

MAXIMIZE 365

A year of actionable tips
to transform your life

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KRISTIN A. SHERRY



Black Rose Writing | Texas

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MAXIMIZE 365

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Praise for *Maximize 365*

“In a world of distraction, we often neglect doing the things we should. The opposite of distraction isn’t focus, it’s traction. Traction is any action that pulls you toward becoming the person we want to become. Kristin Sherry’s book, *Maximize 365*, is a unique treasure map of daily tips that will guide you towards traction and give you insights for improving your health, wealth, relationships, and career.”

– **Nir Eyal**, bestselling author of *Indistractable*

“Knowing yourself is essential for success. The more deeply you can know your strengths and weaknesses the better off you are in every area of your life. *Maximize 365* can help. Each daily entry provides you with actionable tips to transform your life in five areas: health and wellness, spirituality, relationships, career, and finances.

–**Vanessa Van Edwards**, bestselling author of *Captivate: The Science of Succeeding with People*

“If you want to change your life you must take action to make it happen. *Maximize 365* is your playbook to shift your mindset and creatively solve problems to improve your life in the most important areas. Give yourself permission to unlock your inner changemaker one daily tip at a time.”

–**Beth Comstock**, Author, *Imagine It Forward* and former Vice Chair, GE

“Are you a life-long learner and high achiever seeking a holistic approach to continual improvement? Perhaps you’re looking to own your mess and turn it into a masterpiece! No matter where you are on your journey, Maximize 365 offers one valuable insight after another, combined with relevant action steps to help you thrive in your personal and professional life.”

–**Scott Jeffrey Miller**, Wall Street Journal best-selling author of *Management Mess to Leadership Success* and *Everyone Deserves A Great Manager*; EVP of thought leadership and chief marketing officer, FranklinCovey

“We all have blind spots that can block us from reaching our potential or achieving fulfillment. In *Maximize 365*, Kristin Sherry offers readers inspiration combined with information and application to deliver practical daily tips you can use to impact the most important areas of your life. If you’re someone who wants to improve using a no-fluff, no BS approach, read this book.”

– **Jordan Harbinger**, Creator, *The Jordan Harbinger Show*

“What I love about Maximize 365 is it helps you fulfill your potential in so many areas. Get out of your own way, get unstuck, or just get after your goals with daily bite-sized actions to love yourself, your relationships, your career, and your life!”

– **Susie Moore**, author of *STOP CHECKING YOUR LIKES*

“In a time of uncertainty, the world needs more inspirational voices to deliver messages of hope. Kristin has done just that with *Maximize 365*. Kristin has managed to create a book designed to help you transform your life in today’s age. *Maximize 365* doesn’t just offer you helpful tips, Kristin provides readers simple actionable steps anyone can take to empower themselves. There are 365 days in a year. 365 opportunities to manifest your dreams and fulfill your destiny. Kristin’s actionable steps will help you get there.

– **CJ Johnson, entrepreneur, speaker, and author of *The Maguire Method***

*To my parents, Wayne and Judi Spear.
Most of what I know about living a life of gratitude
and improvement I learned from you.*

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Who This Book is For

- Learners and curious sorts
- Individuals interested in self-development
- Those who are unsatisfied in certain areas of life
- Bathroom readers
- Anyone seeking a holistic approach to growth
- Folks who like straight-to-the-point guidance
- People who want to increase their impact
- Anybody who likes learning but not reading at length

If you enjoyed this excerpt, please visit <http://bit.ly/maximize365> to purchase *Maximize* 365.

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MAXIMIZE 365

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“One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth. Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again.”

Abraham Maslow

Introduction

“You’re off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting, So ... get on your way!”

Dr. Seuss

I’m truly excited you’re reading this book. I started coaching people in 2007. I’ve walked alongside clients through victory and misfortune.

We all experience highs and lows in life, without exception. We can’t compare ourselves to other people because we are each at different mile markers on life’s highway. Whether you think you mostly have it together or believe things are mostly coming apart, you’ll find something in *Maximize 365*. This book addresses topics common to humankind, despite our uniqueness as individuals.

In early 2019, I had a conversation with colleague and friend, Bob Sager. He is an innovation consultant and works with companies to increase revenue through innovation strategies.

During our conversation, Bob coached me on the

topic of money. On that call, he explained finances are only one form of wealth and shared his Five Forms of Wealth model, which includes health, relationships, money, time, and satisfaction.

Our conversation influenced me to be more mindful to invest in each area of wealth.

If you're poor in health, what good is being rich in finances? If you're rich in finances but poor in time, how can you enjoy the fruits of your labor? If you're rich in time and wealth but poor in relationships, you'll have no one to enjoy life with.

Years ago, author and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar developed a model called the Wheel of Life. Ziglar's model has seven spokes representing seven areas of life: Mental, Spiritual, Physical, Family, Financial, Personal, and Career.

Inspired by Bob's concept of wealth and Ziglar's Wheel of Life, I settled on the idea to present the tips in this book within categories to allow you, the reader, to access content where you have greatest need or interest.

I've organized the book into five main chapters:

Health & Wellness, Spirituality, Relationships, Career, and Finances.

Each chapter has themed subcategories, and each daily entry includes three components:

1. An inspirational quote
2. A brief story or information on the topic
3. An idea for action

In the coming pages, I've compiled daily tips from my own work, as well as from others knowledgeable in each area. As a unique individual, you should prioritize taking action on the entries that will work best for you—watch out for limiting beliefs telling you something is impossible! “Impossible is an opinion,” says my colleague, Bob.

At the back of the book, *Reflect* and *Act* sections, beginning on page 400, encourage you to later recall your thoughts and intended action items as you read. List specific tips you want to act on as a running to do list. You can transfer action items with due dates to your personal weekly or daily to do lists to help you take action.

Take a week to work through a topic, if needed. Move to a new topic when you're ready. Though I've included 356 daily tips, it's unrealistic and would overwhelm you to try to implement a tip every day of

the year.

You can tweak the “Idea(s) for Action” in each entry or come up with your own actions based on what you’ve read or need. You can read through the book from front to back or use the rating scale on the next page to prioritize your path. Choose your own adventure based on your needs and interests. For example, if you have money struggles, you might want to start with “Finances.”

If you’re committed to implementing the ideas for action in this book, you can expect to grow and expand your potential.

On the following page, rate your satisfaction in each of the five topics this book covers.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest), rate your satisfaction in these five areas of your life:

Health & Wellness



Spirituality



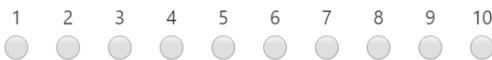
Relationships



Career



Finances



Based on your rankings or interests, choose where to start your journey through *Maximize 365*.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

“If you do not take time for your wellness, you’ll be forced to take time for your illness.”

Joyce Sunada

For years, I took my health for granted. Not until high blood pressure, headaches, back pain, and increased gastrointestinal problems became part of daily life did I decide to take control and make changes.

In November 2019, I changed my eating habits to release thirty-five pounds in sixteen weeks. A complete overhaul of my diet was hard. Many social situations revolve around food. I overcame cravings and withdrawals, but I also followed a process, which meant fewer decisions to make.

The benefits extended beyond physical into emotional well-being and have allowed me to engage in a more active lifestyle with increased energy and mobility.

Yet, health goes beyond physical. The “Health & Wellness” chapter takes a holistic approach to wellness with entries presented in Emotional, Environmental, Intellectual & Mental, Physical, and Social sections. Spiritual, Relationship, and Financial health are addressed in their own chapters.

Emotional Wellness

The following topics are covered in Emotional Wellness:

Loving Yourself

Affirmations

Self-Care

Monitoring Emotions

Anger

Disappointment

Self-Absorption

Emotional Insecurity

Emotional Temperature

Imposter Syndrome

Loneliness

Life Regrets

Loving Yourself

“To fall in love with yourself is the first secret to happiness.” – Robert Morley

Somewhere along the line, we’ve lost the message of one of the most respected people to have walked the Earth. Jesus said, “Love your neighbor *as yourself*” (Mark 12:31 NIV). How many of us focus on the first three words of that statement but miss the last two?

Imagine treating your best friend the way you treat yourself each day. What if you said the things you say to yourself to others?

Your friend comes to you excited with an idea for a new business, and you say, “What a dumb idea. Who do you think you are to start a business? You’ll just end up failing. You don’t have what it takes.”

What if your mother, sister, or daughter asked how you liked her new outfit, and you responded, “You look fat and terrible.”

If we’re honest, all of us, at some point in our lives have looped self-criticisms in our heads like a broken record, which probably made us feel needlessly inadequate.

Ideas for Action

The following link contains 30 ideas to practice self-love. Choose two or three ideas to implement right away: bit.ly/SelfLove30.

Speak self-affirmations when you wake up and when you go to bed. Set a reminder on your phone to do it!

Affirmations

“Believe in yourself. You are braver than you think, more talented than you know, and capable of more than you imagine.” – Roy T. Bennett

Everything we repeat aloud or in our thoughts are affirmations. Repetition sews affirmation into our identity, positive or negative, by our brain’s Reticular Activating System (RAS).

Since default thoughts are often negative (see *Mind and C.R.A.P. Boards* on page 55), positive affirmations are a way to influence our subconscious minds.

The subconscious doesn’t know the difference between past and future; only here and now. The RAS reacts to affirmations as truths. We must speak positive affirmations and emphasize they’re true *now*. Instead of, “I will be” say, “I am”

Affirmations don’t need to be true. Shape your thoughts to affect your actions. It’s not magic. Thoughts become reality because they influence behavior.

Idea for Action

1. Write an affirmation. An example, by Idil Ahmed is, “My life is great. I am great. Everything is happening for me. All of the things that I am currently experiencing are only taking me to the next level of my life. I am growing better. I choose to believe in sudden miracles and unexpected blessings.”
2. Read your affirmation when you wake up and before you go to bed, as suggested previously in *Loving Yourself* on page 8.

Self-Care

“When I became chronically ill and left corporate, my husband encouraged me to start my month by filling my calendar with personal self-care and *then* fill in the rest. Too often we say we don’t have time for self-care (which is why I got sick), but we actually do, we just don’t make it a priority. So for me, all self-care goes in my calendar first, then the rest.”
– Kimberly Ficklin

Many people I know who faithfully practice self-care didn’t do so until they had a physical, mental, or emotional crisis that forced them to pay attention.

Self-care is not something that comes naturally for many, as our tendency can be to focus on the external instead of the internal. We let immediate demands of our environment take precedent. We wouldn’t drive our cars without oil and blow up our engines, would we?

When our basic needs, such as proper sleep, nutrition, hydration, intimacy, and relaxation are not met, it’s just a matter of time until we end up in the shop. Only the shop is a hospital. The good news is self-care is something you can prioritize to greatly improve your health!

Idea for Action

Schedule blocks of time on your calendar for health and wellness activities such as stretching, walking, or meditating. Try a meditation app such as Headspace.

What is one thing you can schedule now, for today or this week, to increase your self-care?

Monitoring Emotions

“Your emotions are the slaves to your thoughts, and you are the slave to your emotions.” – Elizabeth Gilbert

Have you felt yourself become anxious, depressed, or fearful without knowing why?

I remember standing in my garage about to enter my house. I was agitated and stressed but didn't know why. I wasn't tuned in to my body to intervene earlier.

This happens because 80 percent of our thoughts occur on autopilot. Our subconscious mind replays thoughts over and over, day after day. Thoughts, in turn, create emotions in response to those thoughts. If we don't actively monitor our thoughts, adrenaline and cortisol rush into our blood stream, placing us in fight/flight/freeze mode. Ideally, we can learn to arrest thoughts before they affect our mood. Until we master that level of control, we can start by training ourselves to react more quickly when thoughts negatively affect our mood.

Idea for Action

Monitor your body twice daily, morning and afternoon. Rate your mood on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being a great mood.

Observe your body. Are you anxious? Do you have tightness in your chest? Are your shoulders stiff?

If your body reveals signs of stress, stop and monitor your thoughts. What message are you telling yourself in that moment that is causing an emotional reaction? Replace the message with a more constructive one.

Anger

“Get mad, then get over it.” – Colin Powell

Anger can rally us together to address injustice. It mobilizes us to act and initiate change. It protects our values.

Anger aids well-being by discharging stress after an upsetting event. Anger gets a bad rap, yet anger can be healthy. Your Life Counts International explains three kinds of anger:

Passive aggression – Unhealthy anger stemming from a need to be in control and includes the silent treatment, sulking, or procrastinating.

Open aggression – Unhealthy anger including sarcasm, accusations, criticism, shouting, quarreling, bullying, and verbal or physical attacks.

Assertive anger – Healthy anger which allows a person to communicate in a controlled, confident manner while listening and seeking to understand, such as calling out injustice with conviction.

Anger is triggered when our values misalign with a situation.

Idea for Action

If you're angry with someone, express it privately. Share feelings, not their flaws. Discuss current anger, not past, and avoid making the discussion a win/lose. Keep your cool, and let them speak without interrupting. Address positive qualities along with complaints to avoid defensiveness:

“I'm angry about your comments and need you to know their impact. I want to discuss how to go forward from here.”

Disappointment

“If we will be quiet and ready enough, we shall find compensation in every disappointment.” – Henry David Thoreau

Disappointment is sadness or displeasure caused by our unfulfilled hopes. When we experience disappointment, our hopes are out of alignment with reality.

We aren't disappointed only when we don't get what we want. Sometimes we're disappointed when we get exactly what we wanted. Think of people who pursue fame, and it crushes them. Our *hopes* are out of alignment with *reality*.

Some people turn their disappointment inward and blame themselves then experience shame. Others turn their disappointment outward and blame others, which creates bitterness. Unfortunately, both approaches keep you stuck.

Idea for Action

Consider using these three prompts to understand and manage disappointment:

1. Was the disappointment in or out of my control?
Out of my control? Move on. Better days will come.
In my control? Redirect thoughts to solutions, reframing failure mindset to a growth opportunity.
2. Are my expectations reasonable? Ask two or three objective people you trust.
3. How is choosing to remain disappointed helping me? Disappointment is inevitable, but remaining discouraged is a choice.

Self-Absorption

“Generally speaking, the most miserable people I know are those who are obsessed with themselves; the happiest people I know are those who lose themselves in the service of others ... By and large, I have come to see that if we complain about life, it is because we are thinking only of ourselves.” – Gordon B. Hinckley

Excessive self-focus is “navel gazing.” The most dissatisfied people I know spend a lot of time thinking of themselves and their problems.

What we focus on grows. When laser focused on ourselves, discontent increases. Self-absorption is not equivalent to selfishness. Selfishness is a lack of consideration for others, and concern for your own profit or pleasure.

Self-absorbed people can be generous, even if pre-occupied with themselves and their issues. Often, self-absorbed people complain and talk about themselves and their own lives.

Self-absorption can lead to depression or anxiety, if negative, and narcissism when fueled by self-importance.

Idea for Action

Journal answers to these questions to reveal consequences of self-focused thinking:

1. What is the purpose of my obsessive thinking?
2. Do I obsess over the past or worry about the future?
3. Was my thinking helpful? If not, how was it unhelpful?
4. What do I want to happen next?

Emotional Insecurity

“The reason we struggle with insecurity is because we compare our behind-the-scenes with everyone else’s highlight reel.” – Steven Furtick

Emotional insecurity is unease or nervousness often triggered by feeling vulnerable or inferior. Most people face insecurity from time to time. Dr. Melanie Greenburg cites three common causes of insecurity. Recent failure or rejection, low confidence due to social anxiety, and insecurity driven by perfectionism.¹

To overcome insecurity, look inward. Are you insecure because of failure, a belief you’re not good enough, social anxiety, or a combination of these?

Idea for Action

Examine signs of emotional insecurity. Do these describe you?

Social anxiety: Blushing, fast heartbeat, trembling, sweating, upset stomach, trouble catching your breath, drawing a blank, or muscle tension. *Embrace your awkward!*

Perfectionism: Struggling to celebrate success or get things done timely. Trouble accepting challenges where you could fail or not allowing yourself to make mistakes. *Challenge your thoughts!*

Failure/rejection: Low happiness due to job or relationship loss, seeking signs of rejection, or misreading or overreacting to what others say or do. *Reflect on your success. Talk yourself up!*

See *Perfectionism* on page 53, and *Failure ... Or Temporary Defeat?* on page 306, and *Social Anxiety* on page 240 for more.

Emotional Temperature

“If you can’t regulate your own emotional temperature, you’ll regulate everyone around you to keep yourself comfortable.” – David Schnarch

In April 2020, I attended a *Neuroscience of Resilience* webinar hosted by Pepperdine University. Dr. Izzy Justice, who holds a doctorate in Emotional Intelligence, led the session.

He used an analogy of a highway packed with cars to explain our overstimulated brains. He used a traffic light to explain three cognitive states:

Red – In this state, we release epinephrine, cortisol, and can experience increased blood pressure, ulcer formation, and muscle tension.

Yellow – In this state, our amygdala is agitated. We experience difficulty staying mindful and objective. Dr. Justice shared many of us are in this state much of our day!

Green – In this state, we’re engaged, collaborative, perform better, and are willing to take risks. Our brain is focused and can respond mindfully.

Idea for Action

Take your emotional temperature twice daily. Set an alarm and ask, “How am I feeling now?” Red? Yellow? Green?

Examine your prior thoughts. Do they explain your result? This practice hones our ability to monitor our thoughts, which affect our emotions. With practice, you will learn to interrupt negative thought patterns more quickly. What gets measured gets managed!

Imposter Syndrome

“It’s not what you are that holds you back. It’s what you think you are not.” – Denis Waitley

Impostor syndrome is a psychological pattern where a person doubts his or her accomplishments and fears being exposed as a “fraud.”

Despite external evidence of competence, those experiencing this phenomenon remain convinced they’re frauds and don’t deserve all they’ve achieved. Individuals incorrectly attribute success to luck or interpret it as a result of deceiving others into thinking they’re more intelligent than they perceive themselves to be.

Imposter syndrome affects men and women, typically high achievers. Even Albert Einstein experienced imposter syndrome!² People generally recognize the psychological phenomenon in others but genuinely believe they, themselves, are imposters. Inadequacy and self-doubt are relentless and severe. Have you recently felt inadequate?

Idea for Action

Engage 5-steps when you experience imposter syndrome:

1. Acknowledge your emotions.
2. Discuss with others instead of hiding your thoughts.
3. Work on reducing perfectionism (see *Perfectionism* on page 53 in this chapter).
4. Connect your strengths to successes to show yourself you earned them.
5. Practice repeating a mantra such as, “I’ve earned my place here.”

Loneliness

“Loneliness is not a lack of company; loneliness is a lack of purpose.” – Guillermo Maldonado

Loneliness is a feeling of isolation. You can be surrounded by friends and be lonely. Loneliness is related to the quality and depth of intimacy of relationships rather than the quantity.

According to research, improving social skills, increasing social interaction, and enhancing social support are not the most effective strategies for loneliness. What is?

Changing maladaptive thinking.

“Lonely people pay more attention to negative social information like disagreement or criticism. They remember more negatives which happened during an encounter with another person and fewer positives.

“All this leads, as you might imagine, to more negative expectations about future interactions with others: Lonely people don’t expect things to go well for them and, consequently, they often don’t.

“The cure for persistent loneliness lies in breaking a negative cycle of thinking that created it in the first place.”³

If you’ve experienced loneliness, try to trace the onset of loneliness to specific negative interactions.

Idea for Action

When lonely, engage the cognitive part of your brain to shift from an emotional to an adaptive state. Color, sing, complete a puzzle, or make a collage of places you want to visit. If you want to take a loneliness test go to bit.ly/lonelytest.

Life Regrets

“If only. Those must be the two saddest words in the world.” – Mercedes Lackey

We can learn a lot from the wisdom of our elders. A unique area of insight they have is life regrets.

During my research for this book, I read a lot of articles and watched interviews of people who reached 100 years old and beyond. What I found most interesting was the common themes of regret, regardless of gender, race, or geographic location.

Our lives can benefit significantly from the lessons of others. We can even choose to change the course of our lives by making decisions today based on lessons we learned from experiencing regret or where we are likely to experience it.

Some common regrets people share are worrying too much, not spending more time with people they cared about, failing to pursue their dreams in favor of doing what others expected of them, not spending more time outside their comfort zone, neglecting their bodies, and working too much.

The good news? If you're reading this, it's not too late to avoid your regrets with changes starting today.

Idea for Action

Write your regret list. Imagine this is your last week on Earth, and create a list of regrets. Choose one thing you can start doing now to alter the course of your life to avoid this regret.

Watch this video for the full list and details of top 10 life regrets: bit.ly/top10liferegrets.

Environmental Wellness

The following topics are covered in Environmental Wellness:

Forest Bathing

Simplifying Your Life

Decluttering

Organization

Timing Matters

Managing Your Time

Delegating

Cell Phones

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Forest Bathing

“In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.” – John Muir

A decades-old practice from Japan known as shinrin-yoku, which means “taking in the forest,” is becoming popular for improved health.

Research on forest bathing, which is a leisurely forest walk, found 20 minutes of walking in the woods boosts mood.⁴ Forest bathing also tends to lower the stress hormone, cortisol, over taking part in other activities, a review of 30 studies found.⁵

In addition, forest therapy appears to decrease depression levels in adults as well as boost the activity of antibodies, which help fight off infections and cancer.

The fragrant substances produced by plants and trees have been linked with lower inflammation and brain protection benefits.

Search online for forested areas within a reasonable distance.

Idea for Action

To engage in forest bathing, walk at a slow pace without jogging or running for at least 20 minutes a few times weekly. Take your time to look around as you walk on a wooded path. Engage your senses and observe your surroundings. Stop every so often and sit. Look up and around. Breathe in deeply and focus on the sounds you hear.

Simplifying Your Life

“Simplicity is an acquired taste. Mankind, left free, instinctively complicates life.” – Katharine F. Gerould

Why do we brag about how busy we are?

“Blake, how have you been?”

“Busy! The kids are in football, and I’m spending half of my life in the car!”

“That’s our life too. I’m driving my daughter all over for cheer competitions every weekend while my husband takes our son to Scouts.”

Being busy has become a status symbol.

Do you know the reason we’re so busy? We don’t have the courage to make difficult choices. Every time we say we’re busy, we’re actually saying we can’t prioritize our lives.

We don’t tell our kids no. We don’t set and defend boundaries. We are reactive instead of proactive. The outside world dictates our agenda and, therefore, our lives.

I like the quote from *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen, “Life is just a quick succession of busy nothings.”

Simplified living requires making tough choices. We chip away the unnecessary and are left with the important instead of a life filled with “busy nothings.”

Idea for Action

Want to simplify your life? Say no more. Read *Saying No* on page 84 in this chapter, and put it into practice!

Decluttering

“Look around. All that clutter used to be money.” –
Unknown

If you struggle with clutter, you're not alone.

- Twenty-five percent of people with two-car garages have so much stuff in there they can't park a car.⁶
- One year of our lives is spent looking for lost items.⁶
- Twenty-three percent of adults say they pay bills late, earning late fees, because they lose them.⁸
- Forty percent of housework would be reduced by eliminating clutter in an average home.⁹
- \$154 billion in revenue is made annually in the storage industry—more than the Hollywood film business.¹⁰

Clutter consultant Lianne Hofer says:

Make a commitment to give yourself space to own where you are in your clutter journey and move forward, aiming to get where you want to be. We all start somewhere! When you are ready to make changes, start with your space because the energy in your home effects the energy of your life. Clear the clutter in your physical space to make room in other areas of life. It is hard to accept blessings life has to offer if you are still holding on to things that do not fit the life you want to lead.

Idea for Action

Start a declutter project this week. Declutter by category, not room or location. For example, organize clothes or books to see quick progress. Visit Lianne at TheClutterConsultant.com.

Organization

“For every minute spent organizing, an hour is earned.” –
Unknown

Disorganization affects our physical and mental health. When our work and personal spaces are organized, we sleep better, eat better, improve our relationships, and are more productive.¹¹ Not sure if disorganization is affecting your quality of life? Ask yourself if you:

- Have piles growing in height and number
- Have pest problems related to clutter
- Are embarrassed to have people visit your home
- Struggle to find necessary items, manage finances, or stay on top of housework

Break tasks into bite-sized goals. Avoid dwelling on all your unorganized spaces at once, or you'll be overwhelmed.

Idea for Action

If you're organizing a pantry, closet, or set of drawers, pull everything out and into a space where you can see everything.

Clean the area and then sort items into five categories:

1. Trash or recycle.
2. Donate.
3. Sell. If you don't have time to sell, donate.
4. Keep. If you'll use it or you love it, put it on the shelf.
5. Undecided. Not sure? Put it in a box, date the box and look at it in six months. If you didn't need it in six months, you probably don't need it.

Timing Matters

“We are smarter, faster, dimmer, slower, more creative, and less creative in some parts of the day than others.” – Daniel Pink

Researchers at Cornell University analyzed 500 million tweets on Twitter for a period of two years to explore the moods of people during a typical day.¹² They discovered a clear pattern. People often experience peak positivity in the morning. Moods rapidly drop in the afternoon and rise again in the evening.

This cycle occurs every day to everyone, regardless of race or nationality. Daniel Pink’s book, *When*, describes this daily pattern as morning peak, afternoon trough, and evening rebound.

Understanding this pattern is crucial to accomplishing goals, getting what we want and avoiding troubles in the trough. Be mindful of the afternoon trough and how you spend time there. Set an intention to capitalize on the peak times that work best for you, whether that’s morning or early evening.

Ideas for Action

1. Schedule meetings when you’re trying to get a “yes” from someone midmorning (peak positivity).
2. Handle tasks that require more mental power in the evening if you’re a night owl. If you’re a morning person, handle complex mental tasks midmorning.
3. Schedule your mindless work in the afternoon during the mood drop period.

Managing Your Time

“Time equals life; therefore, waste your time and waste of your life, or master your time and master your life.” – Alan Lakein

Five pressures derail people: Time, relationships, money, health issues, and expectations. Time is fixed to only 24 hours in a day. The only thing that can change is you and what’s on your plate.

People who are skilled at managing time use it effectively and efficiently. They value their time, concentrate their efforts on more important priorities, get more done in less time than others, and can attend a wider range of activities.

People unskilled at managing time waste it. They flit from activity to activity with little rhyme or reason, don’t set priorities, can’t say no, are easily distracted, don’t follow a plan or method, and don’t control time wasters.

In general, are you productive most days, or does it seem like time often gets away from you?

Ideas for Action

Apply these tips to immediately begin to master your time and your life:

1. List points to make before a phone call to stay on task.
2. Use your most productive time of day for tough tasks.
3. List meetings/activities you participate in. Step aside where you aren’t needed or if you don’t enjoy it.
4. Practice saying: I have to get back to my next task. Can we pick this up another time?

Delegating

“If you want to do a few small things right, do them yourself. If you want to do great things and make a big impact, learn to delegate.” – John C. Maxwell

“It’s easier if I do it.”

Have you said this when someone suggested you get help? My thoughts are, “Easier for whom?”. Certainly not you if you have too much on your plate. Everything you take on that you shouldn’t isn’t easier. Second, easier isn’t always better. Giving people responsibility is a gift, whether to children or coworkers.

Failure to delegate stems from control, fear of the ball being dropped or being too busy to explain what you need others to do. If you add up time spent on tasks because you don’t have time to explain, delegation is an undeniable time saver.

When delegating, explain outcomes, constraints, or boundaries. Match responsibility with the authority needed. Let go of preferences for “how,” and focus on outcomes. Provide support without managing too closely, and delegate to the lowest possible level. No data entry for skilled workers.

Delegating frees you up to add more value and grow your skills.

Idea for Action

Assess your delegation ability: bit.ly/assessdelegation. For a score below 20, practice low stakes delegation like folding laundry, making dinner, mowing the lawn, or tasks you tend to do. Adjust as you go, and introduce more complex delegation.

Cell Phones

“A smartphone is an e-toy designed for the lonely inner child hidden in each and every one of us.” – Dr. Saurabh Sharma

If you add up the hours we’re projected to spend on social media apps in our lifetime, it’s a solid five years, four months.¹³ Imagine dedicating that many hours in a trance staring at a screen. That’s alarming. To put that amount of time in perspective, it’s 36 percent more time than any of us spend eating and drinking.

Five scary facts about your phone:¹⁴

1. Apps are intentionally designed to hook you, like slot machines.
2. Phones are altering our brain. The short attention required to scroll and swipe decrease our ability to concentrate.
3. Apps are free because we’re not a customer, we are a product. The product being sold is our attention.
4. Digital tech innovators shield their kids from the devices they create.
5. Snubbing people during conversation has become so common it has a name: phubbing (phone-snubbing).

Idea for Action

Keep your phone in another room or the far side of your bedroom when going to sleep instead of at your bedside. This prevents late nights and early mornings on your phone. Also, check out Catherine Price’s book, *How to Break up with Your Phone*: bit.ly/breakupwithyourphone.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

“Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud.” – Maya Angelou

Ten-to-twenty percent of Americans experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a mental health condition that occurs several months of the year. Symptoms of SAD include sadness, fatigue, and a loss of motivation, and, sometimes, change in appetite and headaches.

Michelle Riba, a professor of psychiatry and the associate director of the University of Michigan Depression Center says, “For people who see a regular pattern every year of getting sad, anxious or a cycling of moods, the first thing they need to do is to see someone to get an overall diagnosis. They need to treat the underlying depression.”

SAD should not be underestimated or brushed off as winter blues, as it is a complex mental health concern that can be aggravated by a lack of light, which is why it’s more common in northern parts of the US where days are shorter during the winter.

Idea for Action

If you struggle with Seasonal Affective Disorder and haven’t been diagnosed, consider seeing a doctor.

Natural remedies include using a light box, dawn simulators that slowly introduce light as you wake up, getting outside regularly for natural light, adding vitamin D to your diet, getting sufficient sleep, and exercising regularly.

Intellectual & Mental Wellness

The following topics are covered in Intellectual & Mental Wellness:

- Daily Gratitude
- Day Tight Compartments
- Resilience
- Growth Mindset
- Control
- Discipline
- Embrace the Suck
- Excuses
- Good Habit Creation
- Procrastination
- Setting the Right Goals
- It's JUST ...
- Indecisiveness
- Intellectual Wellness
- Mental Sharpness
- Realistic Thinking
- Making Tough Decisions
- A Problem a Day
- Self-Reliance
- Self-Control
- Motivation
- Optimism
- Perfectionism
- Perspective
- Mind and C.R.A.P. Boards
- Staying Stuck
- Vision Boards

Daily Gratitude

“Developing an ‘attitude of gratitude’ is one of the simplest ways to improve your satisfaction with life.” – Amy Morin

Each year, people say they can’t wait for this awful year to end. Each year I wonder why I never look back and think my year was awful. Things I didn’t like or thought were terrible surely happened.

I asked my husband, “Why do you think I never say the year was awful?”

He said, “You see the glass as half full. People who see the glass as half empty will focus on the bad things that happened instead of the good.”

How we view each day, week, or year of our lives comes down to perspective. Gratitude is a powerful way to shape our perspective.

Research shows eight benefits of gratitude: Better sleep, more relationships, improved physical health, improved psychological health, increased empathy and lower aggression, higher self-esteem, and increased mental strength.¹⁵

Gratitude is a game changer for how we perceive our lives.

Idea for Action

In a notebook, daily write three things for which you’re thankful. Be specific. For example, a compliment you received, or a goal reached. List reasons you’re grateful as a daily habit. Over time it will reap big dividends. Review entries monthly to note trends and areas for future focus.

Day Tight Compartments

“Sometimes I succeed, sometimes I fail, but every day is a clean slate and a fresh opportunity.” – Gretchen Rubin

I first read the concept of day tight compartments in Dale Carnegie’s book, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. The focus of the book is worry, but I believe the message of a fresh start to every day is imperative for a happy life.

The universe is created for fresh starts. Every day the sun sets on the day and rises on a new one. Have you ever thought about the mercy of that opportunity?

This concept is not new. The Bible discusses the concept of living in day tight compartments. “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:34 NLT).

We often associate fresh starts with moving to a new city, getting a divorce, and changing jobs—big events and major changes.

What if you looked at the eight-hour period of sleep as a reboot? Every day can be a new beginning.

Idea for Action

As a way to let go and start new, consider having a “funeral” at the end of the day. Write a note saying goodbye to a particular situation or problem. Burn the note (safely, please!) or crumple it up and throw it away. Say goodbye to the old and make way for the new. Wake up ready to receive a fresh start!

Resilience

“If your heart is broken, make art with the pieces.” – Jodi Picoult

Psychologists define resilience as adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, or significant stress. Resilience doesn't mean absence of distress or difficulty. It is an ability to bounce back, often leading to personal growth.

The American Psychological Association recommends five ways to build resilience:

Build connections – Prioritize relationships and join groups.

Foster wellness – Take care of your body and mind; avoid negativity.

Find purpose – Help others, be proactive, set goals, and engage in self-discovery.

Embrace healthy thoughts – Keep things in perspective, accept change, learn from your past, and adopt a hopeful outlook.

Seek help – Get help when you need it! Ask someone you trust.

Idea for Action

Rate your effectiveness, 1 to 5, in the five areas of resilience introduced in this entry.

1 = Not at all effective, 2 = Slightly effective, 3 = Moderately effective, 4 = Effective, 5 = Highly Effective

For ratings below 4, find additional support to build resilience at bit.ly/resiliencetopics.

Growth Mindset

“It’s not that I’m so smart. It’s just that I stay with it longer.” –
Albert Einstein

Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, has published a body of research on what can be achieved by shifting from fixed thinking to a growth mindset—a building block of life-long learning.

She explains in her TED talk (bit.ly/dwecktedx) how retraining one’s thinking in a simple, fundamental way changes how we manage life’s challenges. This mindset shift caused Indigenous kids at the bottom of their school district to outperform kids in affluent areas of Seattle.

Dweck researched how children cope with challenge. She gave challenges to 10-year-olds slightly harder than they could solve.

Some kids responded positively, expressing enthusiasm for the problems and the love of a challenge. These kids believed abilities could be developed beyond present capabilities.

Other students reacted horribly. They felt their intelligence was being judged, and they failed. These students, in study after study, ran from difficulty.

Research shows growth mindset alters how people view setbacks or failure. Instead of a fatalistic view of failure, a growth mindset creates persistence.

Idea for Action

List areas where you have a fixed mindset. Add “yet” to shift to a growth mindset, “My business isn’t profitable *yet*.”

Control

“When you can’t control what’s happening, challenge yourself to control how you respond to what’s happening. That’s where your power is.” – Unknown

One of my favorite pieces of advice is from the late Stephen Covey’s book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. He said, “Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

We can’t control others, and we can’t control everything that happens outside of us. We can control only what happens inside of us.

Surrendering control can seem threatening, but it’s vital to recognize you were never in control anyway. Control is rooted in fear and being attached to a set outcome.

Einstein said, “The most important decision we make is whether we believe we live in a friendly or hostile universe.”

If we believe in a friendly universe, we can loosen our grip and trust things will work out for our good.

Ideas for Action

Reflect on one or more times you didn’t get what you wanted.

List outcomes that were good or better for you than your original plan. Some examples are a relationship ending against your will or a job offer that never came. What came into your life that was better than what you originally wanted?

Discipline

“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.”

–Jim Rohn

The Dalai Lama said, “A disciplined mind leads to happiness, and an undisciplined mind leads to suffering.”

I’ve seen this in my life when I drifted from set routines, exercise, healthy eating, and a consistent bedtime. I replace focus, productivity, and energy with procrastination, lack of direction, and a general sense of malaise.

Increased discipline requires setting goals we believe in and a basic plan of execution. We achieve a mental shift when we perceive greater emotional benefits from *doing* a desired behavior than *not* doing it, which motivates us.

We must also drop the shame if we break from our plan.

An example is someone trying to lose weight. When they fall off the wagon and eat donuts, the shame of failure causes them to eat another. In a vicious cycle, they fall deeper into self-loathing. We shouldn’t allow temporary defeat to lead us to believe we’ve failed.

Idea for Action

We are what we repeatedly do. Discipline is a skill we can build. To increase discipline, try a 30-day cold shower challenge. It sounds nuts, but discipline requires willingness to accept discomfort. Taking a cold shower for 30 days builds mental toughness. You will take a shower anyway, so you have no excuses. Do you think you could do it?

Embrace the Suck

“Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty ... I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life. I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.”
– Theodore Roosevelt

When my friend Doug Thompson was participating in triathlons, he told me sometimes the workouts just “sucked.”

Doug explained, “It could have been the weather, a really tough workout to push to the next level, not recovering from a previous workout, or any of a dozen other reasons. Usually those workouts that really sucked were the ones that did [me] the most good.

“Somewhere during one of my whining fits about a sucky workout, a coach or fellow athlete, I can’t remember exactly who, told me to ‘embrace the suck.’ To this day, when I am trying something new or trying to push out of my comfort zone, I utter that phrase and push on.”

Idea for Action

What area(s) of your health or wellness do you avoid embracing the suck? How can you reframe or take action?

When doing a task that isn’t pleasant, use positive affirmations such as, “I’ve got this. I *will* do this.” Or, as Doug suggested, say to yourself, “Embrace the suck!”

Excuses

“Never make excuses. Your friends don’t need them, and your foes won’t believe them.” – John Wooden

We make excuses when we think circumstances fall outside our control. Some things are outside our control, but people who habitually make excuses routinely blame circumstances or people.

Excuses limit us. Of course, the “Just Do It” philosophy is oversimplified and misguided in some situations.

We must define a reason versus an excuse. Reasons are objective acknowledgement of our beliefs and emotions: I haven’t looked for a job because my confidence is low.

Excuses are obstacles we erect to rationalize why we aren’t pursuing a goal, such as, “I can’t find a new job. No one will hire me.” Excuses are full of “can’t” and “but.”

The danger of excuses is we start to believe they are facts. Once we believe an excuse, we fail to set or pursue goals. Our excuses stop us from getting what we want.

Examine excuses you frequently tell yourself.

Idea for Action

1. Make a list of goals or issues you avoid.
2. Examine how you view your ability to control each.
3. Assess your belief in your abilities.
4. Identify small changes to build confidence and belief in your ability to make a change.
5. Add a follow up strategy, such as a weekly progress review.

Good Habit Creation

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” – Aristotle

Behavioral scientist B.J. Fogg is the father of the tiny habit movement. He calls his three-step process to form new habits The Fogg Method.

The first step is to identify a clear goal or outcome, such as lose 10 pounds, run a marathon, or learn a new language.

Next, list out the easy-win behaviors, what he calls tiny habits, that you can do to achieve your goal.

Finally, identify a routine or habit you already have and graft the new habit onto the existing one.

Let's say you want to get in better shape and release 10 pounds as your goal. A tiny habit to achieve the goal might be to start incorporating daily squats.

I will assume you brush your teeth every day. Set a goal to complete 20 squats before you brush your teeth in the morning and again before you brush your teeth at night.

Before you know it, the tiny habits lead to goal attainment!

Idea for Action

Watch B.J. Fogg's TEDx talk on how to create tiny habits that lead to big change here: bit.ly/bjfoggtedx.

Next, select a goal you want to achieve, and choose a tiny habit to start implementing, attaching it to an existing habit.

Procrastination

“You can’t just turn on creativity like a faucet. You have to be in the right mood. What mood is that? Last-minute panic.” – Bill Watterson

People regret things they haven’t done over things they have done.

Everyone procrastinates, but not everyone is a procrastinator. Chronic procrastinators have perpetual problems finishing tasks, while situational procrastinators delay *based on the task itself*. A perfect storm of procrastination occurs when an unpleasant task meets a person who’s high in impulsivity and low in self-discipline.¹⁶

It’s not effective to advise a procrastinator to buckle down and get it done, just as it’s not effective to tell a depressed person to cheer up. Procrastination is not the same as laziness.

Sometimes people will say they work better under pressure to justify procrastination. Research shows most of us are less effective under pressure.¹⁷

Ideas for Action

If you struggle with procrastination:

- Set smaller tasks.
- Create a deadline.
- Try to find meaning in the task.
- Remind yourself time lost is lost forever.
- Develop new habits by linking to a task you do daily, like brushing your teeth.
- Forgive yourself when you procrastinate and refocus.

Setting the Right Goals

“Some goals are not going to fulfill you. Choose goals that you value and care about.” – Henry Cloud

In *Weight Loss*, on page 62, I will share previous unsuccessful attempts to lose weight. Here, I discuss setting the right goals—for you.

When I wanted to lose weight, losing thirty-five pounds wasn't important to me. If I didn't care, it would never happen. Why did I want to lose weight? I started to have high blood pressure. I was afraid I would die before enjoying grandchildren.

I altered my goal from “lose 35 pounds” to “Imagine my youngest child crying, holding a newborn, wishing I were there to see her first child. Now, make daily decisions to prevent this scene from happening.” Everything changed after I changed the goal.

When confronted with an all you can eat dessert bar, I could ask myself, “Will this help me live longer to hold my grandchild?” It made decisions easy as, well, pie. Connect your goal to something that matters to you.

Idea for Action

Why do you want to reach your goal? Dig two or three whys deep to get to what you value. I wanted to lose weight to live longer. Why live longer? To know my grandchildren. Why is that important? Because love and connection with my family is my top priority. Dig deeper to find your true motivation.

It's JUST ...

“There are all these ‘just one’ times throughout the entire year. Whenever we indulge, is it really just this one time? Pay attention to how many ‘just this one’ times you actually experience.” – Char Aukland

Our “just” can be related to many areas, such as how we allow people to treat us by excusing behavior: “He’s just stressed at work lately.” Not holding our boundaries: “I’ll give her money just one more time.” Our relationship with food plays out through, “It’s a special occasion, so I’ll eat everything I want just this one time.” Special occasions can be found all year long, from parties to holidays, birthdays, weddings, events, conferences, and vacations. Before you know it, every week becomes a “just this one time.”

Often, our “just” serves a purpose by giving us security, comfort, control, or stemming some other fear.

Each “just” extends permission that might not serve us best.

Idea for Action

Observe your thoughts and behaviors for one week to become mindful of areas where you are making justifications.

Consider journaling everything you “just” about.

Related to your health, what have you been JUST-ifying?

Indecisiveness

“It is better to make a wrong decision than build up a habit of indecision. If you’re wallowing in indecision, you certainly can’t act, and action is the basis of success.” – Marie Beynon Lyons Ray

Colin Powell follows a rule of thumb for making hard decisions. He says every time you face a tough decision you should have no less than 40 percent, and no more than 70 percent, of the information you need to make the decision.

If you make a decision with less than 40 percent of the information necessary, you are “shooting from the hip” and will make too many mistakes. If you wait to get over 70 percent of the information, opportunity will often have passed.

Powell’s rule supports the fact that intuition separates great leaders from average ones. Intuition allows us to make tough decisions well, but many of us ignore our gut instincts.

Do you desire 100 percent certainty your decisions are right? Absolute certainty is unrealistic. Your intuition, combined with 70 percent of the information, constitutes an educated decision. Mathematically, a decision should not need to change course after acquiring 70 percent of the information.

Idea for Action

Write the consequences of indecisiveness the next time you’re making a decision. Seeing the outcomes might help you move forward. If you’re still stuck, flip a coin! Perhaps the choices aren’t materially that different, which is why you can’t choose.

Intellectual Wellness

“People with many interests live, not only longest, but happiest.” – George Matthew Allen

Intellectual wellness refers to active participation in scholastic, cultural, and community activities.

We promote intellectual wellness when we commit to learn new things and possess an openness to new ideas and ways of doing things. We expand our knowledge and skills and foster creativity, curiosity, and lifelong learning.

The key to intellectual wellness is open-mindedness.

Reading, travel, and spending time with diverse groups of people who think different from you are great ways to expand intellectual wellness.

Ideas for Action

Enhance intellectual well-being by trying these ideas:

1. Ask a friend to debate and argue against your view.
2. Play board games such as Clue or chess.
3. Complete puzzles: sudoku, word search, or crossword.
4. Read fiction for fun.
5. Learn a foreign language.

Mental Sharpness

“Being fit will keep you mentally sharp, and people forget that.” – Peter Shilton

Do you seem to always lose your wallet or purse, put things in odd places, or experience absent-mindedness?

You have options to sharpen your mind. The best method is a focus on overall health, rather than targeting specific areas. This includes exercise and eating “brain foods” like salmon, broccoli, walnuts, avocados, and blueberries. Through diet and light exercise, you can reduce the risk of developing health conditions that lead to memory loss.

Ideas for Action

Seven tips for brain fitness:

1. Give your brain a workout. The best activities teach you something new, build a skill, challenge you, and are rewarding. Try learning a language on Duolingo.
2. Oxygenate your brain with physical activity.
3. Get eight hours of nightly sleep; avoid caffeine in the evening and screen time an hour before bed.
4. Have fun with friends.
5. Keep stress under control.
6. Laugh daily.
7. Eat brain foods like wild tuna, sardines, fruit, vegetables, flaxseed, green tea, and red wine.

Keep a journal for a week of the actions you try. Assess where improvements can be made. If you are concerned about your memory, take the SAGE memory test: bit.ly/sagememorytest.

Realistic Thinking

“Believing in negative thoughts is the single greatest obstruction to success.” – Charles F. Glassman

I’ve witnessed and heard stories from people who expressed opposing opinions and were silenced. They were written off as negative and given “constructive feedback” about their lack of positivity.

Excessive positivity discourages conflict. Conflict avoidance is one of the dysfunctions Patrick Lencioni discusses in his book, *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team*.

Researchers Coyne and Tennen state the idea of adopting a “fighting spirit” against cancer as a solution to the disease is neither scientifically sound nor uplifting. It implies anyone who does not “beat cancer” did not have a sufficiently positive mindset.¹⁸

Oncologist Dr. O. Simonton says pure positive thinking (“I’m healed.”) worked against cancer patients as much as grossly negative thinking (“I’m dying; there’s no hope.”) when he was asked who tends to survive. What seemed to make a difference was what he called realistic thinking. When a person could honestly say everything was being done to help, and they were doing everything they could to be better and healthier, they seemed to cross a threshold—from the fanciful into the possible—which is where real hope exists.¹⁹

Idea for Action

To combine an optimistic view with realistic thinking:

Combine your dream with realistic goals, then list possible challenges and ideas to overcome them.

Making Tough Decisions

“It doesn’t matter which side of the fence you get off on sometimes. What matters most is getting off. You cannot make progress without making decisions.” – Jim Rohn

Susan Britton, founder of TheAcademies.com, taught me an effective way to make hard decisions. When my oldest son was buying his first car, I was nervous. On one hand, he might buy a lemon that was mechanically unsound.

On the other hand, that was his first major purchase, and I wanted him to be independent. I kept going in circles on what to do or not do. It wasn’t until I aligned the forces of my mind, heart, and gut that I was able to make the best decision.

Susan asked me to write what my *head* was telling me. Next, she had me write what my *heart* was telling me. Finally, she instructed me to write what my *gut* was telling me.

After capturing the voice of reason, my emotions, and my instinct, Susan asked me to come up with a decision that would honor all three. She described the method as making the most creative (head), compassionate (heart), and courageous (gut) decision possible.

I ended up offering my son a list of things I would look for in a car if he were interested in advice. I went with him to the dealer but stepped back and allowed him to manage the process. It worked out wonderfully!

Idea for Action

Try Susan’s process for yourself!

A Problem a Day

“We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” – Albert Einstein

Problem solving skills improve with practice. If we let problems fester, we can spend more time worrying about the problem than finding a solution.

Perhaps a problem is overwhelming. We might think we have no control to solve it, or ability to influence a solution. My grandmother used to say, “A problem identified is a problem half solved.” Life teaches us a problem ignored becomes a bigger problem, requiring more resources to solve.

A way to be proactive is to create a list of 1-3 problems you have. You can't solve all problems in a day, so the idea is to dedicate a day of constructive thought to a problem. Prioritize the problems, and tackle each using the *Idea for Action* below. Once a solution is found or in progress (or you conclude it's not in your control to solve) update your problem list with new challenges.

Idea for Action

Choose a daily time to brainstorm solutions like during your commute or lunch break. Work through these steps:

1. *Define the problem.* Dig to the root problem by asking, “Why is that a problem?” three times as you would ask why. See *Setting the Right Goals* on page 41.
2. *Write outcome(s) sought.* What do you want to happen?
3. *List all potential solutions.* Include help or resources needed and ways to obtain them.

Self-Reliance

“The best place to find a helping hand is at the end of your own arm.” – Unknown

Self-reliance is not doing everything by yourself and shouldering your burdens independently. It’s the capability to do things and make decisions by yourself.

Examples of self-reliance are the ability to think independently, embrace who you are as an individual, and boldly pursue your goals.

Self-reliance is important because help won’t always be available. Also, it’s important for making decisions, solving problems, and, most importantly, being able to be happy by—and with—yourself.

Moving from relationship to relationship and the inability to remain single is often a sign of low self-reliance.

Do you turn outward or inward as your first reaction to problems?

Ideas for Action

Three tips to increase self-reliance:

1. Accept responsibility to try to solve problems first before turning to others.
2. Practice making decisions before looking to others to help you make decisions. Start with small decisions, if needed.
3. Learn practical skills, such as how to cook, sew, do laundry, or fix basic things at home to increase self-reliance. Check out *Dad, how do I?* at bit.ly/dadhowdo.

Self-Control

“He who controls others may be powerful, but he who has mastered himself is mightier still.” – Lao Tzu

Self-control is an ability to manage your actions and emotions.

Self-control is comprised of the ability to:

1. Control behaviors to avoid temptations and achieve goals.
2. Delay gratification and resist unwanted behaviors or urges.

Researchers found low self-control is detrimental to having and maintaining close interpersonal relationships, whereas high self-control brings relational success.²⁰

Reflect on areas in which you struggle with self-control.

Idea for Action

Instead of struggling to resist temptation, try to reduce or remove it.

Name an area in your life where you lack self-control. Brainstorm ways to remove temptation. For example, if you find yourself getting into political debates online, limit social media time or scroll past topics that are pitfalls for you.

If you struggle to resist sweets, avoid tempting circumstances and carry healthy snacks, such as nuts, to help you pass the doughnuts.

Motivation

“Push yourself because no one else is going to do it for you.” –
Unknown

We all struggle with motivation. People ask how I find motivation to write books each year. The answer is, I don't always.

I write when I don't want to. Motivation follows action. Sometimes I get a dopamine hit after I get into it. Other times I dislike every minute and quit when I hit the daily goal.

I set bite-sized goals. When I write, I set the date I need to have the book to my editor. I calculate the number of words the book will have, how many days I plan to write weekly, and how many words I need to write daily. When I wrote this book, I set a goal of four entries seven days a week. Some days I wrote four, some days 10.

Lack of confidence can also cause loss of motivation. “Who am I to _____?” or “I'll never be able to do this.”

If you're not motivated, maybe the goal isn't defined or set in achievable chunks. Goals that are large overwhelm us. A goal to write a book is vague. Write 5,000 words weekly is clear.

Idea for Action

Reflect to find the cause of stalled progress:

- What's blocking my path to achievement?
- Do I care and think about the goal?
- Is the goal aligned to a purpose?
- Is the goal bite-sized?
- Do I celebrate wins?

Optimism

“In my ninety-plus years, I have learned a secret. I have learned that when good men and good women face challenges with optimism, things will always work out! Truly, things always work out! Despite how difficult circumstances may look at the moment, those who have faith and move forward with a happy spirit will find that things always work out.” – Gordon B. Hinckley

In his book, *Think and Grow Rich*, Napoleon Hill wrote:

“Optimism is a matter of mental habit. You can learn to practice the habit of optimism—and thereby greatly enhance your chances of achieving success. Or you can drive yourself into the pit of pessimism and failure.”

Yikes!

The good news? If optimism is a mental habit, new habits can be formed by retraining and reframing your perspective.

Ideas for Action

1. Create an optimism jar. Write the best thing that happened each day and add it to the jar. Read the entries at the end of the month. Repeat each month.
2. Limit time spent with the “doom and gloom” crowd.
3. Look for silver linings in each day.
4. Practice speaking positive affirmations daily, for example, “I can accomplish anything I set my mind to.”
5. Limit your consumption of negative news.

Perfectionism

“Research shows that perfectionism hampers success. In fact, it’s often the path to depression, anxiety, addiction, and life paralysis.” – Brené Brown

Studies say perfectionists aren’t actually trying to be perfect. They’re trying to avoid not being good enough.²¹

Whoa.

Even though the root of the word perfectionism—perfect—seems positive, perfectionists are shown to achieve less and experience more stress than other high achievers.²²

The saying, “Done is better than perfect” doesn’t always resonate with perfectionists. Try, “Is my constant tweaking creating significant new value that will benefit others?”

Idea for Action

Do you exhibit perfectionist tendencies?

bit.ly/PerfectionQuiz

If you are a perfectionist, do a cost analysis by making a list of the ways perfectionism hurts you. Ask friends, family, or trusted coworkers to add their perspective on the negative consequences of your perfectionism.

Perspective

“Not all storms come to disrupt your life. Some come to clear your path.” – Paulo Coelho

Having perspective means being able to provide wise counsel to others and having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and others. Plainly put, it's the way a person looks at things.

A wise perspective thinks things through, examines them from all sides, and doesn't jump to conclusions. A wise perspective enables us to change our minds in light of evidence weighed fairly.

People with perspective understand themselves better than most. They are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and have developed ways to work around their weaknesses so they don't become a barrier. These individuals have paid attention to how their minds work and are better able to understand the thought processes of others.

Ideas for Action

Try these six strategies to expand your perspective:

1. Listen more and speak less.
2. Ask more questions.
3. Spend time with new people.
4. Read more and more broadly.
5. Watch different programming, such as documentaries, biographies, or the news.
6. Be curious about things you don't understand or that surprise you.

Mind and C.R.A.P. Boards

“What consumes your mind, controls your life.” – Ben Francia

Hans Berger, inventor of the electroencephalogram (EEG), first proposes the brain is constantly busy. We have conscious thoughts, but when our minds wander, or we perform repetitive tasks, we enter a Default Mode Network (DMN).²³

In my Brain-Based Coach certification I learned we spend 60-70 percent of the day in the DMN. We reflect on ourselves, others, and think about our past and future in this space.

During my neuroscience studies, my coaching certification, and research for this book, I read several assessments on thoughts. General consensus is 80-95 percent of thoughts are repeated each day, and 80 percent are negative.

One study revealed 60-70 percent of students' spontaneous thoughts were negative, but students estimated 60-75 percent of their thoughts would be positive!²⁴

Implications of repeating negative narratives include misinterpreting facts, mood depression and anxiety, and releasing too much stress hormone, cortisol, into our bodies.

Idea for Action

Create a “C.R.A.P. Board” to record *Conflicts*, *Resistances*, *Anxieties*, and other *Problems*. Creating a space for these thoughts itemizes your brain's concerns. C.R.A.P. board creator, Mark Waldman, advises keeping the board. He says if discarded, the brain will remind you, taking up precious emotional energy.

Staying Stuck

“Fear is the glue that keeps you stuck. Faith is the solvent that sets you free.” – Shannon L. Alder

A key mindset difference separates those who succeed and those who stay stuck. When I was coaching, I could tell within minutes of speaking with someone which team they were on: “Team Stuck” or “Team Possible.”

People who stay stuck:

- Say, “I don’t know how.” Because they don’t know exactly what to do, they do nothing.
- Fall back on habits standing in the way of their progress. These could be drugs and alcohol, poor eating habits, or unhealthy relationships.
- Make excuses. “The problems is”, or “That won’t work because”
- Fail to learn from mistakes and keep falling into the same bad decisions and behavior patterns, such as making impulsive decisions.
- Deny they, themselves, are the cause of being stuck. Reasons are almost always external and out of their control.

Review the five items above. Which of these challenges you?

Idea for Action

Review these three questions weekly and set tasks accordingly:

1. What outcome do I want?
2. How can I make it happen?
3. What help do I need, and who might help?

Vision Boards

“You are the author of your life. If you don’t like your story, change it.” – Jesse Lyn Stoner

A vision board is a board or poster with a collage of words and images to represent your goals and dreams. The idea for this book came from a vision board I created in Sharon Gill’s G.O.R.G.E.O.U.S. Woman Bible study program.

When I created my board, I set goals in the areas of work, health, finances, relationships, and spirituality. I realized these are life’s foundations and wanted to share them with others.

Visualization is one of the most powerful exercises to see your goal through. Olympic athletes have long used visualization to improve performance. Arnold Schwarzenegger swore by visualization to reach his bodybuilding goals.

As a child, Oprah Winfrey watched her grandmother toil endlessly. Winfrey says she’d tell herself over and over again: My life won’t be like this. My life won’t be like this, it will be better.

Vision boards work because they take unorganized thoughts from your head and organize them into something concrete you can set goals around. Your board should focus on how you want to feel, not just things you want.

Idea for Action

Start gathering words, images, and quotes aligned to your purpose and desired goals for your board. Watch this video for more guidance: bit.ly/howtcreatevisionboards.

Physical Wellness

The following topics are covered in Physical Wellness:

Power of Routine

Sedentary Lifestyle

Body Image

Weight Loss

Eating Mindfully

Gut Health

Food and Mood

Intermittent Fasting

Functional Medicine

Healthy Aging Secrets

Skin Health

Sleep

Stress Management

Burnout

Power of Routine

“Depending on what they are, our habits will either make us or break us. We become what we repeatedly do.” – Sean Covey

Successful people swear by their routines and rituals. Routines create habits, and habits create consistent results. Warren Buffett reads 500 pages every day. He says knowledge builds like compound interest. Steve Jobs wore the same black turtleneck each day to create fewer decisions to maintain focus.

Our routine, or lack of one, determines how our day will go. If we aren't intentional, we succumb to interruptions, procrastination, and time wasting. Alternatively, people with a routine are more productive, focused, and motivated.

Ideas for Action

Start by adding a new routine in each of the following areas: personal care, relationships, career/work.

Personal care – Block off 20-30 minutes daily to do something you enjoy such as meditate, read with a cup of tea or coffee, or practice yoga or some other form of physical activity.

Relationships – Set up a weekly date night with a partner, add a family game night, or video chat weekly with friends and family who live far away.

Career – Make daily to do lists, blocking the time on your calendar. Start a learning habit to sharpen your skills such as reading a book each month related to your field. Join professional associations or take LinkedIn Learning courses.

Sedentary Lifestyle

“I encourage people to pick up small habits like taking a walk after meals ... we’ve become way too sedentary. Just move!” – Theo Rossi

You might have heard, “Sitting is the new smoking,” which suggests a sedentary lifestyle has replaced smoking as a health hazard. The well-documented effects of smoking suggest they are not equally hazardous. The point is humans aren’t meant to be sedentary, and inactivity yields consequences.

Some ramifications of a sedentary lifestyle include weight gain, anxiety, osteoporosis, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, inflammation, reduced immune function, and other ailments.²⁵

As a full-time author, I make a point to spend half of my workday standing and practicing legs raises, squats, calf raises, and marching in place to keep my blood flowing. My husband also uses a standing desk and paces during phone calls to get in his 10,000 or more daily steps.

If you have a challenging schedule, adopt creative ways to keep moving without going to a gym.

Ideas for Action

Try implementing easy exercise-at-home ideas daily:

1. 12-minute walk at home YouTube videos:
bit.ly/walkathomevideo
2. Side leg raises each time you wait for the microwave
3. 15 – 20 squats before getting in the shower each morning

Body Image

“Stop wishing for other people’s bodies. Find peace in your own. Just eat food. Eat real food, be active and live your life. Forget all the diet and weight loss nonsense. It’s really just that ... Nonsense.” – Gemma Collins

A study of 2,000 women commissioned by Lycra found women spend almost two hours each day, 12 hours and four minutes weekly, or an entire month of each year worrying about their looks.²⁶

This isn’t just a problem for women. Multiple studies found men worry about their appearance more than women and would exchange a year of their life for a perfect physique. Men worry about going bald and having a “beer belly.”^{27,28}

No universal ideal of beauty can be defined, because every culture differs. Remember people you view as ideal in appearance also struggle with body image. We are irrational beings.

We care about our appearance because we care what others think of us over what we think. Don’t believe me? During the COVID-19 pandemic when people were holed up at home, people joked about not wearing make-up or showering and wearing pajamas all day since no one could see them!

Idea for Action

Create a plan to eat real food, avoid processed foods, and keep active according to your ability. Let go of everything outside your control. Set an intention to change what you can and practice telling your inner critic to stuff it. “Thanks for your concern, but I am in control here.”

Weight Loss

“Weight loss doesn’t begin in the gym with a dumb bell; it starts in your head with a decision.” – Toni Sorenson

In my early 40s, I had two more children. I ate healthy during my pregnancies, but as is typical, I gained 30 pounds with each pregnancy. After my second daughter—and fourth child—I found myself 35 pounds above my ideal weight.

Determined to lose weight, I decided to try the Keto diet. After six months, I lost 22 pounds, yet every ounce found me again over the next year.

Trying Keto a second time, I lost five pounds in 30 long days, and my lips became intolerably chapped. Since Keto wasn’t sustainable for me, I decided exercise was the way to go. After two weeks running on my treadmill without losing an ounce, I quit. I was convinced I was too old, my metabolism was too slow, and my genetics rebelled against my chances of losing weight.

I made a discovery. I had to shift my goal and connect it to a meaningful purpose. My “why” mattered if I intended to reach my goal. See *Setting the Right Goals* on page 41.

Idea for Action

Connect a goal which has eluded you to something you deeply value. Focus on what you value to guide behavior change instead of the goal itself.

What goal have you failed to reach? Rewrite your goal to align with something deeply important to you.

Eating Mindfully

“Mindful eating is eating with intention while paying attention.” – Kati Konersman

In November 2019, I started mindful eating. Prior, I wasn't aware I was a mindless eater.

Many of us focus on what we eat but not *how* we eat.

I thought I was a healthy eater. I didn't eat processed foods or indulge in desserts. I ate my vegetables. When I continued to gain weight, I attributed it to my metabolism, age, and genetics.

I started paying attention to my eating habits and observed I ate more frequently than I realized because of mindless snacking. For example, when I made my daughter's lunch for school each morning, one slice of cheese went on her sandwich, and one went in my mouth.

Midmorning, I went to the kitchen for a snack and another slice of cheese. At lunchtime, I snacked on a cheese slice while I made lunch. By midafternoon, I indulged in a fourth slice, along with a fifth and final as I prepared dinner.

I mindlessly ate a whopping 525 calories in cheese. One-fourth the recommended daily calories for an average person! Luckily, a problem identified is half solved.

Idea for Action

Keep a daily food journal for a week to track your eating. Do you eat more than you realize? If so, read 13 science-backed tips to stop mindless eating at [healthline.com/nutrition/13-tips-to-stop-mindless-eating](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/13-tips-to-stop-mindless-eating).

Gut Health

“Your gut is not Las Vegas. What happens in the gut does not stay in the gut.” – Dr. Alessio Fasano

In recent months I’ve become focused on gut health. I was experiencing a number of signs my gut health was poor.

Indicators of poor gut health include stomach disturbances, changes in weight, sleep issues or fatigue, skin irritation, autoimmune conditions, and food intolerances.²⁹

I experienced most of the issues above, but since improving my gut health I released 35 pounds and improved my overall health by employing the following ideas for action.

Talk to your doctor before making drastic changes. Some advice is not compatible with certain medical conditions.

Ideas for Action

Research-backed ways to improve gut health:³⁰

1. Take probiotics, and eat fermented foods like miso, kombucha, sauerkraut, kefir, or kimchi.
2. Add prebiotic fiber to your diet.
3. Eat less sugar, sweeteners, and processed foods.
4. Reduce stress.
5. Avoid taking antibiotics unnecessarily.
6. Exercise regularly.
7. Get adequate sleep.
8. Avoid smoking.
9. Increase intake of plant-based foods.

Food and Mood

“The food you eat can either be the safest and most powerful form of medicine or the slowest form of poison.” – Ann Wigmore

Low serotonin, a neurotransmitter in our brains, can cause depressed mood, low energy, negative thoughts, irritability, and sweet cravings. Ninety percent of serotonin receptors are in our guts!³¹ Diet affects mental well-being.

In my own experience, my eating habits had a negative effect. My diet caused reduced energy levels and depressed my mood. This caused me to eat to cheer myself up. Negative self-talk went up, and so did my weight. I was stuck in a vicious cycle.

According to nutritional biochemist, Shawn Talbot:

“Weight loss is generally 75 percent diet and 25 percent exercise. An analysis of over 700 weight loss studies found people see the biggest short-term results when they eat smart. On average, people who dieted without exercising for 15 weeks lost 23 pounds; the exercisers lost only six over 21 weeks. It’s easier to cut calories than burn them off. For example, if you eat a fast-food steak quesadilla, which can pack 500-plus calories, you need to run over four miles to ‘undo’ it!”

Exercise combined with clean eating is the healthy and natural way to improve our mood and overall well-being.

Idea for Action

Add 3-4 antidepressant foods to your daily diet. Examples are salmon, mussels, spinach, cauliflower, and strawberries.

Intermittent Fasting (IF)

“The best of all medicines are resting and fasting.” – Benjamin Franklin

In history, fasting was part of life. Sourcing food was a challenge, and humans went without food for long periods.

Researchers from the University of Alabama conducted a study with prediabetic, obese men. They compared a form of IF called “early time-restricted feeding,” where all meals are fit in an early eight-hour period of the day, compared with a group who spread meals over 12 hours (7 a.m. to 7 p.m.). Both groups maintained their weight, but after five weeks, the eight-hours group dramatically lowered insulin levels, significantly improved insulin sensitivity, and lowered blood pressure. The eight-hours group also experienced drastically decreased appetite.³²

To fast, you should meet lifestyle guidelines of adequate sleep and water and eat quality food. Fasting is effective with a healthy lifestyle.

Individuals who are underweight, struggling to gain weight, under 18, pregnant, trying to become pregnant, breastfeeding, at risk for an eating disorder, or on multiple medications should not fast. Nor should you fast without consulting your doctor to make sure it's safe based on your medical history and current medications.

Idea for Action

Read Harvard Health Publishing’s article on Intermittent Fasting at bit.ly/HarvardIFStudy. To learn about a 16:8 fasting lifestyle, visit bit.ly/16-8.

Functional Medicine

“Functional Medicine is medicine by course, not by symptom. Functional Medicine practitioners don’t, in fact, treat disease, we treat your body’s ecosystem. We get rid of bad stuff, put in good stuff, and because your body is an intelligent system, it does the rest.” – Mark Hyman, MD

Functional medicine addresses underlying causes of health problems instead of treating symptoms. Traditional medicine does a good job tackling acute and emergency problems, while functional medicine is suited for chronic conditions. A good functional medicine practitioner will usually work with your traditional doctor to help you achieve the best health outcomes.

I admit, when my parents started seeing a functional medicine doctor, I assumed it was hocus-pocus or new age silliness. Until my parents looked like they were aging backward and eliminated chronic problems traditional medicine had been unable to solve.

My father used to have panic attacks and tried numerous medications which didn’t work. The attacks became daily events. Through a series of adjustments to balance my father’s “ecosystem,” the panic attacks ceased.

If you have a chronic health problem, such as an autoimmune disorder or diabetes, consider exploring functional medicine.

Idea for Action

Read this article published by the Cleveland Clinic to see how functional medicine works and if you should consider it: [cle.clinic/3bkOY0W](https://www.clevelandclinic.com/3bkOY0W).

Healthy Aging Secrets

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing.” – George Bernard Shaw

Many cultures place a high value on youth. Fear of getting old is common. Interestingly, the second half of life is what many people consider more rewarding and fulfilling, not the first half. Increased confidence, patience, wisdom, less stress, better sex, more money, and stronger relationships are a handful of reasons cited in a Huffington Post article by Jack Anderson.³³

On a scale of 1 to 10, as people age, their well-being quotient rises, climbing to its highest levels when people are in their 80s and 90s, according to Nielsen research.³⁴

What are the secrets of healthy aging? According to WebMD, science-backed tips to healthy aging include:³⁵

1. Eating whole, unprocessed plant foods
2. Walking
3. Connecting in meaningful relationships
4. Eating a fiber-rich diet
5. Practicing exercises to support balance, such as Tai Chi
6. Taking supplements (calcium, vitamins B6, B12, and D)
7. Choosing an optimistic attitude
8. Getting adequate sleep

Idea for Action

Review the eight tips above for healthy aging. Start by adding one or two to your routine then add more over time. See *Good Habit Creation* on page 39 in this chapter.

Skin Health

“The mirror of your health is your skin. If you drink, it shows in your face; if you eat the wrong foods, you have pimples. If you take care of your food and you lead a healthy life, your skin will look wonderful.” – Sophia Loren

My friend, Alison Bucklin, is a skincare consultant. She says,

“What standard do you have for ingredients? Everything we put on our skin, including skin care, make up, lotions, and fragrances are absorbed through our skin in less than a minute.

“The products we choose contribute to what’s absorbed into our bloodstream and our organs. Pay attention to the ingredients in the products you use.”

I didn’t pay attention to what I put on my body as in my body. I read the label on everything I eat.

I researched skin care ingredients and discovered ingredients widely considered harmful or toxic.

The best ways to maintain healthy skin is diet.³⁶ Moisturizers go skin deep, and aging develops at the cellular level. Some foods known to contribute to healthy skin are tomatoes, olive oil, kale, omega 3, and mangoes.

Have skin concerns? Review your diet and read ingredients.

Idea for Action

Avoid parabens, synthetic colors, triclosan, phthalates, fragrance, sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS)/sodium laureth sulfate, formaldehyde, toluene, propylene glycol, retinyl palmitate and retinol, lead (check lipstick), and hydroquinone.

Sleep

“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor’s book.” – Irish Proverb

Sleep is often neglected but is vital to health. If it’s no secret sleep is important, why do so many people neglect getting sufficient rest? In many cases, it’s a trade-off to fit in other activities we need to get done or want to participate in.

As a society, we could do a more effective job helping people understand the effects of sleep deprivation, including weight gain, lack of concentration and productivity, depression, heart disease, inflammation, a weaker immune system, lower empathy, degraded athletic performance, and prolonged recovery from illness.³⁷

You should be rested upon waking if you’re getting quality sleep.

Idea for Action

Use a sleep tracker for 30 days to see how well you’re sleeping.

Sleep recommendations:³⁸

Newborns (0–3 months): 14–17 hours

Infants (4–12 months): 12–16 hours

Toddler (1–2 years): 11–14 hours

Preschool (3–5 years): 10–13 hours

School age (6–12 years): 9–12 hours

Teen (13–18 years): 8–10 hours

Adult (18–60 years): 7-plus hours

Adult (61–64 years): 7–9 hours

Adult (65+ years): 7–8 hours

Stress Management

“One of the best pieces of advice I ever got was from a horse master. He told me to go slow to go fast. I think that applies to everything in life. We live as though there aren’t enough hours in the day, but if we do each thing calmly and carefully we will get it done quicker and with much less stress.” – Viggo Mortensen

The best stress management is being proactive. If you wait to manage stress when you’re already stressed, your ability to cope is diminished.

The number of people who are stressed out makes clear most of us aren’t doing a good job of proactive stress management. Eighty-two percent of employees said their jobs fall on the more stressful end, and a workplace stress study found 60 percent of US workers are stressed all or most of the time at work.^{39,40} Are you frequently overwhelmed in a typical week?

Idea for Action

Practice this daily mindfulness technique to manage stress. Close your eyes, take a deep breath to the count of five and slowly release. Repeat another deep breath and then:

Acknowledge *five* things you can see, then close your eyes.

Name *four* things you can feel.

Three things you can hear.

Two things you can smell.

One thing you can taste.

Practice mindfulness outdoors while walking. See *Mindfulness* on page 130 in the *Spirituality* chapter.

Burnout

“Burnout is when long-term exhaustion meets diminished interest.” – Unknown

Burnout occurs when we are under excessive stress for a prolonged period. It can be emotional, physical, or mental. As burnout sets in, our drive and motivation wanes.

Signs you might be experiencing burnout⁴¹:

1. Believing every day is a bad day
2. Caring about work or life seems like a waste of energy
3. Continual exhaustion
4. Spending the majority of the day on tasks you find mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming
5. You don't believe you make a difference or are appreciated

Ideas for Action

Assess your priorities – Set boundaries, take social media and technology breaks, take up a creative hobby, prioritize sleep and relaxation time.

Exercise 30 minutes daily – Even if you need to break activities into 10-minute chunks, move your body daily.

Connect with your support system – Reach out to people you care about, build friendships at work, get involved with a group or cause you care about, limit time with negative people.

Eat a healthy diet – Limit alcohol, caffeine, refined sugar, and food with preservatives. All of these can alter your mood.

Social Wellness

The following topics are covered in Social Wellness:

Who Surrounds You

Choosing Friends Wisely

Belonging

Community

Social Media

Caring What Others Think

Fun

Laughter

Sense of Humor

Asking for Help

Saying No

Who Surrounds You

“A friend is someone who gives you total freedom to be yourself.” – Jim Morrison

Are you familiar with the term “crabs in the bucket”?

Following is an excerpt from the novel, *The Great Escape*,

“Listen, he said, you ever seen a bunch of crabs in a bucket?”

“No, I told him.”

“Well, what happens is that now and then one crab will climb up on top of the others and begin to climb toward the top of the bucket, then, just as he’s about to escape another crab grabs him and pulls him back down.”

Lids aren’t necessary on a bucket of live crabs because they can be counted on to pull each other downward.

Discover what downward pull you’re subjected to and think explicitly about whether or not to reject the pull.

Idea for Action

Reflect on behavior which is encouraged and discouraged in groups to which you belong. Every community enforces some level of conformity. For any given group, what are you required to believe? What are you forbidden to do? Are these conformities serving you well? If not, reconsider your presence and participation in these communities.

Choosing Friends Wisely

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” –
Proverbs 27:17 NIV

The people you surround yourself with affect your future, for better or worse.

I participate in a group text with two friends, Char and Lila, and the productive ideas that have come from our daily texts are staggering. Both became authors because of my influence. I have written children’s books, lost 35 pounds, and learned to communicate better because of our relationships.

Your circle of friends can act as a mastermind group which challenges and makes you better, or they can hold you back and keep you stuck. It might sound heartless to evaluate your friends, but your relationships can alter the course of your life.

Avoid these types of people in your circle:

Manipulators, criticizers, gossips, liars, people who never apologize, are envious of you, don’t support you, are always negative, temperamental, or habitually self-absorbed.

Choose friends who offer empathy, support, honesty, generosity, trust, and reassurance, and be this kind of friend.

Idea for Action

Write a list of your friends. Do they inspire or drain you?

What changes can you make in the relationships which are not serving you, or them, well?

Belonging

“Those who have a strong sense of love and belonging have the courage to be imperfect.” – Brené Brown

The importance of belonging cannot be underestimated. Much of our behavior stems from a need to belong. Sensing we belong is based on shared experiences, vulnerability, and feeling supported.

A large body of research exists on belonging. Our bond to others is a source of happiness. Social networks can cushion us from stress. Belonging affects our performance and motivation. Employees cite connections with coworkers as a greater reason for career satisfaction than salary.⁴²

Neuroscientists have also found our brains react similarly to social injuries as physical ones. When connections are severed, we experience pain as if we've incurred physical trauma.⁴³

The implications of this research are huge. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many reports surfaced about people suffering from the isolation. One heartbreaking example was a woman I follow on Twitter who shared her mother died alone (not from COVID-19) in a nursing home because visitation wasn't allowed. She felt anguished her mother died alone. She wanted to hold her mother's hand and tell her she was loved as an expression of belonging to each other.

Idea for Action

Do you hold the belief, “I don't belong”? If so, why? Feelings of not belonging occur when people feel different or not accepted. The path to belonging begins with self-acceptance. Join a group of like-minded people. You are not alone.

Community

“Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.” –
Helen Keller

As a full-time writer, I spend a large amount of time alone. However, I've learned the importance of community, despite my personality tendencies.

At the time of this writing, I've certified coaches and consultants in the Middle East, Canada, the US, the UK, and Belgium. We meet monthly to build community among YouMap® practitioners. Our time together is high value because it creates a bond among us as we learn and grow from one another.

Communities create a sense of belonging, offer support, foster innovation, open up mentoring opportunities, turn a solo voice into a unified voice, challenge us to grow and see things differently, broaden our impact, provide resources, establish peace, and build humility.

A community can have many forms, including networking groups, the gym, professional associations, neighborhood groups, faith-based gatherings, clubs, and sports teams.

Do you belong to one or more communities? If so, what communities?

Idea for Action

Everyone benefits from community. Identify communities you currently belong to. List ways you contribute to the groups and how the groups contribute to you. What are the gaps and opportunities to enhance the relationships?

Social Media

“It takes discipline not to let social media steal your time.” – Amy Jo Martin

Is social media really social?

Social media can connect and reconnect people. The average American internet user has seven social media accounts. Despite this level of access to connect with other people, two in five Americans report their social relationships aren't meaningful.⁴⁴

A separate study had similar findings. Young adults who spend at least two hours daily on social media platforms were significantly less likely to report perceived emotional support in high numbers.⁴⁵

Yet another study of adults between 19 and 32 found increased social media caused significant disturbances in sleep.⁴⁶

One of the reasons we have trouble regulating our social media, despite its influence on mood and sleep, is social media is addictive. Do you need proof? Uninstall the app of your most used social media platform and count how many times in a day you reach to tap the icon.

Experts suggest 30 minutes or less per day on social media to experience better health outcomes.⁴⁷

Ideas for Action

Remove apps from devices which don't bring you joy. Use an app timer to limit use. Commit to a weekly social media fast.

Caring What Others Think

“Enough about me, let’s talk about you. What do you think of me?” – CC Bloom in *Beaches*

Research confirms no one is thinking about you because our brain defaults to think about ourselves. We talk about ourselves over any other topic, and we make assumptions based on our own experiences. When we believe we are judged, we’re often judging ourselves.⁴⁸

For example, we might assume people are glancing at us because of what we’re wearing, our accent, or our weight. In reality, we often interpret behaviors to make them about us.

Yes, people will sometimes say negative things to you. Remember—and this is key—people use their own experiences and thoughts as an anchor to form assumptions about you. People are harshest with you in areas where they are the most insecure about themselves.⁴⁹

Even when people appear to be focused on something related to you, it’s *still* often about them. What a liberating thought. You’re free to think whatever you want about yourself. Why not make it positive?

Idea for Action

Whenever someone judges or takes a jab at you, practice the following response until it becomes a habit.

Replace a hurt or negative response with curiosity by asking, “What negative thoughts do they have about themselves influencing their beliefs about me?”

Fun

“We’re so busy watching out for what’s just ahead of us that we don’t take time to enjoy where we are.” – Bill Watterson

Fun provides many benefits. Fun increases serotonin in our brains, which is believed to regulate our mood, sleep, appetite, and memory.

Fun can also increase our coping abilities and reduce stress levels. Not to mention fun is, well, fun! Why don’t we intentionally have more fun if it’s so good for us?

Maybe we’re worried what others think. Or believe we need to spend money to have fun. Perhaps we don’t think we have the time or shouldn’t take the time. Maybe we believe fun needs to be planned, or struggle with mental health challenges causing us to be apathetic about having fun.

Fun doesn’t have to be a grand production. Fun is found in the little moments: a spontaneous game of hide and seek, a family game night, a dance party for one in your living room to your favorite songs. If you have kids, create a fort with pillows. Maybe a fort would do your soul some good even if you don’t have kids. Play with modeling clay, go to a museum, fly a paper airplane, take a bubble bath, put on a puppet show, learn some magic tricks, go for a hike, or tell a joke.

Idea for Action

Block time in your calendar for fun in the coming week. Don’t worry if you’re aren’t sure what to do, just block the time! Use an idea from this tip or search online for “ideas to have fun.” Be present and leave your mobile phone behind.

Laughter

“Always laugh when you can. It is cheap medicine.” – Lord Byron

Laughter delivers a surprising number of benefits. Importantly, the positive emotions of humor and laughter decrease the risk for stress-related diseases.⁵⁰

Laughter also creates positive social connections, promotes learning, reduces anxiety, increases optimism, and is even linked to the healthy function of blood vessels.⁵¹

Are you getting enough laughter in your life? I once read in a *Psychology Today* blog stating the average four-year-old laughs 300 times a day. The average 40-year-old, only four.⁵² I think we can agree most adults don't laugh enough considering the positive benefits.

How many times would you guess you laugh in a day?

Ideas for Action

Need more laughter in your life? Here are six ideas:

1. Watch funny YouTube videos of animals, laughing babies, etc.
2. Listen to comedy tracks on an app such as Spotify.
3. See a live comedy show.
4. Laugh at yourself and your friends with some karaoke.
5. Journal for a week about times you laughed each day.
6. Listen to humorous podcasts. Check out this best comedy podcasts list: bit.ly/bestfunnypodcasts.

Sense of Humor

“A sense of humor is a major defense against minor troubles.”

– Mignon McLaughlin

Developing a good sense of humor should be considered an essential life skill!

Ninety percent of men and 81 percent of women report a sense of humor is the most important quality in a partner and a crucial quality for leaders.⁵³

Being funny is possibly one of the best things you can do for your health. Humor can help lower stress. It functions like an immune system for the mind. Reframing a negative event in a humorous light can serve as an emotional filter to help prevent negativity from initiating depressive emotions.

A wealth of evidence shows funny people are often smarter, healthier, and less stressed about their lives.⁵⁴

Everyone is different, so your sense of humor should be authentic to you. When someone says you don't have a sense of humor, they're revealing your humor isn't the same as theirs. It doesn't have to be. Even if you're not confident to create humor, you can disperse humor others have created.

Ideas for Action

1. Practice laughing at yourself; see humor in situations.
2. Expose yourself to more humorous content.
3. Watch the TEDx talk, *The Skill of Humor*, by Andrew Tarvin, at bit.ly/skillofhumor.

Asking for Help

“Be strong enough to stand alone, smart enough to know when you need help, and brave enough to ask for it.” – Ziad K. Abdelnour

If you've exhausted your options or you're in over your head, it's time to ask for help.

Maybe you don't ask for help because you don't want to be a burden to anyone. Perhaps you're independent and prefer to work alone. Maybe asking for help makes you look weak.

Dig into why you don't want to ask for help to understand your motivation for going it alone.

Asking for help makes others feel good. Think about a time you helped someone. Allow others the same fulfillment. If you're in a place which isn't sustainable without support, you will probably need help when it escalates to a crisis.

Asking for help can get you unstuck. Whether you're procrastinating or spinning your wheels, the help of someone you trust can take you farther than you'll go alone.

The good news? Asking for help gets easier every time.

Idea for Action

Make a list of current struggles. List the help you need and who might help you. Do you need help keeping up with household chores or cutting the grass? Are you struggling with administrative duties in your business? Can you delegate or barter services?

If you're not sure who can help you, ask friends, family, or colleagues for ideas or suggestions.

Saying No

“I refuse to please others at the expense of my own emotional well-being. Even if it means saying ‘no’ to people who are used to hearing ‘yes.’” – Unknown

You have an obligation to create and protect your boundaries. Establishing boundaries prevents you being manipulated or used and allows you to filter what’s acceptable—and what’s not—in your life.

I struggled to say no for years because I felt guilty. It became easy when I reframed my thinking:

- Believing I’m the only one who can help is an ego trip.
- Saying yes could cause me to become resentful.
- Realizing the person wouldn’t ask if they knew it would affect my emotional well-being. If they would, they don’t care about me.
- Saying yes deprives someone else of an opportunity.
- Establishing boundaries builds confidence and respect.
- Saying no reduces stress and increases time, focus, energy, and satisfaction.

Ideas for Action

1. *Say no.* A reason is not needed, and the less said, the better. “I appreciate you asking; however, I’m currently stretched too thin.”
2. *Say yes and no.* “I’m happy to but need to put a task on hold. Which project should I temporarily pause?”

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