

clearly

TUNING IN,
TUNING OUT &
MAXIMIZING
PRODUCTIVITY

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clearly

Tuning in, Tuning Out & Maximizing Productivity

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pieces of
GRIT

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Introduction

Life comes at us a million miles an hour. Often from the time we are teenagers we're taught to juggle an overabundance of commitments beginning with school, sports, college prep, and social obligations. We have an array of devices to help us manage our obligations and hopefully locate some sort of semblance of balance as our calendars fill up. Still, we are pulled in many directions and lack the ability to focus.

Honestly, it can be overwhelming and as we struggle to keep up with every opportunity we think we should be pursuing, we can end up excelling at none.

Distractions enter your life in all shapes and sizes. They might show up as people, job offers, or wealth. These distractions aren't necessarily bad, but they might pull you away from pursuing the dream you've held deep in your heart through the years.

Sometimes you feel it is simply life happening at a rapid and non-stop rate that has held you back from achieving your goals. Time goes by and before you know it, it's been years that you've waited for the "right moment" to pursue a passion. Now is the time to take charge of your destiny, focus on who you were created to be and answer the call you hear in your soul.

You need an individualized plan because you are unique. Exercises and questions in this book are largely open-ended to give you space to dream as big as you choose. As someone who has coached and mentored dozens of women, I believe you have everything you need already inside you. You have the willpower, the vision, and the answer waiting to come out and be realized. There are no black and white instructions or step-by-step guides to help you get from point A to point B. Instead, this guide will challenge you to map out the journey that is right for you.

Set aside some time each day to read a chapter, write down your answers and thoughts, then reflect on them as long as needed before moving on to the next day. It's most beneficial if you keep all your responses in a single notebook or journal so you can refer back to various sections as you work through the process. You will get as much out of this book as you choose to invest and reading this far already says a lot about how committed you are to finding focus and running toward your dreams.

This is the beginning of life change for you. Coming out on the other side you will have tools and tips to develop into the best version of you, motivated by your deepest values and vision of your future. Commit to the process of constant personal growth and see how the journey unfolds before you.

Step 1: Start Where You Are

Anytime you embark on a journey, it's helpful to understand where you are beginning. It's a crucial step in plotting a map to your destination. For purposes of this journey, your beginning is everything in your current circumstances.

Life often keeps your calendar so tight there is no white space left and no time to accurately assess where you are and how you are feeling. Today is the day you get to begin creating enough margin to sit quietly with your thoughts. I know it's a shift from the way we usually live our lives, but pause long enough to go beneath the surface of your daily activities. Busyness is a murderer of awareness and you can lose touch with your emotions when you're lost in a sea of doing. Push aside some of the busyness and make time to be honest with where you are.

If we were taking a poll, I would be one of the worst offenders of covering up my inner life with busyness. I find it easy to plot my days according to task lists. There is safety in using a full schedule as a buffer between myself and deeper thoughts and emotions. Patterns emerge where I am achieving many great things in all areas of my life, then inevitably I experience low levels of burnout and only then do I pause to assess where I am spiritually and emotionally. Part of my own journey of focusing on the path ahead of me is to continually assess how connected I am to my own heart.

You spend your days caring for people around you, whether it's your team at work, your children and family, or clients who heavily rely on you. In the midst of these exchanges, serving and supporting those around you, your own self-awareness is placed on the back burner. Without carving specific time to rejuvenate and hear yourself, it's an imbalanced give and take. Just like your bank account, you can only withdraw for so long before you run into a negative balance with harmful consequences.

As little as 5 minutes each day to meditate, pray, or journal will change your approach and state of mind to whatever comes at you. There is something cathartic about breathing out, writing out, or speaking out what is on your mind. It releases some of the tension and brings your problems into a better perspective.

Find a quiet space right now, turn off your phone alerts, and allow yourself to relax as you mentally snapshot your world and lay it out in writing.

Rate each of the following areas from 1-10, 1 being unhealthy and needs a lot of attention, 10 meaning you're acing this area of life and don't need any growth whatsoever.

Physical health _____

Mental/emotional health _____

Financial stability _____

Job satisfaction _____

Relationships _____

For every category you rated under a 5, write your thoughts about your situation and the feelings associated with your thoughts. It's important to address your feelings here because that is where clarity happens and you may stumble upon an answer you've needed for a long time. Spend as much time writing as you need to, revisiting this exercise tomorrow if you need extra time to process.

- What are a few predominant thoughts you find yourself mulling over frequently?
- Close your eyes and think about why these thoughts persist.

Mindfulness Practice

This is called a practice because there is always room for improvement to become more in tune with ourselves. Choose one or two of the following to implement into your routine this week. Make a note of how it impacts you.

Meditate/pray - begin with five minutes each day, then add a minute every week for several weeks and see what it does for your daily outlook.

Fresh air - it doesn't matter what you do, just get outside and breathe. Feel the sun and notice your surroundings.

Move - find something you love doing. Feel what's going on in your body, listen to what it tells you. Connect with yourself, and love yourself by allowing your body to do what it was created to do.

Disconnect - set aside one hour each day to go device-free. (Ah, the nerve I have to suggest this!)

Be intentional - practice being in the moment whether you are preparing a presentation, eating a burrito, or playing with your preschooler. Mentally note what is happening in and around you.

Borrowed Wisdom

“Awareness is a key ingredient in success. If you have it, teach it, if you lack it, seek it.”
- Michael Kitson

“Awareness is like the sun. When it shines on things, they are transformed.” -Nhat Hanh

Step 2: X Marks the Spot

You've heard that the journey is just as important, if not more, than the destination. Don't you wonder where phrases like this come from? Who sat around and said, "Yeah, I want to get to the top of that mountain, but equally as satisfying will be taking my time and looking at the pretty flowers. You know, it's also okay if I don't get to the finish line because, gosh darn it, that was a great journey!" No one said that. Ever. It is perfectly okay to define your big goals and bust your butt to get there. As you start off, make it easy on yourself and clarify where you're going; you'll enjoy the journey a lot more that way.

The sky is the limit in this phase. Dream big and let your mind wander for a while. Let go of expectations placed on you by yourself and others and reach further than you ever have. The only boundaries you have are the ones you put on yourself. Stretch yourself and go beyond the box you've created in your mind.

Here are a few questions to help you connect with some of your inner dreams.

- What did you dream of becoming as a child?
- What do you dream of now?
- What would you do/be if there were no limitations on you?

If you have trouble answering any of these questions, think about your core values, hobbies in which you might want to invest more time, past activities or jobs in which you thrived, or what sparks passion in you now.

You are capable of so much more than you think. When you don't allow yourself to dream big and keep those ideas in front of you, you limit yourself. However crazy you think an idea is, it arrived in your soul for a reason. You owe it to yourself to pursue that dream until it is no longer a desire living in you.

- How have you limited your potential in the past?
- What would you do differently if you could rewind the clock and pursue those dreams?

Keep a list of the vision for your life in front of you in some way - vision board, notes list on your phone, scrapbook, a board in work management software - whatever will remind you of the things that spark passion and drive.

Answer these questions to further expand your boundaries.

- If money was no issue, what would you do?
- When you have free time, what occupies the majority of your thoughts?
- Who is with you in these dreams?

- Where would you be geographically if you were living out these dreams?
- How do you feel when you think about these goals?

Borrowed Wisdom

“You’ll never know unless you try.” - Rachel Stewart

“When you cease to dream, you cease to live.” - Malcolm Forbes

Step 3: Answer Your WHY

The more you understand about where your goals come from, the easier it will be to stay committed when challenges arise. On Day 2, you found your target destination. Now it's time to ensure you have the key that fits the door and will allow you to cross the threshold. Go deep and find your motivation today.

In my mid-twenties I began to develop a strong interest in fitness and nutrition, which was a far cry from my education and experience up to that point. These had no correlation with the corporate job I had at the time and I felt torn between where I was and where I wanted to be. I was becoming established within my company, yet my heart was pulling me in a different direction. The lure of cycling classes and personal training started edging out my desire for sales calls and bonus incentives.

Struggling to make sense of this shifting dream, I did a lot of soul searching for the better part of a year. A lightbulb went on when I answered my why and discovered the connection I had with the fitness industry. I wanted to help people in a valuable and tangible way, which my corporate job did not really do. Once I found this intrinsic motivation, it made it a lot easier to leave a higher paying job to venture into an industry that fed my passion and made me happy even though I was starting from scratch.

Drill down into your core motivation and put some meat on the bones of your goals. Money or status are certainly motivators and you should write those down with specific attainable goals, but go beyond that today and look for what would bring you satisfaction even if you never gross a million dollar year or you never reach 100,000 followers on social media.

- When did you develop this dream?
- What was happening in your life around that time?
- What, if anything, sparked this idea?
- What emotions were associated with the realization of something bigger than yourself?
- How does it align with your personal values?
- Are these answers enough to make the effort worth it and keep you motivated to achieve the end result?

If you have never created a personal mission statement, now is the perfect time. The tools are simple, the process is life-changing, and the result is a framework through which you can run every thought, dream, and opportunity. You can find a simple worksheet on the Pieces of Grit website (piecesofgrit.com), along with two podcast episodes to help you through the process.

[Podcast Episodes 12 and 16](#)

[Life Purpose Statement Worksheet](#)

Here are five ways to discover the true you and get to your core motivation.

1. Go Deep - really look inside.
2. Be Honest - with yourself and others.
3. Excitement - are you truly excited about your dreams?
4. Journey - reflect on the past, asking if your journey points to your future.
5. Fail - what would happen if you fail at small steps or the big picture?

Borrowed Wisdom

“Sometimes, you have to look back in order to understand the things that lie ahead.”
- Yvonne Woon

“I don’t focus on what I’m up against. I focus on my goals and I try to ignore the rest.”
- Venus Williams

Step 4: Pack Your Toolbox

You know where you're going, now it's time to pack all your gear for the journey. To the best of your ability you need to anticipate the tools you'll require and be as prepared as you can. Get ready to make a packing list.

- What would help me achieve my goals? (education/training, internship, a business/life coach, more supportive network of friends, organizational skills, goal-setting tools, perseverance, commitment, confidence, a babysitter, etc.)

Separating internal and external tools is a healthy way to visualize areas you can easily change and those which are more challenging. The examples above are more internal, while aspects like geography, work environment, and finances might not be as easily shifted since other people are usually involved.

- Write out each item from the question above separately and add notes about what you need, such as money for a college degree. Add pros and cons for each one as well. Using education again, it might be a huge bonus to have a degree in your chosen field, but the downside could be the length of time to complete.

A little later you will have an opportunity to develop short and long-term goals for any of these you choose. Having the right framework to achieve your goals is crucial, but here's where your commitment and dedication come in.

You are the boss of you and one of the most important tools you need is to become self-directed. No one sees your vision exactly the way you do and no one possesses as much passion for this dream. As a visionary, a learner, an entrepreneur, you must take charge of each step of your journey.

Be the driver.

Be the captain of your own ship.

Take the bull by the horns.

You get what I'm saying.

Borrowed Wisdom

“Every challenge you face today makes you stronger tomorrow. The challenge of life is intended to make you better, not bitter.” - Roy T. Bennett, [The Light in the Heart](#)

“Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.” - George Bernard Shaw

Step 5: Pick Your Team

Have you heard that you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with?

I wish I came up with that myself, because it's genius and it's true. I find myself picking up gestures, phrases, and attitudes of the people I spend the most time around, often whether I realize it or not. Hopefully, most of what I'm unconsciously adopting into my own life is positive. This idea has definitely made me pay more attention to who gets the bulk of my time, even the people I work with and don't necessarily have a lot of choice to be around.

Over the last decade one particular mentor, Teresa, has been integral in various degrees. Ten years is a long time and so much life has happened between the two of us. Although we are still in the same city, we have each moved multiple times, I got married, our work relationship has evolved through several phases, and as with any friendship, season look different. Teresa is one of my top five picks. During seasons where we weren't organically in the same space, I had to exert extra effort to keep her voice in my life.

During one busy year, Teresa and I couldn't make lunch or coffee dates work out and since we are both morning exercisers, 6:00am walks through her neighborhood became our coaching sessions. It wasn't convenient for me because I didn't live in her neighborhood and it meant that I had to sacrifice my sacred morning time. (I'm married and my quiet mornings of solitude are like gold to me and I will punch you in the throat if you interrupt me while I'm in the zone!)

There is something about walking and talking that puts me in a very chatty mood. It may also have been the coffee I sipped as we walked... I should mention that Teresa was so awesome that she would usually have a cup of coffee waiting when I arrived at her house - she is the best!

Morning walking coaching sessions were the way I kept Teresa in my top five and I would have driven twice as far and met as early as necessary to get the wisdom and insight I gained during that season. As you identify the Teresas in your life, do whatever you need to do to keep their voice in your head.

Create Healthy Boundaries

Outside of work relationships, which you may or may not be able to control, who in your world is life-giving? You know, the people who are positive, friendly, encouraging, collaborative, who get you, and allow you to be yourself. Think of the people who are successful, provide a great example for you to follow, and who are willing to invest in you.

- Write down the names of healthy people in your life in one column and why you enjoy being around them or what you admire.

Unfortunately, you probably have a few individuals on the other end of the spectrum, the ones who are life-draining. Perhaps they are argumentative, glass-half-full, uncooperative, and stubborn.

- Write their names down in a separate column. Include how you feel when you're around them and what benefit there is to allowing them in your life.

Think about the goals you wrote in Step 2 and begin to restructure the top people in your life. Prioritizing who gets your attention doesn't always mean people get cut out of your life. It's not necessarily an option if it's a coworker or family member. What it does mean is that you choose the boundaries that keep you in a healthy space and focused on your journey.

Family members who emotionally drain you may not warrant a 20-minute phone call to complain about their life. Interaction with them may need to be reduced to holidays and other celebrations.

Officemates who let their own misery spill into your life or stir up drama in the workplace don't need as much attention from you. Perhaps it's time to keep it more cordial and professional, skipping the non-work related chatter.

Certainly there are times when people do need to be removed from your social circles and that is an entirely different chapter and book altogether.

The key to remember is that your health and sanity must stay intact to succeed in the plans you see for your future. Create healthy boundaries that will allow you to breathe, exhale slowly, and have enough energy left at the end of the day to keep dreaming.

Develop Strategic Connections

According to your top goals from Step 2, who do you know that is further ahead of you? Who has experienced success in that industry?

Mentors rarely fall into your lap, so think about who you want to learn from and how you can get into their space. Perhaps they would meet you for coffee, jump on a Skype session with you, or even commit to a long-term mentoring relationship.

The year I took charge of my own development I began seeking out people all over country who were more successful than I was in my field. Some were video calls, most were over the phone, and a few simply responded to emails. I reached out to executives of different levels of notoriety, receiving many rejections from top individuals. I went on a national hunt, but I could have just as easily stayed in my region of Southern California. Wherever you live, you will find people to network with.

There was one woman whose assistant sent me the typical rejection letter and although I was disappointed, I wasn't deterred. She was the one I most wanted to talk to and I made a promise to myself to keep trying. After I sent a thank you note for the consideration, with

more information and a subtle second request, I received a note from the assistant saying that my idol was open to chatting to me.

I joked that we were going to become best friends over the course of a 30-minute phone call and she would want to be in my life forever. Spoiler: that didn't happen. But I went into the phone call prepared and got some of the most valuable advice anyone has given me. I will treasure the gift of her time, wisdom, and experience forever.

One discovery that did surprise me is how many people are willing to take a few minutes out of their day to help someone travel the path they themselves have traversed. People are inherently kind for the most part, so reach out to those around you and learn from their mistakes, from their successes.

Choose to be around greatness.

Try out this people inventory exercise.

Write down names of the great people around you. Then make a list of those you admire who might not be as accessible. If you aren't sure who is ahead of you, sources such as LinkedIn or other social media outlets will help you connect quickly.

- How could you spend more time with them?
- What would it look like to have them mentor you?

It might be helpful for you to have a strategy in mind when you ask someone to be your mentor. For example, you may want to meet in person once a month and ask them questions about specific business decisions they made to reach certain goals. Make it simple for them to understand your expectations.

- How can you observe their work more closely?

Great leaders often have books or other resources they have created that allow you a seat very close to them without ever needing to be in the same room. Social media is another outlet providing access to their tips and tricks for success. If it's possible for you to spend time in their physical world, you've hit the jackpot!

Entrepreneur.com shared an article titled, *The 4 Types of People to Surround Yourself With For Success*¹. Choose those who are relentless workers, have positive attitudes, are inquisitive people, and who dream. The article is a valuable tool: <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/276050>.

- Make a plan for how and when you will connect with each person you listed above.

¹ Gerard Adams, *The 4 Types of People to Surround Yourself With For Success*, Entrepreneur, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/276050>

- Set a goal to reach out to at least 2 people each week until you've gone through your list.
- Be prepared for your conversations. Think through the most important pieces of advice you want to take away from the encounter and write them down so you can review them before you meet. Listen well as it may be the only time you have an audience with them. Depending on the nature of the connection, it's a good idea to take notes or at least write down the highlights of the exchange as soon as possible.

Borrowed Wisdom

“Surround yourself with people who have dreams, desire, and ambition; they'll help you push for, and realize your own. - Anonymous

Surround yourself with the dreamers, and the doers, the believer, and thinkers, but most of all, surround yourself with those who see the greatness within you, even when you don't see it yourself.” - Edmund Lee

Step 6: Two Small Steps

When you learned to walk, your first two steps were the most difficult. Unless you took those baby steps you would never improve and gain momentum. Once you gained confidence and practiced for a while, you walked faster, with more confidence. Eventually you walked so well you began running.

Big dreams are necessary, but they can be overwhelming as the only goal in front of you. Breaking down the big goals into bite-size milestones will give you a greater foundation for success. Micro-goals allow you to celebrate your progress, which is healthy for your soul and can help include others in your journey.

- Choose one of your goals from Step 2 and write it down at the top of a blank page.
- What is one action you can take toward this goal in the next 30 days?
- How will you remind yourself to work on this goal?
- What is a second step you can take toward achieving your goal in the next 30 days?
- What feelings and thoughts come up when you think about these two micro-goals?
- Is there anything you need to complete these two actions? What will you do to ensure you have all the tools you need?

You may want to walk through this exercise for multiple goals from Step 2.

Remember that the tension is to set yourself up for success by creating attainable goals while pushing yourself to reach new limits. Create action steps that motivate you, but that are not too large to handle.

Reaching goals is like developing a muscle. When you start out, you must not push too hard otherwise you will injure yourself. As you consistently work that muscle, the exercise will get easier, the muscle will get stronger and you'll be able to do more. For the first cycle of goal setting, set action steps that allow your focus muscle to begin building strength. As you go on, you'll be able to create more challenging milestones to strive toward.

Once you complete your two micro-goals, celebrate, perhaps reward yourself accordingly, then set new micro-goals to get you to the next level.

Borrowed Wisdom

“I think the first step toward achieving your goals is to first have goals. I think it is important to set achievable goals for yourself. It is also important to set stretch goals for yourself. Something that might be a little far out of reach. - John Lyon, CEO of World Hope In-

ternational <https://www.success.com/top-of-mind-the-first-step-toward-achieving-your-goals/>

Step 7: Minimize the Clutter

Many of us live in abundance. We have enough food to eat. We always have clothes to wear. Then we get the plush extras like social engagements, home furnishings, and leisure activities of our choosing. It's easy to get caught up and take it for granted, assuming that all of these are rights instead of privileges.

Simplicity is a word that is tossed around lightly. It may mean something different to you than it does another since you are uniquely wired. Let the gravity of simplicity settle in with you for a moment.

- Write down what it would look like to live a simpler life.

Clutter makes it difficult to see things as they truly are. It may also make it difficult to hear your own thoughts and get to the root of your desires and dreams.

There are tv shows created about home owners labeled as hoarders. For a variety of reasons, these individuals have developed an insatiable need to keep everything. I mean *absolutely everything*. By the time television cameras and interventionists show up at one of these homes, they can often barely walk through the front door. Everything from magazines to food to furniture is piled high in every nook and cranny.

As the interventionist begins working with the homeowner, the common theme is that all the clutter prevents the resident from seeing the truth and dealing with root issues. They are not in touch with themselves, the layers of distraction they have built around them, and the impact it has on their quality of life.

These tv shows capture the process of helping physically clean out the home, plus giving the resident renewed vision for their life and steps to stay healthy.

Hoarders are an extreme example and you may not be a hoarder, but in this digital age and culture of insatiable drive for success, you might have filled your life so full that you can't see above the emails, the obsession to look a certain way, the attachment to your phone and "must have" apps, or the 16-hour work days as you navigate an entrepreneurial journey.

In order to gain clarity and focus, you must simplify and remove clutter from your life. At first glance it may feel like everything is of utmost importance, but you will likely benefit from letting a few balls drop that you don't need to be juggling.

- What are ALL the things you feel have a voice in your life? (All of it - barre class, Taco Tuesday Happy Hour, Little League, ballet lessons, hours of Netflix every night, work, a long commute.) Don't worry, writing it down doesn't mean you'll automatically have to cut it out of your life.
- Now prioritize each items with a number 1, 2, or 3 based on the following:
 - 1 = anything non-negotiable, like work or family.

2 = anything that is good, but not mandatory and has a possibility of being reduced like gym time, social activities, sports commitments, screen time.

3 = anything that is wasteful and could be eliminated, even if it's temporary.

- Keep this list with your priorities to revisit later and assess your progress.
- Choose up to 3 items labeled with a #2 or #3 to reduce or eliminate.

The goal is not to punish you for enjoying activities, but to create space in your life to focus on your priorities. Reducing items that have a 2 or 3 priority rating will highlight your true core values by removing clutter from the list of what is important to you. Not everything can be top priority all the time.

Put your top priorities (the activities labeled #1 and maybe #2) in a place you will see them frequently such a bathroom mirror, refrigerator, or task list on your computer.

Borrowed Wisdom

“The point is, you need to distinguish between what honestly moves you and what the world is telling you should melt your heart. If something doesn't reach you on a personal level, let it go. It's hard enough dealing with everything that does.” - Judi Culbertson, The Clutter Cure: Three Steps to Letting Go of Stuff, Organizing Your Space, & Creating the Home of Your Dreams

“Reduce the clutter in your life. Get rid of the things that no longer serve you: past regrets, leftover anger, old plans. Clutter doesn't just occupy the house in which you live, it occupies your mind. Learn to maintain your mind. Learn to do a daily clean up. Get rid of those unwanted thoughts.” - Avina Celeste

Step 8: Stay on Track

During Step 6 you set a few 30-day micro-goals to kick start your progress. Now that you've laid the foundation for increased focus, it's time to look at broader milestones and create a structure that will support you over the long haul.

Based on the initial goals you set, you may need to taper some of them or expand your vision to answer the following questions. Filter your goals through the following questions, one at a time.

- What would a 5-year goal in this area look like?
- Where would you like to be one year from now?
- Is there anything that needs to be completed during a specific month or season over the next year?

Schedule times for quarterly check-ins with yourself. Every three months, spend time assessing how well you are maintaining your priorities and what tweaks need to be made to stay on track with your goals.

You learned a process for 30-day goals on Step 6. Be sure to refer back to it as often as needed.

What weekly rhythms do you need to incorporate? Spending a few hours early in the week preparing for whatever is on your calendar will spare you from last-minute panic and set you up for success in every meeting, phone call, or project focus. I love taking time on Sundays nights to wrap my mind around what my week looks like. It helps me understand how I need to balance my self care and the relationships in my life without sacrificing my productivity at work.

Daily habits are the building blocks to achieving the big picture. Monitor your physical, mental, and spiritual health and don't neglect yourself. If you aren't taking care of yourself, it will catch up to you and impact your success.

Create systems to reduce multi-tasking and increase batch working so that you are giving sole attention to various projects. Rotate through your projects in a planned approach to avoid missing any areas. Countless resources for organizational and process planning are available online and in print. Goal-setting, task management, and affordable virtual assistants are all at your fingertips with a quick Google search.

You need both the big goals and small goals. It's possible to get lost in the minutia of small details and lose sight of your big vision that ignited the original fire in you. Remind yourself frequently of the dream in your heart. On the flip side, if you only think about the big goal, it can become overwhelming and create paralysis when you don't plan. You can prevent the feeling of overwhelm by setting smaller goals which allow you to celebrate and track your progress.

Plus, achieving small goals along the way reminds you that you are awesome!

You can reach success.

You have the willpower to focus.

And darn it, it just feels good to celebrate!

Suggested Resources

- Goal-setting worksheets
- Budget Planner
- S.M.A.R.T. Goals
- Work Plan

Borrowed Wisdom

“What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.” - Henry David Thoreau

“Small daily improvements over time lead to stunning results.” - Robin Sharma

Step 9: Reduce and Reuse

Following simplicity, increasing your ability to focus is strongly supported by scaling back and incorporating routine into your life. Scaling back may mean learning to say the word “no” more frequently. Routine is a huge factor in setting new habits and is useful in re-centering portions of your life.

Routine can be a four-letter word for those of you who label yourself as free spirited. I have no desire to tame the rainbow-colored unicorns in my life! What I am suggesting is that having a plan for the foundational pieces of your life will provide sustainable freedom to be you and create a framework to thrive while reducing overwhelm and burnout.

While you are focusing on being focused, minimize as much of your life as you can to provide margin. You may not stay in that space forever, but if you continue to be distracted and pulled in a million directions, you will end up going nowhere. This period of focus requires you to say no. Only you can decide where the no's go, but maybe it's a “no” that extra work project or even something fun like a sports game.

The majority of opportunities in life are not bad, the problem is that they aren't right. If you say yes to every good thing that comes along, you may never get to the important things.

- What are some recent opportunities to which you could have said no?
- What obligations do you have lined up that aren't in sync with your goals? Be honest and cancel these plans if possible. You are the boss of you and ultimately the only one responsible for your success.
- Do you have a strategy that has previously helped you achieve a goal? Revisit it and reignite that motivation. Figure out how to use that method for your current goals.

Reduce complication in your goals. If your goal is to run a marathon you don't do a 180 degree flip in both your fitness and nutrition all at once. A better method is to refine your nutrition and maintain fitness, then alternate and maintain nutrition while you tweak your activity. One or the other needs to have a higher priority initially. Small tweaks are preferable to complete overhauls to make lasting changes. Choose to give primary focus to one goal at a time.

Routines can get a bad rap. There is nothing wrong with finding a rhythm that works for you and sticking with it. Tempted by bread and chips when you're trying to minimize carbs? Well, you might want to keep these items out of the house for a while. When you find a plan that works for you, don't let anyone else judge you out of it.

Routine is helpful for establishing healthy habits. Write out some thoughts about your current routines to see if they actually reflect what you're trying to achieve.

- What healthy routines do you have in your life now?
- What would you like to implement?

- How will you begin?
- When will you commit to starting?
- Which routines have become unhealthy ruts? What actions will you take to stop or change these routines?

Borrowed Wisdom

“No” is a complete sentence.” - Annie Lamott

“The only real conflict you will ever have in your life won’t be with others, but with yourself. -
Shannon L. Alder

Step 10: Establish Accountability

There is power in verbalizing your plans and dreams. They somehow seem more real once they exist through your spoken words. As you hear your vision out loud it can energize you and create an excitement beyond what your initial thoughts gave you. What may have only seemed like a possibility begins to sink in and take root as reality.

I tend to keep ideas to myself for a while because I know that once I tell another human being, I'm on the hook for followup and I don't always like that accountability. I know the next time I see that friend, I will be asked how my idea is developing or what action I'm taking to achieve a goal. I can't bear to answer that a once exciting idea has dwindled into action-less chatter. So until I'm fairly certain it's a solid idea or that I have a chance at success, I shut my mouth. That's not always the best strategy, so challenge yourself to share some of your goals and dreams.

On the flip side, knowing that it's easy to cast out what could be the genius idea of a lifetime if no one else knows about it and I happen to get discouraged, I have learned to force myself at times to share intimate dreams with close confidants. Doing so provides the accountability I need to pursue the next step, which is really all you can do. Speaking it out loud builds my confidence or shows me where the gaps are in my planning.

Choosing to open your soul to someone you trust will increase your odds of success. Not only can you share the positives, but you can expose your fears. Fears are usually diminished when they make it into the light; don't keep them hidden. An outside person will have a fresh perspective and be able to help you see the situation from different angles. In any given day, week, or month you can experience highs and lows in life; a friend in your inner circle will help you walk through each of those without losing sight of the end goal.

Two powerful tools have become my arsenal when it comes to staying focused on my goals.

1. Incentives

I plan ahead for ways to reward myself with a combination of short and long term rewards. Since I like training to run long distance races, I will often use a specialty coffee drink as a reward for a long run on a Saturday. If I don't hit my goal, I have to drink coffee at home and that's just not as much fun as a cute little beach coffee shop.

For a successful 10-week training log, I might buy myself a new pair of shorts or something a little bigger than a cup of coffee.

Doing both of these helps keep me focused on the big picture, yet stay engaged in the day-to-day activities that can become monotonous no matter what you do.

As you have mapped out goals of varying lengths, choose rewards that fit. Rewards don't have to cost anything, they just need to be valuable to you and remind you of what you have accomplished.

- Write down a few small rewards that would make you smile after hitting a goal.
- What is something larger that you could use as a target for a longer time frame and reaching a bigger milestone?

2. Accountability Partners

These can be formally structured relationships where the conversations are centered around specific topics. Accountability can also happen organically with close friends, depending on the nature of the relationship.

One of my good friends came into my life through an online networking group. We never spelled out intentions for our meetups, but being in the same industry and similar seasons, we always challenge each other. Every time we get together for coffee, we ask about previously shared goals or thoughts because we know the other person is capable of so much more. We would be doing the other person a disservice if we didn't ask the hard questions and push each other to grow.

Mentors are a great resource for this. A mentor is typically someone who shares commonalities with you, but is further ahead in life or career. They will know pertinent questions to ask you about your project.

Coaches are an invaluable resource. It doesn't matter what their background is in because a great coach knows how to ask the best questions. It makes no difference if they have never seen the widget your company produces. A coach knows that you hold all the answers and their job is to open your mind, introduce new perspectives, and create a large space for you to move ahead.

When you hire a professional coach, they will track your conversations and your progress, following up with you each time you meet. Be prepared, because they are going to ask you hard questions about what you've done since the last time you spoke, so if that doesn't keep you motivated to stay focused, I don't know what will.

Sometimes you need to do a little work underneath the surface before you can make progress. Therapists can work with you to examine deeper reasons that may be preventing you from achieving success that is beyond a coach's scope of work.



- Who in your life knows any of your big dreams?
- What have you held back from trusted friends? Where do you think that comes from?
- What challenges do you see to beginning an accountability relationship?

- If you don't currently have someone in your life who can fill this role, who could you ask? When will you have that conversation with them?

Determine if you are going to wait for casual encounters with your accountability partner or if you will set up intentional conversations.

Schedule these on your calendar or goal board. Remember, you are ultimately responsible to make it happen.

Borrowed Wisdom

“At the end of the day we are accountable to ourselves - our success is a result of what we do.” - Catherine Pulsifer

“My philosophy is that you are not only responsible for your life, but doing the best at this moment puts you in the best place for the next moment.” - Oprah Winfrey

Focus Pokus

Unfortunately, there is no magic potion to miraculously turn you into a super focused person. Reading this book without implementing the strategies, answering the questions, or taking time for introspection will not lead you to greater levels of concentration.

Life change happens through the small tweaks you make; the repetition that becomes a habit, which then becomes a way of life. Successful people develop healthy habits long before they reach success. Rather than flipping a switch, developing better habits like increased focus happens through dial turns. Stay on the lookout for little ways to build on your foundation.

You are re-training your heart and mind to approach life differently and that takes time. Give yourself grace and patience, coupled with the gift of commitment. Set yourself up for success in this re-training by creating realistic expectations. The only person you're competing against is yourself, so there's no rush to get ahead of anyone else. It's all about your own motivations and perspective.

Habits are said to take 21 days to establish. What is 21 days in the scheme of life? You can absolutely make a change and become more focused.

Go to your happy place. I know it sounds silly, but I'm serious. Visualize the feelings of accomplishment early and often.

When you are climbing a mountain you can't stop and stay in the middle. At some point you have to continue to the top or else throw in the towel and head back down. If you're already on your way, you might as well keep your eyes focused on the pinnacle, placing one foot in front of the other until you reach your destination.

The question isn't whether you will win or lose. The only two options are to win or quit. Don't quit.

This book is your tool. It will only be helpful if you use it. You've made it this far, so I have complete confidence that you will carry on to the end.

This book is a product of Pieces of Grit, resources to amp up your passion and perseverance. You have more potential than you will ever know. Commit to constant growth and development and see where your path takes you.

More resources can be found at piecesofgrit.com.

Dig deep, aim high.

Rachel

About the Author



Rachel Stewart is a podcaster and blogger residing in San Diego, CA. She is obsessed with seeing every person realize their potential and pursue their passions. Rachel operates Pieces of Grit, creating resources and opportunities for people to become the best version of themselves.

When not behind her computer and microphone, you'll find Rachel running and drinking coffee at any of the beaches along the San Diego coast.

Learn more about Pieces of Grit and all their services and resources at [PiecesofGrit.com](https://www.PiecesofGrit.com)

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