

How to Make the Time for Your Personal Goals

“Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” - Henry Ford

One of the biggest challenges in trying to accomplish any personal goal is that we tend to put them off until tomorrow, or next week, in favor of more pressing matters at work and home.

Unfortunately, tomorrow never gets here.

If you want to accomplish a goal, you have to start on it today. Finding the time to take the steps necessary is the problem, of course, as we all lead busy and complicated lives, and when we do have time, we're too tired to do anything that requires energy or thought. We want to veg out in front of the TV, or take a nap.

So how do you find the time for your personal goals? That's what reader Trin recently asked:

How do you honestly make the time? I'm not even sure where to begin with my own goals, as I already feel I have to sacrifice something important to take care of me. I would really love your opinion, as a father of 6 children, what activities were cut out of your daily life in order to insert your personal goals?

I'm not going to be able to give an easy answer. There isn't a single little trick I can give you to find huge blocks of time where you can pursue all the goals you've ever dreamed of. It takes work, it takes commitment, it takes motivation ... but it can be done, without a doubt. I've done it — despite being married with six kids, and until recently working two jobs; I found time to train for a marathon, to work on eliminating my debt, to eat healthier, to declutter and become organized, to wake earlier, and more.

How? Again, there was no one step that did it for me, but a series of them that add up over time:

1. **One goal at a time.** Often the problem is that we try to take on too many goals at once. We have a list of things we want to accomplish, spanning the spectrum from gardening to learning Italian to getting in shape. It can be overwhelming, and because of that we never start. Or instead, perhaps we

start with a head full of steam, but then run out of steam quickly, because it's extremely difficult to maintain focus and energy (the two key ingredients in accomplishing a goal) for too many goals at once. Even two goals at once is difficult, if you aren't already running on autopilot for one of those goals. For now, focus on one goal at a time. Once that's on autopilot, you can go to the next one. Figure on at least a month per goal.

2. **Make sure you really want it.** It's not enough to say, "It would be *nice* to learn French" or "It would be *cool* to do yoga every morning". It has to be something you really want. Ask yourself why you want to achieve this goal, and how much you want it. Figure out your motivations. That's important to do early on, or you won't make time for it.
3. **Make it your top priority.** We all have multiple things to focus on in our lives, from school or work to family to errands to various goals and commitments and hobbies and civic activities. If we put all these focuses before our One Goal, we won't ever find the time for our goal. There's only so much time in the day. At some point, we've got to prioritize, and if we make our goal our top priority, we'll make the time.
4. **Reduce your commitments.** I'm a big fan of simplifying your life — and one of the first things you should do when simplifying is to make a short list of the 4-5 things that are most important to you, that you want to make time for, that you love and that bring you joy. I've said this before, but just to give you an example, my top things are spending time with my family, writing, reading, and running. Everything else is non-essential. Once you've made your short list, you should reduce some of the non-essential commitments. Is being a member of the Harley-Davidson club no longer bringing you joy and fulfillment? Gracefully bow out. If you reduce at least a few commitments, you'll now have room in your life for the things you want to do — including your personal goal.
5. **Keep it simple.** It's important not to make your personal goal too complicated. You don't want to have a huge list of things to do in order to accomplish your goal. You'll be overwhelmed. Instead, focus on a smaller sub-goal that will lead you to your bigger goal. If you have a goal to invest for retirement, for example, make your first goal simply to learn what you need to know about investing. Make your second goal to open the necessary account and transfer money. Then make it your goal to have

regular, automatic contributions and not to touch those contributions. Another approach is to focus first on creating a habit that will get you to your goal. If your goal is getting in shape, for example, focus on forming the habit of walking each day (or running, or cycling, or whatever). Once you've formed that habit, focus on drinking only water. Then on eating fruits and veggies instead of junk snacks. And so on, until you've reached your goal.

6. **Stay focused.** One of the most difficult things when it comes to achieving goals is maintaining your focus on that goal. It's easy to become obsessed with something else, and when we lose focus, we suddenly stop making time for the goal. Instead, find ways to maintain that focus. Put a poster on your wall or a printout on your fridge, or make your goal your computer desktop picture. Send yourself daily reminders. Tell others about it, in real life and on your blog, and have them ask you about it daily.
7. **Block off time.** OK, this is a crucial step. Maybe it should be No. 1 on this list, but I felt it important to lay the foundation with the steps above first. But once you've laid that foundation, you absolutely must block off time to work on your goal. Whatever time works for you — first thing in the morning, lunchtime, mid-afternoon, right after work, late at night. Try to schedule a time when you won't be interrupted by other "urgent" requests (meetings, calls, kids, etc.) and when you have good energy. For me, that's in the morning, as mid-afternoons are times when other things come up to interrupt your schedule (especially when I worked in an office) and early evening (right after work for most people) I tend to get a bit tired. You have to find the right block of time. Designate no less than 30 minutes, although really an hour is much, much better. Two hours isn't feasible for most people, but your schedule might be different.
8. **Make it your most important appointment.** That block of time you just scheduled has to be given the utmost priority. There are appointments we take seriously — a doctor's appointment, or an important meeting — and we will do everything we can to ensure that we make those appointments and are not late for them. "Sorry, I have a doctor's appointment at that time — can't take the conference call until a couple hours later." But when it comes to our time for working on our personal goal, we will often push it back because of other pressing things. Don't let that happen. Make that

block of time on your schedule become sacrosanct, and never let it be violated.

9. **Show that you're serious.** Be fully committed. Tell as many people as possible about your goal, and the scheduled block of time that is sacrosanct. Write down your goal, and be specific. If you can't even write it down, you're not serious. Then write out a plan, with dates and actions. Think about obstacles, and write down your strategy for overcoming them. The plan shows you're serious.
10. **Find your time wasters.** In every person's life, there are things that can easily be cut out without making much of a difference. Things that waste our time without giving us much benefit. Things such as TV, video games, fun stuff online, going to bars, etc. If you can identify those time wasters, you can free up time for working on your goals. Remember, if it's not on your short list (No. 4 above), you can eliminate it.
11. **Make it a part of your daily or weekly routine.** This is important to keep the goal going for a long period of time. If it's a goal you can complete in a week, you don't need to do this step. But the most worthwhile goals are ones that take time to accomplish, and for those, you'll need to make it part of your routine. Some goals will need to be daily — say, drinking water, or exercise, or perhaps decluttering. Find a time in your daily routine where you will always do this activity, and don't let yourself drop it. Put it immediately after something that's already firmly ingrained in your routine — say, showering or brushing your teeth, or arriving at work — so that you won't forget to do it. For other goal activities, a weekly schedule would be better — say, making a weekly savings deposit or debt payment, or a weekly yoga class — put this on your calendar and have a reminder sent to you so you don't forget it.

“Try not. Do or do not. There is no try.” - Yoda in The Empire Strikes Back

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