at poker.

I know, we don’t usually like to allow ourselves to do such an “egotistical” thing as this … but really, why not? Our brains are wired in such a way that we have no trouble at all recalling and replaying our greatest failures, often in great detail! And over time, as the failures accumulate (along with the successes, but we forget them easily), it gets harder and harder to believe that you’re capable of much.

Wouldn’t it make sense to deliberately focus on the successes for once? And because you’re writing them down, you’ll have a huge list you can look at again and again, and add to as your new mindset helps you to remember more victories.

The instructions are simple, and this should take you a little while, so let’s get right to it. Don’t hold back — work yourself into a frenzy of pride and excitement, writing as fast as you can for 10 or 15 minutes (more if you have it) about all the times you’ve “won” in life.

A few cues if you get stuck:

- Awards you’ve won
- Races you’ve finished (group them together, or write them all down!)
- Goals you’ve conquered
- Habits you’ve successfully started and maintained
- Performances you’ve given
- Obstacles you’ve overcome
✦ Skills you’ve learned
✦ Children or friends you’ve coached and are proud of
✦ High school, college, and rec sports accomplishments
✦ Grades you’ve earned and tests you’ve aced
✦ Volunteering you’ve done or charities you’ve contributed to
✦ People you’ve brought into your life
✦ Jobs for which you’ve been hired
✦ Degrees or diplomas you’ve earned
✦ Anything you’ve been congratulated for
✦ Acceptance into a college or other organization

Today’s action: Create your victories list in your journal.

Helpful hints:
✦ Don’t get hung up on details. Write “Training for and running a half marathon!” and move on.
✦ Count any accomplishments, even when they’re not literally “wins.” (For example, you don’t have to have won that half marathon for it to be a huge win!)
✦ This list is for you! Don’t be concerned with what others would think, because you’re the only one who will read this list (unless you choose to share it, of course).
✦ If you find it tough to think of many, stick it out. It’s hard because you haven’t allowed
yourself to think so “selfishly” before, so the exercise is all the more important for you! Write what you can at first, and keep writing, even when it seems like you’re only writing minor accomplishments. You’ll build momentum and start remembering more wins from different periods of your life.

- Have fun with this! Write exclamation points, underline words that make you feel great, and put some emotion into it!

- Add to your list throughout the day, and beyond. Get as many as you can in one session, then add to your list as you remember more throughout the day and after that.

- Glance at your list as often as you can. Post it somewhere you’ll see it over and over, or set a reminder in your calendar to reread it every few weeks.
Day 4: What Has to Change?

“You get what you tolerate.”
— Mike Ditka

We’re getting closer to setting some massive goals, and today we want to build up some serious motivation and plant the seeds of change.

There are two ways to create motivation in your life: get inspired, or get frustrated. Either one is great. What you don’t want is to be in the middle, in the no-man’s land where things are “good enough” — not great by any means, but comfortable enough that you don’t feel any urgency to change. “Good enough” is what most people accept, and why most people ultimately fail to build lives they’re proud of. While they wait for a perpetual tomorrow to take action, time passes them by.

Today, we want to get frustrated — but constructively so.

The action is simple. Think about the areas of your life — physical, relationships and family, financial and career, spiritual, emotional — and decide what’s not at the level that you deserve and will tolerate anymore.

So get to it, and don’t be afraid to twist the proverbial knife today … remember, the point is to get fired up to make some changes.
Some examples of areas of frustration might be:

- Unfulfilling relationship or lack of communication with your significant other
- Poor health or a body you are ashamed of
- Stressful financial situation
- A career that’s unfulfilling
- Emotional instability
- Shallow relationships with friends
- Boredom with your hobbies
- A lack of cheerfulness at home

**Today’s action:** Make a list of three to five things in your life that are not at the level you expect and demand. Then choose the three areas you’re most frustrated with, and write two emotionally charged paragraphs about each, describing why you deserve more, why you’re committed to changing it, and (just as importantly) what will happen if you don’t make a change?

Get to it, and get excited! Making changes like these is what this program is all about, and we’ll dive into the “how” in the days to come.
Day 5: Get Clear on Your Fears

“Set aside a certain number of days, during which you shall be content with the scantiest and cheapest fare, with coarse and rough dress, saying to yourself the while: ‘Is this the condition that I feared?’”
— Lucius Seneca

Yesterday you listed the areas of your life that you’re not satisfied with. The day is coming when we’ll address them, and set some concrete and measurable goals to change them. But first, we’ve got to understand why you haven’t already done exactly this — or, if you’ve tried to make the changes but failed, why you haven’t been successful so far.

In almost one-hundred percent of cases, if you trace back far enough to the reason you haven’t yet changed something that bothers you, fear is to blame.

An obvious example is when your point of dissatisfaction is your job, and you really want to start your own business. Here the fear is clear — to quit the job and start a business represents a risk, and if things don’t go well, that’s a very public failure.

Tim Ferriss writes in The 4-Hour Workweek that “most people will choose unhappiness over uncertainty.” We’re naturally risk-avoiding creatures, so when we compare in our minds a
mildly or even strongly dissatisfying present course with an uncertain alternative one that may work out or may blow up in our faces, we tend to choose the former — almost unconsciously.

The solution is to gain some certainty about the probable results of "going for it." True, we can’t know whether it’ll work out or not, but we can define what we believe to be the worst possible scenario if everything were to go as badly as it possibly could.

And guess what? When you describe your worst-case fears in detail, they become a lot less scary. While it may be slightly painful to play out the highly improbable scenario of utter and complete failure, it will also be liberating. Instead of letting your mind run wild, endlessly looping through the same what-if concerns, you set a hard limit: "Here’s the worst that could possibly happen — is that a risk I can live with, in exchange for the chance to make my life the way I want it?"

Once you’ve done that much, and defined in detail the worst-case scenario, putting yourself in that situation and envisioning how you’d correct course is also helpful.

Let’s say you’d like to run a marathon. But when you think about signing up and making the big announcement, your mind races through the fears:

What if I can’t find the time and the rest of my life falls apart?

What if I get hurt?

What if I just can’t keep up as the mileage increases?
What if I make it to the start line, but can’t finish the race?

What if I just can’t get myself to do the training?

And for most people, that’s where it stops. No answers, just questions that spawn more questions, but never any action. And no marathon.

Instead, answer the questions. What if it really did seem like too much time out of your schedule? What would happen then — what other area in your life would be the first to give? How awful would that really be? And would it be as awful as growing old without running the marathon that’s evidently so important to you?

Then — and this is crucial — what would you do to fix the situation if the worst did happen? Suppose marathon training took too much time and your family got upset when you weren’t there on weekend mornings, or to make dinner each evening after work. Could you go to bed earlier and get your training done in the mornings? Could you trade time with your spouse, and agree to cover some other times to give him or her a break?

And don’t forget the humiliation — if it absolutely didn’t work, and you had to give up entirely in front of all your friends, would it be so embarrassing that you’d never recover? Or could you choose another race, this time more carefully addressing the issues that prevented you from training the first time, and show your friends that failing once doesn’t mean failing permanently? There’s a lot of inspiration that radiates from someone with that attitude, you know.

You get the point. Let’s do it.
**Today’s action:** Define your worst-case scenario fears of what could happen if you took action to change the aspects of your life that you listed yesterday. Once you’ve described the fears, in detail and in writing, consider how painful they actually would be. On the off-chance that these worst possible outcomes actually did come to fruition, what steps would you take to rebuild?

Compared to the alternative of never attempting to change, how does all of this feel?

Write these answers in your journal, and get ready to shift into a more positive gear tomorrow, when we’ll take the final step to prepare you for some massive goal-setting this weekend.

**Further reading**

- Tim Ferriss’s 5-minute Google presentation on the Practicality of Pessimism
- Letters from a Stoic (see Epistle XVIII)
Day 6: Find Your Inspiration

“You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.”
— Jack London

Everybody likes the feeling of being inspired — that deep appreciation for the stunning ability of a single, determined person to change the world.

But for some reason, we usually wait for inspiration to find us. Why not seek it out?

Pretty soon, we’re going to set some pretty darn incredible goals, so use today to get excited for that. Even more important, use others’ examples to free your mind from the shackles of limitation.

As Jim Rohn asks, “Why not you? Why not now?”

Think about that. Really, why not? We assume greatness is reserved for others, but it’s so easy to forget that they all started like you. Sure, we’re all born into different circumstances and given different opportunities, but time and again we hear examples of the Oprah Winfreys of the world, who grew up with every disadvantage and reason not to succeed (poverty, rape, and pregnancy at age 14, in Oprah’s case) and somehow create a life of magnificence and meaning. It’s not what happens to us; it’s what we do with it that matters.
So put on some headphones, fire up your laptop or your Kindle, and indulge in a little bit of inspiration.

A few ideas:

✦ Reread the victories list that you made in day 3.

✦ Watch a movie that you know inspires you. *Rudy? Braveheart? Spirit of the Marathon?* If you don’t have time for a whole movie, look for the highlights on YouTube. But if it’s YouTube, really sit there and watch — undistracted and focused — instead of checking your email and tweeting at the same time. Let yourself be immersed in the emotion.

✦ Listen to or watch a stirring speech (again, YouTube has lots of them, including condensed versions). Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Steve Jobs, Brene Brown … even Ashton Kutcher had some inspiring words to say at the Teen Choice Awards!

✦ Listen to some music that moves you.

✦ Watch some clips or stories of inspiring athletic accomplishments. Roger Bannister and the four-minute mile, Kerri Strug in the 1996 Olympics, the U.S. hockey team knocking off the highly-favored Russian squad in 1980, Derek Redmond’s injury in the 1992 Olympics and subsequent finish of the race … this is just the very surface of the inspiration in the sports world.

✦ Start reading a new book. You probably won’t finish a book in one day, but that’s ok: most authors put the inspiring stuff right up front, to hook you. Different people are
inspired by different books, but a few personal favorites for rocket-fueling my brain are *Awaken the Giant Within*, *Way of the Peaceful Warrior*, *Turning Pro*, *Born to Run*, *Eat & Run*, *Finding Ultra*, *The 4-Hour Workweek*, *The Magic of Thinking Big*, *Unlimited Power*, *Linchpin*, and *The Alchemist* (the only fiction work of the bunch).

**Today’s action:** Get motivated! Do whatever it takes. Then let your mind wander into the territory of what you might do to address some of the challenges you identified a few days ago. Soon, we’ll make it official, so be ready!

While this is just a one-day exercise to help you discover that inspiration that’s all around you and at your fingertips, the real benefit comes when your attitude shifts as a result of constant inspiration and wonder at the possibilities that surround you. This won’t happen in one day or one movie or one YouTube clip. As best you can, find time to seek inspiration every day — this wouldn’t be a bad habit to add to your routine. Reading, of course, is a simple way to do this.

**Helpful hints:** I find that engaging my body helps the wheels in my mind to start turning. A 40-minute run with great music or an amazing audiobook can be a huge boost … but so can a trip to the bookstore and a cup of coffee. Go with what excites you and gives you energy in this moment, and you can’t go wrong.
Further reading

- **Top 100 Inspirational Quotes** (Forbes)
- **All of the Inspiration You Will Ever Need** (Nerd Fitness)

**One more thing:** Tomorrow is goal-setting day! It’s one of the most important days in this program (perhaps THE most important), which is why I designed it to fall on a weekend day if you’re following this program the way I suggest. Whatever your situation, give yourself the gift of some focused, solitary time in a place that’s conducive to big thinking for the goal-setting exercise.
Weekend Mini-Project
Set Massive, Obsession-Worthy Goals and Take Action

“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”
— Mark Twain

“I worked for a menial’s hire
Only to find dismayed
Whatever I had asked of life
Life would have gladly paid.”
— Jessie Belle Rittenhouse

Saturday (Day 7): Set goals

Today is the day! It’s time to set some big, “unreasonable” goals and chart the course of your future.

Before we start, look at the Mark Twain quote above, and ask yourself: What is the thing that 20, 30 or more years from now when I look back, I’ll be disappointed that I never did?

Setting goals, if you’re doing it right, is unbelievably exciting and energizing. For the next several minutes, I implore you to throw off
those bowlines. Forget about limits and be a kid again. Have fun with this — if it’s not fun, you’re probably thinking too small.

Goal-setting isn’t woo-woo, hippy-dippy New Age stuff; there’s plenty of scientific evidence to confirm that goal setting really does work.

It’s my belief that you’re more likely to achieve a big and seemingly unreasonable goal than you are a more modest one. Why? Because major obstacles are going to arise in between you and any goal that’s worth your time. When they do, are you more likely to persevere if your sights are set on something ho-hum, or something that’s so magnificent that it makes your palms sweat just to think about it? Something that keeps you up late at night and wakes you up early, because once captivated by the thought that somehow you can make this happen, you become borderline obsessed?

Tim Ferriss, in *The 4-Hour Workweek*, sums this up remarkably well, in my favorite passage in the entire book:

*Ninety-nine percent of the people in the world are convinced they are incapable of achieving great things, so they aim for mediocre. The level of competition is thus fiercest for “realistic” goals, paradoxically making them the most time- and energy-consuming …*

*If you are insecure, guess what? The rest of the world is, too. Do not overestimate the competition and underestimate yourself. You are better than you think.*

*Unreasonable and unrealistic goals are easier to achieve for yet another reason. Having an unreasonably large goal is an adrenaline infusion that provides the*
endurance to overcome the inevitable trials and tribulations that go along with any goal. Realistic goals, goals restricted to the average ambition level, are uninspiring and will only fuel you through the first or second problem, at which point you throw in the towel. If the potential payoff is mediocre or average, so is your effort.

The fishing is best where the fewest go, and the collective insecurity of the world makes it easy for people to hit home runs while everyone else is aiming for base hits.

Ready? Have some fun with this — the right goal, your “magnificent obsession,” just might come to define your life. And it all starts now.

In a quiet space that inspires and energizes you, go through the goal-setting process described below. The more time, energy, and emotion you can put into this, the better!

The Goal-Setting Process

Step 1. Take a quick look back at the areas of your life you listed a few days ago that are not at the level you deserve. Then quickly review your victories list, and let yourself feel the emotion those accomplishments stir in you. Do what it takes to get amped up for this!

Step 2. On a sheet of paper or your journal (I like to actually handwrite for this step), make a huge list of all that you’d like to accomplish, acquire, and experience in the next 10 years. Don’t think about what’s realistic, just dream, as if a genie were going to grant you your every wish. Write for 10 minutes straight here, and try to get as much down as you possibly can —
don’t let your pencil stop moving if you can help it. We’re not concerned about details at this stage; just write enough so that you’ll know what it means later.

Think of this as a dream list, or even a fantasy list. Don’t censor yourself or worry about what’s possible yet — we’ll think about that later. This is just for you, so go crazy with it! Include goals that are short-term and long-term. Even if you know you’d never choose some of these as goals to pursue right now, writing them down helps you to see what your dream life would look like. And make sure it’s your dream life — no sense going after goals someone else chooses for you.

Some questions to prompt you:

✦ What skills would you like to learn?
✦ Where would you like to travel; what would you like to do there?
✦ What experiences do you want to create?
✦ Where would you like to live? In what type of house?
✦ What fitness goals would you like to accomplish?
✦ Who would you like to have dinner with? Who would you like to call your friend?
✦ Who do you want to spend your days with?
✦ What would you like to do for a living?
✦ How much money would you like to earn each year, or accumulate?
✦ What would you like for your family?
✦ What do you want to contribute? How do you want to change the world?
✦ What “toys” would you like to have? (Nothing wrong with a goal like this!)
✦ What disciplines would you like to adopt?
✦ What books do you want to read?
✦ How spiritual do you want to be?
**Step 3.** Go through your list of dreams and quickly put a timeline on each one — the amount of time in which you’d realistically like to make each happen. No need to get more detailed than “1 year (or less),” “2 years,” “3 years,” “5 years,” “10 years.” Make sure you’ve got several goals that are short-term and several that are long-term.

When you do this step, keep in mind what Tony Robbins says about timelines for goals: “We usually overestimate what we think we can accomplish in one year — but we grossly underestimate what we can accomplish in a decade.” There’s no rush. Don’t overload your brain with one-year goals that really should take much longer, or you’ll feel paralyzed with overwhelm. But when it comes to longer-term goals, don’t underestimate what you’re capable of accomplishing!

**Step 4.** Go through your dream list and pare it down a bit. Cross off any that you wrote down that, while perhaps fun, you aren’t really willing to work for, as well as those for which you’d have trouble coming up with a strong “why.” Your reasons for going after the goals you decide on will be a crucial part of the motivation to work at them, so if you can’t find a “why” that inspires you, cross that goal off your list.

**Step 5.** From the goals that remain, choose your top three long-term goals (those whose timeline is longer than a year), up to 10 years out from now. Circle, underline, or star each one. Here, it’s especially important to be balanced — you wouldn’t want all your long-term goals to be financial, for example. Make sure you’re willing to start creating each one now.

**Step 6.** Next, choose your top three one-year goals and circle each one or put a star next to it.
Aim for balance again here; try to choose one goal from each of three different areas of your life.

**Step 7.** Now, look at how your one-year goals line up with your long-term goals. Do any of them match up with (and act as stepping stones to) a corresponding long-term goal that you selected back in step 5?

For example, someone might have a three-year (long-term) goal to run a 100-mile ultramarathon, and a one-year goal to run their first marathon. This is perfect, because the one-year goal gives you a place to start working on the long-term goal.

It’s not likely that all three one-year goals will exactly line up with three long-term goals this way. In that case, add more one-year goals to act as those stepping stones. For any long-term goal that does not have a one-year stepping stone goal, choose another one-year goal to add your list. It may be from your dream list in step 1, or you may need to think of a new one-year goal that would represent the perfect stepping stone to the long-term goal (while still being exciting for its own sake).

Day-to-day you’ll be more focused on the one-year goals than the longer-term ones, so by aligning them in this way you’ll be constantly reminded of your longer-term goal. Just as valuable, you create a lot of “why”-power for the one-year goal.

**Step 8.** Finally, from your one-year goals (you’ll have three or more), choose one to be your most important, “banner” goal for the year — the one thing that if you accomplished it and none of the others in the next year, you’d still be pretty darn ecstatic.
**Step 9.** Check your goals. Are they specific? (For example, don’t say “I want to get faster”; choose a precise time in which you’d like to run in a certain race.) Are they positive (focused on what you DO want, not what you DON’T)? And most importantly, do they really excite you, so much that you can’t wait to get started on making them a reality? If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then adjust accordingly.

**Step 10.** For each of your new goals (you should have a total of three goals longer than one year, and at least three for one year or less), set a precise deadline for its achievement and write in your journal a positive, first-person, present-tense statement about it: For example, “I run a marathon in under four hours by December 1st, 2016.” Avoid listing what you DON’T want (like, “I LOSE 25 pounds by January 1st, 2015”) and instead list what you do want (“I achieve my ideal weight of 135 pounds by January 1st, 2015”). Put your one-year banner goal at the top of this list.

Congratulations, you now have a set of written goals, and you’re significantly closer to getting what you want than you were when it was all just floating around in your head. Take your list of goals (short- and long-term, with the banner goal at the top), and put it somewhere where you’ll see it often. It’s fine to keep it in your success journal, but you may also want to copy it on a separate piece of paper that you keep by your bed, so that you see it every night before you go to sleep and every morning when you wake up.

If you’d like, create a habit of reviewing your goals every day, closing your eyes and actually envisioning and feeling what it would be like to make them a reality. Some people love this type
of visualization, others get nothing out of it, so it really is up to you.

We’ll officially start taking action tomorrow, but if you’re feeling super-inspired, don’t hold back from doing something now! One sign of setting a great goal is that action flows immediately from it, so don’t hold back! You could even go on to Sunday’s actions now and then give yourself an extra day of action tomorrow, if you wish.

One final word of warning: Don’t get too hung up on how well you’ve done this process, or worry, for example, about whether or not the short-term goals match up perfectly with the long-term goals. I suggest that you repeat this exercise every three to six months, so each time you do it, you’ll learn what has worked well and what hasn’t.

Sunday (Day 8): Take one action for each of your one-year goals

So you’ve taken the big step: you now have a written, organized list of your goals, short- and long-term. You’ve joined the ranks of a very select few people who will ever take the time to deliberately design their lives. Now it’s time to start making these goals a reality.

Right now, your goals are on paper … which is significantly better than in your head. Albeit a tiny one, they’ve made that imprint on the world — they’re not just thoughts!

Now we want to go further with that idea of impacting the world. We want to make bigger and bigger waves in the real world to cement
these goals — which started as simple thought impulses — in the physical reality we inhabit. Today’s action will be focused on this aim. The point is to use your current level of motivation (which should be high) to set in place commitments, reminders, and tangible progress — so that when the inevitable obstacles arise, you’ll have plenty of incentives and encouragement to tough it out. The more concrete and involved you can get today, the more likely it is you’ll follow through in the long run.

Don’t let this weekend pass without having taken a measurable, tangible step towards each of your one-year goals. Otherwise, you risk forgetting about them as the stresses and priorities in your life pull you in a hundred other directions.

So your task is simple: take one, specific action that moves you toward the achievement of each of your one-year goals. Bigger, bolder, and ongoing is best, but anything is better than nothing.

A few examples:

* If you have a one-year goal to run a marathon or do a triathlon, you can sign up for that marathon or triathlon today. Or take a trip to the bookstore and find a training program — then mark on the calendar the day training begins, and schedule what you’ll do in the meantime to build your mileage base. Hiring a coach or joining a training group, if you have the means to do so, would be even stronger, since these involve other people and thus create extra accountability.

* If you’re determined to start a business, go online and sign up for some education. It doesn’t have to cost anything — if you’re interested in building a business around a
blog, for a example, my.copyblogger.com has tons of free resources you can sign up for to start learning and building out your business ideas (or coming up with some) immediately.

✦ To improve your relationship with your significant other, one obvious but extremely powerful action is to talk to that person and explain that you’re committed to making some positive changes together. Then (and this is important) figure out what action you can take together today — maybe scheduling a date night (tonight, perhaps?), planning a weekend getaway to jumpstart things, or getting a copy of Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus and reading a chapter each day.

✦ If there’s a home, car, outfit, or some other material possession that you’ve set the goal to acquire, get a photo that you set as your desktop background or frame above your desk. Or go see it in person … test drive the car, try on the outfit. I personally don’t think this sort of action is as beneficial as one that more clearly represents progress, but it’s better than nothing. And sometimes with material goals like this, that’s all you’ve got.

Today, take one action for each of your one-year goals — the reason this activity is scheduled for a weekend is so that you have time to actually go somewhere if you need to. Don’t put this off!
Day 9:
Make the Plans

“In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is everything.”
— Dwight D. Eisenhower

Ike’s quote says it all — especially if your goals are as massive as I tell you to make them, it’s naive to think that you’ll be able to plan for every obstacle that could arise or understand what steps will be required months or years down the road.

But that’s okay. The process of planning achieves our aim of creating “touches” in the real world, and that’s key.

For your long-term goals (those that you aim to achieve more than a year from now), you’ll want to figure out what intermediate goals you can set as stepping stones. You should already have done that when you set your one-year goals, but what about beyond one year? Going back to our example of the three-year goal to run a 100-mile ultramarathon, we mentioned that a marathon might make for a good one-year goal to serve as a stepping stone to the 100. But what’s the plan after the marathon? Probably a 50K and a 50-miler, at least, during the second and third years, so think about how that schedule might look. For long-term goals you don’t need to get any more detailed than this, but it’s important to
have at least an overview of what the path from here to there looks like.

Make your one-year plans more granular as the time frame shortens — set quarterly benchmarks for this current year, then figure out where you need to be at the end of each month in the current quarter. Then, for this month only, decide what you’ll do each week. Take this process all the way down to the current week, where you can decide what you’ll do each day to keep making steady progress in these important early days.

Again, if your long-term goal was a 100-miler and you chose the marathon as the corresponding one-year goal, then you’d need to schedule that marathon. From that, back out when you’d need to start an 18- or 24-week training program. What kind of mileage base do you need to build, starting now, to be ready when that training program starts? Maybe you decide that running a half marathon six months from now would boost your confidence. So what do the next three months look like, before that training plan begins? Perhaps this first month is about getting up to 15 miles per week, starting this week with some very short runs to rebuild the habit. Schedule those, and you’re ready to go!

Obviously, you won’t be able to stick to these plans exactly, and that’s not the point. What matters is that you’re clarifying in your mind (and on paper) what needs to be done.

And don’t forget about obstacles! Try to anticipate what might happen to prevent you from making progress, and come up with a plan to handle it. When you lose the initial motivation, what will you do to get excited again? If work gets busy or you get sick or you
need to go out of town, how will you adapt? These are tough questions to answer because it’s hard to even anticipate the obstacles, but again, remember that we’re doing this more for what the exercise does for you and the sense of certainty it helps to foster, than for the actual plans that come about.

**Today’s action:** Create plans for the achievement of your goals. Be as detailed as possible without making this an overwhelming task that causes you to procrastinate. Set both long-term and short-term benchmarks, getting more specific in your plans as the time frame shortens.

Since each of your long-term goals has an associated one-year goal with it, you can combine each pair into one plan, which increases in detail as the time frame shortens.

For any additional one-year goals you set, create separate plans for each.

**Helpful hints:**

For some goals, the “how” won’t be so clear as it is with our example ultramarathon goal, where you can pretty easily define the intermediate steps necessary to get there. If you wanted to start a business, for example, but don’t even know in what field, how can you make plans?

Just do your best. Days 12 and 13 will give you some clarity about where to start, and if that helps you to define more stepping stones, you can come back and revise your plans then.

For now, go with your gut — in the business example, what do you know would have to happen before you started, even without knowing details about the business itself yet?
You’d need to come up with an idea or find an existing business to model. So give yourself a deadline for doing so, and schedule some research, brainstorming, and education during the next few weeks to make sure you hit that deadline. Thinking longer-term, you could decide how much savings you’d need to feel comfortable quitting your job to make your business full-time, then set up a plan for saving, generating, or raising that money.

Don’t stress about these plans. You’re just trying to map out the path, and that map is going to change as you get your hands dirty and learn more. Even the next few days’ actions in this program will likely require you to make adjustments to your plans, so stay flexible!
Day 10: Get Wise to Your Whys

“Reasons come first. Answers come second.”
— Tony Robbins

You’ve set the goals. You’ve taken an action toward each (right?), and you’ve laid the plans to achieve them — at least as well as you could be expected to at this point.

This is all great, because right now, you’re excited. But how do we ensure that you’ll stay excited and eager to take action?

It starts with understanding your reasons for these goals (also called your “whys”). The fact is you won’t continue to make progress towards any goal you don’t have great reasons to go after.

For each of your goals, get clear about why you set it:

✦ Why must this change?
✦ What’s bad about the current situation, and why do you deserve more?
✦ What about your loved ones — what differences will they experience once you conquer this goal? (This is important: we’ll often do far more for others than we will for ourselves.)
And don’t forget the “negative” whys. The question, “What will happen if I don’t change?” is particularly valuable. Think about what will happen on your current trajectory, one, two, five, or ten years down the road. Really feel it, and then come back to the present and realize what a tremendous opportunity you have right now.

Identifying your enemy can also be extremely motivating. Every hero has his or her enemy — what (or who) is yours? What do you passionately despise, the very thought of which will drive you to work harder and harder? Is it animal cruelty, the factory farming industry, and the forces that wrongly influence the information we get about nutrition? Is it a certain political party? A corporation? A cultural mindset? As clearly as you can, define your enemy, and if this “against” mentality serves you, then by all means employ it.

Or just stick to the positive. That’s what I do. :)

**Today’s action:** For each of your one-year goals, write a paragraph about why you are so committed to making it happen (in the case of the one-year goals that are stepping stones to longer-term goals, you can combine the short- and long-term goal since the whys will be similar). Make sure you describe the following three things, with as much emotion as possible:

1. Why you’re *utterly determined* to achieve this goal — for whom, for what?
2. What will happen if you *don’t* follow through (make this one painful, and really let yourself feel that pain)
3. Why you know you absolutely *can* make it happen — and get excited about that!

Alternatively, create a huge list of your reasons for each goal. I personally find that writing
paragraphs stirs up more emotion than a list — and that’s the purpose here — but choose the approach that works best for you (or do both).

This is one of those exercises that you really want to review as often as possible and feel the emotion each time you do. To prevent overwhelm from having so many things to review each day, think about ways to incorporate the review into your existing routine. For example, if you meditate each day, you could add 5 minutes at the end of your session to think about your whys.
Day 11:  
Decide Who You Need to Become

“If you want more, you’ve got to become more. When you change, everything changes for you.” — Jim Rohn

Over the weekend, you’ve begun to answer the obvious question that pops into mind when you set out to achieve a new goal. This question, of course, is “What do I need to do to achieve this goal?”

We started here in order to get the action flowing, to start creating some accountability and building some momentum. But, believe it or not, what to do isn’t the most important consideration when it comes to achieving goals.

Here’s a secret: the real reason to set goals isn’t because of how great it will feel to make them happen ... the real reason is because of the person you must become in order to get them. In other words, the reason we set goals is to grow into the person who achieves them. Once you become that person, the goal itself turns out to be secondary (but it’s certainly a nice bonus!).

Focus on what to do, and your goals will evade you like a butterfly evades capture in a net. Focus on who to become — and then become that person — and your goals will be attracted to you. Not by some magical force, but because when you change, your behavior changes, and the behaviors and habits that would have been

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unthinkably difficult for “the old you” become routine for the new.

So that’s your simple task for today. Find a quiet spot and close your eyes for a few minutes, and envision the type of person you’d have to be in order to reach the goals you’ve set for yourself. If it helps, imagine vividly that you’ve already achieved these goals … what does it feel like? How do you look? How do you behave? What’s your mindset like? Is there a higher standard you hold yourself to? What sort of facial expressions and gestures do you now employ? What vocal qualities do you now have?

Take all of these observations and use them to distill a list of the most important qualities you must develop in order to reach your goals. Every single one of these qualities already exists in you to some extent, but it’s up to you to nurture it.

Include in your list the important qualities that you already have in large amounts, too. Include any that you can think of, even some that might not appear immediately applicable to your goal (things like honesty, compassion, etc.).

Why? Because in reviewing this list (which I suggest you do often!), you want to nurture the belief that these qualities exist in you … and, frankly, when the list of who you need to become is a bunch of qualities you simply don’t believe you possess, it’s hard to do that. So by including those important qualities that you already exemplify, you make the whole thing an easier sell.

A few examples:

- Responsible
Today’s action: Determine the type of person you need to become in order to reach your goals. Write these qualities down in a list, and refer to it as often as you can (even as often as once each morning and night). If you want to drive the grooves even deeper, write a detailed description of the person you need to become, phrasing it in the first person present tense (“I, [name], am [qualities]”), and make it as descriptive and emotionally charged as possible.

Helpful hints: One of the most valuable personal development practices I’ve ever established is one that Zig Ziglar taught — to read over your list of “success qualities” (both those you have in large amounts and those you need to develop further) and claim each one of them for yourself. This isn’t hard: just say, either in your head or (better) out loud, “I’m absolutely honest, incredibly self-disciplined, a hard worker [or whatever the success qualities you identify are] …” and so on down the list, with as much enthusiasm as you can muster. Or if you can’t manage that, make a recording to listen to when you wake up and before you go to bed.

✦ Organized
✦ Bold
✦ Disciplined and self-controlled
✦ Utterly determined
✦ Compassionate
✦ Patient
✦ Authentic
✦ A leader
✦ Decisive
✦ A delegator
✦ A good communicator
Do this once each morning and once each night for thirty days, and you (and those who know you) will be amazed at how you change.

When I first heard this I was skeptical, but I was desperate so I tried it anyway. Within a week, before I had even noticed any difference in my behavior, my wife asked me what had come over me! Trust me, if you’re serious about achieving the goals you’ve set, this habit is well worth the five minutes of each day that it requires.

If you’re a visual person, you may find it helpful to create a mental picture of the person you need to become. Magazine clippings or bookmarked webpages of imagery that you can compile into, say, a desktop background, can assist you in creating this mental picture.
Day 12: Choose and Schedule the Habits that Will Help You

“Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.”
—Samuel Smiles

Yesterday you decided who you need to become to achieve the goals you’ve set for yourself. Today, we’ll take the first step towards becoming that person.

Chances are good that when you listed the qualities you’ll need to develop, you also thought of a few habits that could serve you. For example, if you’re a writer, then maybe being “someone who writes every day” made your list. If that’s the case, then the habit of writing every day is one you’ll need to consciously develop.

Go through your description of who you need to become, and pull out the most important habits for you to create; say, between three and ten. Some will be obvious, where the quality essentially is the habit (like the above example about writing). Others won’t be quite so obvious … like if you decided you needed to become more patient or mindful, then daily meditation
would be one habit that could help you to develop those qualities.

Don’t stretch too far here — we’re not looking for a list of 20 new habits; that’s overwhelming. But at the same time, one of the biggest challenges with truly inspiring goals like I encourage you to set is figuring out how to begin. Habits provide a clear and simple place to start, and in fact, there’s no more important place than with yourself and your day-to-day behavior.

Do you see what we’ve done here? When you set your goals, I asked you to think big and not worry about about the “how” yet — having a strong “why” is so much more important at this point.

Let’s say one of your goals is, “Be completely self-employed within two years,” but you’re without any idea even of what business you’d like to get into. So there’s no obvious place to start.

So instead we look at who you need to become, and perhaps one quality you decide on is “creative” (to help you come up with interesting business ideas, both before and after you start the business). But how do you develop creativity? Well, Google that. You’ll find plenty of articles on the topic, from which you might create a daily habit like “Sit each morning with cup of coffee, a pen and notepad, and nothing else, to brainstorm answers to a single creativity prompt” (and these answers don’t have to be business ideas, but they certainly can be).

Voilà, you have a starting point! If you were serious about developing creativity, you could begin with two or five minutes each day of this brainstorming habit, and build from there, using
the habit change principles we talked about on day 1. It’s a small step, but within a week or two you’ll have a list of ideas, and more importantly, some momentum.

You’ll have more than one habit to form, of course, and I’ve warned you against taking on too many habits at once. So here’s the trick: schedule your habits. Decide that next Monday you’ll begin a new one (assuming you’ve been successful at doing your anchor habit from day 1), and put it on your calendar. Then pencil in the rest of the habits you’d like to develop, spacing out each one’s start date by at least two weeks. Remember, there’s no rush. Like we said, just one habit a month results in 36 new ones after three years! That’s a lot better than taking on five new habits the first month, only to get overwhelmed and give up entirely … and look back and wonder, three years from now, what might have been.

**Today’s action:** Decide on the most important new habits that will help you become the person you need to be to achieve your goals. Then put their start dates onto your calendar, or another place where you’ll be reminded of them and have a few days’ notice when it’s time to start a new one.

**Helpful hints:** People often wonder how to decide which habits to prioritize and start first. To this, I’d say you should weigh two factors, the excitement and the difficulty of the habit. Generally, the habit that’s most exciting to you and the one that gives you the most energy is the one to start next. But if it’s an extremely difficult one to develop (perhaps you’ve tried and failed in the past), you may want to develop easier habits first, so that you can build your skill at creating habits as well as your momentum and confidence in yourself.
If you have trouble with a certain habit, don’t feel badly. Guilt is the enemy here. Instead, figure out what’s going wrong, and try to remove that obstacle. If you’ve failed for several days in a row, you can reset, shift back your habit schedule, and try again (making whatever adjustments are necessary), or recognize that this is a difficult habit to develop and move it to the end of your list, to be attempted again once you’ve gotten good at creating other habits.
Day 13:
Begin a Weekly Planning and Review Process

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”
— Abraham Lincoln

Assuming you’ve done all the exercises so far, you now have:

✦ Clearly written goals with a timeline for their accomplishment
✦ A plan of action for each
✦ An understanding of why you want each goal
✦ A description of the person you need to become to achieve these goals
✦ A set of habits with scheduled start dates that will help you to become that person and achieve these goals

Step back for a minute and think about that: you’ve come a long way already! Imagine the difference over five years, one year, or even a month, between someone with that kind of clarity about what they want and how they’re going to get it, and someone who just drifts through life accepting what comes their way.

The final step that’s directly related to the achievement of your goals — before we get on to the tools like time management and
engineering your environment that will make you more effective in pursuit of them — is to create a weekly action and accountability plan. This is the tool that will keep you focused and on-task, so that you don’t just let your goals slip away as time goes by and other stresses of life pop up.

This planning process is simple: Once each week, spend 30 minutes (or so) planning your next seven days of activity as it pertains to your goals — basically, decide what you’re committed to accomplishing in the next week. And I deliberately use the word “committed” here, because also in this weekly session, you’ll evaluate the previous week’s activity and decide whether you’ve succeeded in accomplishing each of your weekly goals.

I suggest that during your weekly session, you start with your banner, one-year goal and write out:

1. Goal [write down your main goal statement with deadline here — it’s good to constantly remind yourself of what you’re aiming for]
2. Victories from last week
3. What went wrong last week
4. What you learned last week — meaning what you’ll do differently to correct the failures, and any other insights you had, memorable quotes you came across, etc.
5. What you’re committed to accomplishing in the next week (three items seems to be a good number, but it could be more or less depending on a lot of factors)

Then repeat the process for the rest of your one-year goals. (There’s no need to do this for the longer-term goals, since for each of those you
have a one-year goal that’s a stepping stone for which you’ll do the weekly planning above.)

Simple. The difficult part — and truly the step that really makes the difference — is getting yourself to actually do this planning and review session. Week in and week out, no matter what life throws at you. It must become absolutely non-negotiable, a commitment to yourself that you do not break. At the very worst, postpone it for a few hours or get it done early, but don’t let the day or weekend go by without getting it done.

You’ve got to schedule this appointment on your calendar. I like to do this on Friday afternoon or Sunday night (either at the end of a week of activity, or just before the start of a new one). Your schedule might require something different, depending on what you consider to be the start or end of your week.

Two habit-forming techniques will help you here: a trigger, and reminders. It’s so easy to forget a Sunday afternoon planning appointment with yourself, especially when there’s no urgency — nothing blows up if you don’t do this planning and review for one week or even two, but over the long run, the cost is immense. So pick a trigger (immediately after dinner? once your kids are in bed? with your Sunday cup of tea or coffee?) and set up a reminder in your phone or on your calendar. Put up a Post-It note if that will help you. Just make sure you don’t miss this appointment!

It’s harder to create a weekly habit than a daily one, since it takes much longer to accumulate the number of repetitions required for the habit to become automatic. This is why the steps above are so important. An alternative (and a strongly suggested one if you can make it
happen) is to do this process daily, spending five or ten minutes to determine what you plan to do that day (or tomorrow, if doing it at the end of the day) and how you did with the previous day of activity. You’ll still want to do the broader, weekly session at the start or end of the week though. While a new daily habit may seem daunting, it doesn’t have to take up much time, so this should be a fairly easy habit to form (and an extremely valuable one) if you decide to.

**Today’s action:** Schedule your weekly planning and review session by setting up reminders and choosing a trigger activity that you do each week close to the time you’d like to do the session. If that session is scheduled for today, go for it!

Optionally, do the same thing on a daily basis (spending much less time each session, of course).

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**What’s in Store …**

We’re at an important point in the program, where we’ve laid a very solid foundation for you to get to work on achieving your goals. And because of the general nature of this program, what *specific* actions you take next in pursuit of your goals really depend on what those goals are.

We’re going to make a shift now, first focusing on freeing up time for you to spend on accomplishing your goals, then moving toward enhancing things like your environment, your physical energy, and your mindset.

Specific actions directed at reaching your particular goals (the answer to question #5 in the
weekly planning process) will need to come from other sources that are specifically targeted to whatever it is you seek:

✦ If you want to run a marathon, you’ll probably need a marathon training plan or a coach.

✦ If you want to lose weight, you’ll need to figure out a diet and exercise plan with the help of a book or an expert.

✦ If you plan to start a business, know that there are plenty of tools online to help you come up with an idea and find a place to start.

✦ If you want to change your financial situation, grab a book about personal finance, or read one of the many good blogs on the topic.

You get the point, I hope. If you reach out to me on Twitter (@oneeatathlete), I’m happy to try to give you suggestions about where to start looking for resources to help you reach your particular goal (if I have any experience in that area!).
Weekend Mini-Project: Take Back Your Time

“No more yes. It’s either HELL YEAH, or no.”
— Derek Sivers

Saying yes is so much easier than saying no. It’s less confrontational, it doesn’t hurt people’s feelings, and you appease the fear of missing out that we all deal with. But in order to create the time to accomplish big things, you need to start being selective with the things you agree to spend your time on — and usually, that means saying no.

Steve Jobs famously said that while he was proud of the products he and his team created, what he was even more proud of was all the projects he said no to. He had a vision, and if a new idea or proposal didn’t fit that vision perfectly, it was a no.

When you’re approached with a new request for your time, make “no” your default, and save “yes” for those amazing opportunities that you just know are right.

This weekend, you’re going to examine your current time commitments, to others and to yourself, and see where we can say NO, to free up some time and energy for what really matters.
Saturday (Day 14): Say ‘no’ to some existing commitments

If you’re anything like me, you have a tough time telling people you don’t have time to help them. But trust me — if you get over the initial pain of being more selective, you’ll be happier and have more time not just for yourself, but to give to the people you love and care about most.

Over time, in the same way we tend to accumulate possessions (we’ll get to these later), we also accumulate time commitments. Today, we want to look at each one and consciously decide if it’s something you want to spend your precious, limited time on.

I’m not telling you to break any promises. Some commitments you will be obligated to finish out, and you should keep your word if quitting will result in significant costs for others. But if you’re serious about living a life of your own design, then you’ve got to take control of your time.

Take out a piece of paper and, down the left side, list out every existing time commitment you can think of that you’ve made to other people. This list should include:

- Standing coffee, lunch, and dinner dates
- Weekly or daily phone calls
- Meetup groups
- Exercise appointments
- Clubs in which you participate
- Sports or coaching you do
- Any work-outside-of-work appointments
- Any TV shows you consistently watch
Once you’ve got what you think is a complete list, make another column on the right side of the page. This is your “keep” list. One by one, go down your list of commitments and decide if this commitment really deserves to take up your precious time, and if it fits in with the image of the person you’re committed to becoming. If it does — and some certainly will — write it down in the “keep” list.

But for each commitment that doesn’t belong in your life, axe it. This might be as simple as emailing someone or calling someone. If it’s more involved than that, keep in mind how much time you’ll save in just a few weeks and what amazing work you’ll be able to do with that time. Be polite and apologize if it’s appropriate, but save the excuses.

With this step, you’re deliberately and consciously deciding which commitments have a place in your life. And that’s much better than being oblivious as “the weeds take the garden.” But if you’re finding it tough to summon the courage to yank those weeds out, go further. If nothing else, force yourself to chop the least important commitment on your list — surely you’ve got one that can go. Replace it with something you really enjoy and that moves you towards your goals, and my bet is you’ll start looking for ways to do the same with other commitments.
Sunday (Day 15): Kill your to-do and to-read lists

Yesterday we dealt mainly with commitments to other people. Today, we’ll look closer at the commitments you’ve made to yourself (usually without realizing it).

As I’ve said before, I’m a big reader. I love everything about it. To me there’s nothing better than going to the bookstore (physical or digital) with no inclination as to what I’ll take home, grabbing a cup of coffee, and letting my curiosity guide me from section to section and ultimately determine with what book I’ll spend the next week or two of reading time.

Unfortunately, it’s not often that I get to experience such freedom. Not because I’ve got two kids (although they’re partly to blame!), but because I tend to let my reading list get backed up.

See if this sounds familiar. You enthusiastically start a new book, and it leads you to two or three others. Also before you finish the first book, a blog post that you read adds another book to your to-read list, and you see another one in a magazine or on TV. If you’re really sophisticated/organized/obsessive, you don’t just keep this list in your head as it grows; you write it down, like I do. :)

If I don’t control it, my reading list soon balloons to 15 or 20 books — several months worth of reading! And as you know if you’ve kept to-read lists or to-do lists, you never actually finish your list, since you can’t possibly cross items off as fast as new ones get added. It’s frustrating, it’s defeating, and it sucks much of the joy out of reading (or in the case of to-do lists, living!).
The worst part (in the case of reading): your list gets so backed up that your natural curiosity, which plays a huge part in helping you achieve amazing things, can no longer run free. When you think of reading, you think only of your list. Trips to the bookstore become more stressful than anything else, as you know that any book that piques your interest must take a backseat to the others on your list, and you even feel a little bit guilty about not having found the time to read the books on your list or your shelf. The items on your list no longer excite you, but you refuse to start anything new. Until finally ...

… your reading stops entirely.

It may not be books that have backed up for you. It may be blog posts, knitting projects, doing things with your kids, visiting friends, exercising, home upkeep, or just general to-do’s.

So what should you do? It doesn’t matter what form your list takes; the solution is the same.

Kill your list.

Really. Trash it all. If you can’t bring yourself to do something so extreme, ruthlessly cross off items that don’t interest you anymore.

In the case of reading, ask yourself: which would be more exciting, going to the store or the library to choose a new book, or reading one from your current backlog? If it’s starting a new one, you can guess what I’m going to tell you to do.

Sometimes it helps just to retitle your list. Instead of “To-Read,” call it “Possible References.” File it away, and know that if the situation ever arises where you need to consult it, it’s there.
The best to-do list has **one item** on it. Three max. If something is important and lasting, you’ll remember it. It’ll make its way onto your list.

Use today to look at your lists, and if you can’t throw them out completely, at least limit them drastically. Your creativity, curiosity, productivity, and enthusiasm about life will all thank you.

**Further reading**

✦ **No more yes. It’s either HELL YEAH! or no.** (Derek Sivers)

✦ **Kill Your To-Do List** (Zen Habits)
Day 16:
Find Out Where Your Time is Going

“The essence of self-discipline is to do the important thing rather than the urgent thing.”
— Barry Werner

It’s no secret that we live in an age of distraction. It’s a constant battle to stay focused on the truly valuable activities in your life — and every email notification, Facebook post, and tweet that pulls us away from an important activity sucks away a little bit of precious time.

I’m not saying social media or even television are bad — just that they should be done deliberately. It’s estimated that every time we’re distracted from an activity (by, say, a new email), we take an average of 25 minutes to return to the original task. Twenty-five minutes! And this says nothing of the amount of time it takes our brains to truly refocus and immerse again in the work we were doing before the interruption.

There’s a tremendous time loss here. Today we want to quantify it for you specifically.

Today’s task is a bit of a pain, I’ll admit. But it’s extremely valuable, and has the potential to open up literally hours of time each day — time that you can use to accomplish what you’ve set out to do while the rest of the world is a slave to interruptions.
Today you’ll keep track of every minute you spend. Every interruption, every diversion … everything. If you work a 9 to 5 job, don’t just write “work” for that block. Record the time you spend commuting, the time you spend on your lunch break, and the details of how much time you actually spend on important work tasks, how often you’re interrupted and for how long, and how much time you spend reading blog posts, checking social media, etc.

This is a lot to ask, I know. And you won’t be perfect. But try to be as diligent and honest as you can. For the next few days, we’ll refer back to this “time inventory” and use it to free up the considerable time it’s going to take for you to transform your dreams into your reality.

Your decision to use your time well represents a tremendous advantage over the competition (whoever that may be) when most people spend their days in a state of semi-focus scored by distracting background noise.

I’m often asked how I have time to be a dad, train for ultramarathons, run my own business, read and listen to something valuable every day, cook for my family, and have a life too. The simple answer is that I consciously choose where to spend my time — and for the most part, that doesn’t include television or social media. For business purposes, I post on Twitter or Facebook now and then, and once or twice a week I watch a show or a movie on Netflix to unwind. But because it’s a deliberate choice — not leaving the TV on so that whatever show is next grabs my attention, and setting my phone not to send notifications about the noise that happens on social media — these diversions serve me, not the other way around. I’m not demonizing them or calling anyone “wrong” for
enjoying them … I’m just asking you to be aware that how you use these things is a choice.

Today’s action: Carry around a small notepad or piece of paper today, and record, to the minute, how you spend your time. When you’re done, group similar tasks and total up the time you spend on them (see below).

If you’re honest, how much time did you waste on this particular day? Could you find an hour or even two or more to work on something truly important that moves you toward your dreams, without sacrificing anything but idle distraction time? No need to commit to doing so yet, but that’s what we’ll be thinking about tomorrow.

Helpful hints:

✦ Be brutally honest! If you spend three minutes scanning through your Facebook feed, write it down. Chances are if you do this once, you do it ten times … and that’s half an hour total. With tiny tasks like “15-second email check,” just keep a tally of how many times you do them and estimate the total time at the end of the day.

✦ You probably won’t remember to record every activity as you do it — just go back and estimate as soon as you remember.

✦ If you’re reading this at a time other than first thing in the morning, you should still start recording now, but keep track of what you do tomorrow morning so that you get a full 24-hour picture.
Some people’s schedules vary wildly from day to day … that’s okay. The point of this exercise is to give you an accurate picture of one particular day, to help you spot some leaks and see where you’re spending more time than you cared to admit before. And if you’d like to repeat this exercise for more than one day, there’s nothing wrong with that!

Once you’ve recorded a full day’s worth of activity, categorize your time expenditures and total your time spent in each category. You can do it by activity type, like “social media,” “driving,” “television,” “writing,” etc.

Further reading

Day 17:
Identify and Destroy Procrastination

“Procrastination is the foundation of all disasters.”
— Pandora Poikilos

In our world of distraction and interruption, procrastination pervades. It’s an especially insidious problem, because in the short term, procrastination doesn’t appear to cause any harm.

Often when we think of procrastination, we recall our high school or college days, where we waited until the last minute to cram for a test or write a paper. Some of us, myself included, got great at this, and even took pride in our ability to “perform under pressure.”

But in the real world, when it comes to your life and your dreams, procrastination is poison.

Why? Because in real life, there’s nobody but you to enforce the deadlines that truly matter.

If your dream is to run a marathon and you never get your act together to actually sign up for one and start training, nobody’s going to call you on it.

If you want to start a business, but instead you keep punching the clock and collecting your paycheck, very few people will get on your case for it.
If you plan to write a novel, nobody but you will ever really know if you instead just shuffle papers, fidget with your computer and your writing setup, and never produce anything for secret fear that it — and you — won’t be any good.

When there’s no external deadline (and there usually isn’t for the really important things in life), procrastination has the power to indefinitely delay your dreams ... until, of course, life’s ultimate deadline comes. And by then it’s far too late.

Procrastination must be overcome. But first, it must be identified.

Look back at your time inventory from yesterday’s action and see what might rightly be called procrastination. The most likely culprits are the activities that are neither important nor urgent — the activities that offer a temporary escape and little else. These include:

- Facebook and other social media
- Television
- Computer games
- Drinking alcohol

I’m not calling any of these things bad in small doses. And you shouldn’t feel guilty for indulging in an escape now and then, if you can do so without becoming addicted. But know that the time you spend on these activities represents the low-hanging fruit — the massive chunks of time you can grab right away to spend on more important activities, if you so choose.
Some sneakier forms of procrastination are perhaps more dangerous because they look an awful lot like useful work. These could be:

- Email
- Phone calls
- Meetings
- Housework
- Going out to get a coffee before you get started
- Eating a quick meal before you get started
- Straightening up your desk before you get started
- Excessive research before you get started
- The need to buy a bunch of equipment before you get started

Notice a pattern? If you’re doing something “before you get started,” it’s probably procrastination.

Very often, we disguise procrastination in the form of busywork. Instead of sitting down or going outside to do whatever it is that actually matters — writing, exercising, whatever — we choose a much easier, less scary activity. Organizing our desk, cleaning the house, clearing our inbox … this is easy stuff. You can’t fail at it, so you seek refuge in it.

The only thing that really matters, of course, is that you do the hard stuff. And the only way to make it less scary is to do it.

So how do you get yourself to do it? Make it easier.
Instead of telling yourself you need to run three miles your first day out, make it five minutes. Or two, if you find that even five is causing you to procrastinate. It’s not the distance or the time that matters right now — what’s important is the creation of the habit and the trust in yourself that you build each time you succeed in taking a small, uncomfortable action.

If you can’t ever seem to start writing that novel or that blog, don’t require yourself to write a whole chapter or blog post in order for it to feel like a win. Just write the first sentence. Seriously! Most likely you’ll keep on writing once you’ve written one sentence (just like you’ll probably keep running once you hit two minutes), but even if you did nothing but write one sentence a day for a week, you’d have seven new references to reinforce the idea that you are capable of sitting down and doing the work. And that would help you start to write more each time you begin.

**Today’s action:** Identify the activities in your sample day that are procrastination (in disguise or not), and figure out how much total time you could use for something meaningful each week if you were to eliminate these activities entirely. If you replaced this time with valuable work or practice, how much progress could you make in a month? Six months? A year?

Then make the decision that you will! Make a written commitment, in your journal, to replace some of the “escape” time with an activity that matters, and to eliminate any procrastination activity that you do “before you get started.”

What precisely you decide to do with your newfound time is up to you, but I’ve found that being specific in my commitment (“read,” “write
blog posts,” “practice an instrument” …) is better than being vague (“work on my business”).

**Helpful hints:** The unimportant-and-not-urgent activities in your sample day are likely the same every day. As a result, a simple change like “limit television time to 30 minutes per day” can free up big chunks of time throughout the week.

On the other hand, the more insidious form of procrastination will change disguises day-to-day. The point of identifying it in your sample day isn’t for you to decide, “I will no longer clear my desk before I start writing.” More generally, it’s for you to become aware of when you’re lying to yourself. So if you notice that you straightened your desk for 10 minutes as a way to avoid starting, you’ll be more aware in the future when you use another activity (say, vacuuming your house) as procrastination.

**Further reading:**

- How to Stop Procrastinating By Using the 2-Minute Rule (James Clear)
- Why You Procrastinate, and How to Stop It. Now. (Forbes)
Day 18:
Perform an 80/20 Analysis on Your Life

“Learn how to separate the majors and the minors. A lot of people don’t do well simply because they major in minor things.”  
— Jim Rohn

If you’ve paid any attention to productivity blogs over the last few years, you know that meditation, reading, listening, exercise, freewriting, relaxation, vacation, time for play, time for focused work, learning, socializing, and brainstorming can all make you happier and more effective at whatever it is you do — some would say they’re essentials.

But when it’s hard to keep up with even the bare minimum we need to do for our jobs, families, and health, where are we supposed to find time for anything else?

There’s a productivity principle borrowed from economics known as the Pareto Principle, which says that 80 percent of results come from about 20 percent of activities. Common examples:

✦ 80 percent of your business comes from the top 20 percent of your clients
✦ 80 percent of your fitness gains come from the most effort-filled 20 percent of your time in the gym or your running workouts
80 percent of the work you accomplish in a day comes from 20 percent of your work tasks

You can clean 80 percent of your home in 20 percent of the time it takes you to do a full, detailed cleaning

The idea, then, is that you can drastically reduce the amount of stress in your life and time you spend on work, fitness, and just about anything else by focusing only on the 20 percent of activities that produce 80 percent of your results.

Another way to think of it: Focus on the “majors” of life, and outsource or (in some cases) ignore the “minors.” Don’t spend major time (80 percent of activity) on minor things (that create only 20 percent of your results). Chances are, there are only a half a dozen majors in anything you do — in your job, in your fitness, and in your life.

Take my work at No Meat Athlete as an example. Until I realized what was going on, if I worked 40 hours in a given week, only four of those hours were spent writing blog posts, another one or two hours on podcasts, and a few more hours thinking about what blog posts or products I might write next and then working on them.

So where did the rest of the time go? That other 32 hours each week?

If I’m honest: email, mostly. And accounting, and paying affiliates and people who help me out. Making tweaks to the design of the website. And doing small favors like interviews and contributions to other people’s products or
whatever else I could think of to fill the eight hours I tried to work each day.

Only recently did I get smart. If the blog, podcast, and products are what really matter, why not do just those things? I don’t mean work only six or eight hours a week — far from it. But instead of filling my days with mundane and tiring tasks that involve one-on-one interaction (email) and administrative jobs other people could do cheaply, why not cut that stuff out, and use all the freed-up time to double or triple my output of the handful of important activities that reach 30,000 or more people — the activities that make No Meat Athlete go?

That shift in philosophy has been nothing short of miraculous for my enthusiasm and productivity. It’s the reason you’re reading this ebook right now, its release coming not even a month after I finished a massive, cross-country book tour.

But enough about me. Let’s talk about how to 80/20 your life.

You know now that about 80 percent of your results come from 20 percent of your activities. Here’s the trick: once you’ve identified that 20 percent of activities (probably about a half dozen things), find a way to cut, delegate, or outsource (even in non-business settings) as much else as you can, then spend 80 percent of your time on those half dozen “majors.” Major time on major things, minor time on minor things.

This sounds great, but in practice you’ll find it hard to spend all day on majors. It’s easy to fill the day with mindless, safe, and easy work — much harder and more tiring to put major hours
into the scary, important work that we’re so prone to procrastinate on. But don’t worry — the value of these “majors” so far exceeds everything else that you don’t need to spend all day on them. Instead, having freed up some time to allow yourself to rest and replenish, you can aim for just a few solid bursts of activity each day.

If you’re a productivity fan, you may have heard of the Pomodoro Technique. It’s a process of doing work in 25 minute increments, separated by short breaks. Separate yourself from all distractions, set a timer for 25 minutes ([http://e.ggtimer.com/25minutes](http://e.ggtimer.com/25minutes)), work free and uninterrupted until the timer goes off, then take a short break (I’ve always done five minutes for the break). That 30 minutes is one Pomodoro — record it on a sheet of paper, and do it again. Do four before taking a longer break, and accumulate as many tallies as you can in a day.

The scheme I actually use is one I learned from *The Compound Effect* author Darren Hardy: set a timer for 45 minutes ([http://e.ggtimer.com/45minutes](http://e.ggtimer.com/45minutes)), work hard and distraction-free for that period of time, then take a short, three to five minute walk/stretch break before returning to complete another 45 minute work session. Mark down your completion of the 90-minute session, and aim for two or three of them per day.

Three or four hours of actual, focused work — writing, studying, training, practicing, calling, etc. — may not sound like much. But give one of these focus techniques a try, for just a day or two, and you’ll be amazed how quickly your progress mounts (and probably slightly sheepish, when you realize what this means about how much real work you used to get done).
Today’s action: Use your 24-hour time inventory from a few days ago to figure out which 20 percent of your activities are responsible for 80 percent of your results in a given day as they pertain to your goals. For each of your one-year goals, identify the half dozen “majors,” and consider how you can increase the time and focus you spend on those activities, while eliminating, delegating, or at least reducing your time and energy expenditures on the “minors.”

Helpful hints:

✦ Don’t just look at work — consider the time you spend at home (like cooking, cleaning, yardwork ...), on hobbies, and in your exercise or training regimen.

✦ Some categories will require you to think longer-term than just one day. For example, in a given week, what’s the 20 percent of your training or exercise time that really moves you forward? Even if you’re not going to cut the other 80 percent, simply being aware of which workouts have the most impact (or even which few minutes of a workout) will help allow you to better prepare for them (mentally and nutritionally), put more effort into them, and more fully recover from them (giving yourself extra rest, foam rolling, and nutrition, perhaps).

Further reading

✦ The 80/20 Rule of Time Management: Stop Wasting Your Time (Entrepreneur)

✦ The Pomodoro Technique
Day 19:
Push Through the Dip

“Nothing great is created suddenly, any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig. If you tell me that you desire a fig, I answer you that there must be time. Let it first blossom, then bear fruit, then ripen.”
— Epictetus

I understand.

You’ve been working hard. Carving out the time to read this book and do the action every day, and it’s now been over two weeks since you started.

So when do the rewards start flowing? When do you lose weight, get faster, come up with that business idea, go on that vacation … whatever you’re seeking?

They call this the Dip, after the title of a great little book by Seth Godin. But more useful, for our purposes, might be the term “lag time.”

We’re taking the long view here by starting with fundamentals: your self-image, habits, personal obstacles, goals, motivations, and now your time. You didn’t buy a “Leaner and Sexier in 30 Days” program or a “Start Your Own Internet Business” kit, because deep down you know that unless you change, anything else is going to have only a transient effect. And I’m with you there; I believe it’s one of the most valuable
convictions you can carry with you throughout life.

With any profound and real change, there’s a lag time associated. We’re preparing the soil and planting quality seeds in the spring, and giving them plenty of sunlight and water in the summer so that in the fall, we can reap the harvest.

But just as surely as you’ll see that little plant sprout up from the ground long before the fruit is ready to be picked, you’ll begin to notice subtle changes in yourself — or, just as likely, the people you spend time with will notice first. Be encouraged by this.

Zig Ziglar tells the story of the Chinese bamboo tree, which for four years is nurtured with sun, soil, and water. After the first season the sprout is less than an inch tall. After four seasons, still not much to show for the effort. But in the fifth season, the Chinese bamboo tree shoots up 90 feet in the air in a single growing season!

Or how about the old water pump analogy? You pump and pump with all of your effort, and have not a single drop to show for it as the water rises, hidden beneath the earth’s surface. Then suddenly and without warning, water begins to flow and then gush forth! And the best part of all is that once the water’s flowing, it only takes a little pump now and then to keep it going.

Use today to revisit your commitments and catch up on any actions from earlier in the program you didn’t get to complete as well as you’d have liked. Go back and fill in the holes, and while you’re at it, take a look through your journal or wherever you’re doing the written actions and be proud of all that you’ve done in the past two weeks. Be inspired by what you’ve accomplished, and seek inspiration elsewhere,
like you did back in day 5. Reward yourself in some small but tangible way for the seeds you’ve sown so far, and tomorrow we’ll get back at it.

**Today’s action:** Do what it takes to keep your motivation strong. You’re over halfway through this program, but there are still a lot of actions to complete and changes to make. Catch up, get organized, review what you’ve done so far, and give yourself a dose of inspiration or an external reward.

**Further reading:**

- [Seth Godin’s The Dip](#)
Day 20:
Put Your Passive Time to Good Use

“Turn your car into a mobile classroom, a university on wheels.”
— Brian Tracy

I recently read a statistic asserting that we spend, on average, 360 hours in our cars each year, mostly during our commutes to and from work.

Now consider that a typical three-credit college course involves 45 hours of time in the classroom — it doesn’t take much math to determine that each year, we spend enough time in the car to sit through eight college courses!

Granted, I’m not counting the time you’d spend studying in a college course, which is substantial. But how many hours do you spend on other activities, besides driving, where your mind is free to listen to something? For many readers of this book, running could easily account for another 4 hours per week — or 208 hours per year! How about washing dishes? Cleaning your house? Folding laundry?

Maybe you see where I’m going here. We’ve got many hundreds of hours that we spend on activities that don’t require much brainpower — leaving your mind free for learning, thinking through problems, or other productive behavior.
Now, I’m not suggesting that you need to spend every minute of your exercise time with audiobooks pumping through your headphones — that’s what I do, but I fully understand that I’m a bit of a weirdo. But how about just some of that time? Or how about the driving or the dishwashing hours — where a lot of people get into some pretty unresourceful and even destructive states, as they curse the traffic, their job, their family situation, etc.

And audiobooks aren’t the only good use of passive time. There’s also meditation, reminding yourself of what you’re grateful for, creativity prompts, podcasts, music that inspires you, thinking through problems … the list of useful mental disciplines you can perform while doing other things is endless.

Again, I’m not overlooking the necessity to “just be” sometimes. Most of us could use a lot more “just being” time, and I appreciate that this is one of the great benefits of exercise for many people. I’m not telling you to mess with that.

What I am suggesting is that you identify the hours that you’re letting go to waste, or worse, working yourself into a tizzy of anger, frustration, or worry. And then deliberately choose to spend that time in a more productive way.

Look back at the time inventory you took earlier this week and find some opportunities to enhance that passive time. Can you find 30 or 45 minutes a day that you could use to put some great information into your brain, get motivated or inspired, or be creative or grateful? I bet if you look hard, you can. And that’s enough time to change your life.

Today, decide that you’ll no longer let your mind drift aimlessly through chunks of time for which
you haven’t deliberately decided to let it do exactly that (and again, “just being” can be extremely beneficial — when it’s deliberate). You might find, as I have, that you come to enjoy the opportunity to learn so much that it becomes your very reason to do other things that aren’t quite so much fun: when I get hooked on a good audiobook, I’m much more consistent with running and score big points at home for doing more dishes than usual.

Once you’ve chosen some time, explore some options for how you might feed your brain during that period. I’ve already mentioned spending the time deliberately focusing on what you’re grateful for, or asking yourself a single question and meditating on the answer, however “meditating” looks to you (it could be as simple as redirecting your mind back to the question at hand whenever it wanders).

But my favorite activity during otherwise passive time is listening — I find that meditating and being creative take slightly more energy than I’m willing to give day-in and day-out when I’m already doing something else, like running, that requires its own willpower.

As for what to listen to, it’s difficult to give suggestions, since people are so particular about what resonates with them. I’m a personal development nut — just about anything from Tony Robbins or Jim Rohn can entertain and inspire me for hours. Tim Ferriss’s 4-Hour Workweek will reinforce and expand on a lot of the time management concepts we’ve covered this week (even if you have no desire to work for only four hours each week) — I’ve borrowed this audiobook from my public library, which is a great place to look, since audiobooks can be expensive.
There’s nothing wrong with fiction, either. While fiction is more entertainment than education, certainly there’s a lot to learn from many novels, and plenty of benefits to be had from appreciating art. Even throwaway novels that are borderline trash (no disrespect; I indulge from time to time too) might be a good gateway that eventually leads to more constructive choices during your passive time.

And don’t forget podcasts! Most are free, and if you find one that’s a good match for your personality, it’s like finding a treasure trove. I don’t listen to a whole lot of podcasts, but a few that I do listen to from time to time are Jeff Sanders’s 5 AM Miracle, the Rich Roll Podcast, Entrepreneur on Fire, and Blogcast FM. One more, great if one of your goals is to start a business, is Seth Godin’s Startup School. It’s considered a podcast in the iTunes store, but it’s just 15 (free) recordings from a live seminar of the same name that Seth did a few years back.

**Today’s action:** Identify some passive time in your daily routine that you can put to better use, be it by meditating, being mindful, focusing on gratitude or solving problems, or listening to something educational or uplifting. Then get set up, whatever that entails: downloading podcasts to your iPod, learning a meditation routine, etc., so that beginning today or tomorrow, you can start putting that passive-mind time to good use.
Day 21:
Create Accountability

“You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” — Jim Rohn

As you noticed if you took some time a few days ago to review the first half of this program, you’ve done a lot. On paper, in your head, and in the real world.

Make no mistake; the changes that you’ve made in your head and on paper for only you to know about are real. You can feel them, and they’re impacting your behavior.

But to really start benefiting from them and to make sure they don’t go up in smoke when life throws you a curve ball, you need to involve someone else.

Many people despise working on teams and do their best work when left to their own devices — I know, I’m one of them. But there’s tremendous power in sharing the changes you make with another person — even if that power is just in reinforcing those changes in your own mind.

Think about who in your life (or not yet in your life) would be your ideal partner on this journey. Who would hold you accountable? Who would encourage you, but be quick to remind you when you’re getting off course? Who could both learn from you and teach you a few things?
Whose habits and attitude would you love to have rub off on you?

Often it’s not a significant other, simply because you’ll too easily sympathize and forgive one another when, say, a million things come up and prevent you from doing your anchor habit for a few days. But with an accountability partner whom you’re not quite as comfortable with, you’ll make sure to get it done, even if means doing it at midnight right before bed.

As best as you can, try to get around people who are playing life at a higher level. It’s said that you are the average of the five people you spend most of your time with — in health, wealth, happiness, achievement, and everything else. Think about that, and do what you can to hang out with people who are getting the results you want. If it’s just not possible for you to actually get around someone like that (though I seriously doubt that’s true!), keep in mind that you can learn a tremendous amount through someone’s writings and especially their recordings, where the more subtle aspects of their mindset can be conveyed.

But don’t discount the value of finding a partner — maybe a friend, maybe a business associate — who is at the same level as you are, and embarking together on a journey to create the lives you deserve. “Let’s do it!” is one of the most powerful phrases in our language.

Find someone to be your accountability partner, and agree to meet at minimum once a week. Set up a standing appointment to train together, check in on Skype, or have lunch or coffee, and be deliberate with this time together. Don’t just chit-chat — tell each other what changes you’ve made and what results you’ve gotten since last
week, and commit to what you’ll do before your next meeting.

If you prefer, you don’t need to limit it to one person. Create what’s called a mastermind group — essentially a group accountability team, with more emphasis on brainstorming and using the power of several minds and perspectives to attack each other’s problems.

**Today’s action:** Decide who would make for an ideal accountability partner or mastermind group. Then devise a plan for how you’ll make it happen, and take the first step. With someone you already know, it’s as simple as a quick email or call to pitch the idea. With others, you’ll need to be more clever in your approach.

**Helpful hints:** Given that you’ve made it this far into the program, it’s a safe bet that you’ve enjoyed it and are noticing positive results! In that case, I give you permission to share this entire ebook with one or two others if it would benefit you in recruiting them as your accountability partner(s).
Weekend Mini-Project: Declutter Your Living Space

“The secret of happiness, you see, is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less.”
— Socrates

“The things you own end up owning you.”
— Tyler Durden, Fight Club

Over the last week, you’ve freed up some serious time so that you can work on designing and executing the life you want to live.

Now, it’s time to free up some physical (and as a result, mental) space.

For most of us, the natural tendency is to hold onto possessions. Someone gives you a sweater you don’t really like, but you tell yourself that you’ll keep it in your closet for when that perfect opportunity to wear it comes along. You get a free t-shirt, pen, notepad, or calendar, and for some reason, you keep it, as if you didn’t already have enough of these things. And more common than either of these situations is when you hang onto something you’ve owned for a while, “just in case” the opportunity ever arises when you should need it — or because of sentimental value or a form of guilt that prevents you from trashing, donating, or selling it.
In our homes, we have a finite amount of space for things — in drawers, cabinets, and closets, and on surfaces like desks, tables, and floors. And for some reason, our default is to allow this space to fill to a point that’s just beyond (or sometimes, far beyond) its comfortable capacity.

My advice is that you learn to value space over stuff. In my experience, it feels so much better to own less — and have room to breathe, move, and create.

Our project this weekend is to begin decluttering. I fully appreciate that minimalism is not for everyone, and I’m not going to tell you to throw away your precious family heirloom that is sitting unused in the basement. But what I want for you to experience, in just a few small ways, is how great space feels — and then if it’s something you want to go further with, you’ll have the tools to do so.

Going minimal has been one of the truly exciting and liberating developments in my life during the past three years. Have an open mind, and you may find exactly the same.

**Saturday (Day 22): Practice letting go of stuff; create a “maybe” box and get rid of ten things (minimum!)

Ten things should be no problem whatsoever. It eventually gets tough if you make a habit of it and force yourself to choose, say, five things every day ... but nobody’s saying you need to do that.

Look around you and see if you can find ten things to sell, donate, or throw away or recycle.

Some excellent candidates are:
✦ Clothes (anything that is damaged or that you haven’t worn in six months is very suspect!)
✦ Old shoes
✦ Extra coffee mugs or other dishes
✦ Junk in your junk drawer
✦ Pens and notepads
✦ Books you’ll never read (if one has been on your shelf for years, be honest with yourself)
✦ Books you’ve read but didn’t really like, or liked but won’t read again
✦ CD’s and DVD’s
✦ Old magazines
✦ Anything you’re saving “just in case”
✦ Kids’ toys they no longer use

If you want to get rid of more than ten items — and I know how addictive this can be — by all means do! In that case, you’ll probably want to set up two boxes to help you:

1. A “Donate” box. Most stuff you’ll be getting rid of can be used by someone else, and in many cases it’s tax deductible. Keep a pen and pad near the box and write down everything that goes in, then ask your accountant about how you can get credit for it. Make sure you get a receipt from whichever donation center you choose!

2. A “Maybe” box. This can be the difference between success and failure when it comes to decluttering: If you can’t find a good reason to keep an item but can’t quite let go, put it in the “Maybe” box. When you’re done decluttering, put the box away with the date on it. If you find you want the item back, just go get it … but if
you haven’t missed the item by the end of six months, get rid of it.

Don’t get hung up on involved organizational projects yet (like processing a huge stack of papers in your physical inbox, or organizing your file systems) — just have fun and enjoy the feeling of lightness that comes from getting rid of stuff.

**Sunday (Day 23): Declutter one closet, area, or surface**

Don’t try to declutter your whole house in one weekend. It won’t happen, and like any other habit, going out of the gate too hard will drain your willpower so that you can’t sustain it.

Instead, choose one space to declutter today. If you want to go further, you can use this “space sanctuary” as the central point from which all your other decluttering can radiate outward.

Here’s how to do it.

1. Choose a space. A table, a countertop, a closet, a junk drawer … something pretty small that you can probably knock out in 15 minutes.
2. Remove everything from that space and put it in a pile.
3. Quickly clean that space — wipe it if it’s a surface, vacuum if it’s a carpet, etc.
4. One by one, process each item that was in that space. With each item, either (a) throw it away or recycle it, (b) put it in a box to donate or sell, (c) put it in a “Maybe” box, or (d) put it away in a place where it belongs, which in a few cases could be that original space.
5. If you can’t finish in one session, just keep your pile in place and continue tomorrow.

Once you’re finished, you can continue by doing the same process in a nearby space … if you devote just 15 minutes a day to decluttering, soon you’ll have an entire room that’s decluttered!

Further reading

✦ Project 333: Simple is the New Black
✦ Zen Mind: How to Declutter (Zen Habits)
✦ 10 Creative Ways to Declutter Your Home (Becoming Minimalist)
Day 24:
Enhance Your Environment

“There is no question that the objects that surround us impact our experience of the world.” — Katherine Center

So you started decluttering and have gotten rid of some things — are you enjoying the feeling of space?

Today we want to think about not so much the clearing of space, but the upgrading of it. Not, for the most part, by bringing in new things, but instead by thinking about how you can engineer your environment to make the daunting task of doing difficult work — work that matters — more enjoyable.

How you enhance your space is a matter of taste. I tend to find that minimal is more conducive to creativity and contentment than busy, but some people will feel the opposite. The point is that you take some time to deliberately design your environment.

If a goal of yours involves exercise, do you own clothes that make you feel good? Are your running shoes right for your feet and your running style? What, if anything, could you listen to while you exercise that would make it more enjoyable?

If you want to write, have you looked around at the software options? Check out Byword,
CreaWriter, Google Docs, even Evernote. Or Scrivener, for organizing novels. What about music? I’ve started writing with an ambient white noise track playing, but sometimes I prefer classical music (I’ve found cello music to be particularly well-suited for writing) or even jazz, as long as there are no vocals.

Does the idea of using a timer while you work, write, brainstorm, read, or otherwise create appeal to you? There’s a simple, free, web-based one at e.ggtimer.com, but sometimes it’s fun to set a real kitchen timer and hear it tick. Or if you’re a Pomodoro junkie, it might be fun to get an official tomato timer from the website.

What’s on the walls of your office or studio? How is the lighting?

Are there certain quotes you’d love to be reminded of every day, to be able to look up from your work and be inspired and encouraged by?

What about photos, clippings, or awards that would remind you of some of the accomplishments on your victories list, or otherwise give you confidence in the inevitable moments of doubt?

I fully appreciate that your absolute perfect environment may be out of reach, for financial or practical reasons. Mine sure is! But that’s fine, because perfection is not the point.

How can you make your current environment better, either for free or a small financial
investment that’s dwarfed by the potential gains of producing the results you’re seeking? That’s your action for today.

**Today’s action:** Design your ideal environment, focusing for now on the environment where you’ll do the work that matters for the achievement of your goals. Write a paragraph in your journal about what it would look like in a perfect world — having this mental picture will help to fuel your work. And then do what you can in the real world: make the changes that make sense for you, right now.

**Helpful hints:** Again — *do not* get hung up on perfection or allow “I don’t have the ideal tools/workspace” to become a reason for failing to start. Perfectionism can itself become a form of procrastination. Remember that many artists have found their greatness by intentionally *limiting* the tools at their disposal, then working within those confines.
Day 25: 
Enhance Your Energy

“Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you.”
— Oprah Winfrey

“Energy and persistence conquer all things.”
— Benjamin Franklin

We’ve come a long way and laid the mental foundation — determining what you want, why you want it, and the habits and plans to help you get it. And by now, the step of actually going to work is well underway (and it should come as no surprise that you’ve got to actually do some work).

It’s plain to see that energy is a necessity here. There’s a reason most people flip on the TV and crash on the couch when they get home from work — it’s easy! It takes energy to choose instead to run, read, write, or create, and to get up early and stay up late. Immense, burning desire will get you part of the way, but you can only go for so long before you crash if your physical energy level isn’t where it needs to be.

So how do you upgrade your energy level? Unfortunately, there’s no quick-fix, no shortcut. Stimulants like caffeine will provide only a temporary boost, and at the cost of reduced energy later. The energy you get from caffeine is borrowed, and must be paid back. This doesn’t
mean it can’t help you now and then, but run up too large a deficit and you’ll crash, in the form of sickness or extreme fatigue.

The way to long-term, sustainable energy is an old-fashioned one: proper diet, exercise, and sleep. And, of course, the mental drive and habits that we’ve spent over three weeks developing in this program.

Diet

Chances are good that if you’re a No Meat Athlete reader, you’re already vegetarian or vegan. But if you’re not, make energy your reason to finally give it a try. When I went vegetarian, the most striking effect was on my energy level. Suddenly — and it really was an immediate impact — I no longer felt bloated and tired after dinner. Instead of grabbing a beer and watching TV until it was time to go to sleep, I was driven to work on my new blog or even go for a run.

The reason, I believe: plants are less calorically dense than animal products are. Thus it takes fewer calories to fill your stomach, so you feel full without having eaten a huge load of calories, which must then be digested (and our digestive process takes up an enormous amount of energy). But at the same time, because whole plant foods are very high in nutrients, you get more bang for your caloric buck. More nutrients in less calories is not just the path to long-term health; it’s the path to energy now. After I went vegetarian and eventually vegan, that “2:30 feeling” of needing a nap disappeared — on its own, without the help of 5-Hour Energy or any other stimulant. I realize that I’m just one person and not everyone will necessarily experience the results that I did; all I’m saying is it’s worth a try.
Also, look out for the effects of alcohol and caffeine on your sleep quality. I’m not going to tell you to completely avoid either one of them, but know that any chemical assistance you need to wake up or fall asleep is not natural and will ultimately rob you of energy.

Exercise

There’s an interesting paradox that anyone who exercises regularly can attest to: the more energy you use, the more energy you have.

Of course, it’s not actually paradoxical at all — as your body adapts to exercise, muscle replaces fat and with time your cardiovascular system become more efficient. Not to mention improved sleep and the release of mood-enhancing endorphins which give your brain a rush, without the crash later on.

I find that low-intensity exercise is better for energy than all-out exertion that requires substantial muscle repair afterward, but either form is better than no exercise at all.

If increasing energy is your only reason for exercise, you don’t need to do a lot of it. Twenty to forty minutes a day of easy jogging or even a very brisk walk is enough to enhance your mood and energy levels throughout the day.

If you haven’t been exercising consistently in the past few months, treat it like any other habit. Start small — five minutes a day of running or walking is perfect — and build from there.

Sleep

You need to sleep if you want to be effective. If you have an extremely healthy diet and you exercise, I’m not convinced you need the eight
hours that are prescribed for people who eat the Standard American Diet and live a sedentary lifestyle. But that doesn’t mean you should expect to get by on four or five hours a night.

I know that creating a massive change in your life sometimes involves “moonlighting” in one endeavor while working a 9-to-5 and taking care of your family all at once. Missing out on necessary sleep isn’t sustainable for too long, but the advice to work harder on whatever your magnificent obsession is than you’ve ever worked at anything in your life is usually incompatible with the advice to sleep more too.

If getting enough sleep just isn’t a possibility right now, at least improve the quality of the time you do allocate for sleep. Diet and exercise will play a big part, but other factors matter too.

A few tips:

✦ Get rid of lights in your room that stay on all night. With digital clocks, cell phones, tablets, television sets, DVD players, and more all plugged in and flashing, you’re not going to sleep as well as you will in a completely dark room. Not to mention the stress and lack of sleep that come from a constant awareness of the time.

✦ Take the TV out of your room. Screen time has no place in a nighttime routine — if you’re going to watch TV, don’t do it within a half hour of when you hope to fall asleep.

✦ Read before bed. Fiction is particularly good, and tends to lull you to sleep in a way that nonfiction doesn’t.
Have a nighttime ritual that signals to your brain that it’s time to wind down. If you’re trying to get to sleep by 10pm, set an alarm for 9pm that reminds you to start getting ready for bed. This routine could include putting on night clothes, meditating, writing in your journal, or reading.

Get a good pillow and a comfortable bed. If you’re going to spend a third of your life doing a single activity, doesn’t it make sense to invest a little money in making that activity as enjoyable and restorative as possible?

Finally, if you really want to get nerdy about your sleep, get a bracelet that monitors your sleep quality, and test different pre-bed routines and other things to determine what helps you sleep best. Sleep is a big deal, so it’s worth getting it right.

**Today’s action:** Choose the area — diet, exercise, or sleep — that you’re most neglecting, and take some concrete steps to improve it. For example, you could commit to a 7-day vegetarian or vegan trial, commit to starting a light exercise routine, or get a new novel and find a new home for your electronics besides your bedroom.

**Further reading**

- 7 Day Vegan Challenge
- *How to Go Vegetarian or Vegan* (No Meat Athlete)
- 5 Easy Ways to (Finally) Start Running (No Meat Athlete)
- *Relax Like a Pro: 5 Steps to Hacking Your Sleep* (Tim Ferriss)
- Bulletproof Your Sleep (Bulletproof Executive)
Day 26:
Enhance Your Mindset and Break Through Limiting Beliefs

“Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armoury of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself; he also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace.”
— James Allen

Today we’re going to focus on your beliefs. What you believe deep down at a gut level governs so much about the way you think and operate, yet if you’re like most people, you didn’t consciously choose your beliefs and deepest convictions. Your beliefs have been shaped by the major influences in your life, from your parents and teachers many years ago to the books and blogs you read today and the messages that advertisers bombard you with everywhere you turn. Some of these people have your best interests at heart, but many do not. Some are simply misguided.

This week, we’ve enhanced your external environment. Then we focused on your physical energy. Finally, we move inward to enhance your mind (which, of course, we’ve been working on for this entire program).
The “victories list” that you did back in the first week of this program was designed to create some references to reinforce a belief that, essentially, you are a winner. As cheesy as that sounds, your beliefs about yourself and your capabilities (also known as your self-image) are inextricably tied to the results you’ll get in life, so you’ve got to make sure that foundation is solid.

Many of your beliefs are so deeply rooted that they’re unconscious, and these take time and strong references to the contrary to actually change. But other beliefs are closer to the surface, and these can be chosen and changed through conscious effort. That’s what we want to do today.

Today’s action is somewhat in depth. I’d like you to give it ample time and really do it well, so let’s get right to it!

**Today’s action:** Make a list of the positive beliefs that you currently hold that have empowered you and helped you thus far. You probably have five or ten convictions that are clearly tied to your successes; try to draw out as many of those as you can.

A few of my favorite empowering beliefs, in case some examples help you, are:

- I’m responsible for everything that’s in my life, good and bad
- My uniqueness is my power
- If I set out to do something with a mindset of “no matter how long, no matter what, whatever it takes,” then I cannot fail
- Rejection is a sign that I’m taking the risks I need to take

Once you have your list, take the top two or three and rewrite them in a prominent place.

Wake up
where you’ll be reminded of them and the power they hold for you — this could be inside the front cover of your journal or on your computer desktop or on an index card that you carry around and see every time you open your wallet.

Then make a list of five to ten beliefs that you know have held you back. When you think of your goals, do you have any hesitation or uncertainty that you are going to find a way to make each of them happen? If so, a negative belief (like “Nothing I try ever works out,” or “I’m not smart enough”) is likely at the root of it. Try to identify the big ones, and once you’ve got your list, focus on the two or three strongest, the ones that have had the biggest negative impact on your life so far.

Now, commit to changing them: for each negative belief, come up with an opposite, empowering belief, and add this to your list of most empowering beliefs. Then — and this is important — make sure you review this list (which should now have five or six very powerful, positive statements, a few of which you already believe and a few that you intend to install) often.

Helpful hints: Simply identifying beliefs is good, because you’ll be more likely to catch yourself when you’re employing a belief that you know has held you back in the past. But the real power in this exercise is in actually changing the negative beliefs into positive ones. My personal preference is to memorize the list of five or six positive beliefs and mentally run through it often, like while I’m exercising or driving. Reciting it out loud, with emotion and enthusiasm, is even better.
Finally, keeping a list of references, examples that back up each positive belief, is also helpful (you should find plenty of them on your victories list from day 3). You don’t need to memorize these, but knowing that you have a list of examples of times when you proved correct the beliefs you’re trying to reinforce goes a long way.
Day 27:
Make Gratitude a Part of Your Routine

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.”
— Cicero

Gratitude is an incredibly powerful but often neglected emotion in the human experience. If you have the means to read this ebook, you are surrounded by unthinkable abundance, in comparison to the three billion people who live on $2.50 per day. Or the 80 percent (!) of the world’s population who lives on less than $10 a day, to make no mention of the availability of water, food, and healthcare we’ve grown accustomed to.

We have so much to be grateful for, and it’s so easy not to see it. But you should. There’s a large amount of scientific research, most of it recent, that links the emotion of gratitude to happiness, altruism, relaxation, self-acceptance, growth, and so much more.

Completely aside from the argument of whether it’s your responsibility to be grateful for the abundance you have, it benefits you to do so. This 31-day program may be focused on goals, but as we’ve said, the purpose of goals is to become the person you must be to achieve them. But what’s the purpose of elevating yourself to that level? You may have some more intermediate steps before you reach the end,
but drill down far enough, and the answer is “Because it will make me happy.”

Here’s a shortcut. A way to increase happiness right away, without achieving a single goal, and in a way that is anything but destructive. Just get grateful.

And of course, the punchline is that the by-products of gratitude — feeling better, being less stressed, and having a better self-image, to name just a few — will undoubtedly help you in the achievement of the goals you’ve set. Which, if you’ve got good reasons for wanting those goals, leads to more happiness and a higher standard for yourself and any goals you set in the future. And, of course, more gratitude.

So let’s install gratitude into your daily routine. We’ll choose an activity that you’re already doing, and simply set a reminder or two for you to think of what you’re grateful for and allow yourself to feel this powerful emotion for a few minutes.

Even if you’ve got other habits on your list to start once your current ones are automatic, go ahead and start this one. It doesn’t have to take any extra time, and hey, it feels good! Willpower should be a non-issue here. It’s an easy habit to start, so why not?

**Today’s action:** Choose an activity you’re already doing every day that can be your trigger (or even your arena) for gratitude. The activity should be one where your mind is free, like running, doing the dishes, meditating, etc. Make the decision that during some portion of that activity — the first or last five minutes, or even just one or two minutes for now — you’ll focus on things you’re grateful for. Then start the habit next time you do the activity!
Helpful hints:

✦ You can, of course, increase the time that you spend in gratitude, but like with any other habit, starting small is your best bet for making it last.

✦ A technique that has worked for me is one I learned from Tony Robbins — start with yourself (being grateful for your health, your talents, your faith, etc.) and expanding outward to your family, your friends, and then more abstract concepts. Be specific to make sure you’re actually feeling the emotion (like think of each individual family member for a few seconds). Simply running down a list and checking off names won’t cut it!

✦ Another idea is to choose one person or concept each day, and focus on that for the entire period.

✦ The most likely cause of failure with this habit is just forgetting to do it. Do what you can to put reminders in place so that you don’t forget!

✦ There are a good number of smartphone apps specifically dedicated to helping you experience gratitude every day. I’ve never used them, but you may find them helpful.

Further Reading

✦ Random Gratitude Journal (iPhone app)
Weekend Mini-Project:
Help Someone Else

"You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want." — Zig Ziglar

Up until now, this program has really been about you. Your goals, your habits, your mindset. Sure, those goals and improvements you make to your thinking and behavior will benefit others, but so far, self-interest has been the primary reason for all we’ve done.

The gratitude habit will start to shift that mindset a little bit, and this weekend we’ll take that further by doing something that directly helps somebody else.

And, lest you object and angrily wonder, “Wait a minute, what’s in it for me!?” … well, take comfort in the fact that giving of your time and/or money is recommended in countless self-improvement programs, even those aiming at increasing your time and your money! These authors strongly believe from their own experiences and others’ that the act of giving serves to change your attitude from one of scarcity to one of abundance. By giving, you send your brain and nervous system the signal that “I am the type of person who has plenty to give,” which in turn attracts more.
There, so I’ve taken a concept that looks purely altruistic and turned it around to be a self-serving one! Happy?

Whatever your reasons, let’s help some others this weekend.

Saturday (Day 28): Tell someone that you appreciate him or her

Zig Ziglar makes a wonderful point in several of his books and audio programs: If someone were to call you on the phone, first thing in the morning, and let you know how much they appreciate you — your sense of humor, your generosity, how interesting, inspiring, and unique you are — how much better would you be at whatever you do that day? Even without improving the skills your job or activities require, you’d feel better about yourself, and that confidence would flow over into the work that you do and improve your interactions with others.

This improvement is completely free. It doesn’t cost the person who calls you anything more than their time, and don’t you think they’re going to feel better about themselves, knowing that they made your day with a quick phone call?

This is your job today. Make someone feel fantastic, with your words. Say it in person, make the phone call, or just send an email. Heck, do it on Facebook if that’s what it takes. Just get the message across, make it genuine, and make sure that person you’re talking to knows that you mean it. And make it special — not just an offhand compliment disguised as a joke. Make them wonder what has come over you!
Please, don’t skip this exercise. I put it near the end of this book because I know it’s difficult — most of the other actions you could do by yourself and in the comfort of your own head or journal, and this is different. This is the type of exercise I’m always tempted to skip! But it matters, and it’s powerful. I’ve put it near the end of the book in hopes that the other exercises have prepared you for it, but more than that, in hopes that you’ve got a good streak of action going and won’t allow yourself to skip a day!

Help someone feel great today, and let yourself feel good about doing that.

Bonus action: There’s no reason you can’t tell more than one person how much you appreciate them today — it only takes a minute or two. I’ll leave that up to you.

Sunday (Day 29): Share your knowledge with someone

When you give someone money, you no longer have that money to give. When you donate your time, say a few hours of work on a project to help someone, those hours are gone. But when you share your knowledge — an immensely valuable resource — you don’t lose anything.

I’ll spare you the “Give a man a fish ...” quote, especially considering the audience of vegetarians that’s likely reading this book. But the point is dead on. Knowledge can be shared at no cost other than the short time it takes to share it, and the benefits of such sharing are without limit.
You are great at something. Maybe it’s your job, maybe it’s meal planning or healthy, plant-based eating, maybe it’s running or sticking to an exercise program. Having just read this book and done the actions, you’ve made vastly more distinctions about goals, time management, decluttering, and mindset than has someone who just drifts through life, going only where the winds of chance take them.

There’s someone in your life — and others not yet in your life — who could benefit tremendously from what you know, if only you’d share.

Why should you? Well, besides the obvious benefit to the person you’re helping, you’ll feel good. Like a giver.

What’s more, whomever you help will probably be grateful, and one day, they just might return the favor. Even if not, who knows what doors might open as a result. Maybe they’ll tell someone else how much you helped them, and that person will have an opportunity for you. Maybe you’ll learn that you love the feeling of sharing your knowledge, and that you’re more an expert than you realized. And you never know: If one of your goals is to create a business of your own, this action just might be the one that gets you started.

When I started my blog, that’s exactly what happened to me. I didn’t realize I had much knowledge to share about cooking, nutrition, or running — or at making them all work within a “normal” lifestyle. It was a big experiment that I thought would be a fun way to share recipes, and it turned out people really valued what I posted each day. Not in my wildest dreams did I think that in just two years that little blog would become what I do for a living.
Today, think about how you might help someone (or many someones) by sharing what you know.

You could:

✦ Give someone a copy of this book (you have my permission) and offer to help them work through it, sharing what you’ve learned and the actions you’ve taken.

✦ Make a direct offer to someone who could use your expertise. Maybe you’ve got a friend who eats unhealthily but badly wants to get in shape — could you offer to go shopping with them next time?

✦ Make a general offer to help — to your friends, Facebook friends, whomever you want. A friend of mine (who you may know from the blogosphere as Johnny B. Truant) once sent around an email to acquaintances offering to help any of us with anything he could — I took him up on it and got his advice on parenting, which I knew he was good at, and I’m so grateful today for the comfort his words gave me back then.

✦ Help your child or spouse work through a problem.

✦ Start writing a blog, publishing a podcast, or working on a book or ebook about whatever it is you’re good at or passionate about. Are there two topics that don’t seem like a natural fit but that might make for an interesting crossroads to explore (the way vegetarianism and running seemed to me)? This is my favorite of the suggestions, and the one that has the biggest potential impact.*
Help someone by sharing your knowledge today. This might not be something you can do in one day, but you can at least send the email or write the Facebook post to make the offer, write the first blog post, or set up your podcast and plan the first few episodes. Try to do something besides just planning — take an action that touches someone else in some way, something that’s concrete.

And please, make it free. You never know where it might lead down the road, but start with free — make it a gift.

*If you do start something, please let me know about it!

Further reading

- The Millionaire’s Secret Trait that Attracts Crazy Amounts of Success (Copyblogger)
- How to Start a Blog: The Definitive Guide (Impossible HQ)
- How to Start a Podcast (Smart Passive Income)
Day 30: Ensure You Stick with It

“Rain puts a hole in stone because of its constancy, not its force.”
— H. Joseph Gerber

We’re just about at the end. You’ve done the hard stuff, made the changes that have the potential to compound into major transformation over the course of months or years.

Tony Robbins, the man who started me on this journey, illustrates what I mean when he says to imagine your path in life as a straight line: The changes you’re making represent a small, 10-degree shift in the direction of that line, connected at the origin to your original line but veering away from it as you extend the two lines outward. At first, the difference is tiny — a few millimeters. But as you move farther and farther away from the point of the change — as more and more time passes — the gap between the two lines becomes very noticeable. Eventually, it’s enormous.

You’ve made the 10-degree shift (perhaps a much larger one). Now the trick is to ensure that you stay on the new path.

We don’t want to rely on chance or even willpower. Situations in your life will come up that throw you for a loop and tempt you to
throw all of this away and go back to the “normal” path you were on before you started.

You’ve got to plan in advance. Here are the keys.

1. **Keep doing your anchor habit, for as long as it serves you.**

Your anchor habit is still the glue that holds these changes together. Because it’s every day, and because you chose it as the habit that most makes you feel happy and in charge of your life, it will keep you on your new path. If for any reason your anchor habit stops being that for you — and not just for a few days, but for a prolonged period — it’s time to leave it behind and choose another.

Because your anchor habit is the most important, it’s the one you should do the most to maintain. Think ahead about what will happen when you travel, when relatives come to visit, when you catch a cold, when work gets busy. Any of these, and a few days of skipping your habit because of it, has the potential to throw you off of your habit, never to return (until you “wake up” one day, after months or years have gone by, and make a concerted effort to take control of your life again). Make sure you plan for these obstacles before they arise — if not for all your habits, then at least for this one.

2. **Keep exposing yourself to ideas like the ones in this book.**

This doesn’t have to be the end. You can pick this book up again anytime, re-read it, and redo the action steps, but I’d suggest you learn from others as well. Not just to get new perspectives, but because you want this study to be ongoing,
for the rest of your life. And for that, you’ll need a lot of sources.

There are countless books, audio seminars, podcasts, and blogs devoted to the topic of personal development. You need to find the ones that resonate with you. My personal favorites are Tony Robbins, Jim Rohn, Leo Babauta, Seth Godin (though Seth’s teachings are decidedly marketing- and entrepreneurship-oriented). They happen to be all men, not because there are no women who write about these topics or because I’ve intentionally avoided learning from women, but simply because those are the handful out of hundreds of authors whose work has struck a chord with me.

Find an author or speaker you like. Read their books, put their talks on your iPod to listen to during your passive time. Let one lead you to another. And as much as you can incorporate this type of learning into your daily routine, do so. (This is the reason reading is my anchor habit.)

3. Involve other people.

Remember, for all the work we’ve done in this book, much of it has been in your head and in your journal. If a stressor in your life suddenly derails you for a week or two and you forget to return to this study (trust me, I’ve done it plenty of times), will anyone know or care?

That’s why you want others to be involved. You should have an accountability partner, or even a mastermind group. Consider getting a coach. Let your friends know what you’re up to, and certainly your significant other (who has probably noticed some changes in you by now anyway). Touch the world in a real way —
beyond just in your head and the pages of your journal — so that accidentally letting all these changes slip away unnoticed is not an option.

4. Set reminders and “don’t miss twice.”

Forgetting sounds like such a trivial issue for someone so sophisticated in habit change as you now are, but don’t underestimate its power.

It doesn’t take long to get off track. One missed weekly planning and review session isn’t the end of the world. But it certainly increases the chances that you’ll miss the next — possibly because you’ll forget without a reminder. (After all, it will have been two full weeks since your last.)

That second miss is the big one. Miss two in a row, and the third one probably ain’t happening. Partly because you might forget; partly because you’ve lost momentum and to get back to it feels like a bit of a chore.

And then … you guessed it. Not only don’t the fourth and fifth ones happen; you don’t even realize that you’re missing them. Because you’ve forgotten.

Make it your mission to never miss two in a row — of anything!

And don’t miss because you forget. If you use an online calendar or one in your smartphone, setup weekly reminders that remind you about any non-daily habits. And be sure to set them to automatically recur until some future day when you turn them off (which, I hope, is never).

**Today’s action:** Do everything you can today to ensure that you’ll stick with this process of personal development — your anchor habit and
weekly review/planning session of your goal-oriented actions, at a minimum. Think of potential obstacles to at least these two disciplines, and create a plan for dealing with those obstacles now, before it’s too late. Finally, check out a few personal development speakers and authors and if you’re up for it, download something from iTunes or order one of their books as your next step.
Day 31: 
Wake Up and Start Living On Purpose!

“Forever is composed of nows.”
— Emily Dickinson

“There are only so many tomorrows.”
— Michael Landon

You’ve made it! For that, I offer you my most sincere congratulations, and a lot of respect.

Respect because most people won’t invest in something to change their lives; they’re too busy with idle distractions. But even among those who will take that step and make that first commitment, the vast majority will not finish.

But you have, and you should be proud. You’ve done the work, and you’ve woken up.

It’s time to wrap up, with our thirty-first day together and your thirty-first action to take charge of your life. You no longer allow the winds of chance to blow your ship where they will.

The most important thing you can do today is live. Mark the words of Lucius Seneca, who two-thousand years ago wrote in one of his letters:

What man can you show me who places any value on his time, who reckons the worth of each day, who understands that
he is dying daily? For we are mistaken when we look forward to death; the major portion of death has already passed, whatever years be behind us are in death’s hands.

Therefore, hold every hour in your grasp. Lay hold of today’s task, and you will not need to depend so much upon tomorrow’s. While we are postponing, life speeds by.

You understand Seneca’s point. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have put so many hours into this program, when watching TV or scrolling through Facebook would have been a whole lot easier.

And that’s why it’s not all that hard to get the results you want out of life — so many other people are content to sit on the sidelines and watch and sleepwalk their way through it.

Not you. You have woken up. And now it’s up to you to stay that way, to work intelligently and tirelessly at whatever it is you seek from life — so that the rewards, internal and external, become more than enough motivation to never go back.

Ask a lot from your life — it’s not a rehearsal; this is the real thing.

Helen Keller said, “Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” Which will you choose, while the choice is still yours?

**Today’s action:** Decide where you need to be more deliberate in your life (that life which is slipping by even as you read this). What’s one area where, in light of the brevity of life, you need to step up and not waste another day? Write a paragraph in your journal about why you need to do this (and what will happen if you
don’t), and a plan for what you can do differently, starting today. (Or better yet, right now!)

Tony Robbins tells the story of basketball legend Julius Erving, also known as Dr. J, who when asked what made him so great, said that it was because every day since he was a kid, he had held himself to a higher standard than anyone else could possibly expect. Think about what holding yourself to a standard like that, starting in just one area of your life, could do.

I wish you the very best.