HOW TO SET AND ACHIEVE
ANY GOAL

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TechWorld WithMilan
simplifying complex topics

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You may wonder why I need to set goals because I know where I'm going (e.g., I'm a software engineer, and it's usually the next step in the career ladder). However, you will probably get nowhere high on that ladder or get somewhere if you think this way. **But somewhere is not where you want to be**.

Where you are now is based on your decisions **from 5 to 10 years ago**. Goal setting is choosing the rewards you want to enjoy and the **costs** you are willing to pay.

> "*If a man knows not to which port he sails, no wind is favorable*" - Seneca

We will go through the steps for defining your life/work goals.

1. Defining your life vision and mission

The first step in defining goals is to **create a vision and mission statement** for your life purpose. You can do this by answering the following questions:

- What would my life look like if I achieved my goals?
- What's my greatest superpower?
- What drives me?
- What do I like to do in my free time?
- What are my talents?
- What gives me energy when doing it?
- Which job would I like to do so much I would do for free?
- For what reason are people usually asking me for help?
- But also, what stuff I don't like to do?

If it is hard to answer all these questions, you can **talk with your mentor, [coach](), or friends to help you**. Ask them what they think about you and how they see you.

Then, try to **make three things pop up from here**; this is the zone where you need to be in the future.

> *We want to live life according to our own values to be trully happy.*

2. Defining your values

Now, we need to know your core values. Human values are the essential principles that guide how we behave and treat others. They include things like honesty, kindness, and respect. These values help us make decisions, interact with people, and shape our character. They are learned from family, culture, and society and are essential to personal growth and getting along well with others.

How can you define your values? First, you select 3-5 values from the **Maslow B-values list** that mostly resonate with you. Sit quietly, take a look, and select the most resonating with you.

For example, it can be *autonomy, honesty, justice, perfection,* and *order*.
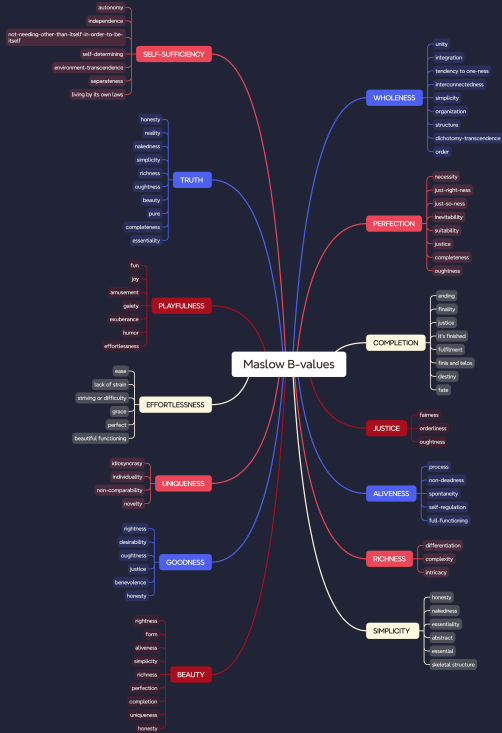
Maslow B-values list

If you want to learn more about life values, check the book "[New Knowledge in Human Values](#)" by Abraham Maslow.

3. Defining your life purpose

When you select your values, the next step is to define your life purpose. This will make it clear to you whether something is good for you. If something is good for you, it must align with your values and purpose.

As Abraham Maslow defined in his book "Hierarchy of Needs: A Theory of Human Motivation**," through the Pyramid of Human Needs, at the top, we have self-actualization**, and this is an important concept. It means that finding our purpose in life and becoming a fulfilled person is something we want to achieve.

Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs

Self – actualisation
- What can i do for others?
- I Inspire others to do their best
- Creativity
- Morality and Ethics
- Inner talent
- Lack of prejudice
- Problem solving
- Fulfilment
- Reciprocity

Esteem / Importance
- I'm an achiever
- I feel important
- Confidence
- Achievement
- Respect of others
- Respect by others

Sense of Belonging
- I know I'm part of something bigger
- I'm happy with my relationships
- Friends
- Family
- Spouse
- Lover

Safety needs
- Of resources
- Of morality
- Of family
- Of body
- Of finances
- Of employment
- Of health

Safety needs
- Air
- Food
- Water
- Sleep
- Sex
- Homeostasis
- Excretion

SELF-ACTUALIZATION

IMPORTANCE

BELONGING

SAFETY

SURVIVAL

How can you define your purpose:

1. **What are your main personal characteristics** (mine is learning and transferring knowledge to others)
2. **How do you like to do it** (for me, it is to digest, simplify, and share knowledge with others)
3. **Now, if the world is perfect, what would it look like?** (e.g., everyone works prosperous lives)

Now, you can create your purpose from these three, e.g., "*I like to help people to be successful and happy by providing them with knowledge.*"

You can fulfill your purpose in different ways, e.g., in this case, you can write for free for others, give lectures, etc. It is important here because this purpose is **ecological**, bringing others good.

> *You can also use tests such as [16 Personalities](#) or [The Four Tendencies](#) to learn more about yourself.*

4. Personal SWOT analysis

A personal SWOT analysis is a tool to identify and assess your **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**. It's a framework for self-evaluation and planning, helping you to understand where you excel, where you can improve, and what external factors may impact your personal and professional growth. Here's how you can conduct one for yourself:

1. **Strengths**: List your internal attributes that are advantageous. This includes professional skills, education, networks, personal traits, or resources. For me, it is my expertise in software engineering and experience.
2. **Weaknesses**: Identify internal areas for improvement. These might be skills you haven't developed yet, personal traits that could be limiting, or resource constraints. Be honest but not overly critical. For example, I don't have time for everything I want.
3. **Opportunities**: Look at the external factors you can capitalize on or use to your advantage. These might include industry trends, networking possibilities, educational opportunities, or emerging markets relevant to your skills and interests.
4. **Threats**: Recognize external challenges or obstacles you might face. These could be market competition, changing technology, economic conditions, or anything hindering your goals or career path.

How to Do It:

- Set aside uninterrupted time for reflection.
- Be honest and objective with yourself.
- Gather input from your family or mentors.

|	**Positive**	**Negative**
Internal	**Strengths** • Writing • Blogging • Software engineering	**Weaknesses** • Not enough time for writing • Lack of initiative in learning new skills
External	**Opportunities** • Industry trends • Networking • Education	**Threats** • Competition • Changing Technology

Personal SWOT Analysis

Here, you can also use **the Wheel of Life exercise**. The Wheel of Life is a simple tool that can help you gain a clearer perspective on your life and set goals for the future. It's a visual exercise that enables you to assess your current level of satisfaction in various areas of your life, like **a pie chart showing how much "pie" you have in each area**.

The Wheel of Life is typically **divided into eight to ten sections**, each representing a different area of life that is important to you. Some common areas include:

- Health and well-being
- Career and professional life
- Finances and material possessions
- Relationships and love
- Personal growth and development
- Fun and leisure
- Spirituality and purpose
- Environment and contribution to the world

For each area, **you rate your current level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10**, with 1 being the least satisfied and 10 being the most comfortable. Once you've rated each area, you can check what areas are thriving while others suffer. This visual representation provides a clear overview of where your life might be out of balance.

Then, you can **decide to take on 2-3 areas where you want to focus in the next period to improve** and make your goals based on those areas.
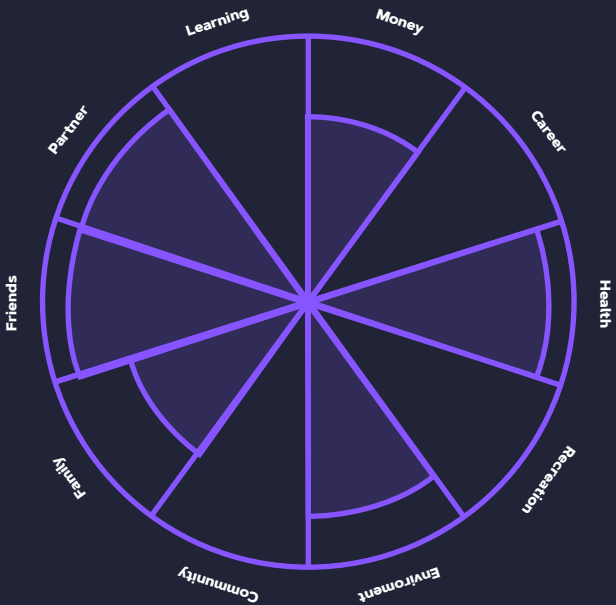
The Wheel of Life exercise

To learn more about this exercise, check PositivePsychology and Noomii.

5. Your Zone Of Genius or Ikigai

Your Zone of Genius refers to a skill or area in which you shine; you accomplish it with such skill and relative ease that others are in awe (as described by psychologist Gay Hendricks in the book **"The Big Leap"** and **"The Genius Zone."** Your creative flow is unrestricted in your zone of genius, and you are actively pursuing goals that fulfill and greatly satisfy you. It's the intersection of your innate abilities and your most significant interest.

How **you can find your zone of genius** is to take all the answers from the previous sections, such as your values, purpose, what you are great at, and what skills you have to fill this image. It will tell you where you need to focus on.

Here is a simple diagram of the concept:

Zone Of Genius

WHAT YOU ENJOY DOING

WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT DOING

YOUR ZONE OF GENIUS

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS
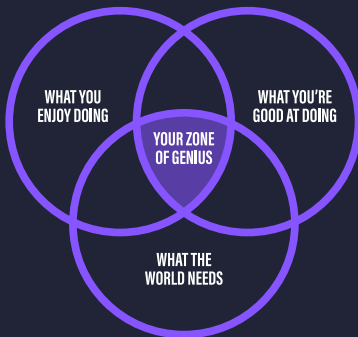
> *The most successful people are not the ones who have had an easy ride but the ones who have overcome challenges and obstacles.*

This concept is similar to **Ikigai**, popularized in "[Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life](#)" by Héctor García and Francesc Miralles. Ikigai is a Japanese term that roughly translates to **"reason for being."** It's the **intersection of what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for**. This concept isn't just about finding your professional calling; it's a compass for creating a balanced, fulfilling life.
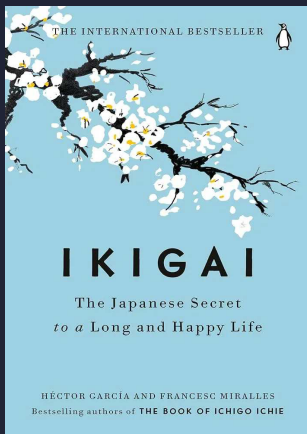
"Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life", García, Héctor, Miralles, Francesco

So, how can we use Ikigai to define meaningful and achievable goals? Here are the four critical elements of Ikigai and how they can guide your goal setting:

- **What you love:** What are you passionate about? What activities make you lose track of time? When you identify your passions, you'll find goals that feel less like work and more like play.
- **What you're good at:** What are your natural talents and skills? Leaning into your strengths can help you set challenging but not impossible goals.
- **What the world needs:** How can you use your skills and passions to make a difference? Finding a way to contribute to something bigger than yourself can add purpose and motivation to your goals.
- **What you can be paid for:** This doesn't have to be about making a fortune, but it is essential to consider how your goals can sustainably fit into your life.

By reflecting on these four elements, you can identify goals aligned with your Ikigai. Here are some examples:

- If you love **writing** and are good at storytelling, a goal could be to **write a novel**.
- If you enjoy **teaching** and have a gift for explaining complex concepts, you could aim to **become a tutor** or online course creator.

6. Defining S.M.A.R.T goals

When you know your values, purpose, strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for being, you can use them to define your goals. Creating the **right, specific, and actionable** goals is essential here. To do this, you can use **the SMART framework**. George T. Doran first coined this term in a 1981 paper titled "[There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives](#)" to help managers set clear and attainable objectives.

SMART stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, Relevant, and **T**ime-bound:

1. **Specific**: Goals should be well-defined and clear. Instead of saying, "I want to grow my newsletter," specify, "I want to grow my newsletter subscribers by 30,000."
2. **Measurable**: Include precise amounts, dates, and other metrics to measure progress. For example, "Increase weekly newsletter content from 1 to 2 articles."
3. **Achievable**: Ensure the goal is attainable with your resources and time. For example, I will write 3.000 words per week.
4. **Relevant**: The goal should align with your broader objectives and values, like enhancing your role or being a good father.
5. **Time-bound**: Set a deadline to create a sense of urgency and focus. For instance, "Achieve the new subscriber goal within 12 months."

So, the **summary** of this goal would be: "*Expand my newsletter to 100,000 subscribers in the next 12 months by consistently writing 3,000 words per week, focusing on key topics in software engineering and leadership*."

Aim to set up to **3 goals per year**. Anything more than that could be overwhelming for our mental space.

Specific	**Measurable**	**Attainable**	**Relevant**	**Time-bound**
S	**M**	**A**	**R**	**T**
G	**O**	**A**	**L**	**S**
What exactly are you trying to achieve?	How will you know when you've achieved it?	Is it genuinely possible to achieve it?	Does it contribute to your agency's revenue growth?	When do you want to achieve this by?

7. Transform goal-setting with OKRs

Another way to set and track goals are OKRs (Objectives and Key Results). They are a powerful goal-setting framework widely used in the tech industry. They turn ambitious goals into trackable outcomes.

Here's how they transform goal-setting:

1. **Objectives:** These are qualitative, inspirational, and aspirational goals. They define the "what" and the "why." For example, "Grow my newsletter's subscriber base significantly."
2. **Key Results:** These are quantitative and measurable outcomes that indicate progress towards the objective. They answer "how" you know you're achieving your objective. For example, "Increase weekly new subscribers by 20%."

How we can implement OKRs:
1. **Pick a life category** you want to focus on improving (e.g. Finances)
2. **Create an "Objective"** around that life category (i.e. Keep and grow money) and break it down into "Key Results" that you can track in the progress dashboard.
3. Each "Key Result" can be broken down into quarterly targets (i.e. Save $20,000 before Q4; Save $10,000 before Q2; Save $5,000 before Q1) to **make your goals more manageable.**

For example, if our objective is to "Keep and grow money", we can define two key results:
1. Save 2.000$ before Q4.
2. Save 1.000$ before Q2.

One key problem with OKRs is that we often fall into the **OKR trap and create a task list**. Because it's just task list (output), not the goal we want to achieve.

I've seen a lot of confusion here, even in my own planning over the years. What we want to do here is **to have an outcome (not outpout) focus** that will result in a certain impact we want to have. Here we want to understand better our users or our company, how to solve important problems for them. **The bigger problem we are solving we are more important to the company or our users.** The outcomes only show that something has been done, they do not however show if this has also resulted in actual benefits.

Outputs are results achieved in a specific activity (usually a tasks list), while the **outcome** is one step further, it says more about the **effects we achieved with our outputs** (i.e. value we provided). While outputs are intended to achieve higher-level goals, outcomes' primary goal is to provide actual, worthwhile, and measurable results. Also, it's much easier to measure outputs than outcomes, as outputs are usually quantitative, while outcomes can be both qualitative and quantitative. Here success depends a lot on the perception of our target group.

We often find that many OKR newbies fail to **distinguish between outputs and outcomes**, i.e., we tend to define them in an output-driven manner with a list of activities and to-dos. OKRs are actually about achieving results that **bring real value to our company or users.** You can only assess your progress toward attaining your goal when each major result is phrased in a way that represents relevant outcomes.

So, **OKRs should always be written with outcomes in mind**. Teams can collaborate to achieve a specific goal within a set time frame when using outcome-based OKRs. Employees are much more motivated in this manner than they would be if they were working via tasks.

Also, don't forget to regularly to check-ins on your OKRs. This could be weekly or monthly. Adjust strategies as needed based on these insights. At the end of each OKR cycle, **reflect on what worked and what didn't**. This learning phase is crucial for continuous improvement.

Output → creates → **Outcome** → creates → **Impact**

Task list   Achievements   Results

Examples of OKRs for Engineering organizations

8. Forget goals; build systems

Goals are good for *planning* your progress, and **systems** are suitable for *making* progress. With systems, it means you need to have three things:

7.1. Split goals into action items and reflect

What is essential here is to **break down your yearly goals into quarterly, monthly, and weekly goals and tasks**. Weekly goals are critical because you can focus on some tasks to achieve your goal every week.
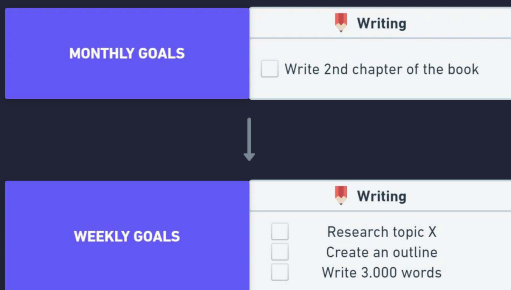
Break monthly into weekly goals

I particularly like weekly goals and doing a <u>weekly review</u> to improve those tasks because it is an excellent frequency to assess the progress for goals.

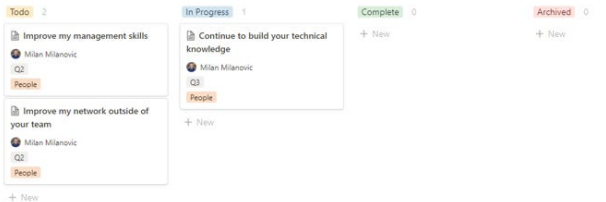## 7.2 System for Managing Goals

First, you need to track your goals using **some tool** for this. You can use any tool, such as Notion, Trello, or similar, to track your goals, break them into tasks, and measure your progress.

Tracking goals in Notion

Next, when you have a board, you need a methodology to deal with those goals and tasks, and for this, you can use the **"Getting Things Done" (GTD) methodology."** It's a system designed to capture, clarify, organize, reflect upon, and engage with tasks and ideas. When integrated with SMART goals, GTD transforms how one approaches goal achievement.

For instance, if your SMART goal is to grow your newsletter to 100,000 subscribers in 12 months by writing 3,000 words per week and hosting monthly webinars, GTD helps manage this goal. You start by **capturing all related tasks, including topic research, content creation, and marketing strategies**. Each task is clarified and organized into actionable steps, like setting specific times for writing and planning webinars.

> *Here is the GTD template for Notion you can duplicate. In the Bonus section you can check the Goal tracker template.*

7.3 Strong focus

With this in mind, **we need a strong focus** that can be achieved in the following way:

1. **Select one priority per day**, what you want to accomplish (abandon others).
2. **Eat the frog first** (do the hardest thing in the morning). We have the most energy in the first 3h when we wake up.
3. **Manage your energy, not time** (work at the time when you feel most energized, depending on your chronotype).
4. **Schedule deep work periods**: working in a quiet location or adopting a work philosophy that suits your lifestyle (monastic, bimodal, rhythmic, or journalistic).
5. **Embrace Boredom**: Train your brain to resist distractions. Practice focusing without succumbing to simpler tasks or social media. It's a skill to develop, not an innate talent.
6. **Drain the Shallows**: Minimize shallow work by scheduling every minute of your day. This doesn't mean working more, but working more efficiently on high-priority tasks.
7. **Only check e-mails and phone messages at specific times**
8. **Remove all tasks that distract you**

To learn more about the deep focus, check the book "**Deep Work**" by Cal Newport.
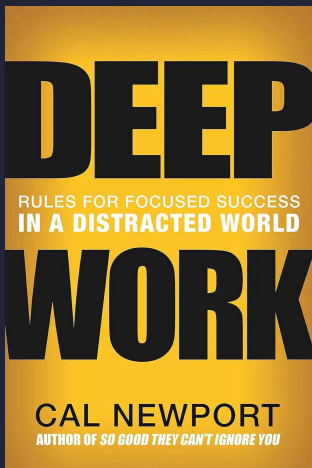
Deep Work by Cal Newport

9. Finding the right motivation

We often see that people who get goals right and have a good system for tracking them often lack motivation. To deal with this, we can use **The Goldilocks rule** (from the book "Atomic Habits" by James Clear). The Goldilocks Rule states that **humans experience peak motivation when working on tasks right on the edge of their current abilities**. So it means we should do things that are not too hard or too easy but just right.

For example, if you're writing 3,000 words per week, adjust the complexity of the topics or the depth of analysis to keep it engaging. If it's too easy, you might lose interest; if it is too hard, you could get overwhelmed. The key is **finding that middle ground** where you're learning and growing, but not to the point of frustration.

This approach maintains motivation because it **keeps you in a state of 'flow'** - a psychological state where you are fully immersed and enjoying the task.

The Goldilocks Rule

**JUST RIGHT**

TOO EASY

TOO HARD

10. Building proper habits

One thing that can help you a lot with achieving your goals is to form a proper habit that will lead you to your goals. In his influential book, "**Atomic Habits**," James Clear eloquently outlines why small, consistent actions are more impactful than one-off, monumental efforts.

As Clear explains, habits are the **compound interest of self-improvement; tiny changes, repeated over time, can lead to remarkable results**. They effectively bridge the gap between ambition and accomplishment. This is especially true in the fast-paced and ever-evolving world of technology and leadership.

The Power of Tiny Gains

1% better every day $1.01^{365} = $ 31.18

1% worse every day $0.99^{365} = $ 0.03

Improvement of Decline

1 Year
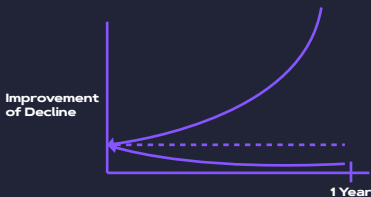
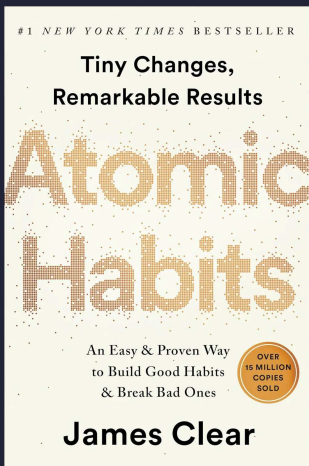The Power of Tiny Gains by James Clear ("Atomic Habits" - page 16)

We can use the 3 R's of habit formation to form the proper habits. They are:

1. **Reminder (Cue):** This is the trigger that initiates the behavior. A bit of information or a regular occurrence signals it's time to start a habit. For example, if you're looking to build a habit of writing daily for your blog or newsletter, the reminder could be a set time of the day, like right after your morning coffee (schedule it in your calendar or TODO list).

2. **Routine (Response):** This is the actual behavior or action you take in response to the reminder. **It's the habit itself**. For example, you are sitting down to write for a specific period or until you've achieved a certain word count.

3. **Reward:** This is the benefit you gain from doing the habit. The reward helps your brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future. For a writing habit, the reward might be the satisfaction of sharing knowledge with your readers, getting positive feedback, or the sense of progress toward growing your subscriber base. But it could even be a cup of coffee or chocolate after writing time.

The 3 R's Of Habit Formation

1 REMINDER
The cue or trigger that starts the habit.
(Example: Traffic light turns green.)

ROUTINE 2
The action you take. The habit itself.
(Example: You drive through the intersection.)

If the reward is positive, then you'll have a desire to repeat the action the next time a reminder pops up. Eventually this repetition will form a new habit.

REWARD
3 The benefit you gain from doing the habit.
(Example: You get closer to your destination.)

To learn more about habits and habit formation, check the James Clear book "**Atomic Habits**." Or the book "**The Power of Habit**" by Charles Duhig.


Atomic Habits by James Clear

11. Be passionate with Grit

Even though you define good goals, have motivation, and have the proper habits, you can still fail to achieve them. And here we have **Grit** to save us. In her book "**Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance,**" Angela Duckworth explains the concept of Grit. Grit combines resilience, ambition, and self-control. It's about **maintaining your commitment and passion over time, even in adversity**. People with Grit are more likely to embrace these challenges and grow. They view setbacks not as overwhelming obstacles but as opportunities to learn and improve.

> *Grit [noun] - Possessing indomitable spirit. Having a drive for achievement regardless of upbringing or situation. Earning success in the trenches through hard work.*

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance, by Angela Duckworth
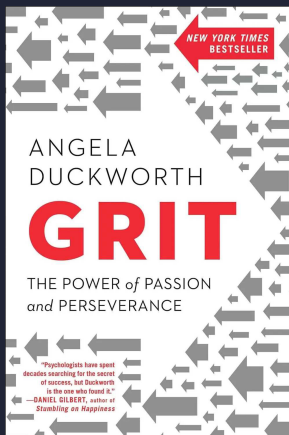
So, how can you develop more Grit? Duckworth suggests:

- **Find your passion:** Explore, experiment, and discover what lights you up. That intrinsic motivation fueled by passion is the engine that keeps you going when the going gets tough.

- **Embrace the "Hard Thing Rule":** Step outside your comfort zone, push past initial frustration, and seek challenges that make you grow. Remember, **growth often happens outside the zone of immediate pleasure**.

- **Develop lifelong interest:** Cultivate curiosity and a love of learning. This intrinsic drive to understand and explore keeps you engaged in the long haul, even when progress feels slow.

- **Build resilience:** Learn from setbacks, view them as opportunities for growth, and don't let failures define you. Remember, Grit is not just about pushing through but bouncing back stronger. **This is the most crucial part.**

If you want to learn more about Grit, check Angela's TED talk:

Another book that I could recommend on this topic is "*[Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder](#)*" by Nassim Nicholas Taleb.

*He introduces the idea of **antifragility** and provides insights into how we can apply this concept to various aspects of life and business. Antifragility is about turning challenges into growth opportunities, building mental and emotional muscles through controlled exposure to stress, embracing uncertainty and experimentation.*

Check the video from Talks at Google below.

12. Be Productive

I was always amazed by top performers. I asked myself what those people do and how they are much better than others. Then, I started to research more and talk directly to some of them. I finally managed to get some top performers as my mentors and, in the end, became one of them. I learned that they are not better than others, but they use some techniques that help them achieve more.

Here are some productivity techniques you can use daily to achieve 10x more than you imagined.

11.1 Focus on ONE thing

A primary differentiator between top performers and others is that top performers don't multitask. It is [scientifically proven](#) that our brain cannot multitask, and even if we try to do that, we lose a significant amount of time to concentrate on another task.

We can achieve this by **blocking our time in the calendar early in the day when we have the most energy** to do something and try to **keep the focus on it**. **Try not to manage your time; manage your energy**. Enable yourself to have at least 2-3h of in-depth work sessions because you need 20-30mins to get in the flow state (4h is the max you can do in a day). Set **one goal for each work block** and break it into **actionable tasks**. Focus on only **one task at a time**. Leave the afternoon for meetings or some other repetitive or administrative tasks. **Batch** similar tasks and tackle them collectively. When you finish a job, reward yourself with an activity you like (and yes, put this into the calendar too).

This single-tasking approach not only leads to better-quality work and enhanced problem-solving but also reduces stress and mental fatigue, promoting a sense of accomplishment and motivation to maintain productivity throughout the day.

2h
Focused Work

4h
Distracted Work
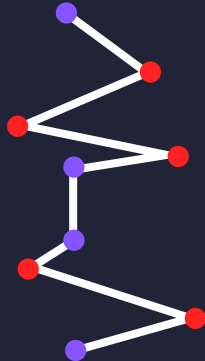
11.2 Prioritize tasks by using the Eisenhower Matrix

We need to understand first that **urgent is different from necessary!**

Urgent tasks require immediate attention, and essential tasks mean that those activities have an outcome that leads to us achieving goals. What is necessary here is to make a difference between "urgent" and "important" tasks.

To do this, you can use **The Eisenhower Matrix**. It is a simple decision-making tool that helps you distinguish between important, unimportant, and not urgent tasks. It splits duties into four boxes that rank which studies you should focus on first and which you should delegate or delete.
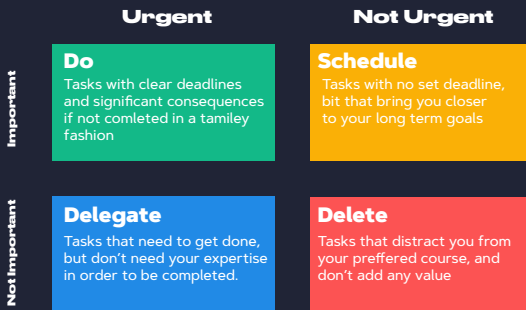
Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 34th President of the United States and a five-star commander during World War II, first proposed the Eisenhower Matrix when he said, "I have two kinds of problems, the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent."

Eisenhower's statements inspired Stephen Covey, author of [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](), to create the now-famous task management system known as the **Covey Time Management Matrix**. It brings many benefits, such as increased productivity, clear habits, and better work-life balance.

When you get a task, you put it in one of **the four quadrants**:

1. **Important & Urgent (Do):** this task requires immediate attention, which means "do it now" (e.g., something you can do below 2mins). It could be *responding to necessary e-mails, finishing a client project*, escalating in a team, illness, etc.

2. **Important & Not Urgent (Schedule):** these tasks do not have fixed deadlines but bring you to your long-term goals. It would be best if you spent the most time here. Rank and schedule them. These activities are usually *strategic planning, education, and exercise*.

3. **Not Important & Urgent (Delegate):** these tasks must be done but usually drain your energy. Try to delegate them since they are not important. Examples of such activities are *responding to non-important e-mails, meal preparation, lengthy phone calls, or meetings with no apparent purpose*.

4. **Not Important & Not Urgent (Delete):** these activities only distract you from your goals and do not add anything to your value, e.g., *watching TV, checking Facebook, etc*. Try to limit them.

So, the trick is to focus on the right tasks by prioritizing essential tasks and saying NO to non-important and non-urgent ones.

	Urgent	**Not Urgent**
Important	**Do** — Tasks with clear deadlines and significant consequences if not comleted in a tamiley fashion	**Schedule** — Tasks with no set deadline, bit that bring you closer to your long term goals
Not Important	**Delegate** — Tasks that need to get done, but don't need your expertise in order to be completed.	**Delete** — Tasks that distract you from your preffered course, and don't add any value

Eisenhower Matrix

Another framework you can use here is the **Impact-Effort Matrix**. Here, you prioritize your tasks based on their potential impact and the effort required to implement them. The ability of a course of action to accomplish a specific project aim is often used to assess its impact. The time, money, or other resources necessary to act are measured. The relative result and effort of various acts can be compared using an impact effort matrix to determine which ones are most likely to be successful. When we create a matrix, we want to **focus on things with high impact and low effort, while we don't want to do something with** increased effort and low impact.
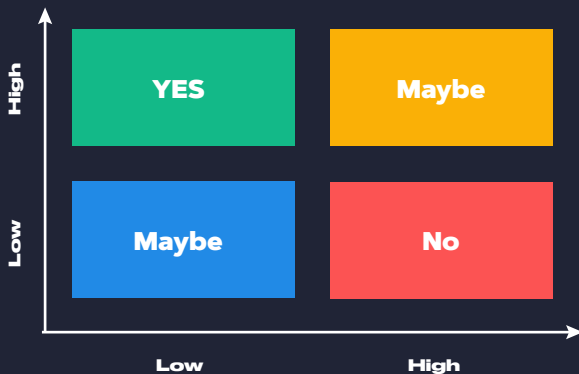
The Impact / Effort Matrix

Other prioritization methods exist, such as **RICE, ABCDE, MoSCoW prioritization** and more.

11.3 Stay organized by using the GTD method.

We all need help with what we should do next and what to prioritize. So here comes the **Getting Things Done (GTD) framework** to help. [David Allen](#) developed it in the 1990s. The main idea behind GTD is that by getting your tasks and commitments out of your head and into a trusted system, you can reduce stress, increase productivity, and free up mental space to focus on more important things.

Here are **the critical components of the GTD system**:

1. **Capture**: This is the process of collecting all things that have your attention. It can be anything from emails, thoughts, ideas, tasks, or projects. The idea is to write it all down in a "trusted system" outside your head to reduce cognitive load.

2. **Clarify**: In this step, you process what you've captured. This involves deciding whether the item is actionable or not. If it's not actionable, you can discard it, incubate it for potential future action, or file it as a reference. If it's actionable and can be done in less than two minutes, you do it immediately. Otherwise, you delegate it or defer it.

3. **Organize**: Once you've determined what you need to do, you organize those tasks. This might involve assigning them to specific projects, scheduling them in your calendar, or placing them on a "next actions" list.

4. **Reflect**: This involves regularly reviewing your system to ensure it remains up-to-date and aligned with your commitments and goals. Allen suggests a weekly review to clean up, update, and revise your lists.

5. **Engage**: This is the actual doing of the tasks. With a well-organized and updated system, you can confidently choose what to do at any given moment.

In addition, David Allen emphasizes using **context-based lists for your tasks**. For instance, some tasks may be done only at your computer, while others may be done when traveling. By grouping tasks based on context, you can tackle them more efficiently.

So, how it works in practice or by using a tool is to have the following **lists**:

1. **In** - Here, we put all ideas we have as they occur. Write down every task, vision, or commitment that comes to mind, whether small or insignificant. When you add items here, ask yourself if this is actionable. If the answer is NO, you should remove it or add it to the **Someday/maybe** list. If it's actionable in the physical and visible sense, you can move it to the **Next Actions** list.

2. **Next Actions** - The most crucial section, we have everything you can choose to do at any moment. When determining the next action, consider if it takes less than two minutes. If this is the case, do it immediately (**2-minute rule**). If an effort needs less than **two minutes,** it gives us overhead to track compared to how long it takes. If you need more than 2 minutes, delegate it if possible and put it in the Waiting for a list or your Next actions list if not.

   Here, you can use the **Eisenhower matrix** to help you understand what you should do immediately, what to delegate, and what to delete.

3. **Waiting for** - This is the list where you put stuff you delegated to others, or you're waiting to reply to, or some issue blocks it.

4. **Projects** - This is where we put stuff that needs more than one action, so a grouping for activities. It is a simple list of projects with two or more steps. And be sure that there is at least one action from a project in the Next actions list.

5. **Someday/maybe** - This is where you put your ideas without concrete actions, which you would like to pursue in the future, but now you need more time.

You can use any TODO app for this method, such as **[Todoist](#)**, **[Microsoft To-Do](#)**, etc.

Getting Things Done Workflow

"STUFF"

↓

Inbox

↓

What is it?

↓

Is it actionable? → **NO** → Trash 🗑

↓ → ...

YES

↓

Will it take less than 2 mins?

YES **NO**

↓ ↓ ↘

DO IT **DEFER IT** **DELEGATE IT**

↓ ↘ ↓

Calendar 📅 Options (next actions) Waiting ⧗

11.4 How to deal with Parkinson's Law?

Parkinson's Law states that work expands to fill the time available for completion. Unfortunately, this means that we usually tend to **procrastinate** about what we need to do to fill our day and even to work overtime. So, in the end, we do less than we could.

To fight it, we can use **the Pomodoro Technique**. It is a simple and effective way to increase productivity and focus by breaking down work into **intervals of 25 minutes**, separated by **short breaks**.

There are the steps to use the Pomodoro Technique:

1. **Choose a task to work on**, prioritize your tasks for the day, and select the first. Then, try to "**eat the frog**," i.e., tackle the most challenging task in the morning.
2. **Set a timer for 25 minutes** and start working on the task.
3. **Work on the task until the timer goes off**. Then, focus on the task at hand until the timer goes off. Avoid distractions during this time, such as checking your phone or browsing the internet.
4. **Take a short break**. When the timer goes off, take a short break for 5 minutes. Use this time to stretch, grab a snack, or do something else that is not work-related.
5. **Repeat**. After the break, set the timer for another 25 minutes and continue working on the task. Repeat this cycle until you have completed four 25-minute intervals, then take a longer break of 15-30 minutes.

We can also use some tools to help us here, such as **Mariana Timer** or **Pomello**.

The Pomodoro Technique

A simple method to beat procastrination

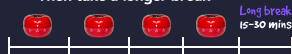**1 Plan your tasks**
How many pomodoros might you need?

2 Do 1 pomodoro
Time for 25 mins then take a 5 min break

focused work
25 mins

Break
5 mins

=

3 Repeat x4 pomodoros
Then take a longer break

Long break
15-30 mins

11.5 How to beat Procrastination?

Whatever we want to do, there is always something more substantial. We put it in our TODO list, sometimes with a reminder, and then when it alerts us, we postpone it to another day until we forget it. So, it goes in this direction, a direction of procrastination. Yes, we want to do something about this, but we need to understand better what is happening here and what we can do.

Jim Rohn introduced this term and further expanded on by John Maxwell and others. It's called **the Law of Diminishing Intent**, which says: "*The longer you wait to take action the less likely you are to take action*." And this law is the reason why we procrastinate.

THE LAW OF DIMINISHING INTENT
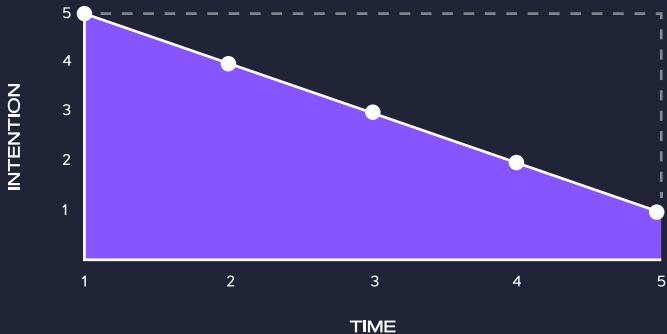
So, what are the strategies that we can do to fight it:

1. **Take action immediately if possible**. This is important if something you need to do is small. Why do we need to do it immediately? Because over time, your intention and motivation for taking action will diminish. Sometimes, we are scared or do not know what should be the next step. Take your time to clarify and make a plan; if you cannot, take the next step; other steps could emerge independently.

2. **Do something small about it today.** Take your time and invest something in your goals because the effort you invest in a task compounds over time (**the law of compounding effort**). So choose a job you want to complete, find the little meaningful peace of work, and do it today.

   Why is this also important? When you start to do something, your brain will work on this **subconsciously** while walking, sleeping, etc. This is why we have "aha" moments when we expect it. It also motivates us because we have a sense of progress and are less likely to quit once we invest our time.

3. **Do your most important work first**. If we have many things to do and don't know what to focus on, we can use the Ivy Lee method, a great productivity technique. It works in a way that we select 5-6 tasks to be done and rank them to work on them tomorrow. Then, only work on the first thing until it's finished, then go to another one, etc. At the end of each day, plan for the next day. If we need help with rank, we can use the Eisenhower matrix.

11.6 Do weekly reviews

We have yearly, monthly, weekly, and even daily goals if we are well organized. We managed to transfer some plans to daily habits, which was the game-changer. Yet, some goals are not worth pursuing, and we are focused on more minor and unimportant tasks or fulfilled with our actions.

The remediation for this is to have weekly adjustments in our work by reusing **the Weekly Reviews** approach. With Weekly Reviews, we can stop, pause, think about where we are headed, and take control of our TODO list.

A [study from Harvard Business School](#) shows that we **learn better if we reflect on what we have already done**. And it is like achieving our goals. By meditating, we move forward faster. With Weekly Reviews, we learn more about ourselves (e.g., at which time of the day you have more energy) and continually improve (we measure and track progress).

There are several ways you can do Weekly Reviews, and this is the one I prefer:

1. **Do Weekly Reviews on Sunday evening** - I usually spend around 20-30mins, and now, I can reflect on a preceding week and plan for the next one. You can choose Friday afternoon or any other time you'd like.

2. **Go through my checklist** - I ask myself different questions, such as: what are my five accomplishments, what did I do well, what do I need to improve, and how can I be better next week? For example, can I reorganize my calendar better (e.g., to work in batches)?
   What is essential here is to **be objective** as much as possible (try to be unbiased and honest) and **be kind** to yourself. For example, if you missed doing something, don't think bad about yourself; reflect on what went wrong and plan a more productive week.

3. **Start planning the following week** - I check my goals for the next week. What are my top 3 priorities I want to achieve? Is everything I'm doing helping me reach my goals? What are potential roadblocks, and what can I do about them (if there is a blocker, it is a go)? I reuse the GTD method to continue with my plan.

As an extra step you can do, I can recommend **journaling**. You can do it every day at some fixed time, which will help you discover possibilities, thoughts, and ideas the next time you do Weekly Reviews.

WEEKLY REVIEW

Date: _____

TOP 5 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

WEEKLY SCORE:

WHAT DID I DO WELL?

_____
_____
_____
_____

WHAT DO I NEED TO IMPROVE?

_____
_____
_____
_____

LESSONS LEARNED

_____
_____
_____
_____

GRATEFUL FOR

_____
_____
_____
_____

HOW CAN NEXT WEEK BE BETTER?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

TechWorld
WithMilan

Weekly Review Template

11.7 Some additional considerations

Along with the suggestions above, there are a few more that could be helpful to everyone:

- **Revise the daily schedule the night before** or immediately in the morning. Here, I rank my list and select the one big task I want to achieve tomorrow. Of course, there could be more tasks, but the fewer you have, the better.

- **Don't just think, too**. We often think about things and do nothing. We need to do things as this is the thing that only counts. Always focus on 20% of things that matter (**Pareto principle**). This can help teams prioritize their efforts, too.
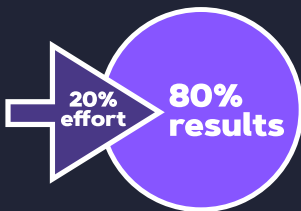

Pareto Principle

- **Say NO to everything by default**, especially to meetings - Yes, it's hard for large corporations with meeting cultures. Try to mark your sessions as worth it and then decide to go to the next one. And also, make no default for everything that doesn't bring value to your life.

- **Automate everything you can**. Try to use different tools to automate everything you can, especially repetitive tasks.

- **Timeboxing**. If TODO lists or GTD don't work for you, try timeboxing. It is a calendar-based system. If you have something to do, take some time, e.g., four hours, and put it on the calendar. Try to bundle similar tasks together, reducing the amount of context switching needed between tasks.

- **Try Time-blocking**. Try to divide your calendar by specific tasks, which enable you to be more intentional and avoid distractions. This means you can have fixed or flexible, as well as ad-hoc tasks inside.

- **Use a note-taking system** like [Second Brain](#) to make you more organized. You can put stuff you need to remember and easily find it later there.

- **Take good sleep and exercise.** Last but not least. This is the thing that can affect productivity the most. Usually, it needs 7-8h of sleep to maintain physical and mental health. Also, try to eat healthily and to have some physical activities. For example, regular walks can do wonders, as [scientific research shows](#).

- **Do something relaxing**. Try one of the techniques for mindfulness, such as meditation. It will help you to enter a flow state more quickly and understand yourself better.
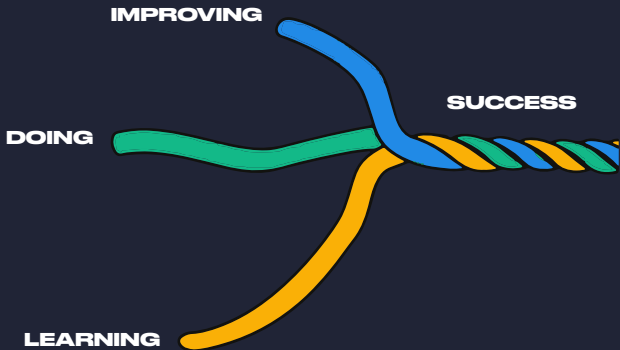
13. Growth vs Fixed mindset

Carol Dweck's book "**Mindset**" revolutionized our understanding of how we think about our abilities and potential. She identified two distinct mindsets: the **growth mindset and the fixed mindset**. These mindsets profoundly impact how we approach challenges, learn, and ultimately achieve our goals.
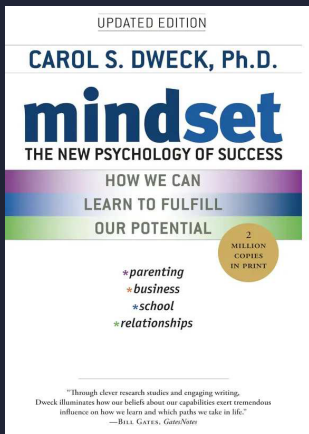
Mindset: the new psychology of success, by Carol S. Dweck

12.1 The Growth Mindset

People with a growth mindset believe their abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and learning. They see challenges as opportunities to grow and setbacks as temporary hurdles on their journey to success. They are intrinsically motivated to learn and improve, and they value the process of learning over simply achieving results.

Characteristics of a growth mindset:

- **Belief in the power of effort:** People with a growth mindset believe their abilities can be improved through effort and practice. They are not afraid to put in the hard work, even when it is difficult.
- **Love challenges:** They see challenges as opportunities to learn and grow. They are unafraid to step outside their comfort zone and try new things.
- **Learn from mistakes:** They view mistakes as learning opportunities, not failures. They will analyze their mistakes and adjust to improve their performance next time.
- **Persistence:** They are not easily discouraged by setbacks. They keep going even when things are tough because they believe they can eventually succeed.

12.2 The Fixed Mindset

People with a fixed mindset believe that their abilities and intelligence are fixed and cannot be changed. They see challenges as threats to their self-worth and avoid them whenever possible. They are more focused on achieving results than on the process of learning, and they may give up easily when things get tough.

Characteristics of a fixed mindset:

- **Belief in innate talent:** People with a fixed mindset believe that talent is something you are born with. They do not believe that their abilities can be improved through effort.
- **Fear of failure:** They are afraid to fail because they believe it will reflect poorly on their intelligence or abilities.
- **Avoid challenges:** They avoid challenges because they do not want to risk failing or looking bad.
- **Slow to start, but give up easily:** They may give up easily when things get tough because they do not believe they can succeed.

The growth mindset is important for achieving success and living a fulfilling life. People with a growth mindset are more likely to succeed in achieving their goals. They are also more resilient in the face of challenges and more likely to live happy and fulfilling lives.

12.3 How to Develop a Growth Mindset

- **Challenge your negative thoughts:** When you think negatively about your abilities, challenge them. Ask yourself if the evidence supports your thoughts; try reframing them more positively. Say to yourself, "*I don't know how to do this YET, but I will learn.*"

- **Embrace challenges:** Step outside your comfort zone and try new things. Even if you don't succeed initially, you will learn from the experience. When there is pain, this means learning. View challenges as opportunities.

- **Learn from mistakes:** See mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow. Don't beat yourself up over them; try to do better next time. Try not to use the word "failing," but use "learning." Even better, learn from others mistakes.

- **Try different learning methods:** There's no one-size-fits-all model for learning. Be flexible in your strategies.

- **Celebrate effort and progress:** Focus on the effort you are putting in and your progress rather than just on the results.

- **Surround yourself with positive people:** Spend time with people with a growth mindset who will support you.

Remember, it takes time and effort to develop a growth mindset. But it is worth it! With a growth mindset, you can achieve anything you want.

FIXED MINDSET

vs

GROWTH MINDSET

Avoids challeges

Shy away from things you dont know

Unable to handle criticism or feedback

gives up easily

Belives failiure is the limit of ability

My abilities are unchanging

Whenn frustrated, gives up

Challenges help me grow

I can learn anytging I want to do

Views feedback and criticism as an opportunity for growth

Resiliant to advertisity and strong mental fortitude

My abilities can develop and grow

Looks for the positive in every situation

14. Tips and tricks

Here are some tips and tricks you can use to achieve your goals:

- When you have goals, **tell someone.** By telling someone, you will feel more obligated to fulfill your goals.
- Try to focus on the **plan**. Be **persistent**! Don't change your goals often, but adjust them occasionally (e.g., quarterly or in a half-year).
- Use the "**Seinfeld Strategy**" to focus on daily progress. You marked each day on a calendar when you worked on your goals, aiming to create a chain of X's over time. The key is not to break the chain, fostering consistency over perfection.
- Use **Accountability buddy.** Find a partner who shares similar professional aspirations or understands your goals. Establish regular check-ins, either weekly or bi-weekly, to discuss progress, challenges, and next steps. During these sessions, be transparent about your achievements and setbacks.
- If you have a hard time defining your goals, **pick someone who achieved what you want to achieve**, and then:
  - **Deconstruct** their process.
  - Select them as a **mentor** (don't be scared; you will be surprised how many people will say yes).
  - Do what **you know** will work.
- Put your goals in **front of you** and read them every night before sleep and every morning when you wake up. This is a powerful technique!
- There is also a Japanese word, "Oubaitori," which means "**Don't compare yourself to others."** Comparing ourselves to others can lead to negative self-esteem. Everyone has strengths, weaknesses, and paths, so focusing on our progress and accomplishments rather than comparing ourselves to others is essential.
- And don't forget to **celebrate** even small wins!

Learn more about goals

After 25 years of dealing with successful people in business, universities, and relationship settings, Stephen R. Covey noticed that great achievers were frequently troubled by emptiness. To comprehend why, He read self-help, self-improvement, and popular psychology books from the past 200 years. Here, he observed a striking historical disparity between **two kinds of success.**

According to Covey, **developing your character rather than your personality is the key to long-term success**. More than what we say or do, who we are speaks volumes. A set of guiding principles is the foundation for the "Character Ethic." According to Covey, most religious, social, and ethical systems uphold these ideas as self-evident and timeless. They are applicable everywhere.

Covey's seven habits are composed of the primary principles of character upon which happiness and success are based. **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People** puts forward a principle-centered approach to personal and interpersonal effectiveness.

1. Be Proactive: Take initiative and responsibility for your actions. Don't blame others or circumstances; focus on what you can influence.

2. Begin with the End in Mind: Define clear, personal, and professional goals. Visualize the outcomes you desire, shaping your actions toward achieving them.

3. Put First Things First: Prioritize tasks based on importance, not urgency. Invest time in activities that align with your core values and goals.

4. Think Win-Win: Seek mutually beneficial solutions in interactions. It's not about being nice; it's about being effective, valuing and respecting others.

5. Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood: Listen empathetically. Understanding others' perspectives can significantly improve relationships and problem-solving.

6. Synergize: Combine people's strengths through teamwork to achieve goals no individual could. Value differences and leverage them for collective success.

7. Sharpen the Saw: Regularly renew and enhance yourself in four areas: physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual. This habit ensures longevity and effectiveness in your other habits.

Following these habits represents one of the important elements in career growth I always recommend, especially if you aim to become a **top performer** in your organization.

Everything we discussed here is aligned with what Stephen R. Covey wrote about goals in his book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" under 2. Begin with the end in mind.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen R. Covey

If you want to research goals more, I recommend the book "**Goals!: How to Get Everything You Want**" by Brian Tracy.
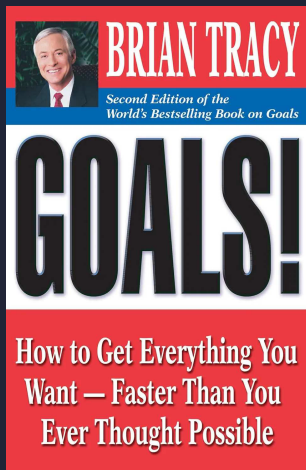
Goals!: How to Get Everything You Want" by Brian Tracy

Also, check the following three **Huberman Lab** podcast episodes from the Dr. Andrew Huberman podcast:

- **The Science of Setting & Achieving Goals** - Dr. Huberman talks about the science of goal-setting, evaluation, and pursuit in this episode. He describes the neural (brain) circuits that drive the establishment and pursuit of goals. He also outlines nine scientifically proven tools everyone can use to achieve their objectives.

- **Goals Toolkit: How to Set & Achieve Your Goals** - He explains science-based techniques in this episode for setting and achieving goals to optimize the probability of success. He explains how to determine a priority and accomplish a certain objective by methodically evaluating the degree of difficulty, measurability, benchmarks, and stages of action required to get from the beginning to the end.

- **How to Build Immense Inner Strength** - In this episode, David Goggins (ex-Navy seal) explains how facing his early struggles—which included learning disabilities, physical and mental abuse, and obesity—became a discipline of intense introspection, which ultimately helped him transform those experiences into a superhuman work ethic.

Bonus: Free Goal Tracker

Here, you can check a simple and free **Goal Tracker in Notion**. It allows you to track your goals, where each goal can have multiple steps and a deadline.

You can duplicate it as a template and adjust it more for your needs.

Goal Tracker in Notion

Conclusion

And in the end, don't forget that **success is worked on**! Treat any failure as a scientist; it is just a data point and something you learned along the way to success. It is not important **how many times you failed but how many times you managed to stand up after falling.** Failure is simply a **cost** you must pay to be **correct.**

In any case, to succeed is to want, try, fail, and try again to succeed finally! **You need a winning mindset.**

I wish you a great year ahead 🤛!

Chances of success

I'm eager to hear your opinion on this topic. Feel free to contact me *directly*.

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simplifying complex topics