

7 Steps to Turn Your Self-Improvement Desires Into Reality

“Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.” - **John Lennon**

How many times have we told ourselves in complete earnestness, “I’m going to be more organized and productive from now on.”? Or that the diet starts tomorrow? Or that we’re going to make a real effort to exercise now?



Photo courtesy of [James Jordan](#)

Only to have that enthusiasm fizzle away, and all our best intentions come to nothing?

It’s the most common thing in the world (besides bacteria) — the honest and fervent desire for self-improvement, followed by inaction or giving in to temptations, followed by guilt or giving up. Bridget Jones captured it best, writing her constant resolutions into her diary. “Will definitely go to the gym this afternoon.” Only to be followed by a binge of pastries followed by drinking and smoking.

We’re all Bridget Jones. It happens to the best of us. It’s inertia at work, mixed with a bit of laziness as well as the very human trait of giving in to desires despite all the good intentions in the world.

So how do we beat inertia and temptations? Four basic ways, really:

1. **Get moving, a bit at a time.** Inertia is beat only by movement. Once you get going, momentum builds up and inertia is no longer a factor. So the key is to get started, and you do that not by trying to go from 0 to 60 in 5 seconds, but by trying to go from 0 to 5mph in a day or two. That’s doable. It’s all about baby steps. Once you get going, you’re golden.
2. **Be accountable.** Laziness, the second culprit, is beat by a bit of public pressure. We all get lazy from time to time (or, to be more honest, all the time), and there’s nothing wrong with that. But to beat laziness, we must apply a bit of pressure, in the form of accountability. There’s nothing wrong with a little pressure, as long as it’s not overdone. Pressure is a motivating thing, especially when it’s positive. Positive pressure includes encouragement from family or friends, an online forum, a help group in your neighborhood, or the readers of your blog.
3. **Ignore failures — giving in to temptation is OK.** We will always give in to temptation. Plan for it, accept it, move on. There’s no need to beat yourself up.
4. **Motivate yourself.** Most importantly, you want to really want it. It’s not enough to feel pressure to do something — you have to really desire it. I mean, really desire it, not just think it’s something you should do, or that you’ll be a better person for doing it. If pressure gives you the push toward your goal, motivation gives you the pull.

Given those strategies for beating the obstacles to making your desires become reality ... how do we implement them? How do we go from theory to actual action steps? Easy. Seven simple steps, that you can do today. Really. Do them today.

1. Make a date. Right now. All the good intentions in the history of the universe mean nothing if you don't actually get started. And the only way to get started is to take action, right now. Not tomorrow, not later today, not in an hour, not when you finish reading this article. Right now! Look at your calendar, and make an appointment to create your action plan, or to take the first action ("Go walking at 5:30 p.m. today in the park," for example). What's the first action you can take to make your desires a reality? Create a healthier meal plan for tomorrow? Create a place for everything you use at work, so your organizing system doesn't fall apart in two days? Decide what that is and make an appointment for it, right now. Second part of this step: make that appointment the most important appointment on your schedule, more important than a doctor's appointment or a meeting with your boss.

2. Set a small, achievable goal. Remember, inertia is a powerful force. If you haven't been exercising for a couple years, it's hard to get started. You're used to the way things are, and even if you want to change, it's difficult. So don't start out trying to conquer the world. Just conquer something exceedingly small. It might sound wimpy to say, "I'm going to walk for 10 minutes" or "I'm going to do 10 pushups and 1 chinup", but those are much more likely to beat inertia than, "I'm going to exercise for 45 minutes today." Be realistic, and make it very very achievable. It's the only way to beat inertia.

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

3. Commit thyself, big time. It's this commitment that will keep you going after you overcome inertia. Sometimes we get filled up with enthusiasm, but then a few days later, that enthusiasm wanes and we submit to our old buddy laziness. Now, I'm not anti-laziness — just the opposite, I assure you — but we can't let it stop us from making our dreams come true. So instead, make a commitment, publicly. State your small, achievable goal, and tell it to as many people as you can. Call or email friends and family, tell all your coworkers, join an online forum related to your goal and tell all of them. Put it on your blog. However you do it, make sure people are aware of your goal, and that there's sufficient pressure to overcome laziness.

4. Baby steps, baby. Again, inertia is a very strong force. I've said it before, but this is a very important step here: the best way to change is through baby steps. One small step at a time. Don't try to bite off too much. How is this different from the above step, setting a small and achievable goal? It's the same concept, but extended beyond the initial goal. It's taking things one little goal at a time, a bit at a time. For example, let's say you want to run a marathon, but currently your running regimen consists of running to the bathroom during commercial breaks while you're watching *Lost*. So do you go out and start a marathon training plan? Nope. You start by walking 10 minutes a day. Then, when that becomes a habit and too easy, walk 15 minutes. Then 20, then 30. Then jog a minute, walk a couple minutes, jog a minute, and so on, for those 30 minutes. Then jog 90 seconds, and so on, until you're running for 30 minutes. Do these steps a week or two at a time, so that all of a sudden, you're running for 45 minutes every other day ... and you barely noticed the progression. That's the way you get to a goal ... small progressions that are barely noticeable. Not by killing yourself the first day out.

"Seventy percent of success in life is showing up." - **Woody Allen**

5. Hold thyself accountable. You've committed yourself publicly ... but it's not enough to tell people your goal. You have to make it clear that they must hold you accountable to reporting to them your progress. Then report your progress to them regularly. Daily is better than weekly. Reporting to them makes sure that you will think twice about being lazy and forgoing your action plan.

6. Motivate yourself. We've already discussed accountability and commitment, which are ways to put positive pressure on yourself — a form of motivation. Those are great, but you also want other types of motivation. You want to find ways to make your progress feel great ... either through rewards, or the positive way you feel about your progress, or the positive way you feel when others see how well you're doing. Find a few different ways to motivate yourself — the more the better. Incorporate these into your plan. Tell people about them. Let them help

push you along.

7. Just keep doing it, no matter what. You'll encounter obstacles, and falter and fall. Just get up and keep going. You'll face temptations and give in. That's OK. Just keep going. You'll make mistakes and get discouraged. No matter ... just keep going. Learn from your mistakes, and ... keep going. No matter what happens, keep going. If you're taking baby steps, you're holding yourself accountable, and you're actually doing something, you'll get there.

“Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one” - **Albert Einstein**

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Author: Leo Babauta

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