

Never Get Stuck Again

PROCRASTINATION PROOF



JON ACUFF

New York Times Bestselling Author

Procrastination Proof: Never Get Stuck Again

Jon Acuff

Baker Books (Apr 2026)

Rating: ★★★★★

Tags: Self Help

How to Stop Stalling, Take Action, and Build the Life You Want

- **Stop spinning your wheels and start living the life you were meant for**
- **Learn to implement the four essential permissions of being remarkable**
- **From a New York Times bestselling author**

Procrastination is the most expensive fear because the price tag is your life. Every day you wait to begin, you're stealing from your future self. The worst part? You *know* you're doing it, but you don't know how to stop.

The solution may surprise you. It's not willpower--it's permission. Everything you're waiting for has been waiting for you. Give yourself permission. Permission is what changed *New York Times* bestselling author Jon Acuff's life from one of discontent, floating aimlessly from job to unsatisfying job, to one that anyone would say is *remarkable*. Remarkable is when your actions match your intentions, when there is no gap between who you want to be and who you are. When you trade procrastination for permission, the result is a remarkable life.

In *Procrastination Proof*, Jon gives you permission--to dream, to plan, to do, to review. It's an easy, effective, and enjoyable four-step system that can be applied to your entire life, from your most mundane tasks to your most audacious dreams, so that you stop spinning your wheels and start making real progress.

The person with the greatest opportunity to change your life is you. You're not too old. It's not too late. Don't buy into the lie of later. Start now. You have permission to try, to risk, and to win.

“Jon reminds us that true leaders act, not just plan. This book gives you the courage and clarity to move forward today, not someday.”

John C. Maxwell, *New York Times* bestselling author and leadership expert

“Reading *Procrastination Proof* felt like finally finding the exit door in a hallway of hesitation. Jon Acuff doesn’t just understand procrastination; he dismantles it with humor, honesty, and deeply practical insight. This book is smart, fast-moving, and full of the kind of wisdom that feels like a friend reaching through the fog to hand you a flashlight. Whether you’re stalled on a dream, a conversation, or a to-do list, Jon shows you how to trade self-doubt for traction. He doesn’t just inspire—he equips.”

Ginny Yurich, founder of 1000 Hours Outside, host of the top-ranked *1000 Hours Outside Podcast*, and bestselling author

“Some books make you feel better. This one makes *you* better. Jon Acuff doesn’t just understand procrastinators—he used to be one. And that’s what makes *Procrastination Proof* the most effective, empathetic guide I’ve read on this topic. Also, I got this endorsement in early.”

Carey Nieuwhof, bestselling author, speaker, and podcaster

“The secret to beating procrastination isn’t more discipline—it’s permission. Jon shows us that we’ve been waiting for someone else to give us what we already have the power to give ourselves.”

Brian Buffini, *New York Times* bestselling author, and founder and chairman of Buffini & Company

“*Procrastination Proof* will show you how to bridge the gap between waiting and remarkable. I highly recommend this

book.”

Vanessa Van Edwards, bestselling author and founder of
ScienceOfPeople.com

“If you’ve ever felt stuck—paralyzed by perfectionism or trapped by overthinking—Jon Acuff offers a liberating path forward. With wit, heart, and proven tools, *Procrastination Proof* will help you trade delay for momentum and turn your big dreams into bold action. This book is both freeing and deeply practical.”

Michael Hyatt, *New York Times* bestselling author and business coach

“No one can get us thinking (and acting!) like Jon can. This book will help you completely rethink your struggle with procrastination and give you the permission you need to build a life you truly love.”

Liz Forkin Bohannon, *Forbes* Top 20 Speaker and bestselling author

“In a world of overwhelming productivity advice, my good friend Jon Acuff delivers something different: quick, digestible wisdom that actually works. Each concise, high-impact chapter moves you closer to the life you’ve been waiting to live.”

Craig Groeschel, pastor of Life.Church

“Jon wrote the book on procrastination so I wouldn’t have to. Which is great, because I wouldn’t have.”

Chris Guillebeau, author of *Time Anxiety* and *The Art of Non-Conformity*

“Jon Acuff has done it again! *Procrastination Proof* takes the excuses that keep entrepreneurs stuck and turns them into massive action. It helps you develop a mindset that attracts prospects, a blueprint that drives daily activity, and a review process that keeps your business growing long-term. If you’re

serious about building a business and a life you love, start here —then Go Pro!”

Eric Worre, founder of Network Marketing Pro and bestselling author of *Go Pro: 7 Steps to Becoming a Network Marketing Professional*

“Packed with relatable stories and practical insights, *Procrastination Proof* is a master class in overcoming the barriers that hold us back. Jon Acuff’s approach will not only help you break free from procrastination but will also inspire you to live with greater clarity, focus, and impact. If you’re looking to unlock your full potential and get more out of life, this book is an absolute must-read!”

Jordan Montgomery, bestselling author of *The Art of Encouragement*

“Procrastination keeps too many of us stuck, but it doesn’t have to. In *Procrastination Proof*, Jon Acuff gives you the tools to finally break free. If you’re ready to stop settling for less than you’re capable of and unlock your limitless potential, this book is your road map.”

Hal Elrod, #1 international bestselling author of *The Miracle Morning* and twelve other books

“When I was asked to prepare an endorsement, I dove in to reading *Procrastination Proof* and immediately began drafting an eloquent set of sentences to share how profoundly Jon’s writing impacted me and can impact you. Then, after a great start, I put it off. But what happens in *Procrastination Proof* is Jon Acuff presents the reason for our delays, what we need to do to address our inclination toward procrastination, and how we can all consistently cross the finish line of any project or task.”

Greg Sankey, commissioner of the Southeastern Conference

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JON ACUFF



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To Jenny, always.

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Acknowledgments

A beginning of sorts

I don't know where to start.

If you've ever procrastinated, you've thought that too.

I'd begin right this second, I'd be brave and bold, if I could just figure out which door to open first. This project, this task, this conversation, this everything has a thousand possible entrances, and they all look like they could be "the one."

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever had the sense that you were waiting for something?

If you could travel back in time and peek inside my tired, black Toyota 4Runner as it slowly crawled in Nashville traffic, that's where you would find me waiting. There I was in Old Navy khakis, a woven leather belt from Express, and a haircut from Sport Clips (because I have a very athletic head). Oddly enough, you'd probably catch me singing to myself in the car. Though Robin Thicke and Pharrell were sweeping the nation with "Blurred Lines," that was not the tune I was carrying back then. Mine was more of a dirge.

That year, I listened to Colin Hay's "Waiting for My Real Life to Begin" hundreds of times. Hay is the lead singer of Men at Work, a Grammy Award-winning band that has sold more than thirty million albums. He was very successful, but I wasn't. I was waiting and the lyrics gave me all the quicksand I needed to stay stuck.

A few years ago I wrote a book about mindset called *Soundtracks*. One of the most fascinating ideas that continuously popped up in the research was that the thoughts you allow into your head often turn into actions, and those actions turn into results.

The weirdest study of that phenomenon was highlighted in *Research Quarterly*. It showed that people who practiced shooting

free throws for twenty days in a row improved by 24 percent. That makes sense. If you go to the gym and practice free throws for twenty days, you get better. What didn't make sense was that another test group of people who just *thought* about practicing free throws improved by 23 percent. They didn't even touch a basketball during the study. It was just the power of their repetitive thoughts that made them better. The brain is bizarre.¹

That happened in less than three weeks. What do you think singing a song titled "I'm Waiting for My Real Life to Begin" out loud for a solid year does to a person?

I don't think Colin Hay meant to write a theme song for procrastination, but that's what he did. The main character was full of hope but devoid of motion. He wasn't fighting the dragon, he was thinking about fighting the dragon. He wasn't sailing the horizon, he was scanning the horizon. Nothing was happening, but maybe it would eventually.

He was stuck and so was I.

¹ Maxwell Maltz, *Psycho-Cybernetics* (TarcherPerigee, 2015), 40.

Daily kidnappings are not a good long-term plan

Have you ever woken up a teenager for school? That's a fun experience, isn't it?

Stage one is sitting in the living room and discerning if you hear them stirring inside their lair. Was that a footfall? Did they just open their closet? Maybe they got up early to read some Marcus Aurelius meditations?

You can't hear them, so you gently crack the door and stick your head in the lion's den. "It's 6:15," you tell them.

"I'm up! I'm up!" they declare while warmly snuggled under their covers, which is technically the opposite of up.

"I'll buy them an alarm," you think, one that will vibrate and roll across the floor like a nervous hedgehog they must chase to turn off.

No one ever talks about this experience when they describe their morning routine online. *After my bone broth smoothie, I enjoy a twenty-seven-minute bout of emotional jujitsu with someone who lives in my house and used to not hate hugs.*

For years, the only thing harder than convincing my teenager to go to school was convincing myself to go to work. It felt like a battle between the two opposite sides of myself. Responsible Me had to kidnap Procrastinating Me each morning to force him back to adulthood.

"Wake up, it's time to go to the office," Responsible Me would say.

"What are you doing here again?" Procrastinating Me would moan.

"Let's go, get in the car and drive to your job," the responsible version of myself would calmly reply.

"We did that yesterday!"

"I know, I know, buddy. Don't make me use the flex cuffs."

"I don't want to do this anymore. I want to retire."

"You're only thirty-seven, and pretty poor to be honest. Stop struggling."

Procrastinating Me would throw a smoke bomb, slip out the back door, and sprint across the yard.

The problem is that I *had* to work. Every day too. Have you noticed that? There's no graduating from work after four years. There's no three months off for summer. This adult thing is daily. I was hoping I would have accepted that after I got married and had kids. That's the dream when you have surly teenagers after all. Someday when they're older, they'll easily pop out of bed well before dawn and mature into responsible members of society. That didn't happen for me by my late thirties though. A can-do attitude had not arrived and change did not appear to be on the horizon.

I just couldn't get it together, whatever "it" is. I would have willingly, gleefully continued to be an underperforming, unfocused bundle of mediocrity for the rest of my life, but then something disastrous happened.

I started my own company.

This is the origin story

I didn't want to stop procrastinating. Until 2013, I was content to have it be someone else's job to manage me. Let my boss be the one who struggled against this rascal Jon Acuff. Let my coworkers be the ones who pressured me into honoring my commitments. Let the building and the dress code and all the trappings that come with a thousand-person company create the standards I live up to.

But then I did the unthinkable—I started my own business and lost all my support systems overnight.

To say the rug was pulled out from under me would be an understatement. Seven years before the rest of the world would be sent to work from home because of the pandemic, I self-distanced in a tiny home office overlooking our backyard. I was woefully unprepared for the amount of self-discipline this new structureless landscape of employment would require. The argument I'd had within myself for the first fifteen years of my career suddenly hit very differently.

"I don't want to go to work! I hate my boss!" Procrastinating Me yelped.

"We work for ourselves. We *are* the boss!" Responsible Me replied. "Quit struggling—you're only making this harder!"

"This is the worst job ever!"

"What are you even talking about? You created this job! The name of the company is 'Acuff Ideas.' We're the Acuff."

"Wait, who's going to make sure there's money and the bills are paid and the printer works and meetings are efficient?"

"We are!"

“Who’s going to make sure we’re detailed, turn in projects on time, honor commitments, and make good decisions?”

“We are!”

“Dear God, we are doomed.”

The honeymoon phase of starting my own company lasted about thirty seconds.

My main problem was that I only had one employee and that employee was terrible. I was unfocused, undisciplined, and unorganized. If you reviewed the first fifteen years of my working life, a good summary would be “un.”

But in 2013 I didn’t have a choice.

Either I learned how to stop procrastinating or I failed.

My biggest fear at the time was public humiliation. When I started my own company, I left a dream job with a famous person in our town. The local news did a story about it. People told me I was an idiot to leave that opportunity. In coffee shops, total strangers would say, “You’re doing *what* exactly now?” with a look of pity on their faces.

I felt this mounting wave of embarrassment about to crash on my shores if I didn’t get my life together. My own motivation to change was suddenly sky-high.

It was a real Bone Thugs-N-Harmony moment.

I was at a crossroads.

I had to change.

What? Everything.

When? Right now.

I couldn’t afford to wait any longer. I had to fight my procrastination with a thousand different tools or I was doomed. Desperation is a heck of a drug. I tried everything and boy, a lot of it worked. Not all of it, of course. A few of my experiments blew up in my face as experiments are prone to do. But like a sailor constantly adjusting the ship’s sail, I did make it to more ports than I knew existed all those years ago.

When it was time to write this book and I began looking back on thirteen years of wrestling with procrastination, I couldn’t find the perfect way to start it. Every author wants an introduction that

draws you in. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . ."

This isn't that kind of book though. This isn't fiction. This is fact. And the fact is, if you ever procrastinate, you're going to see yourself on every single page. This book is a mirror. "That's me!" you'll shout. Or "That's my husband, he needs to read this." If you do give it to him, please say, "This is a book about becoming remarkable," not "This is a book for terrible procrastinators."

Procrastinators are not losers. They just don't know they're winners yet. Procrastinators have a storehouse of creativity and energy that they haven't opened yet. When I peeked into mine, I found eleven books, a successful small business, a speaking career that has taken me around the world, a dozen half marathons, and more peace than I thought this chattery brain of mine could ever experience.

What's the perfect way to start a book about procrastination? Probably with a question.

What are you waiting for?

Short king summer

If you write a four-hundred-page book about procrastination, you are a monster. True procrastinators will not patiently march through your exhaustive exploration of the topic starting with something Voltaire believed in eighteenth-century France. You are not a procrastinator if you had the patience to include a ninety-page section of notes in the back of your procrastination book. That would be Jane Goodall writing a book about monkeys. You're just an outsider visiting our community. This, on the other hand, is a book by a monkey for monkeys.

The chapters are short because every time I see "65 pages remaining in chapter" on my Kindle, I groan. I like the little hit of dopamine I get when I finish a chapter. I don't care how short it is. It feels like an accomplishment. It's a small win, and the more of those I can jam into my day, the better the day goes.

Procrastinators unite!

The chapters will be short. The advice immediate. The pace urgent.

I promise.

Why do we procrastinate?

If you ask a hundred thousand people that question, you get a hundred thousand different answers. That's what happened to me when I did exactly that. I am not famous. My kids constantly remind me of that by saying I'm "regionally famous." I only get recognized at Costco and church, but I do have a few followers online. Occasionally I will ask them questions. When I posted a series of inquiries about the topic of procrastination, the floodgates opened!

The words they used were different, but consistent themes did emerge. The five most common reasons people believe they procrastinate are:

1. Task
2. Time
3. History
4. Fear
5. Ego

Here's what that looks like in day-to-day life.

The *task* appears too difficult. We don't know which project to work on, we feel overwhelmed, so we put it off. Today's task becomes tomorrow's problem.

We don't have enough *time* to complete a project in one sitting, so we don't bother beginning. Or we're bad at estimating and the day gets away from us, which prevents us from finishing.

Procrastination paid off in the past. We turned the college paper in at the last second and still got an A, so we mistakenly believe we

work best under insurmountable pressure. Our *history* has confused us into thinking procrastination is an asset.

We are afraid it won't be perfect. If we avoid the project altogether, maybe we can avoid being judged and criticized. What will happen if we try our best and it's still not enough? *Fear* stymies us in a thousand different ways.

We don't think we should have to do this. It's not fair. Somebody else should be doing this. We feel entitled to the rewards but not the work. It shouldn't be this hard or take this long. Expectations become demands. Demands become disappointments. Disappointments become delays. Our *ego* gets in the way.

Which one stops you in your tracks most often? I've messed around with all five, but at heart, I procrastinate most out of fear and ego. Either I'm afraid of starting because I don't think I'll be up to the task, or I'm angry I have to do it at all and dig in my heels out of pure, prideful stubbornness.

Those are all valid reasons people procrastinate, and that's a tidy little list, but none of them are the real reason. There's only one true reason.

The reason people procrastinate is that it's the best tool they have.

Procrastination is not a problem. Procrastination is a solution.

We use it because we think it will get us out of a jam. Call it a coping mechanism if you've been to counseling. Call it a tool if you've been to auto-diesel college. The word you pick doesn't matter much.

We choose procrastination, even though we know it has negative consequences, because we believe it's better than the alternative of doing whatever it is we're avoiding. What's so fascinating about procrastination is that it impacts every part of your life. You will procrastinate on things you really want to do, like writing a book, but also on things you really don't want to do, like the laundry.

We procrastinate at everything, but we're only doing it because we haven't found a better solution yet.

The solution to what? Sometimes there's a specific task or project we're avoiding. Sometimes we use procrastination to save ourselves

from experiencing a whole array of emotions such as shame, fear, guilt, and boredom.¹

It's OK that you're leaning on it as a solution. I won't even ask you to stop using procrastination just yet. You shouldn't trust me. We just met.

By the end of this book, though, you'll never turn to procrastination to solve a problem again. You won't have to. You'll have the best solution to every project you care about.

¹ Reza Feyzi Behnagh and Joseph R. Ferrari, "Exploring 40 Years on Affective Correlates to Procrastination: A Literature Review of Situation and Dispositional Types," *Current Psychology* 41 (2022): 1097–1111, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02653-z>.

This will be easy

Before I tell you the system that beats procrastination, I need to assure you, this is easy.

An influencer recently told me that I should start the day with a cold shower because it tells my brain I can survive difficult things. So does slamming my hand in a car door, but that seems like a dumb way to start the day.

Life is preset to hard. Life's default is challenging. Why would we use any system that makes it harder?

If you're worried it will take a newfound level of willpower, persistence, or sacrifice to beat procrastination, I assure you it won't. As I'll say a dozen times in this book, procrastination isn't a laziness problem. Therefore, hard work won't fix it any more than brushing your teeth would fix a broken arm. You don't need to try harder. You need a completely different system, a system that works just as well on the days you have zero willpower as it does on the days you're performing at 100 percent.

Over the years, I noticed something interesting. I never procrastinate on things that I'm good at or that come easily to me. I'm quick to do those. I can do the easy stuff all day. I only procrastinate on the difficult, scary, and overwhelming activities. That's why the question "Why do you procrastinate?" is kind of silly. If you changed the question to what you were really asking, the answer would be obvious. "Why do you put off things that are difficult, scary, and overwhelming?" Because they are difficult, scary, and overwhelming. Duh.

The system for beating procrastination therefore can't be difficult, scary, or overwhelming, because we've proven for years we will

avoid anything like that. The system needs to be so easy it feels too good to be true, so enjoyable it feels like a hobby and not a job, and so simple you could write the whole thing down on a Post-it note. It also has to work in the real world, not just the idealized world portrayed in self-help books. Most self-help books are about as real as the set of a Hallmark Christmas movie.

The system for beating procrastination needs to be easy, simple, and effective for any life situation. The American folk singer Woody Guthrie is credited with saying, "Any fool can make something complicated. It takes a genius to make it simple."

Tall order, but we did it.

Who's this "we"?

I stopped waiting in 2013. I've spent the last thirteen years absolutely dominating procrastination. People who knew me before this season of my life don't recognize me now.

Big deal.

That's what I would be thinking if I were you. *So what?* That's another fair response to anyone who tells you "I did this and so can you!" *I don't believe you. You're probably exaggerating. Also, just because one person accomplished one thing doesn't mean it's repeatable.*

I agree.

That's why I started testing these ideas with thousands of people in 2014. In the last twelve years, I've done fifteen different challenges with more than thirty thousand participants. Some were quick sprints, like the 30 Days of Hustle. Some were eight weeks long, like the Greatest Year Ever. Some ran the course of entire years, like our online community. In addition to pouring through reams of results, I also answered more than a thousand different questions live from people studying the course materials.

Professor Richard Feynman, one of America's greatest theoretical physicists, is often attributed with saying, "If you want to master something, teach it. The more you teach, the better you learn." He's

right and I did learn. Then I took the show on the road. It's one thing to teach a digital course where you're separated from real people, but it's a completely different animal to test ideas with a live audience.

You know in two ways if a solution doesn't work when you share it with a live audience. The first is immediate. The second is eventual. The immediate way is that you see it on their faces. If the crowd is confused, their grimaces tell you. If the crowd is bored, their phones tell you because they pull them out instantly. As a speaker, the eventual way you learn that a system doesn't work in the real world is that event planners stop booking you. If your ideas are too complicated, too confusing, or too ineffective, the phone stops ringing.

Fortunately, that didn't happen with any of the more than four hundred companies I shared these ideas with. The even better news is that the system worked with every type of company and industry. I shared these ideas everywhere from FedEx to Walmart, Nissan to Range Rover, the chimney sweep convention to the funeral home directors conference.

When an idea worked, I honed it further. When it didn't, I quit it. Poor procrastination. Just when it would rally, I'd try a new idea with a new group of a thousand people and knock it right back down.

Finally, after I wrote two million words and worked with half a million people, I knew which ideas really helped. I had my system, but I wasn't done yet. I spent another two years testing it, with another round of online challenges, dozens of additional events with clients, and a two-thousand-hour study in my own life.

Then I wrote this book.

Aren't there easier ways to write a book? There are. According to Facebook Ads you can write one with AI in nineteen minutes. I've read those books. They feel like you threw motivation, gratitude, and Seneca in a blender and then published the resulting frappé.

Yuck. No thanks.

I took the long way to this book so that you can take the short way to remarkable.

If you want to beat procrastination and never wait again, it all starts with one word.

Permission.

Field and stamp

My own road out of procrastination was not a straight path. Though I wouldn't get serious until 2013, it really started in 2002 at the Bose Corporation in Framingham, Massachusetts. The best part of working for that stereo company was that they had a dog trained to chase Canada geese off the property. A dog with a job is the highest form of joy our planet contains. I hope someday you find a career you love as much as that dog loved herding the geese into a tight knot, taking thirty steps back, and then sprinting into them like a furry bowling ball.

The second-best part about working at Bose was Ted Bocelli. He was a giant of a man, though my own lack of height may be skewing my memory.

Ted was lean, gruff, and grizzled. He looked like Anthony Bourdain, if Anthony Bourdain had been a creative director struggling to make sense of Jon Acuff. I was twenty-six, on my fifth job in six years, and dangerously close to needing a new one if I didn't turn around my performance. I'd already been fired at one company, quit the next one when I got mildly bored, and been laid off from the next one before being hired at Bose. My track record was spotty and only getting spottier. I was waiting for someone to fix my career and hoping that someone was not me. I was procrastinating on becoming an adult even though my wife and child were indicating it might be time.

After a meeting one day, Ted pulled aside the sullen little storm cloud that was me and took out a napkin. "Jon, do you know why you're so unhappy right now?" I started to unfurl a litany of people who were conspiring to ruin my life because I was certain the first

five jobs I hated were someone else's fault, as was this one. He cut me off with a big, tired hand. "You're unhappy because of the field and the stamp." As he said that, with his pen he drew a large rectangle that almost completely filled the napkin.

"This is Bose," he said. "It is an expansive soccer field for writers like you to play in. We don't make widgets here. We make magic carpets that transport people into the world of music. We are the sound at weddings, the anthem in arenas, the background to a runner trying to crest that final hill with a pair of headphones pounding out a favorite song. We are in the arts, and that is a joy unlike any other. But there is a problem."

He continued, "When Doctor Bose gives this soccer field to his second-in-command, the CEO, guess what the CEO does? He draws the borders just a little bit smaller. He makes the field three feet shorter on each side so that he has a bit of a buffer. I don't blame him. He doesn't want to launch a product that goes out of bounds. He doesn't want to disappoint his boss. Who does? So, he plays it safe." At this point Ted drew a smaller rectangle inside the original.

"Guess what happens when the CEO passes this smaller field down the corporate ladder to the next person in charge? The exact same thing. The president doesn't want to make a mistake either, so she draws her rectangle even smaller." Ted drew a third rectangle inside the second. "The same thing happens with the vice president, the department head, the project manager, and your boss, the head of the copywriting department." At this point, Ted's illustration looked like a Russian nesting doll made of rectangles.

"By the time you are given the parameters, Jon, you don't have a soccer field. You are handed a postage stamp." With his pen he stabbed at a tiny rectangle in the center of the napkin.

"It is very difficult to create something remarkable when you're trapped inside such a small, constricted world."

You are trying to get your attention

Ted was the first person who tried to shake me loose from procrastination's grip. He saw what my frustration really was—hope gone spoiled from all that waiting. What I mistook as anger against corporate bureaucracy was really just passion looking for an outlet. A racehorse who's not allowed to run does not grow happier stuck in the stall. Ted was trying to help me see the boundaries and break through them. They were artificially set anyway, and with a little effort would crumble quickly.

I wanted to blame my corporate overlords for my go-nowhere career, but in the nicest way possible, Ted told me who was really holding me back: *me*. I was the one drawing the borders of what was possible tighter and tighter in my own life. Was it fear? Was it entitlement? Was it confusion? Was it lack of vision? I don't think Ted cared. I was procrastinating, hiding from life, and he was desperate to wake me up.

He wasn't mad at me. He was frustrated for me. He knew how close I was to remarkable. I was teetering on the edge of it, just one action away, but he couldn't make me do it. I had to choose it on my own. Have you ever watched someone you care about make life harder than it needs to be? It's infuriating.

Ted was calling me out into the land of remarkability. He never even used the word "procrastination" in any of the guidance he passionately tried to give me, but it was the heart of every lecture.

Do you know what happens when you stop procrastinating? You become remarkable. Not eventually—instantly. There's a lot of self-improvement you have to wait for, where the results are slow and imperceptible. That's not the case with procrastination. If you've never walked a mile before and you walk one, you've made infinite progress. Procrastination's starting point is always zero, so any improvement is massive improvement. Calling three clients instead of zero is remarkable. Writing one hundred words instead of zero is remarkable. Saving fifty dollars instead of zero dollars is remarkable.

If you put off your dreams for too long though, you get used to zero and eventually find it comfortable. Ted was telling me not only

that I was capable of running in the field but that I was built for it. He gave me the napkin, but what he really handed me that day was permission.

I wasn't ready for it then, but you are today.

The road map to sooner

I left Bose six months later and lost touch with Ted. I'd married a Southern wife. She gave me a three-winter ultimatum in Massachusetts that accelerated when our first daughter arrived. Spring snow is what ultimately devastated Jenny Acuff. Snow on Easter tulips that have been tricked into blooming too soon is very depressing. When we first moved to New England, she asked, "Why does LL Bean sell summer sweaters?" I was perplexed. "It's a sweater you wear in the summer." When we moved back to her home state of Georgia, I understood her confusion. You don't need a sweater in Atlanta in July.

Twenty years after my conversation with Ted, as I approached the age of fifty, I started thinking about that napkin again. It was a perfect picture of a remarkable life versus a stalled life. I was now deeply committed to never procrastinating, but I couldn't get my friends to join me.

For months I told everyone they were capable of being remarkable. "Don't wait!" I'd plead over coffee. "Why not try?" I'd ask hopefully. "Don't settle for average!" I'd cheer from the sidelines. I didn't draw Ted's illustration, because a guy who carries napkins with him is even too odd for me, but I did my best to exhort my friends into action. I'd researched, studied, and honed my entire system into one word—permission—but no one wanted it. After my failed attempts to spur on people my own age, I shifted gears. I decided instead to have animated interactions with people in their twenties and see if I could convince them to trade procrastination for permission.

“Give it a shot!” I’d shout when their parents introduced me to them at dinner parties. “You have the benefit of compound interest on your side. Don’t listen to the lies of culture and coast. Don’t get wooed into average by getting lumped into a generation with low expectations and high awkwardness. You don’t need an emotional support bearded dragon. You need motion. You need action. You need purpose. Just try! Try! Try! Try!”

At this point in my monologue, the kid in his twenties starts to glaze over. I can tell I’m losing him. He is going to procrastinate his years away and take the long way to remarkable though I urge him not to. In his mid-thirties he will know I was right that night, but he still wants to pay that price. “You don’t need to wait a decade,” I tell him. “You don’t need to wake up at thirty-seven like I did. You can be remarkable right now! Today can be the day it all starts to change!”

My pleas, though emphatic, rarely worked. Those young people went home and thought, *Jon Acuff sure is hyper*. I went home disappointed that I couldn’t save them from years of average.

Procrastination won most of those conversations, but it didn’t have to. Everyone I talked to, everyone who reads this book, could retire from procrastination right this second. It is one of the few forms of life change that is instantaneous. The minute you give yourself permission to stop procrastinating, you do. It’s like turning off a faucet, but no one believed me.

They think they have all the time in the world, and they’re not entirely wrong. They have more time than me but less than they think. They believe in later, and I get that. We’re getting married later. We’re having kids later. We’re building our careers later.

I wasn’t willing to quit my one-man, anti-procrastination campaign though, because I know something important about you. It’s the reason I wrote this book and the reason I’ll hype you up if you run into me at the Nashville airport.

We’ve never met, but I have a prediction about your life. I’ve made this prediction for thousands of people and it’s always 100 percent accurate.

Later, when you finally stop procrastinating and give yourself permission to be remarkable, you will wish you started sooner.

If I had a drum, I would be beating it right now for added emphasis.

You will wish you started sooner.

Everyone does. I won't let that happen to you.

This book is a celebration of sooner.

This book is a road map to sooner.

In some books, you imagine the author meeting you at a quiet coffee shop and sharing a few ideas over a blueberry scone. This is not that kind of book.

Take this audiobook to the gym. Read it in the parking lot before you slingshot into a day job you want to improve. Keep it on your phone for a quick peek before a challenging meeting.

I will sell you on permission.

Let's DTR—define the relationship—right now. Where's this book going? What's the point? Those are wonderful questions, and you should never read a book that can't answer them. So let me put all my cards down on the table.

Procrastination might have started as a solution, but now it's a problem.

Permission is a much better solution.

The reward for reducing procrastination and increasing permission is a remarkable life.

Simply put, trade procrastination for permission and build a remarkable life.

That's where we're going.

By the last chapter, you will not delay—no, not a second more. You will be all in. You will be obsessed with remarkable. The word "later" will fall right out of your vocabulary. Above all, you won't be waiting for what Ted tried to give me and what you've always had inside—permission.

Why permission?

Permission is the pathway out of procrastination and into remarkable, but it's probably a word you haven't thought about in decades. That's surprising because it used to mean everything to you.

The most important piece of paper in your entire childhood was the permission slip. I was going to say report card, but those haven't been printed for decades. Everything is online now, which is cool if you're a parent because each school year they change the entire system and you have to hack back into the cloud to figure out if your kid is failing.

"Skyward says I have a zero, Mom, but that's just because the teacher hasn't uploaded the new grades yet. That's not a real F," your child promises like a time-share salesperson confusing you with smoke, mirrors, and free tickets to Sea World.

Paper was better. I will die on that admittedly treeless hill. And the permission slip was the king of it all.

This magical note allowed you to go on a field trip to the zoo during the middle of a school day with all your best friends on a rumbling, seatbeltless bus. One kid inside a car surrounded by dozens of airbags? Give that child a five-point safety harness, you monster. Eighty kids loose like marbles in a shoebox with 1962's best safety technology? They'll be fine.

A permission slip allowed you to join the soccer team. It even got you past the attendance ogre every school was required to hire for the principal's office in the 1980s. Why am I late? Why did I miss yesterday? Why can I get dismissed early to go to the beach with my dad? Oh, what's this in my pocket? Looks like a permission slip!

A permission slip was a passport.

Permission is a small nudge that starts every adventure.

It is the skeleton key that unlocks all the doors.

Gandalf gave it to Bilbo.

Morpheus gave it to Neo.

Maximus gave it to his ragtag group of fellow gladiators.

The fairy godmother gave it to Cinderella.

The best stories always start with permission, and someone is trying to give it to you.

You've never met them, but you know them intimately.

You've never spoken, but you both share all the same secrets and aspirations.

You've never crossed paths, but every road you both walk is identical.

The person desperately excited to give you permission to stop procrastinating and start living remarkably is Future You.

Stop shouting at the past and start listening to the future

We spend too much of our present giving our past power. We relive memories so often that they turn into myths that eventually morph into laws that shrink our remarkable fields into average stamps. We are so enthralled with the past that we even try to give it advice. “What wisdom would you share with your younger self?” we ask as an icebreaker at off-site work events. It’s a dumb question though.

That person no longer exists. I can’t help him. Nothing I do today will change his yesterday. When we focus on the past we are sending our mail in the wrong direction. The past is past. But the future you?

She’s real.

He’s real.

What would the 2040 me say to the today me? A year from now, five years from now, twenty years from now, what will Future Me be so glad that Present Me did?

Most of us can’t imagine him, but he’s out there. You get closer to him every day. When you procrastinate, you’re robbing him of all his opportunities. Each day you wait to begin steals a chance from him. His soccer field gets smaller and smaller with each decision you delay.

Maybe you’re holding back because when you try to think about the future it feels overwhelming. That’s how I spent my twenties. I knew my thirties were barreling my way, but I couldn’t engage with them without getting frozen in my tracks by procrastination. I was waiting for someone to show up and do something, never realizing

I'm the someone. The person with the greatest opportunity to change my life is me.

When I realized that in my late thirties and stopped procrastinating, every decade grew better than the last.

My thirties were so much better than my twenties.

My forties were so much better than my thirties.

My fifties are going to be wild, and don't even get me started on how fun my sixties are going to be. I don't have to worry about those years because they will be remarkable.

How could they not be? Every day that you live remarkably, you add a new page to your owner manual and life just gets easier. Here are a few from mine:

Jon's Owner Manual

Page 37: When anxious, go jogging.

Page 65: If you feel lonely, don't try to figure out why all by yourself. Call a friend.

Page 111: Heads up, ice cream has decided it hates you. Milk too.

Page 123: It takes one thousand hours to write a book. The sooner you start, the sooner you're done.

I used to say that I love LEGO sets because they're the only thing in my life that has clear instructions. That's no longer true. It just took me a while to realize I had permission to write my own instructions. That's what Future Me was trying to tell me all along. I have permission.

Permission to try.

Permission to risk.

Permission to lead.

Permission to be remarkable.

Future You would say the same things. If you didn't listen, the shouts would only grow louder.

Today is the youngest you'll ever be!

Right now, you have more time than you'll ever have!

These are the best knees—use them!

You're not too old, and it's not too late! Quit procrastinating!
Don't wait! Give yourself permission!

If you listened—and I think you should—the logical next step would be to ask, “Which permissions?” There are probably a thousand different ways you could go, so how would you know which permissions mattered the most?

The four permissions

What was the point of me testing all those ideas for all those years?

I wanted to see if there was a pattern to being remarkable. I didn't want to beat procrastination and become more productive. That's such a boring project. I wanted to beat procrastination and become remarkable. That seemed way more fun and far more profitable.

So off I went, testing hundreds of ideas in my own life and teaching thousands of ideas to thousands of real people. The entire time I was searching for the elusive system to beat procrastination.

Turns out it's permission, but not just any permission. There are four permissions that matter more than any other. These are cornerstone permissions, big umbrella permissions that dozens of smaller permissions sit under.

The four permissions are:

1. Permission to **dream**
2. Permission to **plan**
3. Permission to **do**
4. Permission to **review**

If you want to retire from procrastination, that is all you have to do. Dream. Plan. Do. Review. DPDR.

It took me years to discover what it will take you minutes to master. That's what I love about books—they're time machines. You just saved a decade of frustration.

What do those words mean? They're fairly self-explanatory, and like all good systems they don't require a lot of instructions. But

there is a central question to think about with each.

When you **dream**, you ask, "What do I want to do?" What's your vision, your hope, or your reason to get out of bed in the morning? If you can't think of something you *want* to do, then what do you *need* to do? Perhaps you'd say, "I want my boss to stop bothering me about the presentation deck I'm supposed to prepare." Personal desires aren't the only things we procrastinate on. You might not want to do the presentation deck, but you need to do it, and completing it would instantly relieve a lot of stress.

If you don't have a dream, even a rough sketch, you'll never really stop procrastinating. Why would you? Procrastination is an effective tool that has served you for years and you can't clearly see a reason to give it up. It takes work to live without procrastination. If you can't see the reward, the remarkable life, it's only logical that you wouldn't want to change. You shouldn't quit procrastination without getting something better in return. Always trade up. Daniel Pink puts it this way: "Greatness and nearsightedness are incompatible. Meaningful achievement depends on lifting one's sights and pushing toward the horizon."¹ If you don't lift your sights, you won't have a reason to push toward the horizon.

When you **plan**, you ask the question, "How will I do it?" What resources will it take? How long will it take? What are the steps that will make it easier? Who will you need help from? What are the obstacles that might pop up?

I'm not a natural planner, so this stage intimidated me at first. I had to redefine it so that it was more approachable. Here's my new definition of planning: *Planning is visiting the future and taking notes for when you get back.* It actually allows you to use your imagination as much as dreaming does. When you look at it that way, planning becomes something everyone can do, not just actuaries.

When you **do**, the question is absurdly obvious: "Am I doing it?" Right now, have you moved beyond planning and jumped into action? Are your hands dirty? Are your feet in motion? Even if you can hardly see the ripple effect of all the paddling you're doing underwater, is there progress?

When someone tells me they want to quit their job to pursue a passion, I always ask “doing” questions. Are you doing your passion before work? Are you doing it on your lunch break? Are you doing it after work? Are you doing it on the weekend? If the answer is no, don’t quit your day job. Give yourself permission to use the rest of your calendar before you prematurely make a drastic life change. Ryan Holiday would tell you, “If you want momentum, you’ll have to create it yourself, right now, by getting up and getting started.”² I agree, but jumping in impulsively without a dream and a plan is a recipe for disaster. We love to say, “Go big or go home!” But when you approach “Go big” the wrong way, you always end up back home.

When you **review**, you ask, “Did it work?” The actions you did, the plans you made, the dreams that inspired you in the first place—did you get the results you wanted? Are you still heading in the right direction? If you keep on this course, will you end up where you want to go, or do you need to correct course? The two mistakes people make with this permission is that they either don’t do it at all or they don’t do it often enough. How many times should you review? As many times as is helpful.

If you give yourself permission to consistently dream, plan, do, and review, you will never struggle with procrastination again. You will be amazed at how much time each day offers, how many life-giving tasks you can fit into a week, and how fun every month is. You will stop beating yourself up for avoiding unpleasant tasks because those will become easy and effortless. Loved ones, who in the past heard you make big declarations of intentions in January that were forgotten by February, won’t recognize the person you are now in March. Joy will chase you out of bed each morning. Satisfaction will usher you to sleep at night.

Combined, those four permissions form a success loop you can use for three hours, three months, or three years, depending on what sort of remarkable adventure you’re on. This morning I used DPDR to get some writing done. I dreamed what I wanted to accomplish—three thousand words. I planned it the night before on

my calendar. I did it and then reviewed the progress. The whole system took me less than five minutes to use. Simple.

I'm also in the middle of a three-month loop. My team is holding a live event twelve weeks from now. We're bouncing back and forth between dream and plan as we prepare to execute. We're already doing some parts of the project—for instance, selling tickets. Other parts, like creating the slides I'll present during our sessions, are still in the planning stage. We're also reviewing along the way, holding weekly meetings to assess everything.

Finally, I'm in year two of a three-year loop where I'm deliberately tracking every hour I've dedicated to being remarkable. I'm mostly doing and reviewing right now because there are months of momentum spurring me on. I don't need to dream or plan—I've already done that.

Three hours, three months, three years, the result is the same: DPDR just works. Every bit of research points in this direction.

Fuschia Sirois, a procrastination researcher with more than twenty years of experience and the author of *Procrastination: What It Is, Why It's a Problem, and What You Can Do About It*, preaches easy action steps too. She takes a "do the thing approach," suggesting you say you want to do the thing, do the thing, and check in to make sure you're getting closer to finishing the thing. Though there are certainly academics who offer more complicated solutions to fixing procrastination, the best advice always comes back to a simple approach like DPDR.³

If that's true though—if this system is easy, effective, and dare I say enjoyable—why doesn't everybody use it?

¹ Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (Penguin Group, 2009), 58.

² Ryan Holiday, *The Obstacle Is the Way*, expanded 10th anniversary ed. (Portfolio/Penguin, 2024), 74.

³ Fuschia M. Sirois, *Procrastination: What It Is, Why It's a Problem, and What You Can Do About It* (APA LifeTools, 2022), 32.

Why do most people still procrastinate?

Why did it take me so long to choose remarkable? I'm fifty. I waited until I was thirty-seven to deal with my procrastination. What was I waiting for?

That's a question worth answering. If remarkable is available to all of us, why do we procrastinate in choosing it? We often blame procrastination for making us put off important tasks like following up with a difficult client, but it's a lot bigger than that. Every day, procrastination prevents you from making the easiest decision of your life: remarkable or average.

When you see the options in black and white, it's so obvious which one you should select.

Would you rather have a remarkable marriage or an average marriage?

Would you rather have a remarkable career full of purpose and profit, or an average career full of frustration and boredom?

Would you rather be in remarkable shape, able to play flag football with your nephews at Thanksgiving without blowing out both your hamstrings, or be in average shape?

Would you rather have a remarkable amount of money or an average amount of money?

Would you rather have a remarkable relationship with your kids—one where they call you regularly, seek your advice for big decisions, and consider you not just a parent but a friend—or an average relationship?

Can you think of a single situation where you'd willingly choose average over remarkable? I can't. It's the clearest decision you'll ever be offered. Why don't more people choose it?

The reasons we wait

What percentage of people are remarkable?

One percent?

Five percent tops?

That's a hard question to answer, especially when we haven't defined the word yet. What is *remarkable*?

Remarkable is when your actions match your intentions.

There's no gap between who you want to be and who you are.

Remarkable is being comfortable in your own skin.

How do you achieve that on a consistent, measurable basis?

Well, dreaming is the best way to know what your intentions are.

Planning is the best way to transform your intentions into actions.

Doing is the best way to turn your actions into results.

Reviewing is the best way to make sure your results matched your intentions.

Dream. Plan. Do. Review. That's the system for remarkable. And if it wasn't for procrastination, everyone would already be using it.

Now we know what remarkable is, but what's procrastination?

I like how Joseph Ferrari defines the word in his book *Still Procrastinating?* (Greatest last name for a researcher who is trying to help you move faster, by the way.) He says that procrastination is "the purposeful delay of the starting or completing a task to the point of subjective discomfort."¹

We can make it simpler than that.

Procrastination is the opposite of remarkable.

Procrastination is when your actions don't match your intentions.

It's putting off what you should put on.

It's the delay of desires, decisions, and duties.

It's a solution that always oversells its benefits and underdelivers its results.

It's waiting even when the negative consequences are much worse than trying.

It's somedaying what you could be todaying.

Procrastination is anything that slows, stalls, or stops you from being remarkable. It's a shape-shifter that looks like doubt, fear, insecurity, distraction, or confusion, depending on the day. Don't waste one second trying to determine "Is this technically procrastination or something else?" Instead ask, "Am I doing what I intended to do?" If the answer is no, you're procrastinating.

Procrastination is also the most well-funded fear in modern history. Have you ever put off going to bed because you couldn't stop binge-watching a show on Netflix? You procrastinated one of the four natural resources your body requires to function (food, water, air, sleep). Do you know why that happened? Because Netflix was designed that way.

The CEO of Netflix, Reed Hastings, said at Summit LA in 2017, "We actually compete with sleep."² Their fear is that you'll stop watching and instead get some rest. Or write your book. Or get in shape. Or go on a walk with your spouse.

If you've been beating yourself up over the last ten years because you just can't seem to get your life together, cut yourself some slack. The reason it's easier to procrastinate now is that there's a brilliant Procrastination Industrial Complex pumping out compelling alternatives to living a remarkable life.

Procrastination is subtle and seductive, which is why so few people are remarkable.

What percentage of people are?

There's no hard data on that stat, so it's all a guess. I do know the answer to this second question though.

What percentage of people are capable of being remarkable?

I bet you know the answer too.

It's 100 percent.

Everyone has the opportunity to be remarkable. Not the same opportunity of course. Opportunity comes in eight billion different

shapes and sizes, each one custom crafted to each person's exact life. Life is not fair, but it is consistent. It gives us our own chance to become remarkable. Why don't most people take it?

That question has haunted me for decades. There is nothing I've thought about, talked about, or written about more than that topic. In my experience working with more than a million people around the world, I've discovered seven reasons most of them don't choose remarkable:

1. They don't know it exists.

"Nobody told me when I was young that you could be a songwriter as a career." This is a common story you hear in Nashville. In small towns across America, would-be musicians aren't aware of what's possible. No one in Hudson, Massachusetts, is a full-time songwriter. No one in Guthrie, Oklahoma, is a lighting specialist for arena tours. No one in Cloudcroft, New Mexico, has an a capella group that makes the bulk of their income on Christmas tours. But those are three real jobs that three of my neighbors do for a living.

No one in their hometowns did those jobs, so for years they didn't even know those were options. The same is true of remarkable. Often, you just weren't aware it existed. Then you bump into it one day online, in a book, from a stranger at a conference, and it's like hearing of a distant land you've always wondered about. It's real. It's out there. It's available.

2. Somebody told them they aren't remarkable.

A pox on every dream-killing, hope-stealing, identity-bruising parent, teacher, coach, or pastor. A blessing on every dream-building, hope-giving, identity-strengthening parent, teacher, coach, or pastor. If average is what you're handed as a child, average tends to be what you'll carry into adulthood. Nobody told you otherwise. But I will. I believe you're remarkable. I'll spend the rest of this book convincing you to believe that too. Are you there yet? Don't worry, you'll get there.

3. Remarkable feels too complicated.

So often we procrastinate because we're afraid of what will be required of us if we actually try. If you grow, stretch, and leap, life will get harder for you. Classic "Mo Money Mo Problems" syndrome. The myth is that it's easier to be average than it is to be remarkable. I personally haven't experienced that. I've had "no money" and it didn't come with "no problems." In fact, it made every problem bigger. Needing a new transmission when you don't have money is a devastating financial disaster. Needing a new transmission when you have remarkable money is a minor inconvenience. Some money is 100 percent easier than no money.

4. They think remarkable is a limited resource.

People often think, "If I have a remarkable career, I have to have an average marriage." Or, "If I have a remarkable family, I have to have an average career." Let me fix that one for you right now. Which parts of your life can be remarkable? All of them. Why would I choose any of it to be average? Why would I say, "I want a remarkable business but an average marriage"? Ah, but that scenario happens all the time. You've seen it. But it doesn't have to. The CEO who is wildly successful but on their sixth marriage didn't have to be that way. That was just one option, and certainly not the best one.

It's common for one or two areas of your life to lag behind the others as you embrace remarkability. When you retire from procrastination, your physical health might come easy but your financial health might be a challenge. All of them can be remarkable though. You don't have to pick the perfect one before you get started. You just begin with one area and let remarkable spread naturally to all the others.

5. They're concerned remarkable will cost community.

"Have any of your friendships timed out?" An automotive executive asked me this over dinner one night in Laguna. My answer was yes. There weren't blowouts or dramatic arguments. We just stopped caring about the same things. I

also realized that if I share big dreams with small-dream people, I tend to get discouraged.

Recently, when I told a friend I wanted to grow my company, he said, "Oh, why would you go to all that trouble? Just enjoy the success you already have." What?! I'm fifty. What are you even talking about? Ask a bird why it still flies. The answer is "Because it's a bird!" That's what it's built for. I love what I'm doing and I'm just getting started. I need friends who throw fuel, not water, on my dreams.

Have you ever not shared something you were proud of on social media because you were afraid of what people would think? Is it easier for you to post about your bad days than your good days because you don't want to brag? Me too.

The good news is that remarkable won't cost you community. On the contrary, it will give you the community you've always wanted—like-minded, supportive people chasing similar dreams.

6. They worry about public criticism.

"Tall poppy syndrome" is a phrase that describes what happens if you stand out in Australia. People cut you back down to size because who are you to think you're better than me? That and the spiders are two of the reasons I don't live Down Under. In America, we dare you to be remarkable. Does that come with extra criticism? Yes, but it's worth it.

The worst review I ever received from an industry magazine was, "Acuff's passion is undeniable, but this has the feeling of a pamphlet padded out to book-length." That's a dagger indeed, and I could have avoided it altogether by not writing the book, but what a terrible trade-off that would have been. More than 200,000 people have bought that book in a dozen different languages. Procrastination promises to save us from the pain of criticism, but never writing that book would have hurt much worse. The rewards of remarkable always outweigh the sting of criticism.

7. They've never questioned their "Acceptable Success Line."

Each of us has an Acceptable Success Line (ASL), a limit of success that we're OK with. It's an invisible line cobbled together from our parents' beliefs, the average salary of our five closest friends, the town we grew up in, and our education. It's the greatest, most destructive barrier to remarkable because it's subtle and often noble-sounding. It cosplays as humility but is really just fear.

If you want to know what your ASL is, double your current salary until you feel uncomfortable. If you make \$50,000 right now, imagine \$100,000. What about \$200,000 or \$400,000? At what point do you start to tell yourself, "Nobody needs that much money. What would I even do with all of that? That would be too hard to make and I'd never see my kids." There you go. That's your line. By the end of this book, you won't have an ASL because remarkable is an infinite game with no limits.

Which of those seven reasons stepped on your toes? Maybe number 2 was like a page ripped from your diary, but the idea of putting a limit on success was the craziest thing you've ever heard. Did you go seven for seven? Me too!

I used to check every box on that list. It's why I'm so passionate about making sure you don't. Nobody told me any of this. I had to learn the slow way, but you won't.

1. Remarkable exists.
2. Anyone who said you weren't remarkable was talking to themselves.
3. Remarkable is simple.
4. Every part of your life can be remarkable.
5. Remarkable doesn't cost community, it creates community.
6. Yes, average people criticize remarkable people, but you'd still rather be remarkable.

7. Remarkable is limitless.

You need to cling to those truths because at different points in your journey, procrastination will trot out dozens of lies to trip you up.

Now we know why procrastination is so undefeated in so many lives. Now we know why people don't choose remarkable. But what about the ones who do? How are they doing that? How do they push through? For starters, they avoid the four most common traps.

¹ Joseph R. Ferrari, *Still Procrastinating? The No-Regrets Guide to Getting It Done* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 15.

² Rina Raphael, "Netflix CEO Reed Hastings: Sleep Is Our Competition," *Fast Company*, November 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40491939/netflix-ceo-reed-hastings-sleep-is-our-competition>.

Four traps on the road to remarkable

I've used the word "easy" a lot in this book, so there's a chance you believe there aren't any dangers on this adventure. What a boring adventure that would be. Of course this road has troubles. No one brags about the view from the valley. The best vistas are always hidden on the tops of mountains, not the bottoms. There are four traps you'll have to navigate as you walk through DPDR. Once you see them, you'll never be able to unsee them and can free yourself the minute you accidentally drift into one.

The dreamer's trap

This is going to shock you, but dreamers get stuck in the dream permission. Dreamers have a thousand ideas and zero actions. Dreamers never exit this first stage. There's always one more adventure, one more hope, one more new endeavor. If they are on your team, they have the habit of coming up with new ideas before you've even fully executed the original idea. The week before the product launch, they love to say, "You know what would be cool?" No, Debbie. We are in the land of doing. We've left dream and must finish.

After I described this trap to one of the biggest law firms in the country, their VP of marketing approached me during a break. "My team members texted me during your keynote and all said, 'We've got too many dreamers on our projects. No wonder we can't get anything done.'" Being married to a dreamer is an exhausting experience, or so my wife Jenny tells me because in our marriage, I am the dreamer. I'm not alone either. In his book *Working Genius*,

Patrick Lencioni dedicates an entire profile type to people who wonder, aka the dreamers.

The perfectionist's trap

Perfectionists are going to change the world just as soon as the plan is perfect. Once I've got all my ducks in a row, once I have all the information, I am going to do like no one has ever done before! There's only one problem—the plan will never be perfect. It can't be, because there's too much information and it's all changing too quickly. We haven't lived in an "all information" world for 250 years. Thomas Jefferson was reported to own "all the books." His private library contained around ten thousand books, which was at least a good dent into all the information available. You couldn't do that today. There are too many books. Instead, remarkable people get "enough information" when they plan. Then they do. Then they review. Then they iterate with the new information doing gave them.

Procrastination and perfectionism are so closely related that the Venn diagram looks like a total eclipse. Don't believe me? Feel free to read the study "A Meta-Analytic and Conceptual Update on the Associations Between Procrastination and Multidimensional Perfectionism."¹ Prefer a summary? Here's one: Perfectionists create impossible standards for projects. Procrastinators put off projects that feel impossible. The end.

The hustler's trap

Rise and grind! Always be closing! Coffee is for closers! The hustler is never short on motivational statements to justify why they refuse to spend time doing anything but do. They won't dream or plan, and they definitely aren't going to stop their hamster wheel long enough to review. A review feels like a delay. Stop holding me back with your strategies and adjustments. Let me run! A company I worked with had a soundtrack for their sales team: "If it didn't happen in Salesforce, it didn't happen." The sales team hated entering their

activities into the software. They didn't want to review their progress or learn from their mistakes. They just wanted to sell!

The analyst's trap

Analysts are naturally amazing at review, but a problem occurs when they end up only reviewing mistakes from the past or possible failures in the future. This happens often because procrastination knows that if you are positive, you might become hopeful. If you are hopeful, you might become brave. If you are brave, you might dream. So it turns the spotlights on the mistakes you've made in the past and the dangers of trying, and even highlights the shipwrecks of other people to freeze you in your tracks. Pessimism pauses. Optimism pushes.

I used to tell people, "I don't want a fifty-person company. I want to stay small. I don't want to have to fire people." The truth is, I didn't want to stay small. I was just afraid to really dream. So, I reviewed all the difficult tasks I imagined come with growing a company and overfocused on the potential failure. I didn't even have employees when I was downplaying my desires, so why was I spending time thinking about firing them? Because I was stuck in the analyst's trap.

I'm an analyst at heart but I naturally lean toward negativity, so that's the trap I look out for the most. I struggle with perfectionism so much that I had to write a whole book to learn how to deal with it. (It's called *Finish*.) I've had to rebuild multiple pieces of IKEA furniture because I hate reading instructions and just want to jump in, so the hustler's trap is a real issue for me. Finally, if somebody needs five ideas, I give them five hundred, because turning off the dream spigot is a challenge for me.

If that's true, if I've struggled with all four traps, how have I ever gotten anything done in my life?

How in the world is this my eleventh book and not just a half-written manuscript trapped in a laptop outside of Nashville?

How has my business not collapsed in a pile of dreams or never-launched plans?

Easy.

I just use the permissions I'm about to teach you.

¹ Fuschia M. Sirois, Danielle S. Molnar, and Jameson K. Hirsche, "A Meta-Analytic and Conceptual Update on the Associations Between Procrastination and Multidimensional Perfectionism," *European Journal of Personality* 31 (March 2017): 137–59, <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2098>.

Tailored vs. off the rack

Mellie Brackett had a problem.

For seven years in a row, she'd been trying to master Getting Things Done (GTD), one of the world's most popular time management systems. David Allen's classic book has sold millions of copies and is considered the bible of personal productivity. But Mellie, despite her best attempts, could not seem to make it work, particularly the "two-minute rule."

That rule states that if a task can be completed in two minutes or less, you should do it immediately rather than adding it to your to-do list. It sounds simple in principle, but in practice, nothing Mellie did ever took less than two minutes. Every task she started, even the smallest ones, always exceeded 120 seconds. If she couldn't do that, the easy rule, how could she possibly manage the rest of the GTD system?

"You need to tailor it to you, Mellie, not try to execute it off the rack," I told her.

She'd never heard that concept of self-improvement before, so I explained it.

"A book is a mass-market product, like a shirt at Costco. It's designed to help thousands of people in thousands of different situations, so the advice it gives has to be wide in its application. Then you as the reader tailor it to your exact life so that it fits perfectly. If two-minute tasks take you four minutes, then tailor that rule. If some parts of the GTD system that worked exactly for David Allen don't work exactly for you, drop them. Pick the parts that help you, cut out the parts that don't.

“I wear 30×30 jeans, but no one carries that size. I can usually only find 30×34 in stores. It would be ridiculous if I tried to wear those off the rack, just dragging four extra inches of denim around because I felt like I had to. I get them tailored and then they look custom designed for me. Don’t do GTD. Do MGTD—Mellie Getting Things Done.”

You could see relief wash across her face as I released her from the seven years of perfectionism she’d been wrestling with.

The \$10,000 procrastination tailor

Imagine if you were Mellie and had \$10,000 to spend on a procrastination tailor. Instead of just guessing which permission you need the most—dream, plan, do, or review—he could tell you exactly where to focus. After asking you a few quick questions, he could instantly assess your strengths, identify the specific traps you need to avoid, and give you advice that’s custom designed for your life. He’d create a master list of soundtracks based on your unique answers and even send you weekly updates to keep you focused on your remarkable life.

If you needed some tough love, he wouldn’t pull punches. If you needed lots of inspiration but less instruction, he’d amplify the motivation. If you wanted a laundry list of actions, he’d create it for you. This wouldn’t be off the rack. This would be individually designed for you.

That would be amazing, but who has \$10,000 to spend on a procrastination tailor? How would that conversation go with your spouse? “Do you think the kids want to eat this month? Don’t you feel like heat is overrated? I’ve been thinking about selling the car so I can focus more on walking and being outside.”

You don’t have \$10,000 to spend on a procrastination tailor. Neither do I . . . but my company does.

We invested \$10,000 to build the world’s first procrastination tailor. If you want to customize the ideas in this book to your exact needs, we’ve got you covered. In less than three minutes, you can build a

DPDR plan that's like you, one of one. Authors don't like to use the phrase "put down this book," because what if you don't come back? But that's exactly what you should do.

To multiply the potency of the ideas you're about to read by 1,000 percent, visit JonAcuff.com/profile. With this simple assessment, you'll know if you're a natural dreamer, planner, doer, or reviewer. You'll know which of the four permissions you lean on the most, where procrastination is most likely to strike, and what you should do about it. It's AI-based, so it's fast, fun, and best of all . . . free. Thousands of people have already used the tailor and the results are stunning!

You're up next. The tailor is waiting. He's ready to help you eliminate procrastination and get fit for your remarkable life. Put down this book. Invest three minutes. Build your MDPDR. That's the Mellie Dream Plan Do Review if your name is Mellie too. Or the BDPDR if your name is Brian. Or the CDPDR if your name is Claire. Or the . . . you get the picture.

DREAM

What do I want to do?



Permission to know your purpose

We can't get coffee together.

It's not because I'm an evolved gentleman who only drinks tea. "Could I just get a cup of hot water? I carry my own loose-leaf in this tiny satchel." It's not because Nashville is lacking for coffee shops. We have plenty. They rival churches and bachelorette parties in quantity. It's not because I don't like coffee. I love coffee and it loves me.

We can't get coffee together because I prefer a walk. The older you get, the more you appreciate walks and birds. I didn't notice a single bird in my twenties. I'm sure they were there. I just didn't see them.

Now I do, especially when I take walks, which is what I'd suggest if you asked me to get coffee. If you were wrestling with procrastination and wanted to be remarkable, we'd loop the river trail in the back of our neighborhood. Nashville gets a hundred-year flood every seven years, but the water's low right now. The last time it was up, the cows on a nearby farm were swept away downstream and beached themselves by our community pool. Every man within a ten-block radius who watched *Yellowstone* and owned a cowboy hat tried to lasso them.

On the walk, the very first thing I'd help you figure out is your mission. Did you ever notice that's 70 percent of the word "permission"? Sometimes life is just that simple. If you want to give yourself permission to dream, you have to start by picking a mission.

Fortunately, you don't have to struggle with that because I already figured it out for you. We've never met, but I know what your mission in life is. If you've ever found it difficult to identify your

purpose, passion, or why, I hope you're sitting down. I know it and I'm not even going to drag it out until the last chapter like some sort of Eminem mic-drop moment. "The real treasure was the friends we made along the way. The end."

Your mission is sales.

That's it.

You are in sales.

No, I'm not, you say. I'm a stay-at-home mom trying to make it through the terrible twos or that valley of utter desperation known as "every kid in my house needs a ride somewhere and none of them can drive yet."

I'm not in sales. I'm a retired schoolteacher deciding what's next.

I'm a would-be writer hoping this book will be the nudge that convinces me to finish mine.

I'm a slightly out-of-shape person who wants to be a slightly in-shape person.

I'm a lot of things, but I am not in sales.

You are though.

In fact, you've been in sales your entire life. No one knows the product you're offering as well as you do. You are the top salesperson in the world!

How do I know? Because you are selling you to you.

From the moment you wake up each morning to the moment you fall asleep, you are selling the most important product that's ever existed—a remarkable life—to the most important person you've ever met—yourself.

Did that sound egotistical?

Maybe you're thinking, "I'm the most important person I've ever met?"

I mean, come on. That's a bit much, right?

It's not. It's deep truth if you look at it the right way.

Who on the planet do you have more influence over than yourself? The answer is no one.

Who has the greatest chance to change how you interact with the world? You do.

Whose actions have bigger consequences on you than your own? Whose thoughts shape you more than your own? Entrepreneur and philosopher Naval Ravikant was dead-on when he said, "People think they can't change themselves, but they can. People think they can change others, but they can't."¹

There's not a politician, parent, boss, celebrity, spouse, or friend who has more power over you than you have over yourself. Did you know that? I didn't, and when I first found out, it was a bit overwhelming.

It was easier for me to give that power to other people than it was to admit I had it all if I wanted it. I procrastinated for decades by blaming everyone but me for my very average life. I blamed my own parents for years, blaming them for my stressful temperament, my struggles with money, and my inability to change my own oil. My dad didn't give me a pocketknife when I was eight, therefore I don't have the courage to ask for a raise at thirty-two.

A warning, though, if you'd like to continue to lay all your woes at your parents' feet: Never have kids. The minute you do, you will realize this is hard. I'm making so many mistakes, and my generation has a hundred times more parenting resources than my parents had. I wouldn't want my own kids to spend their thirties in counseling because they blame me for all their problems.

Owning your own life is overwhelming at first, especially in a culture that has decided "personal responsibility" is a vulgar phrase. I once tweeted my frustration about a father I knew who had abandoned his family. I didn't call him out by name, because I'm not a monster, but instead I bemoaned the absurd callousness it requires to walk out on an eight-year-old daughter and stay away for years. One of my followers responded that it was my fault because I helped build a societal structure that forced him to do that. I don't know what I personally did to make that man run off with a flight attendant, but my bad.

If you don't point the finger at your upbringing or society, you can always blame history. A book I recently read claims my anxiety is

because cavemen had to be constantly vigilant or they'd be eaten by saber-toothed tigers. I knew it wasn't my fault for being afraid that every voicemail I get is someone calling to say they're mad at me! Three thousand years ago, some particularly antsy Cro-Magnons screwed me up. Why do I worry that they will run out of overhead space before I get on the plane? Neanderthals. Obviously.

¹ Navalism (@NavalismHQ), "People think they can't change themselves, but they can," X, December 5, 2024, 10:35 a.m., <https://x.com/NavalismHQ/status/1864710071630069809>.

Owner vs. blamer

I genuinely like blame and even used to date its cousin entitlement, but unfortunately, we can't bring it where we're going. This is an either-or situation. Either we take ownership of our mission and build a remarkable life, or we use blame as a form of procrastination and wait for somebody else to do something.

Will you be an owner or a blamer?

This is what remarkable people always assess before they help you. If you ask them for advice over a coffee, they will quickly sort you into one of those two categories. A common way to do that is to make the first meeting ungodly early and on their side of town. If you push back by saying, "I don't like to get up early and traffic is always bad in that area," they know you're not committed. If you won't do the easy action of setting an alarm and enduring a little gridlock, you won't act on their more significant advice either. The coffee is canceled.

My favorite example of this type of sorting is what Rick Edler does. He's one of Sotheby's top agents in the Los Angeles market and has sold tens of millions of dollars of real estate. When aspiring agents say, "I want to join your firm and be remarkable like you," he gives them the book *Ninja Selling*. He says, "This is my favorite book. Read it and let me know what you think." On page 51, he writes his personal cellphone number. If they never call, he knows they're not ready for remarkable.

You are. I know that and you do too, so let's dispatch any last bit of blame you still have kicking around your life. It's a vampire procrastination will use against you. I have an eight-word soundtrack that will put a stake in its heart.

“It’s not your fault. It is your fix.”

I hope you’ve had a perfect life up to this point. I hope your parents were supportive. I pray your coaches encouraged you, your teachers saw the best in you, and bosses always called you to greatness in exactly the way you needed. But if they didn’t—and I have my suspicions—I hope you’ll pause any energy you’ve been donating to old enemies and remember those eight words.

It’s not your fault. It is your fix.

No one has as much at stake in your life as you do. Process the past, but don’t get stuck there. Don’t let regret turn into a form of procrastination. There are too many remarkable opportunities waiting for you in today and tomorrow to delay any longer.

How do we fix it, whatever our “it” is? We start with sales, which is the easiest approach to personal development you’ll ever find.

Rise and grind? No thank you.

No pain, no gain? Sounds awful.

Hard mornings make for easy days? Again, why does the first half of the day have to suck so that the second doesn’t?

Real growth is just sales.

I’m not waging a war against some part of me that doesn’t want to change. There’s no wrestling match happening between my ego, self, and id. My shadow self isn’t grappling with my true self, whatever that means. My days are far simpler than that, and yours can be too.

All I am doing is selling my future self to my present self.

The reward

One afternoon, I told a close friend that I believed most people could make an extra \$10,000 if they stopped procrastinating. His response surprised me.

"I wouldn't share that idea publicly," he said. "That's not very relatable."

That was good feedback. I didn't react in the moment because I knew exactly what he meant. I'd spent the last few years trying my hardest to be relatable. My job comes with an audience, and relatability was always something I leaned on as a strength.

It started with my first book in 2010. It was a satire of Christian culture, and I penned it as an insider. I used to say, "This book is a reflection of a group of people, but I'm standing next to the mirror, not behind it. I'm in the reflection too. I'm not pointing a finger at anyone but me." I wasn't making fun of you. I was making fun of us, and that made it relatable. A few years later, when I transitioned to business books, I brought this same approach with me.

Quitter was about an average guy trying to find his dream job. *Start* was about an average guy learning how to begin adventures. *Do Over* was about an average guy rebuilding his career after a series of bumps in the road. When I wrote *Finish*, though, a hairline crack appeared in my relatable facade. At Penguin, Adrian Zackheim, a publishing legend behind such titles as *Good to Great* and *Start with Why*, pointed out something troubling. "People will have a hard time believing you struggle with finishing, Jon. This is the sixth book you've written."

"Don't worry," I said. "I can make it relatable." And I did, but a small gap was beginning to open between how I was writing and

how I was living. This often happens in publishing. I'll never forget the Barnes & Noble employee who told me a famous guru who writes about peace and kindness was a huge jerk. "That guy," he said, pointing to a poster of a serene-looking man in a shawl, "should read his own book."

My own gap was not that extreme—nice guy in books, mean guy in bookstore. Mine was more average guy in books, ferociously ambitious guy at home. My mistake was that I was holding back the good stuff. I wasn't writing about what was really helping me build a life I'd never dreamed possible, and it started to bother me.

Why wasn't I telling you all the secret tools, tricks, and techniques I used to beat procrastination? Why was I procrastinating at writing about procrastinating? A guest on my podcast summarized it better than I could.

When I asked him what he did to build a remarkable life over the last fifty years, he responded, "If I told you all the things, you'd think I was weird." That is the real reason I held on to my relatable image.

I was afraid.

If I told you that I retired from procrastination in 2013, you'd think I was exaggerating. If I told you that my life changed a second time in July 2023 because I started deliberately tracking my hours and have tallied more than three thousand hours since then, you'd think I was obsessive. If I told you I made millions of dollars with just a bunch of ideas, you'd think I was arrogant. If I told you we got rid of Netflix two years ago and did not die, you'd think I was Amish. If I told you that you could make an extra \$10,000, you'd think I was lying, even though I've helped people just like you to do it.

To be clear, I didn't know any of that would happen when I decided to stop waiting for my real life to begin. When I tell you in this book that if you practice DPDR you can achieve more than you can possibly imagine, I mean it. Remarkable will take you to places tomorrow that you can't fathom today. That makes talking about it a little dangerous.

Relatable is safe because relatable is average. No one argues with relatable, because relatable doesn't have an opinion. It never draws

a line. It never steps into authority and says, "This is the way." People don't fire missiles at relatable, because it's designed to fly under the radar. It's easier to be relatable online because the comments never push back—because there's nothing to push back on. It's an easy life, but it started to bother me.

Relatable becomes an issue

A week after I talked with my friend, I went for a run. I do my bravest thinking on the move. I need endorphins to shake loose what I really believe. As I walked back into my driveway after a 4.3-mile loop in our neighborhood, it hit me. I haven't had very many eureka moments in my life, but this was one of them.

I didn't want to be relatable. I wanted to be remarkable.

More than that, I wanted to help you be remarkable, and beating procrastination was the only way to do it.

That was the biggest surprise for me in 2013.

I used to think the opposite of procrastination was productivity, that my reward for being a person of action would be that I got more done. I once asked a law professor why he left the prestigious firm he was with in Manhattan. "My mission was to become a partner," he said. "I hoped that when I did, I'd have more time with my family. What I learned when I climbed the ladder, though, was that becoming a partner is like winning a pie-eating contest where the prize is more pie. You actually work more when you become a partner, not less."

That's how dealing with procrastination felt to me most of my life. Like a robot who makes ten widgets, with a few adjustments I could make twenty. What a tedious existence that would be, just finding small tweaks to be more efficient. Thank goodness that's not what happened.

What I discovered was that the opposite of procrastination isn't being productive. It's being remarkable. Why? Because procrastination is so common. Nobody starts the race, stays the course, and finishes strong anymore. The entire world is waiting to

launch, so when you dare to fight procrastination, you by definition become out of this world.

Procrastination is an epidemic, and there are signs of that everywhere you look.

Studies show the average American watches about twenty-one hours of TV a week.¹ One of GoFundMe's most common campaigns is for funerals because the average person puts off saving for retirement. The average man doesn't have close friends because he puts off reaching out to a buddy. The average person wants to write a book—more than 80 percent say they do—but less than 1 percent actually accomplish that feat. The average person doesn't like their job, but "this isn't the right economy to look for a new one."

Procrastination is average, and the rewards are too, but who wants any of that?

I don't.

You don't either.

I want remarkable.

I want excitement to chase me out of my bed each morning because I can't believe I get to spend my days the way I do.

I want a marriage that deepens every year, each moment together better than the last. I want to be as happy as those couples you see in Viagra commercials, double tubs on hilltops as the sun sets.

I want to build a home so magical that my kids can't wait to bring their kids to it.

I've sold a million books, and I want to sell millions more.

I want to run hundreds of miles each year, give an ever-increasing amount of money away to causes I love, have a bookshelf with a rolling ladder, and drive a sports car that would make the eighth-grade me with a poster on his wall cheer out loud.

I want remarkable and so do you.

Let's sell ourselves that. This is the time to dream. This is the time to give yourself permission to imagine your mission.

If you never procrastinated again, or even just cut it in half, what would life look like?

If you became remarkable, what would people say about you?

If you never waited for the perfect moment but just used the moment you had, what could you do?

¹ "How Much TV Does the Average American Watch? (2021–2025)," Oberlo, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/how-much-tv-does-the-average-american-watch>.

Every conversation is a classroom

It's easier to beat procrastination when you have a compelling dream that creates its own black hole of time. A good dream will bully all your distractions and hesitations, swallowing every unclaimed hour of your day.

But what if you're not good at dreaming?

I know plenty of people who seem gifted in this first permission. They can rattle off ten new dreams at the drop of a hat and are always chasing after the next adventure. That's not always me though. Despite being more of a dreamer than my wife, I have a much easier time helping a client or reader dream than I do myself. I have to sell myself the permission to dream regularly. Even though I'm a writer, writing a list of dreams is an intimidating process.

When I'm brimming with desire—or the other side of the coin, disappointment—and don't know what I want, I turn to the easiest way I know to find dreams: remarkable people.

I'm an introvert by nature, so sometimes I have to really sell myself on doing this, but it's worked too often for me to ignore. The key is to pretend you have a podcast. It's called *I Want a Remarkable Life*. You're the host. The guests are the people you know who are remarkable. Who would you invite on the show? What questions would you ask?

One that I stopped asking is "What remarkable things are you doing these days?" If I ask that, the person always humbly responds, "I'm not remarkable, I'm just like everyone else."

They are not just like everyone else, but nobody likes to answer questions like that. The CEO of one of the largest leadership companies in the world recently told me that he's not a go-getter.

That wasn't even a little true. Have you ever met a CEO? None of them are casual.

People don't like to admit they are remarkable or even use that word in daily conversation, so a better question to ask is "What games, goals, habits, or actions do you use to accomplish the things you care about?" That's a lot easier to answer. Often, I'll seed the conversation by sharing a few of mine as examples. I'll say something like, "For instance, I carry a notebook with me to write down ideas, and I've learned to unpack my suitcase the minute I come home from a trip. I use the momentum from being excited to be home as a way to push through a task that is painfully simple but massively annoying." Usually that's all it takes to burst the dam wide open. Remarkable people are always using a hundred different permissions to build remarkable lives, but they never talk about them unless you ask the right way.

Earl Endrich, a real estate agent from Hockessin, Delaware, got thirty-three referrals in a single year for his business. How did he do it? He went all in on industry events and attended thirteen of them in a twelve-month period to network like he'd never networked before. Talk about permission to use overwhelming action.

Susan Murray throws a Friendsgiving dinner each November because you get two families in life—the one you're born into and the one you build into. It's a celebration of the year behind and the year ahead. She embodies the permission to encourage everyone.

Craig Groeschel, the pastor who helped found YouVersion, a Bible app that has a billion users, does two intense, humbling hobbies—jujitsu and flying. Why? Because in addition to YouVersion he's also the lead pastor of LifeChurch, a church with forty-five campuses. You have to be mentally present to fly. Being a pilot removes your ability to think about anything else or you're going to crash. It's the perfect hobby to reduce his stress.

Jujitsu, on the other hand, keeps his ego in check. With his leadership role, Craig is the most important person in many rooms he enters, but not on the mat. Because Craig's newer to the sport, a nineteen-year-old high school dropout may tap him out. Humility comes free with jujitsu.

Adam Severson, the chief business development officer of the law firm Baker Donelson, knows that long walks help him stay remarkable. He doesn't have time for them, so he gives himself permission to move around during meetings. He now takes his conference calls on walks, covering as much as eleven miles at a stretch on days full of meetings. The endorphins, sunshine, and landscape make every conversation better.

I only know those stories because I asked. Collecting remarkable is a lot easier than creating it. When you do, you'll get inspired to build your own version. I don't attend a lot of events, but I speak at a lot of them, which gives me a slightly different chance to network than Earl Endrich. Seeing how deliberate Susan was with her relationships encouraged me to be more intentional with mine. After talking with Adam, I increased the number of walking meetings I scheduled.

I'd rather ski than fly, but it helps me concentrate on the obstacle immediately in front of me, just like Craig does. He chose his two hobbies after he finally found a counselor that didn't tell him to go slower and try something soft like writing poetry as a way to unwind. He told him the opposite. Find a high-adrenaline activity that requires maximum focus and humility. He's an intense guy built for intense hobbies. So am I, but I always thought I had to be better at watercolors if I wanted to reduce stress. Nope, intense is good for me.

Every conversation I have is a classroom, and the only thing I'm studying is remarkable.

There are two other great questions you should ask for your pretend podcast:

1. "What book have you read multiple times?"
2. "How do you think successful people lose their way?"

I used to ask guests on my real podcast, "What four books are on your Mount Rushmore?" but that was too difficult for people to answer unless they were sitting where they could see their

bookshelf. Everyone can easily answer the question about one book they've read multiple times though. A book can quickly teach you who that person is and what knowledge shaped them.

The reason I own a remarkable personal library is that I asked remarkable people what remarkable books they liked. Then I bought the books and got one step closer to my own remarkable life.

The second question sounds negative, but it's just a slightly less weird version of the question "What traps do I need to look out for?" This one gets remarkable people talking because you're not asking about them. You're asking about issues. David Ashcraft, the CEO of Global Leadership Summit, told me it was ego. He says, "I've seen more people fall from pride than from anything else." Good to know.

If dreams don't cascade out of you easily, don't worry. Find a few remarkable people and ask them what they're doing. Take some notes. Tailor it to your life and then plan a new project.

People are the best shortcut to remarkable

"Do you want to come to my hotel room and learn knife-fighting skills?"

That's the most awkward sentence a stranger ever said to me in a Marriott lobby. This will surprise you, but I did not want to go to his room and learn knife-fighting skills. That's the fastest way to end up on an episode of *Law & Order: SVU*.

That case would take Ice-T about ten seconds to solve. "He got stabbed. A bunch." *Chung, chung*. Executive Producer Dick Wolf.

I meet a lot of different people in a lot of different cities as part of my job as a public speaker. I never know who I will end up talking to in lobbies, on planes, or in Ubers, but as I got serious about researching procrastination, permission, and remarkable, I started to notice that in all my conversations people told me one of two things:

1. I want to be remarkable.
2. I'm tired of average.

Have you ever said anything like that? At the core, both sentences are saying the same thing: I want permission to dream.

The first is a statement of unmet desire. "I want to have my own business like you. I want to write a book. You've got adult kids—how did you raise them when they were teenagers? I want to be a good mom." Those are all different dreams, but they all stem from the same place: I want to be remarkable.

The twenty-eight-year-old who chased me down at the valet stand after I spoke to Nitrogen, a financial software company, had one question: "How do I learn to give keynotes?" He wanted to be remarkable. He wanted more out of life, and maybe you do too. Chances are you've bumped into someone already doing the thing you want to do, or in a burst of bravery you simply gave yourself permission to dream. Now that desire won't leave you alone. It's remarkable or bust. That's what happened to me when I joined Dave Ramsey's team in Franklin, Tennessee.

Prior to that, I'd had a very traditional—what a kind way to say *average*—career. I earned \$24,500 at my first job after college and thought that was the largest amount of money any one person could make. In order to show off my abundant resources, I immediately bought a used Mazda 626 because it was twice the car my dad had, a Mazda 323. A therapist would have a field day with that sentence.

I progressed over the next twelve years with 5 percent raises and minor bonuses as I climbed the corporate ladder. I thought I was killing it, and since I didn't know anyone who was financially remarkable, I wasn't aware there were other levels to achieve. Remember reason #1 people don't choose remarkable? "They don't know it exists." Ding! Ding! Ding! That was me.

Worse than that, I had a lot of broken soundtracks about money. I thought financially remarkable people were greedy. I was convinced people like me weren't allowed to have any money. I believed that chasing success would cost me my marriage, make me an absent father, and probably lead me to wearing jewel-toned suits with white T-shirts in South Beach. (A lot of what I learned about money I picked up from *Miami Vice*.)

That all changed when I started working for Dave Ramsey.

Practically overnight, I was surrounded by remarkable people who made remarkable money and were remarkably generous. They hadn't been ruined by the money, they'd been equipped by the money. They were using it to change their lives and the lives of millions of people around the world. I didn't have to self-sabotage every time I got close to my Acceptable Success Line. On the contrary, coworkers encouraged me to lift my sights higher and dream bigger. Every preconception I had about money got shattered, and I had permission to make remarkable money.

People are either shortcuts to remarkable or roadblocks. They either raise you up or hold you down. The Ramsey team was a shortcut. Their example made me feel like anything was possible. Desire drove me in that season of life, and maybe it's driving you right now too.

Or the exact opposite is happening. You're tired of "average." You feel behind. You resonated with the Colin Hay song "Waiting for My Real Life to Begin" because you are. It's been weeks, months, maybe even years, and it's enough already. You've had your fill. Your frustration level has reached a tipping point and you're angry enough to change. Righteous anger is just passion pushed to the limit. Never waste it.

A forty-six-year-old mortgage broker in Fairfax, Virginia, told me that exact story. "I've got four adorable kids and a wonderful wife, but my career has stalled. I'm stuck. I'm capable of more and need to reignite that spark that used to drive me. There's something not working right now." Essentially, he was saying his career was average and he was tired of that. If he didn't change, nothing would change.

That's why I started writing online in 2008. It wasn't desire that drove me. It was disappointment. My career was sputtering and I knew it. I had a million words inside me, but my corporate marketing position only needed about a hundred. I had to find an outlet or I was going to explode. I didn't want an average career anymore and was willing to risk remarkable. It wasn't any more complicated than that.

Desire encouraged me to make remarkable money.

Disappointment encouraged me to build a remarkable career.

I've continued being driven by those two opposite forces my entire life. So will you. The nice thing is, regardless of which path brought you here, you always end up in the same destination—permission. If you desire to be remarkable, you have to give yourself permission. If you're tired of average, you have to give yourself permission.

If you don't know what you want yet, that's OK.

Sometimes the fastest path to figuring out what you want is finding out who already has it. When we were young, we'd go to career fairs to understand what was possible out there in the great wide world of adulthood. Why did we ever stop asking other people about what dreams are really possible?

The missing zero

I need to make a confession.

Now that we're deep into the book and closer friends, I need to admit that I left off a zero in chapter 18. When I shared my belief that the average person could make an extra \$10,000, that wasn't the real number. The real number was \$100,000, but I was afraid if I wrote that, you would think I'm out of touch.

That's an absurd amount of money. That's an arrogant amount of money. That's the kind of figure that could make a reader put down a book in disgust, especially when you consider that only 18 percent of individuals in the US make over \$100,000 a year.¹

You're probably thinking, "You're tone-deaf, Jon!" I agree, but this was a real sentence I said to a friend.

You can make an extra \$100,000 in the next twelve months.

That's a crazy thing to write in a book and an even crazier thing to say to a stranger named Steven who I met in South Dakota, but that's exactly what I did.

I hadn't intended to tell Steven that, but hope sneaks up on you sometimes. I'd never met him before, but I'd been on his podcast a few months earlier. When a client brought me to Sioux Falls for the second time in my life, Steven reached out.

The first time I had visited South Dakota, I said another crazy sentence: "I'll grab something to eat as I drive to my destination." I have a compulsive need to leave the airport as fast as I can no matter what city I am in. Sixty miles, one million tumbleweeds, and zero fast-food restaurants later, I arrived at the hunting lodge that was hosting the meeting I'd be speaking at in the morning. "Excuse

me, I know there's not a restaurant in this facility, but can you point me to the nearest one in town?"

"Sure," the front desk employee said with a smile. "It's about sixty miles away, near the airport." The Taco Bell I so confidently passed up in Pierre, South Dakota, was not *a* Taco Bell, it was *the* Taco Bell. That night I dined on the pulverized crackers and long-gone-rubber granola bar every business traveler squirrels away in a deep pocket of their suitcase for hungry moments like this.

Steven's moment was different. He read my book *All It Takes Is a Goal* and had a few follow-up questions about the projects he was working on. He had pages of notes and had clearly put some thought into the conversation. As I listened to his plans, though, I began to realize that none of them would work.

They were good ideas. They checked all the boxes—specific, measurable, personal, time-based, and so forth—but they were doomed for failure. Most dreams are. According to research, more than 90 percent of all New Year's resolutions fail.

Why are we such gluttons for punishment? If we know that 90 percent of all diets don't work, 90 percent of all books don't get written, 90 percent of all businesses don't make a profit, and 90 percent of all closets never really get decluttered, why do we keep trying January after January?

Because deep down there's a tiny flame of truth that refuses to go out:

You are capable of more than you think.

You know you can be remarkable.

You know it's true. You might not have the health you want right now, you might be stuck at a job you don't like, you might be trying to lead a roomful of employees who just don't seem to get it. The odds are stacked against you, perhaps, in one or maybe even every aspect of your life, but there's a part of you that believes you can stop procrastinating and become remarkable.

Steven certainly did. He had pages of ideas, but his Acceptable Success Line was holding him back. Remember how we defined the ASL? It's the arbitrary amount of success we're comfortable with, an invisible line cobbled together from our parents' beliefs, the average salary of our five closest friends, the town we grew up in, and our education.

Steven's ASL was low. Mine used to be too.
I knew just what it would take to raise it.

Why \$100,000?

Why did I use a number that big? Why did I tell Steven I thought he could earn an extra \$100,000?

Because sometimes permission requires a breaker bar belief.

If you've never had to change a flat tire, I envy you. I've changed a few, and the hardest part is always getting the lug nuts off. Sometimes they get stuck through wear and tear. Other times the mechanic who last rotated your tires employed the same impact wrench they use to tighten the wings on fighter jets. You take out the adorable wrench that comes free in your mini roadside assistance kit, and the lug nuts giggle as you struggle to move them 1/82 of an inch.

That's when a breaker bar comes in handy. A breaker bar is a long metal tube you place over the handle of the wrench. The added length gives you feet of leverage instead of inches. It gets you far enough away from the problem that you can exert more power, pressing down with your entire body weight through your foot instead of kneeling six inches from the wheel and hoping your grip strength is up to the challenge.

A breaker bar offers an extreme solution to a tiny problem. An additional \$100,000 was a breaker bar belief. It was massive and outlandish. I knew that number would shock Steven out of stuck and encourage him to take action. I knew that amount of money was double, maybe even triple what he had ever made. It had to be to wake him up. It had to be to demolish his Acceptable Success Line.

I couldn't inspire him to dream, plan, do, and review if I said, "You can make an extra \$4,000 in the next twelve months!" That's less than an extra \$11 a day. Nobody is getting unblocked for that. If your dream was to clean your garage, I wouldn't say, "I bet you can throw away two whole shoeboxes of junk!" Boring. I'd say, "It's going to be so empty when you're done, I bet you can park both cars inside for the first time in years!"

If your dream was to start a business, I wouldn't say, "Imagine filling out the LLC paperwork!" I'd say, "Imagine how big the conference room is going to be in your building in downtown Boulder, Colorado! That floor-to-ceiling window is going to frame the mountains and make every meeting feel like the start of *The Lord of the Rings!*"

Inertia is never dissolved with realism. It is smashed with a breaker bar. So I hit Steven with \$100,000.

That's one of the tensions of living a remarkable life. It requires two opposite forces:

Big, outlandish dreams.

Tiny, achievable actions.

When it comes to dreaming, I am going to beg you to reach for the stars.

When it comes to doing, I am going to ask you to take small steps consistently over time.

The first gets you going.

The second keeps you going.

You need both. The first step with Steven was to dream of something wild. So we did.

I gave him permission to go big, but as expected, he wasn't convinced I was telling the truth.

¹ Jack Flynn, "How Many People Make Over 100K Per Year?," Zippia, January 18, 2023, <https://www.zippia.com/advice/how-many-people-make-over-100k/>.

Belief is a choice

I wasn't insulted that Steven didn't believe me at first. More than 90 percent of the time when I tell someone I see something in them, they don't believe me. If they did, they'd already be doing the thing. Disbelief is actually a good sign because it means you're stepping out of your comfort zone. If you scoffed when you read my sentence about the extra \$100,000, that's great. That just means that would stretch you, and you're not reading this book to stay the same.

If we were on a walk together, do you know what question I wouldn't ask you? "What do you believe right now?" I wouldn't ask because most people have picked up deeply unhelpful beliefs by the time they're adults. Do you know what Steven believed about himself? I do because I asked him.

"You're not in the business world."

"People would never pay you to do what you do."

"You're a fake for doing this, so stick to your day job."

"You'll always be paycheck to paycheck."

"Things are never going to change for you."

"What will people think of you making extra money?"

Can you see why he needed a breaker bar belief? He had every tool that he needed to accomplish his plans, but he didn't have permission to dream. Can you imagine what would have happened if I had tried to untangle that knot of lies before we got started? It would have been impossible.

That's why the wrong question to ask is "What do you believe right now?" and the right question to ask is "What do you want to believe?" One is information. The other is aspiration. And aspiration

will always cause action faster. You'll run through a wall for aspiration. You won't get out of bed for information.

How about you? What do you want to believe right now about yourself?

I want to believe I am a person who consistently exercises.

I want to believe I'm a great mom.

I want to believe I have a wonderful financial future.

I want to believe I'm a writer.

I want to believe I'm a leader.

I want to believe I can run a business.

I want to believe my best years are ahead of me.

It doesn't matter if you don't believe any of those things perfectly right now. That's the best part about permission: 1 percent is enough to start. You can be filled with 99 percent doubt and still move to action. It only takes 1 percent to begin beating procrastination.

I've owned a business for the last thirteen years. It's not a side hustle, it's my only hustle. It's been profitable from day one, grown every year, and been more successful than I could have ever imagined when I first took the leap. And yet . . . almost every morning I need to remind myself what I want to believe because it isn't automatic yet.

Doubt greets me at daybreak, not determination. I have to renew my permissions each morning, as if I've forgotten everything I learned the day before. I swear I went to bed positive, but like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*, I wake up to find the same cocktail of negativity, cynicism, and pessimism waiting for me on the nightstand.

It might be because I grew up in Massachusetts. We're a cold, sarcastic people. When a friend of mine in Boston was in labor, the nurse asked her what she was naming the baby. She said, "I'm picking between the names Navy and Charlotte." The nurse immediately said, "Navy? That's not a name. That's a color. You can't

name your kid a color. Name her Charlotte.” Who criticizes a mom giving birth? Someone cynical from New England, that’s who. Maybe my wicked bad attitude is the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’s fault.

People are always surprised when I confess how naturally negative my attitude is. “But Jon, your books, speeches, and podcast are so positive,” they say.

They are, but that’s only because I learned that the ROI (return on investment) of positivity far outweighs the ROI of negativity. When I give myself permission to have a positive attitude, I make more money, have more friends, stay in better shape, write more books, and feel so much better emotionally and mentally. That starts with giving myself permission to choose how I want to feel instead of just accepting how I currently feel. That’s what Steven did.

When we left that coffee, he didn’t believe he could make an extra \$100,000. He told me, “I still feel like a fifth grader hoping a girl will dance with me.” Remember that feeling? All the boys on one side of the gym, all the girls on the other? Steven felt that way, but I had given him a breaker bar belief and that’s all it took to start. A few months later, he would send me two of the most unbelievable texts I’ve ever received.

The texts

I’ve met a thousand almost-Stevens.

The last time I walked into a bank like some sort of old person who still ambles into physical banks, the teller told me he wanted to write a horror trilogy. Uber drivers tell me they want to be public speakers someday. Strangers on planes tell me they might start their own business. I have one of those unusual jobs where people automatically tell you their big dreams. I don’t think that ever happens when someone finds out you’re a podiatrist. “Oh, you specialize in feet? I’ve always wanted to spend more time around feet!”

What separates the “almost” from the “all done” is always the same—permission and action.

Steven poured it on. He fortified his permission to dream with hundreds of actions. He dreamed, he planned, and he certainly knew how to do. He wrote a book. He pitched his podcast to potential clients. He made the most of every business relationship he had. He followed up with new partners and reached out to old ones. He chased down every lead and took meeting after meeting. The only way to turn a dream into reality is to do.

Keep in mind, he lives in South Dakota. If right now you’re thinking, “That would never work where I live,” you must live in North Dakota. That’s the only state I will accept as a valid excuse.

Over the months that passed, I did my best to buoy Steven’s adventure. I suggested books for him to read. I sent random texts that said things like, “There’s \$100K out there trying to jump into your pocket!” When he got his first win, an \$18,000 podcast sponsor, I told him, “That just means there’s still \$82,000 waiting for you.” (I’m fantastic at math like that.)

He didn’t need much encouragement from me at that point, though, because nothing sustains action like a win, and if you do enough, it’s almost impossible not to win. Harvard researchers call this “the progress principle.”¹

Making consistent progress in work you find meaningful is one of the most powerful generators of motivation. Farmers knew this hundreds of years before Harvard. The law of sowing and reaping goes to work for you and you get to harvest fields that are always bigger than you imagined.

Six months after our coffee, Steven texted me one day. Here is exactly what he wrote:

Jon. No need to respond. I just wanted to say thank you.

The goal I set (with your help) back on July 1 was to make an additional \$100K in the next 12 months.

I’m 6½ months in . . . and I just hit \$131,575.

I can’t believe it! Genuinely.

So far . . . my family has bought:

-2 new living room sets

-An outdoor furniture set

-We took our kids school shopping for clothes last August (for the first time ever)

-This Thursday night our entire family is going to Florida

-Bought a (too expensive) English setter (he's like a son to me)

-We've been able to bless a whole bunch of other people above what we were already giving.

Our conversation in Sioux Falls is one I won't forget.

Five months later, he sent me another text:

Jon. No need to respond. Just wanted to say thank you.

An update on my \$ goal. 11 months in on my goals.

Yesterday I just reached \$196K. My goal was \$100K.

One month left.

What universe is this?!?!?!?

Also . . . I'm driving my new ride. A new Outlander. And my new kitchen should be finished in the next 3 weeks. I'm gonna have a dishwasher!!

I often say that I have the best job in the world, and the reason why is that I get a front row seat to watching people like Steven and people like you wake up to remarkable.

Let me say two things about those text messages:

1. Steven told me twice, "No need to respond," but of course I responded. Can you imagine not responding to a text that amazing? What kind of jerk just thumbs-up that text?
2. I was thrilled for Steven, but I wasn't surprised.

I'm not going to be surprised when you smash through your Acceptable Success Line too. I'm not going to be surprised when you

beat it into submission with a breaker bar belief. I'm not going to be surprised when your dream is so big and your actions so small and sustainable that the combination of these two opposite approaches means you never procrastinate again.

Dream big. Do small.

Text me when you're done.

¹ Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer, "The Power of Small Wins," *Harvard Business Review*, May 2011, <https://hbr.org/2011/05/the-power-of-small-wins>.

Throw shorter pity parties

Some things in life suck. Can we just say that? Spending the night in the Milwaukee Airport La Quinta when the airline finally admits at 2 a.m. that the crew timed out sucks. Firing a direct report you like but who is underperforming sucks. Adult braces suck. Pumping gas when it's six degrees outside sucks. Eating a healthy salad instead of a cheeseburger sucks. Running when it's ninety degrees outside and your neighborhood feels like an armpit sucks.

A speaking engagement at your alma mater where you think dozens of students are going to come hear you and probably stand up on their desks and recite "O Captain! My Captain!" like at the end of *Dead Poets Society*, but only three come and they overordered so many appetizers that the custodial staff has to clean up at the end of the night with a look on their face that says, "I guess they grossly overestimated this guy's popularity, but at least my kids will enjoy this sandwich tray" sucks.

There are so many things in life that just flat-out suck.

When you run into one, you have two options:

1. Procrastinate, pretend you don't have to do it, and multiply the suckitude by a factor of one hundred.
2. DPDR it.

The second way is obviously better, but don't forget one critical component: permission.

Give yourself permission to throw a pity party—just make it a short one.

Set a timer for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, all day if it was an election that made you so upset, and then be honest with yourself.

No one likes a salesperson who lies. You're too smart for that.

If I tried to tell myself, "I love doing social media. YouTube is my favorite," Procrastinating Me would spot that falsehood immediately. Remember, we're selling ourselves, not lying to ourselves. I don't like making videos, and I'm honest with myself about that. But if I had waited until I felt like making them, then I never would have made any.

Instead, I threw a short pity party, which included writing this chapter, and then I piggybacked social media onto something I do like.

I like being able to pay for my daughters' college tuition. It means a lot to me that they won't graduate with crippling student loan debt. Do you know how I do that? I speak at events. Do you know how I do that? I write new books that clients are interested in. Do you know how I do that? I sell books so that publishers want to publish me again. Do you know how I do that? I write emails to my dedicated newsletter subscribers. Do you know how I do that? I create social media content that makes people want to sign up for my newsletter.

Ahhhhhh, there it is.

The dream daisy chain.

I just connected the thing I really don't want to do with the thing I really do want to do.

If I look at social media content all by itself, I will never want to do it. If I look at it as part of a bigger dream, I will sell myself on it every single time.

By the time this book comes out, I will have a thriving YouTube channel. Bet.

See that, I'm already picking up younger slang as I spend time making videos.

If there are a handful of things you have to do but don't want to do, connect them to dreams you love to do. Most people quit the annoying little stuff because they lose sight of the bigger picture. I

am constantly reminding myself of the big dream when the tiny tasks seem terrible.

Build a dream daisy chain.

A word on ready

Procrastination loves the word *ready*.

It is always trying to get you ready. You can't write the book until you are ready. You can't start the business until you are ready. You can't fully commit to the exercise plan until you are ready. You can't give yourself permission to plan until you are ready.

If you've been waiting until you're ready, I have some exciting news for you.

In dreaming, there is no ready.

Ready is a myth.

You will never be ready to have kids.

There's not an honest parent alive who would say, "As soon as we knew everything there is to know about kids, we were ready to have one." No one is ready.

The best things in life are always on-the-job training. The growing is in the going. You become a runner by running. You become a writer by writing. You become a parent by parenting. You become a business owner by starting a business.

The only way to learn how to swim is to get wet. In the words of Lemony Snicket, "If we wait until we're ready, we'll be waiting for the rest of our lives."

Stop waiting for ready.

What do the signs in your stands say?

Garth Brooks is a genius.

I don't care if you hate country music. If you ever have the tremendous good fortune of attending one of his concerts, you will say the same sentence I just said.

I was late to Garth Brooks, but when a coworker dragged me to a concert in 2010, I was instantly hooked. The most brilliant thing he did during the show at Bridgestone Arena is what I call a "live mixtape." Garth has 342 songs. If the average length is three and a half minutes, he'd need a twenty-hour concert to play his entire catalog. That's too long. Nobody wants to honk and tonk for that length of time.

To address that abundance issue, he sings snippets of songs based on the signs people are holding in the crowd. During a break in the concert, he comes back onstage with just an acoustic guitar. Strolling casually like he's about to sing "Wonderwall" to impress a girl at summer camp, he points to someone a hundred rows back holding a sign with the name of a song on it.

"Ohhh, I love that one too," he says. "Is it OK if I sing you my favorite verse?" He launches into the lyric and blows that person's mind. He did that a dozen times over the next ten minutes and the crowd went wild. It was so perfectly executed that it almost felt planned.

Did his team hand out the signs beforehand, or did a spotter just give him a list of signs people brought as he walked onstage? I'm not completely sure, but based on another moment that happened that night, I'm leaning toward the former.

During a duet with his wife Trisha Yearwood, she slapped him on the butt playfully. The audience lost it. It felt like a funny moment every couple in the crowd had experienced in their own kitchen. I was curious though—was that spontaneous? Was that the first time they'd done that?

I texted my friend Chris Thomas, who had attended the previous night's concert, and asked him if the same thing happened at his show.

Yep.

Trisha had slapped him at the exact same moment in the exact same song in the exact same spot on the stage. I didn't ask him if it was the exact same butt cheek because I was already pushing my luck on the amount of awkward questions you can text a friend.

Remarkable people don't leave a lot to chance.

I think Garth Brooks picked those signs ahead of time, and more importantly, so should you.

Everyone has signs

It's impossible to dream when you're busy obsessing about the signs in your stands.

What do they say?

You might not be able to carry a tune, but we've all filled our stands with friends, family members, old bosses, memories, and moments. Each one is holding a sign. What's written on them?

I asked my friend David Pugsley that question and he was surprised by what he found. "I was on the field," he said a few days later. "I was looking at all the people in the stands and they were all holding up signs." He paused for a second as he remembered that moment. "But what I got was people screaming the most incredibly negative stuff. Like my dad . . ." Another pause. "He was saying, 'You're an ingrate. You talk too much. You talk too loud. You'll never make it.'"

David was telling me this during a group coaching call on Zoom, and the chat went quiet as he continued. "I'm looking at all these

people. Some I can identify names and faces, some I can't. 'You're the worst Lyft driver.' That's one. They're bombarding me and they're all negative. There's no one in the stands cheering for me."

Isn't discouragement wild? David's crowd ranged from people he deeply cared about, like his dad, to random Lyft passengers who wrote him mean reviews.

"How do I mitigate that? Do I have to create a new soundtrack for everybody?" he asked.

David was essentially saying, "Do I have to go into the crowd and sell them on me?" You're in sales, after all. Is that how you fix this situation? You climb off the stage and go through one by one with your updated résumé to tell people, "I'm a pretty good Lyft driver. I just didn't see that curb. In my defense, all four wheels didn't leave the ground at the same time. You wrote '*Dukes of Hazzard*' in your review. That was uncalled for."

Can you imagine how terrible that experience would be? Trying to win back thirty thousand people over, in David's case, sixty-five years of life? I didn't tell him to do that, and I wouldn't tell you either. Most of those people have long moved on, but we haven't.

About twenty years ago, I had a small blog that went viral. It grew faster than I ever expected and was the most exciting development in my otherwise very unremarkable career.

An executive at the company where I worked found out about it and took me to lunch to tell his friend what was happening. He wanted me to share this viral moment, so during our meal I happily detailed everything that was going on. At the end of what I thought was a boisterous, admittedly rambling speech about something I was over-the-moon excited about, his friend said, "Well, you certainly hogged the entire conversation today like a greedy little pig." Oof. Who says that to someone they've just met? I felt gut punched in that moment, my most vulnerable excitement shot down.

I've never told anybody that story, including my wife, but I can still see that sign in my stands. It reads, "Don't share your passions with people. Excitement is risky."

What am I supposed to do with that now though? I don't remember that guy's name. We had one lunch twenty years ago.

Can you picture how ridiculous that LinkedIn message would be if I chased him down? “Hey, this is Jon Acuff. You hurt my feelings twenty years ago and I wanted you to know that you’re the real pig, not me. Thank you for connecting on LinkedIn.”

Some of the people in your crowd have even moved on permanently—aka they are dead. I said that to David because I knew it would make him laugh. My exact words were, “You can’t get your dad to change his sign. He’s dead.” He shook his head, chuckling because he could see the absurdity of trying to change the mind of someone who doesn’t even exist anymore. Imagine going to the cemetery with a Sharpie and a piece of poster board you bought at Walgreens the last time your kid told you at 9:00 p.m. that he has a project due tomorrow to see if you could get your dad to rewrite history.

One of the reasons people procrastinate is that they don’t believe they are capable of the task they’re avoiding. They are filled with doubt and uncertainty. Of course they are, though, because the majority of the signs in their crowd are negative. Every game is an away game if the signs in your stands say, “You suck!” I’d procrastinate too if every arena I walked into was against me.

The permission to dream should be the easiest. Why is it so hard?

Because the older you get, the more signs you collect. When we talk about dreaming, we say things like, “Blue sky! Blank canvas! Fresh piece of paper!” But the truth is, our lives aren’t that way. That’s not failure, that’s just reality. Even the most naturally positive person on the planet has a whole lot of signs that distract them when they try to dream. I did too when I first started dealing with procrastination. What did I do with them?

The solution

How do we fix this situation? The solution is twofold:

1. Hire the Hells Angels.
2. Write new signs.

It might be time to clear the stands. If all the spectators are negative, kick them out. Hire the Hells Angels to just start hitting people with whatever it is the Hells Angels hit people with until the crowd disperses. We don't have time for polite ushers in blue blazers who discreetly escort unruly fans to their cars. We need a biker gang grabbing people by the scruff of the neck and hurling them into the parking lot.

If you're reading an international version of this book, feel free to hire soccer hooligans instead. I hear they prefer clubs and bottles. A pack of wolves would do the trick too. We wouldn't even make an announcement first to give people a head start. We'd just open a bunch of crates with timber wolves in them and say, "Have at it, boys." I'd look away if I were you, it's going to get messy.

After the melee subsides and the seats are all empty, start filling them with new signs. You have permission to write anything that helps you. What should you put on yours? Whatever you're selling yourself right now.

I have one on the wall in my office that says "Write with abandon!" I'm selling myself a brave mindset as I write this book. Just now I was tempted to add some disclaimers to the crowd-clearing idea like, "Well, first figure out who you need to make amends to." But we're not talking about amends. We're talking about abusive signs that are making it difficult to be remarkable. We're talking about negative comments that encourage you to procrastinate.

Write new signs, even if you don't believe them at first. It's perfectly fine for your sign to be aspirational. Here's one I don't completely believe yet:

"The goal is growth, not comfort."

I'm only about 18 percent sold on that one so far.

As I write this, I'm transitioning from a solopreneur to a business owner. It's been incredibly uncomfortable, but on days when I feel like procrastinating and pulling back on the dream, I look into my stands. I see that sign: "The goal is growth, not comfort." Then I do another action on my list and take another step forward.

Forget what's in your wallet. If you really want to be remarkable,
ask the better question:

What's in your stands?

How do dreamers exit dream and enter plan?

Dreamers get stuck in the dream stage. That's the most obvious statement I'll make in this book.

But why?

Because they never pick a dream they can plan.

Researchers have found that picking dreams that can be planned and implemented increases your chances that you will follow through.¹ Go figure.

If you don't pick a dream, you can't plan. If you don't plan, you can't do. If you don't do, you can't review. If you won't review, you'll never fail, or so procrastination promises. But never trying is the worst type of failure.

If you are concerned you don't have what it takes to write a book, procrastination will offer to protect you from that feeling. It solves your problem and says, "If you don't write, you won't ever find out you can't write." You agree, never write the book, and get to hold on to the illusion that you could have if you really wanted to.

I used to be afraid of friendship because I didn't want to be rejected. I wouldn't ask people to hang out because what if they said no? But by hiding, I created the very situation I was afraid of—loneliness. If you procrastinate long enough, you eventually create the situation you're worried about.

You get the illusion that you could have written the book if you really wanted to, but you don't get a book. You don't get friends. You don't get that small business that's banging like a kick drum in your heart.

It's time to pick a dream and move to plan. When you do, when you stand on the edge of this next permission, procrastination will fire another question at you.

"What if I pick the wrong dream?"

What a stroke of genius that is, because it subtly introduces the idea that there's a "right" dream. And let's continue to be clear with that word "dream." The dream doesn't have to be something magical like "move to Colorado" or "open a muffin top bakery." The dream can be anything you're procrastinating on. If you muster the courage to finally clean out your garage or buckle down on your job because you were put on a performance improvement plan, that's a dream too.

The problem is that you want to know your exact dream. You think everyone with a remarkable life knew what their exact dream was. They didn't. Nobody does.

Remarkable lives always start with general directions, not exact destinations.

We want precise longitude and latitude. Instead we get "Europe." That's all you need to start though. Each permission you give, each time you push back on procrastination, and each day you successfully sell yourself on doing what's next clarifies where you're going. Eventually you end up at 4 Rue de la Reine, 2418 Ville-Haute. Where's that? That's the location of Ernster, one of the best bookstores in Luxembourg.

Your book, the memoir with the glowing endorsements, is on a large table in the center of the store. You're doing a European tour because for some reason you're like David Hasselhoff in Luxembourg. Who knew? Not you, of course. You had no idea when you started because you didn't need to. All you had to do was give yourself permission to head in a very general direction like "write a book" or "lose weight" or "start a business."

You're probably thinking, "That can't be enough, Jon. Other people told me I need to know exactly where I'm going. What if I climb to the top of the ladder and realize it's been against the wrong wall this whole time?" That's the fear, that you'll choose the wrong dream and discover you wasted your life.

Can I tell you a secret?

There is no wrong dream.

There's not.

There's only the next dream.

You can't choose incorrectly. It's impossible. Every dream, even the ones that don't succeed—especially the ones that don't succeed—just makes the next one better if you pay attention. Remarkable is always iterative. Also, who climbs to the top of a tall ladder never once looking where they are headed? The "I got to the top of the wrong ladder and was shocked at my destination" never happens to people like us because we give ourselves permission to review and make adjustments along the way. That's the whole point of the review! When you stop procrastinating, you start learning.

Carol Dweck, the researcher who first brought the phrases "fixed mindset" and "growth mindset" into pop culture with her book *Mindset*, tells a fascinating story about a high school in Chicago. Like any other high school in America, there were certain classes students had to pass in order to graduate. But unlike most schools, if you failed a class, you didn't get an F, you got a "Not Yet." Dweck pointed out the brilliance of this approach in a TED Talk. "If you get a failing grade, you think, 'I'm nothing. I'm nowhere.' But if you get the grade 'Not Yet,' you understand that you're on a learning curve. It gives you a path into the future."²

I loved that idea so much that I got a "Not Yet" stamp for my desk. Instead of feeling like I've wasted a hundred hours writing about the wrong idea for a book, now I just stamp the pages with "Not Yet" and try again.

If you look up and don't like your ladder, feel free to jump to a different one, now armed with the knowledge the last one taught you. My first book was a satire. My second was about finances. My third was career focused. My fourth was self-help. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. I adjusted along the way until I found the shelf I wanted to stay on.

You don't need a destination to plan, just a direction.

You gave yourself permission to dream, now give yourself permission to exit dream.

¹ Gregory Owens, Christine G. Bowman, and Charles A. Dill, "Overcoming Procrastination: The Effect of Implementation Intentions," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 38, no. 2 (February 2008): 366–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2007.00309.x>.

² Carol S. Dweck, "The Power of Yet | Carol S Dweck | TEDxNorrköping," posted September 12, 2014, by TEDx Talks, YouTube, 11 min., 18 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-swZaKN2Ic>.

PLAN

How will I do it?



Optimism vs. realism

Most people have a hard time making the transition from dreaming to planning because they require two opposite permissions: the permission to be optimistic and the permission to be realistic.

Dreaming runs on optimism.

Planning runs on realism.

If you're realistic when you're dreaming, you say no too fast to big, bold ideas. You play it safe. If you're optimistic when you're planning, you say yes too fast to decisions that are going to be disastrous when you try to actually do them.

You need both optimism and realism to be remarkable. Just make sure you put them in the right parts of the process or you won't enjoy either and will fall back into procrastination.

Keep it simple

My favorite 1-star review that people write about me is:

"This book was too simple."

Joke's on you, because that's my mission! I did that on purpose.

"This is just common sense." Yes!

"Everything in this Jon Acuff book is so obvious." Keep it coming!

I am simple. Guilty as charged.

That wasn't always the case. When I was younger, I made life more complicated than it needed to be as evidenced by "The Muskrat Incident."

My high school biology teacher, who fought in whatever war was the hardest, gave me a choice my freshman year. I could study for his class and rescue my floundering grade with a little bit of academic gumption. Or I could find roadkill, skin it like Daniel Boone, rebuild the broken skeleton, and then present it to him like a Smithsonian T-Rex for extra credit.

I chose the latter, because of course I did.

My first challenge was locating a suitable dead animal. It's like they always say, "When you don't need roadkill, it's everywhere. When you need it? Good luck." For weeks, I hung my head out of my mom's blue Chrysler Town & Country minivan when she drove me to high school, desperately scanning the road for an animal who had paid the ultimate price for my D+.

Finally, I found what I believed was a muskrat. I must emphasize the word "believed" because it was pretty flattened. It could have been any number of woodland creatures. I jumped out of the car, scooped it up by its tail, arm, or leg, and launched my first taxidermy adventure.

My plan was to have flesh-eating bugs do most of the work. I grew up in the eighties, a time when piranhas were a pretty big issue. (We also talked about the Bermuda Triangle constantly for some reason.) If piranhas could skeletonize a whole cow in minutes, certainly backyard bugs could make short work of this extra-credit critter. I'd rebuild it with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker, mount it in some sort of jaunty pose, and saunter proudly into my taciturn teacher's classroom victorious. Boom. Just passed biology.

None of that happened.

I threw the squirrel (maybe that's what it was) into a Tupperware container outside. I then forgot all about it for a few weeks because a new rapper named Vanilla Ice was distracting the entire nation with his billowy pants.

One afternoon, while throwing a Frisbee with a friend, I rediscovered it in my backyard. "What's this?" I remarked, prodding the container with my foot. "Oh no," I said, instantly recognizing the floating CSI scene in the rain-filled dish. There was no way I was getting bonus points for this varmint stew. I bombed the class, limped across the finish line of ninth grade, and was promptly transferred to an all-boys Catholic school to see if we could turn this thing around.

When given the choice between a little bit of studying and an impossible taxidermy project, why did I pick the wrong option? Because I was a procrastinator and we love complicating life.

A better way

Why do procrastinators complicate projects? Because then we don't have to do them.

Then, when the project fails, we can point the finger at the tangled mess of complexity instead of feeling the shame of procrastination. "Me? I would have loved to have completed that project, but as you can see, it was far too complicated."

If you do this long enough, you eventually become a chaos monster. Do you have any of those in your life? They're always

changing jobs, changing spouses, changing houses, changing hobbies, changing cities. Usually all at once, with a rescue rottweiler thrown in the mix just for good measure.

When it inevitably blows up in their face, they will shout the motto of every chaos monster: "I don't know why these things keep happening to me." They will shake their head, walk out the door, and decide on a whim to get really into beekeeping.

We are not chaos monsters.

We're not even procrastinators anymore.

We are remarkable people.

And remarkable people give themselves permission to keep it simple. They don't wear complexity as some weird badge of honor. They don't believe something has to be difficult to count. They don't add three steps when one step will do.

On the contrary, they weed out complexity anywhere they find it. And they especially do that when it comes to planning.

I am about to give you a time-tested, foolproof planning system that could fit on a fortune cookie. If you were expecting Excel spreadsheets, charts, and graphs, fear not. This is the simplest planning system you will ever use. It has only four words:

"Make tomorrow easy today."

If you do that, you will outplan and outperform every procrastinator you know.

How does it work? I feel a little silly explaining it, but what it means is that you do things today that will make tomorrow easy. You hook up your future self. And "tomorrow" could mean next week, next month, or even next year if you want to get fancy. To take this system out for a spin, though, just start with tomorrow morning.

Night Me vs. Morning Me

About 90 percent of the time I don't want to write in the mornings, but that's OK.

About 90 percent of the time I don't want to run in the mornings, but that's OK.

About 90 percent of the time I don't want to lead meetings in the mornings, but that's OK.

Morning Me doesn't make decisions.

Night Me is in charge of decisions.

Morning Me is in charge of actions.

It works a lot better that way because Night Me is a planner and Morning Me is a doer.

There's a reason this approach is so successful. Researchers call it "proactive coping" when people plan ahead to reduce the potential for future stress.¹ Night Me plans in order to reduce the stress of Morning Me.

This painfully simple division of labor took me years to figure out. I know I keep writing things like "took me years to learn," but I genuinely mean it. I'm a slow processor. For example, I recently learned that networking is helpful. Turns out, "friends hire friends." Were you fifty when you learned that? I was.

If I wait until the morning to decide whether or not to do anything even remotely bordering on difficult, Morning Me will talk me out of it. *Isn't bed better? Wouldn't you rather see what's new on Instagram? Don't you think it's a hassle to even find our running shoes, never mind put them on and go outside in this weather?*

I told you that you were in sales, but that concept works both ways.

You can sell yourself into or out of anything. Morning Me is overwhelmed by decisions, so he talks me out of making any.

But again, that's OK because they've already been made.

Night Me hooked him up. Night Me made the plan. It's in the calendar. Morning Me doesn't even have to think about it. The running gear is already by the door too. The exact miles we're going to run, the route we'll take, and the music we'll listen to has been predecided.

It's tempting to compliment Night Me, but he wouldn't accept it because it's just a lot easier to plan the night before. The real pressure of the day is twelve hours away. Night Me feels like he's getting ahead when he plans the night before, which is one of his favorite feelings in the world.

If I wait until 8 a.m. to plan my Monday, emails are already piling up. The phone is already ringing. Text messages are already ding-dinging. Procrastination will pounce on even the smallest hint of overwhelm and blow it all out of proportion. "It's already 8:30 and you don't have a plan? This whole day is ruined—maybe even the whole week!" You think I kid. I kid not.

One of the best ways to make tomorrow easy today is to come up with a plan. It reduces stress and increases motion. Plus, it removes the paradox of choice. Procrastination is an equal opportunity assailant. If you don't have enough time, it will declare you are "too busy." If you have too much time, it will suffocate you with all the options all at once. A true procrastinator gets paralyzed by a big, empty schedule.

Think you're immune to the paradox of choice? Answer one question for me.

Have you ever scrolled through Hulu, Amazon Prime, Apple+, Disney+, Paramount+, YouTube, and Max but still declared, "There's nothing to watch"? On the contrary, there are a hundred thousand shows to watch. There is thirty thousand solid years' worth of content uploaded to YouTube alone every twelve months.² But when your choice is everything, you can't choose anything, which makes you pick nothing.

You end up watching old episodes of *The Office*. It's just easier to pick that show again and again than it is to wade through the never-ending buffet of modern television.

You have too many choices in every single part of your life, and that makes you procrastinate. The scientific term for that feeling is *chronic cognitive overload*. If it's bad right now, do you think in the future you'll have fewer options? Yikes. You need to give yourself permission to plan.

Night Me does all the planning, including getting the coffee ready. Who do you think has the most patience with all the annoying details of adulthood like taking out the garbage, packing for the early flight, and cleaning the home office so that the day starts fresh—fully awake Night Me or barely awake Morning Me?

Morning Me returns the favor by absolutely crushing the plan all day long. Morning Me will run through a wall if you just pick out the right wall first. It's hard to fully explain the impact this partnership made on my life. When Morning Me and Night Me started working together, I experienced what had previously just been a mushy psychology term—*alignment*. The typical definition of that word is when your thoughts, feelings, and actions reflect your core values. My definition of alignment is when Night Me and Morning Me became bros, not foes.

That's a terrible rhyme, but you're going to remember it.

At night, as I engaged in tasks I would have previously put off, I found myself saying out loud, "I'm hooking up Morning Me." In the morning, I'd say the reverse, jumping into activities that would make the night a lot easier.

Here's one small example. I am currently tracking two things:

1. Hours spent on this book
2. Hours spent in the pursuit of a remarkable life

I keep track of both of these in ninety-minute and sixty-minute segments. In the past, if the ninety-minute timer hit zero at 5:00 p.m., I'd call it a day and start with a fresh ninety in the morning.

But I noticed one day how discouraging that was to Morning Me. Seeing 89 minutes and 59 seconds felt like a big hill to climb first thing in the morning. It made Morning Me feel like he was already behind the eight ball, so Night Me made an adjustment. Now, when I go to bed, I spend fifteen to twenty minutes reading a book that directly applies to my dreams. I take notes and do some work that counts by my standards.

In the morning, I subtract those twenty minutes from the ninety-minute timer. I start at seventy minutes. That makes it feel like Night Me has given Morning Me a twenty-minute head start in a footrace against a competitor.

That might seem silly, but remember, the brain is very gullible. It makes you better at basketball if you just imagine shooting free throws. Starting the race with twenty minutes already finished puts fresh wind in my sails. That's just one of the dozens of different ways I've found for these two new friends to take care of each other.

This approach is also perfect for procrastinators because it gives us instant gratification.

Piers Steel, a leading researcher on procrastination, says that procrastination is deeply tied to how we view time. Procrastinators prioritize immediate rewards over future benefit.³ If we know that about ourselves, then instead of the impossible task of delayed gratification, why don't we just add lots of immediate rewards so we can consistently enjoy instant gratification?

What if you just plan your schedule in a way that allows you to win all day?

That's what Night Me does.

He comes up with a plan like this:

1. Wake up at 6:00 a.m.
2. Spend twenty minutes journaling and reading.
3. Write new book for two hours.
4. Run 3.2 miles from 11:30 to 12:00.
5. Eat lunch at noon.
6. Contact five clients.

Guess what happens when Morning Me does all of that?

Six immediate wins!

I feel great most days because I've spent the day enjoying the instant gratification of winning small races.

Finishing a dream is the best feeling in the world.

This isn't motivational hype. This is science.

Have you ever written a task on your to-do list that you've already done, just so you can cross it off? Do you know why you did that?

When you cross a task off your list, your brain releases dopamine. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter associated with feelings of pleasure and accomplishment, essentially giving you a small "reward" for completing a goal. When you experience that dopamine hit, your brain naturally thinks, "I want more of that."

It will take me a year to write a book, but I'm not delaying the gratification of that project by twelve months. I'm not waiting that long to feel good. That would be terrible. On the contrary, I've narrowed my time frame down to ninety minutes. Every time I write for that long, I win.

I get nonstop immediate rewards because I plan. Delayed gratification is for the birds. Daily gratification is a lot more fun.

What does your version of this look like? Well, let's think about that.

Who is your planner?

Who is your doer?

It could be the exact opposite of me. Maybe Morning You is fantastic at planning, Afternoon You is the doer, and Night You is too tired to do anything. Just the idea of planning for ten minutes at night feels overwhelming to you. Cool, switch the roles. Play around with it until it works for you. When you figure this out, you can start assigning the right parts of DPDR to the right parts of your day.

This strategy worked so well for me that eventually I expanded it. Monday Me started hooking up Friday Me.

¹ Shevaun Neupert and Matt Shipman, "To Stay Positive, Live in the Moment—But Plan Ahead," NC State University, March 25, 2020, <https://news.ncsu.edu/2020/03/25/mindful-proactive-positive-mood/>.

² James Hale, "More Than 500 Hours of Content Are Now Being Uploaded to YouTube Every Minute," Tubefilter, May 7, 2019, <https://www.tubefilter.com/2019/05/07/number-hours-video-uploaded-to-youtube-per-minute/>.

³ Piers Steel, "The Nature of Procrastination: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review of Quintessential Self-Regulatory Failure," *American Psychological Association* 133, no. 1 (2007): 65–94, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.133.1.65>.

The plan expands

In order to publish a new book every two years, I need to write an average of twenty hours a week. I wish the days were equal and I could get the same amount done each twenty-four-hour period, but that is never how it works out. There are two obvious issues with that level of mythical consistency. The first is that every day is different. I'm never able to repeat the same exact schedule every day for seven days in a row. The second issue is that by Friday, I am tapped out. I have less energy, less enthusiasm, and less resilience for difficult projects.

That's true at the macro level too. I write better in January than I do in July.

Why? January is a do month. July is a dream month.

I am excited to do a lot of goals in January. New year, new you! Let's go! In July, I'm not that motivated. I've failed every time I've tried to force July to be like January. July refuses to be anything but July, a season of vacation and dreaming about the future with lots of summer-inspired creativity.

September though? I'm back to do! Home Depot knows that. When I worked there, we called September the "Second New Year's" because parents were so motivated by back to school that they'd do more home improvement projects.

I know that about myself now, both the weekly version and the monthly version. That's why Monday Me frontloads the week.

On Monday I think to myself, "How can I hook up Friday Me?" If I do an extra thirty minutes today, when I've got my best energy, I get to do thirty minutes less on Friday, when I've got my worst

energy. If Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday Me all get on board with that plan, Friday will be a breeze.

I'm writing this on a Thursday night. I've finished nineteen hours of writing this week. Friday Me only has to knock out one hour to hit my weekly goal of twenty.

Easy.

The ten-minute marriage, or how to become better friends with your calendar

Someday I will write a book that does not mention your calendar. Today is not that day. The reason I can't resist riffing on it is that it's the best planning tool that's ever been invented. There's not an app, hack, or AI trick that comes close to the power of the calendar, unless you fight against it.

Sometimes I do. I try to shove twelve hours of work into an eight-hour workday and get crushed by the reality that I can't do everything I planned. I get mad at the limitations of my calendar and frustrated that it refuses to allow me to do everything I want to do today. Perfectionism is often an act of our ego because it tells us we can somehow bend the confines of space or time. As author Hillary Rettig says, "Grandiosity, or the delusion that you're special and/or don't have to follow the normal rules governing productivity and success, underpins nearly every aspect of perfectionism."¹

If you've ever shared this same frustration, I have good news for you. If you stop fighting your calendar, it will actually help you. If you respect its boundaries, you can learn to fit an amazing amount of life inside them. That's actually my favorite definition of time management. Time management is just the art of becoming friends with your calendar.

How do you do that? The same way you build a healthy marriage—spend time together.

My marriage would be trash if I only spent ten minutes a week with Jenny. Even if I tried to make those minutes meaningful. Even if

they were special minutes. You can't build a great marriage if you're only spending a few minutes together each week.

The same is true of your calendar. The reason you're afraid of it sometimes, the reason you procrastinate at planning, is because you don't spend any time with your calendar. Doing a ten-minute weekly review with it is better than nothing, but it's not remarkable. If you want to get better at planning, the secret is not really a secret. Spend more time with your calendar. Use it every day. Trust it as the foundation for your week, not an afterthought.

The next time you're tempted to jump into doing without looking at your calendar, remember the metaphor of the ten-minute marriage. That would lead to divorce, and that's what happens to most people when it comes to time management. Their dreams get divorced from the reality of their calendar and never happen.

Not us though.

The more time you spend with your calendar, the better you get at planning.

¹ Hillary Rettig, *The 7 Secrets of the Prolific: The Definitive Guide to Overcoming Procrastination, Perfectionism, and Writer's Block* (Infinite Art, 2011), 21.

The four F's

They sell ten-year calendars, but you shouldn't buy one.

It's absurd to think you can plan a decade.

If someone bought that calendar in 2019, do you think they would have predicted Covid in their ten-year plan? Did they have "Year 2: Desperately purchase bulk amounts of toilet paper at Costco because a boat got jammed in the Suez Canal and we're all obsessed with the phrase 'supply chain'"?

Of course not. The further you get from the moment you're currently in, the shakier your plans naturally get. This is a serious problem because procrastination wants certainty. You never hesitate when the outcome is guaranteed. Even the biggest procrastinator is more likely to jump into doing if they're assured of exactly what will happen when they do.

Time doesn't work that way though. It actually functions on a sliding scale of certainty. It's not that you can't have certainty. You just can't have it all at once. Here is how it works:

Three days is firm.

Three weeks is fuzzy.

Three months is faint.

Three years is fiction.

I can tell you with 90 percent accuracy what is going to happen in the next three days. I can make commitments—and more importantly keep commitments—very easily over the next seventy-two hours. I can plan each hour of my days on my calendar like clockwork. There will be a handful of surprises, of course. Last night I spent forty-five minutes on the phone with a friend who needed to

talk through a tricky situation at work. That wasn't on the plan two days ago, but that wasn't a major disruption.

I can tell you with about 50 percent accuracy what will happen over the next three weeks. We've had a trip on the schedule for a month, but yesterday one of the four people going texted that she was sick. We're rescheduling the whole thing. That's OK because when we planned it, I knew that time frame was a bit fuzzy and would firm up the closer we got to the date.

I can tell you with 25 percent accuracy what will happen over the next three months. I know in April we will move our daughters back home from college. I don't know the date. I don't know the exact time. I don't know if they have so much stuff we'll need a moving van. I have a general sense of when it will happen. If I tried to get my nineteen-year-old to give me specific details this far out, I'd be wasting my time because it's all going to change. The plans are faint at best.

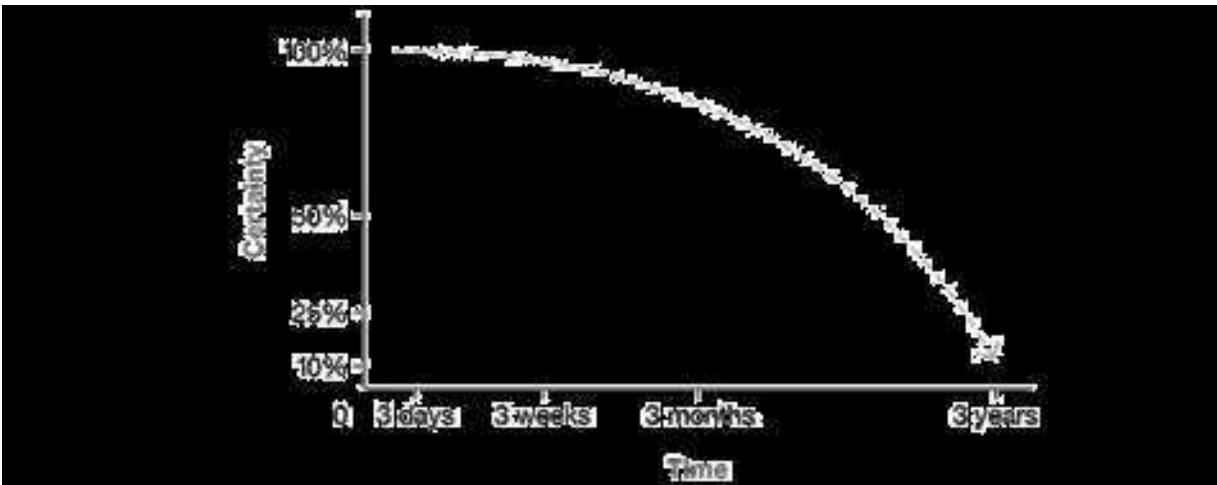
I can tell you with 10 percent accuracy what will happen over the next three years. I know in two years I will write another book. I don't know what it will be about. Maybe I'll work with a coauthor who I haven't even met yet. Maybe I will write it with my daughters. Maybe this one you're reading now will sell so well that we delay the next one by another two years. If James Clear's *Atomic Habits* sold fifty thousand copies instead of twenty million, do you think he would have written another one by now? The success of that book caught everyone off guard because trying to guess what will happen three years from now is fiction.

The reason you've had a hard time planning in the past is that you demanded the wrong thing from the wrong time frame. You wanted firmness from three months when all it can offer is faintness. You thought with the right calendar, app, or book you could plan the next three weeks with 90 percent certainty.

You can't. It's fuzzy. That's disappointing. That makes you feel uncertain, which makes you procrastinate. Let's prevent that from happening to both of us with another short solution:

Plan in pencil, live in pen.

The Sliding Scale of Certainty



That's a permission that will guide you when your calendar refuses to behave perfectly.

My next three days are firm. I can see them. They are real and hurtling my way. I will live them in pen.

I am also planning the next three weeks. I will add as much clarity as I can, but I know true clarity comes with rolling forward and actually doing them. That's the brilliance of DPDR. Your calendar is a living, breathing thing. If today I plan the next three days and then repeat that process tomorrow, my planning spreads over the horizon like a sun rising each morning. The weeks add up that way. The months do too.

Night Me creates actions for Morning Me.

Morning Me accomplishes them.

Monday Me works hard so Friday Me doesn't have to.

Today Me plans next month but won't beat himself up if it's not 100 percent accurate, because it can't be.

Today turns into tomorrow. Pencil turns into pen. Procrastination gives way to permission, and slowly but surely your calendar becomes remarkable.

The two-word planning filter

People often procrastinate because they can't pick which activity to focus on. We can fix that.

Just do less of what you like and more of what you love.

I like watching Netflix, but I love holding a book I've written in my hands.

I like scrolling Instagram, but I love the endorphins I feel all day after a workout.

I like the ease of one-click shopping for things I want in that moment, but I love the long-term career freedom that comes with paying off our house.

Want a filter that will help you pick what you should do with your very limited free time and resources? Ask yourself:

Do I love this or just like it?

The challenge is that your likes (Instagram, Netflix, Facebook, etc.) are very persuasive because they have billion-dollar ad budgets. Your loves, on the other hand, such as doing the work of building your career or decluttering your garage, are very quiet.

Your loves won't hit you over the head with notifications on your phone. They're subtle. You have to seek them out, nurture them, and protect them. When you do, remarkable becomes more than just possible. It becomes probable.

Do less of what you like and more of what you love.

How to do the deadliest job in the world (and also everything else)

They never rank public speaking on the lists of deadliest jobs in the world, but they should, because based on pure terror alone, it punches well above its weight.

People hate public speaking. They're more afraid of it than dying, which is why Jerry Seinfeld once joked, "To the average person, if you have to be at a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy."¹

I do it fifty times a year. Although I still get nervous right before I go onstage, I certainly don't dread it.

I dread leadership.

I am a bad leader. My good friend Nate tells me I should say, "I am a new leader," and he's right. That's a better soundtrack. Switching out the word "bad" for "new" is a much more encouraging way to look at the beginning of any endeavor that you feel inadequate at.

I don't know what I'm doing yet when it comes to leadership.

I need to. I wish I did. My company has grown as large as it can without leadership. It's also become abundantly clear to me that I am what's holding us back. The only way forward is for me to learn to be a good leader. I find that intimidating because I don't naturally like to lead. I don't even like to pick the restaurant when a group of us friends go to dinner. Who wants that pressure?

But lead I must or we're done. We will stay the same size, help roughly the same number of people, make roughly the same amount of money, and fade into obscurity—just another author who could

write books but could never make the transition between solopreneur and leader.

I don't accept that, so I tried DPDR. I did the dream. I want us to have an eight-figure company that helps millions of people, not thousands. That dream is bigger than my current abilities. It requires more than I currently possess. A good dream always does. If you can accomplish next year's dream with today's skills, it's not big enough.

Our company dream is big, but how do we plan it? Recently, as I was walking into a nine-hour StratOp meeting to figure out our mission and values, I felt a bit overwhelmed. What do we do when we feel overwhelmed? Procrastinate. I couldn't skip the meeting. I was already on the sidewalk outside the building where we were holding it. Four people were waiting on me inside, including the expensive consultant we had hired to lead us through this experience. I couldn't procrastinate in that exact moment, but I probably could later.

I could drag my feet on the documents we created. I could hold back in providing feedback to the consultant. I could share our vision, mission, and target customer info with the rest of the team without any enthusiasm. I could kill this project by throwing water on it, effectively procrastinating until the urgency of the rest of our projects got so loud that the StratOps work became an afterthought.

I could do all of that, or I could become a leader. That thought ran through my head as I walked down the sidewalk on Main Street in Franklin, Tennessee, where I live.

Leadership felt hard, but I've already done hard things, like become a public speaker.

Forty-eight hours before the StratOp meeting I had been onstage in front of two thousand very successful health care professionals. I wasn't overwhelmed in that moment. I had fun in that moment. That should have been a lot scarier than a brainstorming meeting with a handful of people. Why was I comfortable speaking but not leading?

How did I become comfortable onstage? What were the steps I used to accomplish that plan? You should never be afraid to

interview a previous win when you are planning a new one, so that's what I did. Here's what helped me DPDR public speaking sixteen years ago:

1. I had a clear sense of the dream.

My first paid speaking event was at a small conference in Edmond, Oklahoma. There were fewer than thirty people there. I was the last speaker at the event, which meant most of the audience had already gone home. My speech was clunky and awkward in spots. I threw small bags of Skittles into the crowd between main points because I thought "Skittle Segues" would be funny. It was probably my worst speech ever, but there's a rhyme you ought to write down: "Your first should be your worst." It didn't matter that it wasn't good, that's how it's supposed to be.

I could cringe remembering my first speeches, but what's the alternative? Looking back and realizing I used to be better? That I got worse over time and look back at how good I used to be? No one wants that. Better is the destination we're all aiming for, which means the origin story is always awkward. But that one speech clarified my dream. I wanted to do that. I had a dream.

2. I was willing to be embarrassed.

You can accomplish anything if you're willing to be embarrassed. If you care enough about the dream, you're willing to look foolish. I once did a thirty-minute motivational speech at an outdoor screamo rap music festival. Do you know what no one at that screamo rap music festival wanted? A thirty-minute motivational speech. You've never seen such bored teenagers in your entire life. It was very embarrassing.

Another time I spoke on a Chicago rooftop bar at sunset. The only problem was that none of the guests were expecting a speech. They were enjoying free cocktails and a stunning view of the city. Then the client handed me a microphone and said, "Here you go." I started into my speech. Half of the

audience, who were at most seven feet away from me, didn't even turn to look at me. They just kept looking at the sunset while I plowed through my keynote. The next time you're at a bar, imagine if someone grabbed a microphone and launched into a passionate discussion on the ways you should pursue goals. That guy would get arrested.

When you bomb at most jobs, there's not five hundred people there to witness it all at once. At my job there is. You have to tolerate a lot of embarrassment to become a successful public speaker, but I think that's really true about every endeavor. If you want to be remarkable, you are going to look weird to a lot of people. You have to, because average is what's common. In a world that doesn't try, the people who do stand out. They're by definition unusual. There's some embarrassment, but you get over it pretty quickly if you care enough about the dream.

3. I asked for advice.

Before I gave that speech in Oklahoma, Dana McArthur told me that seven main points was probably too many.

Before I gave that speech in Oklahoma, my friend Jeff Johnson sat on my couch and allowed me to give the entire thing to him as if he was a massive crowd. Have you ever heard a wedding toast that goes on too long? It's awkward. Now imagine you're the only one at the wedding and the guy keeps throwing bags of Skittles at you.

Before I gave that speech in Oklahoma, I took Brad Lomenick, one of the heads of the 13,000-person leadership event Catalyst, out to dinner and peppered him with questions. I hosted him at Chili's because it was the fanciest restaurant I could afford, and I prayed he wouldn't order a cocktail, an appetizer, or a full rack of baby back ribs. Talk about planning.

I asked every expert I knew for advice. I needed help and I admitted it.

4. I practiced relentlessly.

I've given my *Soundtracks* keynote a hundred different times to a hundred different companies. If you stopped me today in the grocery store and asked for it, I could deliver it right there in the aisle. And yet, this Tuesday in Boston, before I take the stage to present to a cloud-based software company, I will run through the entire thing in my hotel bathroom. Why the bathroom? Because my wife is with me and she still has a bit of PTSD from coming to my early events. I could handle the embarrassment, but for her it was excruciating to watch me stumble through the first years. She wanted so badly for me to do well, but I was new. I was terrible and that was tough for her to watch. That was sixteen years ago, but I still practice relentlessly. If experience is the best teacher, the faster you get it, the faster you become remarkable.

5. I carried myself like I was already a public speaker.

There's no professional status you have to earn to be considered a professional public speaker. One day you aren't and the next day you are because someone paid you to share some ideas. I decided to give myself permission to act like a professional speaker. I might not have had a book to sell yet. I might have had too many slides or not enough. I might have been the sweatiest person you've ever seen onstage because I was struggling to remember my content. It didn't matter. I was a pro and that's how I carried myself.

Those actions served me well when I was a new speaker trying to become a remarkable speaker. Could they serve me just as well in my quest to become a remarkable leader?

I didn't know, but it didn't matter.

I wanted and needed to be a remarkable leader.

Would I develop a clear sense of the dream?

Would I be willing to be embarrassed in the pursuit of remarkable?

Would I ask for advice?

Would I practice relentlessly?

Would I carry myself like I was already a leader?

The answer was yes.

I'm learning.

I'm no longer throwing Skittles, but I know I'm making plenty of mistakes.

I'd better be—worst is first, after all.

In a few years, when I know what I'm doing, I hope you'll buy my leadership book.

More than that, I hope you won't procrastinate on whatever your dream is.

Ask those same questions and then get busy doing.

¹ Jerry Seinfeld, "Jerry Seinfeld—Public Speaking (1998)," posted September 24, 2023, by Classic Comedy, YouTube, 21 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jqhbdQju7g>.

Stop stress stacking

I have too much to do right now. Is there anyone who doesn't?

This book is due in four weeks.

We're holding our first live event in seventy-three days.

I need to sell it out, so it's critical I spend a lot of time online answering questions from potential attendees. I also need to create seven hours of content to teach from stage.

I have twenty-eight speaking engagements scheduled right now. Each one comes with client calls, prep, and travel. Three days from now we're doing a second half-day meeting to discuss our mission, values, and vision for the company. Turns out when you own a company, you have to lead the company. Employees keep asking me for something called "objectives."

I need to record episodes of my weekly podcast, and it would be great if I could double if not triple the amount of social media content I'm pumping out.

I'm about to fly to Dallas tomorrow for one of those twenty-eight events I mentioned. I need to practice the speech when I get to the hotel, write during the entire flight, and empty my inbox.

A client just booked me and wants me to do an old speech that's still listed on my speaking page. That needs to be updated, and I'll have to pitch them a different speech. Speaking of keynotes, I need to create a new one with new slides and get time on the calendar with my speaking coach to get it shaped up for the Global Leadership Summit event in August. That's seven months away, but they're announcing the content next week and need a description of what I'll be doing.

As I run through the list of things I need to do, a transition happens. It's so subtle that I barely notice it, but I'm no longer planning.

Now I'm stress stacking.

Stress stacking is one of procrastination's favorite tricks. It's when you start listing everything you have to do until the list is so long you can't possibly do all of it and then decide to do none of it. Have you ever been so busy that you decided to check out Facebook instead of work?

Everyone has. One of the number one causes of procrastination is overwhelm. What does stress stacking generate? Exactly that. Overwhelm is when your tasks exceed your time. When the list of what you need to do is greater than the amount of time available.

Stress stacking causes this because stress stacking is not honest. There's a phrase it always comes in with, and it's the easiest way to recognize when you've moved from planning to stress stacking.

"Right now."

It was hidden in plain sight in the opening line of this chapter: "I have too much to do right now."

Stress stacking always generates overwhelm because it always tells you that you have to do the entire list right now. If procrastination can't trip you up with the word "wait," it will sucker punch you with "hurry." It will tell you that everything is due today. It's all a priority and none of it can be put off.

Even a small list of tasks seems intimidating when the time frame is "right now."

Right now is never true. Your entire list is not due right now. A lot of it might be, but it is never all due right now.

If procrastination tells you that, stop it in its tracks with this question:

What's due in the next hour?

That's a very small box. Only a thing or two could fit in it.

What's due in the next hour?

There might not even be a deadline that you're up against in the next sixty minutes. See? "Right now" was a lie. You didn't need to be

overwhelmed. If that exercise was easy for you to do, expand your time frame out.

What's due today? What's due in the next three days? What's due in the next week?

If you feel overwhelmed and that encourages you to procrastinate, shrink the time frame back until the overwhelm dissipates. Trying to do next month's task with today's time when you have other more important priorities is a recipe for stress. Keep playing around with the questions until you figure out which time frames work for you.

Today, all I have to do is write for a few hours, respond to a few emails, and rehearse the speech I'm giving tomorrow. The book is due soon, but it's not due today. If I pretend it is, I stress stack, get overwhelmed, and procrastinate.

What's due in the next hour?

Procrastination is never your friend

“When I was in graduate school, if I tried to do my papers ahead of time, I could never get motivated. I knew I should write them over a period of weeks, but that’s just not how I work. I found that the best approach for me was to wait until the day before the paper was due. I’d go to Starbucks early in the morning and stay all day. The pressure would call out my best creativity. I’d write the entire thing in one sitting, do a last-minute edit, and turn it in right before the deadline. Procrastination helped me.”

I heard several versions of this story when I started researching procrastination. I’ve thrown a Hail Mary or two at the last second and saved the day myself, so I can appreciate why you might think procrastination is an ally.

There are three reasons it’s not.

1. Sagacious delay is not procrastination.

Timothy A. Pychyl sums this up well when he writes, “All procrastination is delay, but not all delay is procrastination.”¹ When you intentionally delay a project until a more opportune time to work on it, you’ve employed “sagacious delay,” not procrastination. It’s a phrase taken from the Latin word *sagire*, which means “to perceive keenly.”² It helps you put something off until there’s a better time to focus on it.

When you sleep on a big decision or wait until you’ve talked with your smartest friend before making a choice, you have practiced sagacious delay. If you let your emotions cool down for a few days before responding to an angry email from a coworker, that is

sagacious delay. That is not the same thing as procrastination, which by its very nature is foolish, not intentional. Sagacious delay is measured and purposeful. It gives you a greater degree of control over a situation. Procrastination is chaotic and unintentional. If you've ever waited and won, that was sagacious delay.

2. Research says procrastination is a punk.

A number of procrastination studies have focused specifically on graduate students because it's such a common problem at that level of education and it's easy to research in that environment. DePaul University psychology professor Joseph Ferrari points out that "students may actually think they get a thrill out of delaying their work and believe they work best under pressure, though that's not borne out in the experimental data." On the contrary, a meta-analysis of several 2007 studies suggests that "procrastination is negatively related to overall GPA, final exam scores and assignment grades."³

The promise of procrastination as a superpower is a lie. So why, even years after college, do people still believe it? "Students seem to remember the one time that maybe waiting until the last minute did pay off with a good grade, but they forget the other nine times when it didn't," Ferrari says.⁴ If you skid across the finish line in a blaze of glory, you remember that dramatic moment. Planning ahead of time and successfully turning in your work is not exciting enough to remember. Chances are you got a much better grade, but there were no fireworks at the end of that parade, so it faded quietly into the recesses of your memory.

3. The second draft is always better.

One of the simple truths of life is that if you give yourself time to review, you find errors, inefficiencies, or improvements that you can make to any project. Yes, you turned in the budget on time for the product launch. You checked the box and your manager was

satisfied. But deep down you know that if you had the ability to sit on it for forty-eight hours and look at it again with fresh eyes, you'd find a way to make it better. The first draft of anything is never the best draft. That is true in every situation, including pancakes.

Deadlines give us purpose when we use sagacious delay. They create finish lines for all our actions and put wind in our sails. No one slows down in a race when they can see the end is near.

Deadlines give us an excuse when we use procrastination. But "I do my best work when I wait until the last minute" is simply not true.

¹ Timothy A. Pychyl, "A Sagacious Delay," *Psychology Today*, August 17, 2009, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/dont-delay/200908/a-sagacious-delay>.

² *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "sagacious," accessed June 30, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sagacious>.

³ Amy Novotney, "Procrastination or 'Intentional Delay'?" American Psychological Association, January 2010, <https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2010/01/procrastination>.

⁴ Quoted in Novotney, "Procrastination or 'Intentional Delay'?"

Talented people don't have to plan

Are you good at planning?

I'm not. I used to think it was because I was an artist. I went through brief periods of running my own business where I would blame my penchant for disorganization on my creative career choice. "I can't plan. I'm a writer. We don't do that. Just look at Hemingway—he was a drunk and had so many cats with thumbs."

I hid behind the label "writer." We like labels because they offer an explanation for behavior we don't want to change. "I'm not good at math or numbers," a friend proclaimed as a reason for her poor financial decisions. She might not be naturally inclined to numerical proficiency, but that's a strange thing to declare at age forty. "Yeah, I can't learn math going forward. For the next thirty years, no math." That's a real shame because numbers are everywhere.

If you want a quick way to figure out why you're procrastinating, listen to your labels. "I'm too busy" is a label. "I've never been a detailed person" is a label. "I wouldn't even know where to begin" is a label. All of those situations are malleable. They are not permanent, including this one: "I'm not a planner."

I said that one for years, but not because of any reason you'd ever guess.

Procrastination told me planning was cheating.

Procrastination sold me very convincingly on the idea that the true sign of remarkability was being a prodigy. *American Idol* sells you on that as well. What's more interesting—the classically trained, beautiful, Nashville-born daughter of a famous country singer who also happens to be able to sing, or the cellphone kiosk salesman in the ratty clothes who rode the bus to the audition and blew your

socks off? Carrie Underwood's *American Idol* audition has 10 million views on YouTube. Susan Boyle's *Britain's Got Talent* audition has 263 million views. We love a rags-to-riches story. We hate a riches-to-riches story. We call those people "nepo babies."

Forbes put Kylie Jenner on the cover as "America's Youngest Self-Made Billionaire," hoping we'd forget her mom is worth \$150 million and her sister has 359 million Instagram followers. If you ever decide to launch a makeup brand, I suggest you start with those two assets at your disposal. *Forbes* tried to sell us on an underdog story with Kylie Jenner because it's the story that best reflects the American Dream.

In my twenties, before I dealt with procrastination, I used to imagine the same two movies in my head over and over again when I couldn't sleep. I was back in college in Birmingham, Alabama, at a basketball game. In my dream, the star player had fouled out and the coach pointed to me in the stands to take his place. Though I'd never practiced with the team and was but a humble journalism major, I proceeded to drop forty points, much to the crowd's roaring delight. Of course I dunked a few times for good measure, because in this fantasy I also had a ridiculous vertical leap.

In the second dream, which is far more embarrassing, I was an unknown musician who was accidentally invited to a fancy Hollywood party. The homeowner had a piano, and since I didn't have anyone to talk to, I sat down and played one of two songs I'd written: "Long December" or "Drops of Jupiter." Justin Timberlake happened to be there and immediately signed me to his label.

I thought about those two dreams thousands of times because I was desperate to be discovered. I was waiting to be picked. I didn't want to slowly crawl out of the crowd through discipline, hard work, and consistency. Boring. I wanted my talent to be so extreme that I wouldn't need any of that.

Those are admittedly both silly stories, but the lesson they taught me was tragic—natural talent is diminished by planning. I bought into the lie that the truest sign of a remarkable person is the ability to wing it and catch someone's attention. If you have to work hard,

if you have to plan, it means you aren't that special, you're just a hard worker.

I often waited until the last minute on projects or showed up unprepared because when I sat down to get ready beforehand, procrastination told me, "Talented people don't have to do this, so I guess you're not talented."

"I'll show you," I responded, underperforming with an ego-driven lack of preparation.

I usually don't trust when people post statements online like "The single sentence that changed my entire life" or "The one idea that made me a million dollars." They're often trying to sell you a complicated system that is much more than just one sentence. In this case, though, it's true, and it's not even my idea, so I can't sell it. In *The Road Less Stupid*, one of the best business books I've ever read, Keith J. Cunningham confesses, "I'm not talented or smart enough to be unprepared."¹ He's worth \$50 million. He has bought and sold dozens of companies. He's remarkable in so many different ways and he has to prepare? Noted.

My name is Jon Acuff and I am not talented or smart enough to be unprepared.

¹ Keith J. Cunningham, *The Road Less Stupid: Advice from the Chairman of the Board* (Keys to the Vault, 2017), 229.

Planning, parents, and prices

One of the cruelest things you can do to your kid is tell them they can be remarkable without telling them the price.

It's so tempting. We want them to believe they are capable of anything. We want to instill in them a conquer-the-world confidence that carries them through middle school, beyond high school, and into the real world. We want to root out doubt and insecurity before it can take hold in their tiny hearts. But there's a danger to that desire.

The danger is, if you tell your kids they can accomplish anything but don't tell them what it costs, then one of two things happens when they bump into the price:

1. Disappointment
2. Entitlement

If you were told you could be a National Merit Scholar but not told the price of that achievement, when you eventually realize how challenging it is, you will think something is wrong with you. *I was assured this was doable. It's taking longer than I anticipated and isn't coming naturally, so I must be the problem.*

If you were told you could be the starting running back on the football team but never told that the current running back spends his summers at three different camps, has a nutrition plan, and works out with a trainer before school starts, you will be surprised when you get cut. Disappointment sets in.

The second outcome is even worse. Entitlement is demanding rewards you have not earned. Although that word has a terrible

reputation, it starts in a very innocent place. You just didn't know the things you wanted in life had price tags. It's like getting caught shoplifting in a store you thought was free.

When Greg McKeown, the author of *Essentialism*, was on Tim Ferris's top-rated podcast, I texted him and said, "I'd love to do that show." I was hoping he'd respond, "Let me connect you with Tim. You can be on today!" Instead he said, "If you ever want to hear the story of what I did to make that happen, let me know." There was a process. There was a system. There was a plan.

There always is.

If you're a parent, don't share the whole price of the dream at first. If your eight-year-old wants to play football, don't ask him if he knows about creatine and how hard the portal is for unrecruited players right now. That would be discouraging. If on day one someone told me it would take sixteen years to build the kind of career I want, I would have been discouraged.

I once made the tragic mistake of doing a book signing event with leadership giant John Maxwell. It was a tragic mistake because there were two hundred people in his line to get a book signed and zero in mine. It was brutal. While I was sitting at my empty table watching swarms of people buy his books, a stranger patted me on the shoulder. "Ten years, buddy. Ten years."

That was not encouraging. "Just a decade until someone wants to buy your book. Hope that helps."

It didn't.

Instead, share the price bit by bit. Better yet, reinforce it with DPDR. Invite them into projects that allow them to both plan and do on their own. You'd much rather they learn what it takes to be remarkable at twelve or thirteen when they're still under your roof than at twenty-eight or thirty-two when reality gives them whiplash.

Remarkable is not a mystery. Beating procrastination is not a mystery.

You have to give yourself permission to look at the price and then permission to plan your way there.

How to figure out the price of anything you want in life

Have you ever looked at a price tag and just burst into laughter? The item was so much more expensive than you anticipated that you couldn't believe any human would pay so much for so little.

That happened to me once in Las Vegas. My family was flying home from a spring break trip to the Grand Canyon and decided to spend one night in town before we left. We're not big gamblers, but our kids had never seen the spectacle that is Vegas so we thought it would be fun. Over breakfast, a friend who was also in town asked, "What are your plans for the day?"

I told him, "We're going to the hotel pool."

An hour later, while we were saying goodbye and heading our separate ways, he pulled me aside and quietly said, "I got you a cabana at the hotel." "Wow, thank you," I said effusively, because I know those aren't free. I'd never paid for a cabana before, but what a kind gesture.

When we got back to the hotel, we packed up our kids and headed to the fancy cabana. We felt a little out of place. The group of people next to us had hired a nurse to come give them IV bags at the pool so they could hydrate after their night out. They were still drinking though, so it felt like the IV was in a desperate race against each Corona.

We spent about three hours in the cabana. During that time, we ordered guacamole with chips, two beers, and two sodas. When we started getting ready to leave, a waitress came over and handed me the bill. Have you ever picked up something in a store, seen how expensive it was, and then carefully put it back down because you're

afraid you could break it or at least sully it with your grubby peasant hands? That's the moment I experienced but I couldn't put the bill down. I had to pay it. All \$800! Did you know that cabanas cost \$800? Did you know when a friend says "I got you a cabana," what he means is not "I paid for your cabana" but rather "I reserved a cabana for you"?

What sort of vibes was I giving off in my life that he assumed I was the kind of guy who drops \$800 on pool cabanas that are four feet away from the equally comfortable but free pool chairs? The cabana cost more than our room. A lot more.

I would have burst into laughter when I saw the price, but tears were more the emotion that was welling up in me. "Do I get to keep whatever pieces of furniture I can carry out for this price? Does this price come with the pool? Wait, do I own this hotel? Am I a hotelier now?"

Almost a decade later, our kids still tell that story. "Remember when Dad bought that cabana?"

That price was shocking, but I assure you the price of a remarkable life is not. In fact, you can acquire it with a simple combination of the five resources everyone possesses. Once you understand these resources it becomes even easier to beat procrastination because you'll know how to:

1. Embrace reality
2. Transform reality

That second step is what most people miss when they say, "Be realistic."

Has anyone ever said that to you about your dream? Be realistic. I'm fine with that. That can be helpful advice, but only if you do the second step. In fact, the only reason you should ever embrace reality is so that you can transform it faster. This is just a more practical form of a maxim often attributed to Pablo Picasso: "Learn the rules like a pro so you can break them like an artist." The best

way to embrace reality is to understand the price and which of the five resources it requires.

1. Energy

Call it passion, drive, desire, or just the ability to stay up late and put in long hours. How long can you stay at it when you are at it?

2. Finances

Cash. Assets. Cake. Bread. Clams. Scratch. Dinero. Bacon. Benjamins. Dough. Cheddar. Cabbage. Moolah. Jeez, how many nicknames for money are there?

3. Experience

Wisdom, maturity, laps around the block, battle scars, trench lessons, rodeos, as in "this isn't your first one."

4. Time

The clock and the calendar. How many hours and days can you invest in your dream?

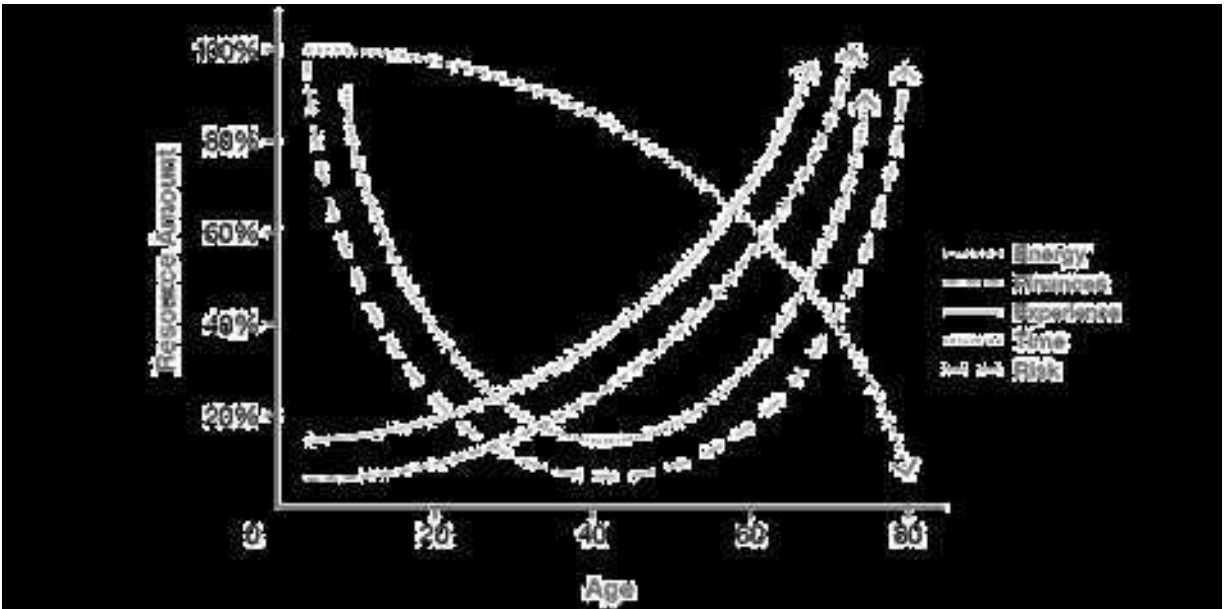
5. Risk tolerance

If you go all in, which is the opposite of procrastination, what do you stand to lose if it doesn't work? What do you stand to gain? How many punches can you take before you get knocked down? How much failure and uncertainty can you tolerate? How long is your runway before you have to give up?

These are the five resources you have at your disposal as you build your version of remarkable, but you don't have them in equal measures throughout your life. They wax and wane like the moon, depending on your age.

Let's start with the bad news first.

The Resources You Have Access to During Each Decade of Your Life



Energy

Energy goes down the older you get.

Did I just blow your mind? Probably not.

My neighbor's son recently drove from Nashville to Phoenix for vacation. I don't know if you're bad at geography, but those two cities aren't close. When you're young, though, a twenty-hour road trip is an adventure, not a chore. I'm fifty. I have a lot of energy, but I'm definitely not driving twenty hours in a day and pretending that will turn out well. In my thirties I stopped taking red-eye flights home from the West Coast because they torpedoed the next day for me. Try as I might, my energy levels are different.

Comedian Nate Bargatze captures the energy shift perfectly. "In your twenties, you're down for whatever. Your friends call you and they're like, you want to go and you're like, 'I'll go.' You don't even know where you're going. . . . Your thirties come and you're like, 'Where are we going? How late are they open? Is it loud? I'm going to drive separate.'" In your forties, you shift again. "I'm not going. I'm mad that you thought I would go."¹

Finances

Finances go up the older you get.

I didn't know we were poor when we were newly married. I just thought we liked camping. "We sure did enjoy the outdoors when we were young," I told my wife. "That's because outside was the only place we could afford to sleep on vacation. It cost \$11 a night." At the time, Jenny stayed home with our two toddlers and I made around \$50,000. Our weekly grocery budget was \$75 for our family of four. If you adjust for inflation that still equates to "volunteer at the local church flea market so you can buy the used toys first before it opens." My salary did increase over the years though, and that's what is supposed to happen.

The older you get the easier it should become to financially invest in your remarkable life. I couldn't afford to hire a business coach until I was in my forties. All I could afford to do to get better in my twenties was read books, but the library was a great place to start and fortunately I had lots of energy to invest.

Experience

Experience goes up the older you get.

You don't have a lot of experience in your twenties, but that's not failure. How are you supposed to? Someone who is fifty-two and has worked in the accounting firm for thirty years has experienced thirty tax seasons. You've experienced two. That's just math.

I annoyed every company I worked at in my twenties because I was high on confidence and low on experience. I'd shout out ways to fix the bureaucracy of a billion-dollar company I knew very little about and then get grumpy when no one listened.

If you develop self-awareness, experience should climb with each year that passes, especially if you stay in the same career.

Time

Unlike the first three resources, time flows on a U-shaped curve. You have the most of it in your twenties and the least of it in your thirties and forties. It climbs back up in your fifties, sixties, and seventies.

You won't feel this way, but you actually have tremendous amounts of time in your twenties. We tend to think we're very busy, even in college. With a serious face you'd tell your parents that this sixteen-hours-a-week class schedule was killing you. I barely had time to work out, do my fraternity meetings, nap, and catch up with friends on the quad.

Do you know what you have on the weekend when you're a single adult in your twenties without kids? Forty-eight hours of free time. Do you know how much free time parents have? The exact amount of time their child naps, and sometimes they just drop those. I remember when my kids stopped taking Saturday naps. I was horrified and asked my wife, "Did we get a family vote on that? I'd really like to write today."

For most people, unless they started families later in life, time starts to return in their fifties. Your kids go to college, your evenings aren't spent at Little League games, your weekends return. Not fully maybe. You have relational commitments and maybe even need to approve a budget on a Saturday since you're in leadership now at your job, but you do have more time to invest in your remarkable life.

Risk tolerance

Risk tolerance is similar to time in that it's a U-shaped curve.

We don't often think of risk tolerance as an investment, but it is. Case in point, if a twenty-four-year-old tells me she's thinking about starting her own company, I always say, "Go for it!" Because I know something she doesn't know: She has massive risk tolerance. If she tries for two years and it doesn't work, she'll end up at twenty-six with plenty of work life left. Even better, two years of running a startup will deliver huge amounts of experience.

If a forty-six-year-old tells me he wants to start a company, I don't give him the same advice I gave the twenty-four-year-old. His risk tolerance profile is different. He's supporting a family financially. He has a mortgage. If it doesn't work, it's harder to replace a mid-management-level job than it is an entry-level job that a twenty-four-year-old would have. Instead of saying, "Go for it! Burn all the boats!" I might say, "Can you start a small side hustle on the weekend and see if it works over the next six months before you make the leap?" I still might think his business is a great idea, but he has far less risk tolerance to invest.

Energy, finances, experience, time, and risk tolerance. Those are the poker chips you get each day when you wake up.

If you're in your twenties, don't procrastinate because you can't financially invest in your remarkable life like someone in their fifties can. Take full advantage of the resources you do have—time, energy, and risk tolerance.

If you're in your sixties, don't procrastinate because you don't have the same energy you used to. Take full advantage of the resources you do have—finances, experience, and time.

If you're in your thirties and forties, quit watching TV. You might be in the busy years with your family, but that doesn't mean you can't claw some wasted time back from your distractions. And use your energy. You might feel more tired now than you did in your twenties, but the fifty-year-old version of you would say that you're sitting on a gold mine right now.

Regardless of age, our mission in each decade is the same: Maximize the resources that are high. Increase the resources that are low.

If you're low on experience, go get more experience. Make that a priority. Why did I do free gigs when I was starting my speaking career? Because I needed the experience more than I needed the money. Why do I say no to 80 percent of my speaking requests now? Because I have the experience and I can afford to not do lower-paid events.

No one is ever really broke.

They've always had untapped resources they don't even know about. But now you know. Don't wait to tap into yours.

¹ Nate Bargatze, "Hello World—Navigating 30s Comedy Special," posted January 31, 2023, by Nate Bargatze, TikTok, 37 sec., <https://www.tiktok.com/@natebargatze/video/7194848417669991722?lang=en>.

One last word on entitlement

I read dozens of books about procrastination and was surprised how few mentioned entitlement as a cause. That's too bad, because it's a doozy.

Entitlement becomes procrastination when you avoid an annoying task because "I shouldn't have to do this." When I am in the throes of this particular tributary of procrastination, I will avoid sending thank-you notes because "I shouldn't have to find stamps." I will even add titles to my pouting. "I'm Jon Acuff. I'm a *New York Times* bestselling author. I don't have time to be looking for stamps. I own my own company. I shouldn't have to spend so much time in the weeds of my inbox."

If you ever get a case of the "I shouldn't have tos" I encourage you to immediately ask yourself this question: "Then who should?"

Who should be writing my personal thank-you notes?

Who should be running my miles?

Who should be leading my company?

Who should be parenting my kids?

That last one is where "Then who should?" started.

If you ever have only one day left to live, I hope you spend it at a swim meet. Swim meet days are forty-two years long. North Korea should use swim meets to extract secrets from spies. Concrete bleachers. Shrill whistles. Overwhelming chlorine smell. Cloying heat from the pool and all the other parents crammed in like sardines for twenty-seven seconds of swim action where you can't tell which one is your kid because they're all wearing the same swim caps and are literally underwater.

Ever root against your own kid? That's a terrible thing to admit, but you'll do it at a swim meet. If they swim at 8 a.m. and qualify for the finals later, guess when those are? 8 p.m. Do you have something you'd like to do for the next twelve hours around the swim facility in Cleveland, Ohio, as you wait for the next race to start?

One Saturday morning in the midst of all that chaos, I thought to myself, "If I'm not supposed to be here, then who should be?" Jenny and I are 100 percent of L.E. and McRae's parents. They are 100 percent of our kids. Who are these other parents that are supposed to be supportive and all in for these weekend-dominating swim meets of my kids? Oh, that's right—it's us. It's me.

There will be plenty of "I shouldn't have to do this" moments on your journey to remarkable. Procrastination will use entitlement on you because it's a lot less obvious than its other tools. Most people don't even associate entitlement with procrastination.

If you feel it sneaking up on you, give yourself permission to ask that simple question: "Then who should?"

The best person to beat *your* procrastination and build *your* remarkable life is always *you*.

The magic question

The hardest part of the eleventh diet is the ten other diets that didn't work. When you get toward the end of plan and head toward do, procrastination gets very nervous. As a last-ditch effort, it will remind you of all the previous attempts that did not work.

If you think about buying a Peloton as a way to get consistent exercise, procrastination will get your BowFlex out of the attic. "Remember this?" it will shout as it drags that strange device across the floor. "Bows were the future!" If you manage to ignore it, it might even resort to getting out your old ThighMaster.

If you're too young to remember the ThighMaster, in the late 1980s a scientist named Suzanne Somers convinced us all that the key to long-term health was our thighs. Ms. Somers—*Doctor*, really—assured us that if we could but master our thighs, the rest of our health issues would take care of themselves. If that sounds ridiculous, keep in mind this was before we invented the core.

Last year's failure feeds next year's procrastination unless you ask the magic question.

I learned the concept of the magic question from John Venhuizen, the CEO of Ace Hardware. We shared the stage at an event in Las Vegas for the top twelve hundred Ace Hardware owners in the country. He told the audience that the corporate team did a study where they A-B tested multiple questions in multiple Ace Hardware locations. The biggest revelation was that if you asked customers a magic question, 61 percent of them engaged. If you asked them the wrong question, 81 percent said no and refused to engage.

What was the wrong question? "Can I help you?" Why is that the wrong question? Because no one likes to admit helplessness,

especially men in a hardware store. A man will individually inspect all thirty thousand SKUs in a Home Depot before he cries uncle to a stranger in an orange apron.

What was the magic question? "What can I help you find today?" If you ask that question, the shopper names the item and is much more likely to buy the item. All you did is move the focus from the shopper to the product. You redirected the question.

That's how you beat procrastination too.

We often think we know the best questions to ask to generate a list of actions when we're planning, such as:

"What do I need to do to be in shape?"

"How do I write a book?"

"What are the steps I need to take to become a better leader?"

Those are the wrong questions though, because they put all the focus on you and that allows procrastination everything it needs to attack. The word "I" is blood in the water for procrastination. Remember, it's trying to protect you from failure and pain. One way to do that is by reminding you of all the failure and pain from your past attempts. The word "I" is a warning bell that alerts procrastination you're on the move again.

How do we cut it off at the pass? Just redirect the question and instead ask yourself this:

"What would a healthy person do?"

"What would a productive writer do?"

"What would an intentional leader do?"

Avoid "I" altogether.

Now it's a research project, not a discourse on your worth as a person.

You shifted from identity to ideation.

I'm not talking about me. I'm just talking about a healthy person in general. That's all it takes to fool procrastination. Try it—it works like a charm.

If you're a mom, ask yourself, "What do I need to do to be a better mom?" Sit with that for a minute and then write down your thoughts.

Then ask yourself, "What would a great mom do?" Write down your thoughts now.

Which exercise was easier for you? I bet it's obvious.

The reason they sold more than eighteen million "What Would Jesus Do?" bracelets is that they took the focus off the person who wanted to change. No one wants to wear a bracelet that says "What do I do to be less of a jerk to my neighbor?" But when you shift the focus, you remove the shame and inspire action.

To come up with a list of actions you want to do, simply ask the right question:

What would a _____ do?

Steven, our South Dakota success story from chapter 20, did this. His breaker bar belief was to make an extra \$100,000 a year. Therefore, his magic question was:

"What would someone making an extra \$100,000 a year do?"

That question will generate dozens of possible actions.

Even musical legend David Bowie had to use this trick. He said it was challenging to write songs for himself. He couldn't easily see himself as a rock star, so instead he created personas like Ziggy Stardust. He once said, "I find it extremely hard to write for me. . . . I did find it much easier, having created the Ziggy, to write for him, even though it's me doing it."¹

You might not need face paint or synthesizers, but stepping outside yourself to plan like Bowie might help you see your mission from a whole new perspective.

¹ David Bowie, "David Bowie on Stardust," posted May 20, 2014, by Blank on Blank, YouTube, 5 min., 29 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFIDXXDsxAo&t=11s>.

How do perfectionists exit plan and enter do?

You never finish the four permissions.

That's what's so wonderful about them. You can always dream a little more. You can always do a little more. You can always review a little more. And you can definitely plan a little more.

The benefit of that infinite game turns into a curse, though, when you add perfectionism to the mix. Perfectionists get stuck in plan because they have not finished everything. There are more boxes to check. There are more dependencies to work through. There are more resources to marshal. There will always be.

How do you break free of this?

You trust the audition process.

I first discovered this when I researched why most New Year's resolutions fail. Despite our best efforts and enthusiasm, most New Year's resolutions only have about an 8 percent success rate. Those are pretty terrible odds. The most common reason this happens is that people overcommit. That seems counterintuitive at first, but let me explain.

People choose a resolution like decluttering, walking with a weighted vest, or doing a weekly budget, and then commit to it for a year. The only problem is that they've never even done it for a day. That's like marrying someone you just met at speed dating. Of course it fails. It has to because you jumped from having never done it to attempting it for twelve months in a row.

Don't do that. Instead, audition your dreams.

Do them for a month first. Review them at the end of the thirty days and then double your commitment to two months. If that

works, double it again.

Not only does this dramatically increase your chances of sticking with a resolution, it also helps you exit plan.

It's just an audition.

It's not forever.

It's not even for very long.

You can do anything for a month. The popularity of Dry January has certainly proven that.

If you're a procrastinating perfectionist, give yourself permission to audition your dreams. These aren't tattoos. This is henna. If you want to commit to a long-term dream after you've taken a few loops through DPDR, by all means do it.

I didn't quit my job after I published my first book. When I reviewed the results of my book sales, I didn't have nearly enough evidence to believe writing could financially sustain my family. I quit my job after my fourth book, but it took years of looping through DPDR to make that decision.

That's a big example, but a smaller one might be your household budget. If you're trying to perfectly figure out how to host weekly budget meetings with your spouse, complete with spreadsheets, graphs, and the latest learnings of the three most popular financial books, pump the brakes. It sounds like you're stuck in planning. You're trying to identify every possible issue before you begin. That's another one of procrastination's empty promises because it's impossible.

Planning is not the best teacher.

Doing is.

It's time to do a little bit of on-the-job learning.

DO

Am I doing it?



The engineer and the artist

The transition from dream to plan was challenging because you had to move from optimism to realism. That becomes a filter of sorts that separates the dreamers from the doers. If you're reading this, congratulations! You passed it.

Now, to transition from planning to doing, you need a new permission.

Permission to plan like an engineer and live like an artist.

Procrastinators get stuck here when the plans they created don't come together exactly as they expected they would. Once again, like holding optimism in one hand and realism in the other, we must hold two seemingly conflicting ideas at the same time.

Plan like an engineer.

Live like an artist.

Planning is marked by detail.

It's the most organized of the permissions, certain to light up every type A's heart.

Planning was made for schematics. You could use charts, logic, and checklists to plot out how your actions were going to go step-by-step.

Do refuses to behave that way.

Do is marked by flexibility.

Even with a firm three days, there's that 10 percent of surprise coming. A client you weren't expecting is going to call. A kid will come home from school sick. What you estimated would take one hour will take three.

In those moments, you must live like an artist.

This was difficult for me at first. I am a control freak and hoped that if I planned hard enough, I could guarantee the day would go exactly as I wanted it to go. When it didn't—and it always didn't—I would procrastinate by stopping everything I was doing. Maybe the day would behave if I added even more details to my plan? It didn't. No amount of planning will guarantee your day goes exactly as you demand. Days play by their own rules, not yours.

Few people capture this balance of engineer and artist like big wave surfers. It makes sense because if you're riding a wave that's ten stories tall, you have to plan much more than the average observer notices. When I met Rodrigo Koxa in Cascais, Portugal, he was then the world record holder for big wave surfing. He'd plummeted down the face of a 101-foot wave at Nazaré, Portugal, in 2017.¹

When we talked, the word he used the most to describe what he did was "team." He wasn't a stoner who decided to wax up his board and catch a few waves. He was a tactical technician who planned carefully with a team of spotters, wave runner drivers, and fellow surfers. He'd ridden thousands of waves before this one, preparing for years for this moment.

He planned like an engineer on dry land.

But once he entered the water, he lived like an artist.

You can't outplan the ocean.

The waves in Nazaré come from a 130-mile-long offshore canyon. The size depends in part on the swell refraction, rapid depth reduction, the local water channel, and atmospheric depressions that generate the correct amount of wind. I didn't understand most of that sentence, but I do understand that I don't control any of that.

Neither did Rodrigo.

He did everything he could to set himself up for success, but then once he hit the water, he had to surf the conditions the ocean gave him.

He had to live like an artist.

The only thing more unpredictable than big wave surfing is whatever it is you're getting into today.

The minute your feet hit the ground and you dare to do, your plan will need to be adjusted. There are too many wonderful, unexpected variables in human life to think you can anticipate them all. When your plan changes, don't freeze, don't pause, don't react in frustration at the change or interpret it as failure.

Plan like an engineer. Live like an artist.

¹ "Surfing in Portugal: Nazaré," Surf Escape, accessed March 16, 2025, <https://www.surf-escape.com/surfing-in-portugal/nazare>.

I don't believe

I don't believe in retirement for boomers.

I don't believe in burnout for Gen X.

I don't believe it's too late for millennials.

I don't believe in work-life balance for Gen Z.

Why?

Because I believe busy people are happy people. A boomer recently told me, "The worst job I ever had was being retired." He left the workforce too early because that's what he thought he was supposed to do, then missed the structure and community of the job and jumped back into work a few months later.

Don't have a life you want to escape by retiring. Have a life with a new season you want to transition to when you hit your sixties, seventies, or eighties. Give yourself permission to plan the next adventure long before the current one ends. You're never just doing. You've always got a foot in each stage, which is the magic of DPDR.

I know too many people my age, Gen X, who are confusing boredom with burnout. They are not burned out, meaning they've given their all, left everything on the field, and expended every drop of energy. On the contrary, they've accidentally procrastinated. They are bored of their life, not exhausted by it. They have a huge pile of presents they haven't opened yet.

Remarkable fuels you, it does not burn you out. When a friend tells me he is burned out, I tell him to do more, not less. Just more of the remarkable things he's been putting off. He needs to dream, plan, do, and review, not go on a sixty-day meditation retreat.

I don't think it's ever too late for anyone, but that's especially true for millennials. Culture tells them, "You'll never be able to afford to

buy a house. You'll never have the opportunities your parents had. If you didn't go to college, you'll never be able to build a career. If you did go to college, you'll never be able to get out from under your college debt. If you don't have your life figured out by now, you'll never have it figured out."

A millennial author I know recently tried to convince me that America is now a "third-world country." What a terrible and false discouragement to preach to her million Instagram followers, who are mostly millennials. Clout-chasing cynicism like this is crushing millennials. If someone told me things like that for years, I would think it's too late too. Only it's not.

That's just fear-based propaganda designed to turn you into eternal renters and consumers of distractions that will never help you build your future. You *can* buy a house. The opportunities are always different from generation to generation, but different doesn't mean impossible. You *can* build the career of your dreams using tools your parents never had. Debt is a monster, but when you beat procrastination and start working on it, it becomes a piñata that's a lot of fun to hit. No one has their life figured out, but this is a great time to do it. It's not too late.

And Gen Z? Why don't I believe in work-life balance for Gen Z? Because I know Jacob.

He used to be my neighbor. "Used to" is a fun phrase because it means he moved out of his parents' house after college. I last saw him at a dinner party his parents hosted. He shuffled downstairs like your standard twenty-four-year-old looking to see if anyone brought any good appetizers he could pilfer.

He had a new job at an automotive factory and was excited to be using his engineering degree. His dad told me he was picking up some overtime hours and enjoying the miracle of time-and-a-half pay. I wanted to throw some fuel on that fire.

"There is no work-life balance at your age," I said to him in the kitchen. He seemed surprised because well-meaning Gen Xers who mistakenly think they are burned out often tell Gen Z to slow down.

"You're twenty-four. These are the building years. Don't even consider work-life balance. I know your girlfriend lives in Atlanta, so

you're not rushing home each night in Nashville to see her. You've got the most time, the most energy, and the greatest risk tolerance you'll ever have. Run! Sprint! Go! Make the most of this season." I was desperate for him to invest the resources he had at his age.

I worried I had overdone it that night out of the frustration I was feeling for another twenty-four-year-old who had ignored that same encouragement from me a few weeks earlier. That other young man was thinking about taking a part-time job instead of a full-time job so that he had more time to spend "researching the stock market." Nonsense. He didn't need more time to sit at home doing nothing. He needed to be busy. Full-time job plus all the research he could muster on the stock market. Do both, I told him, which is what I am about to tell you too.

In defense of both

When presented with two options, most people do neither. Some people do one. Remarkable people do both.

Regardless of your age, I'd tell you that same thing. Do both. Should I focus on exercise or nutrition? Do both. Should I look for a new job or lean into my current job? Do both. Should I write my book or pay down debt? Do both.

Most people have both in them, they've just listened to procrastination too long and underestimate what they're really capable of.

Procrastination will always tell you that you have to pick because picking wakes up your perfectionism. If you have to pick, you have to make the perfect choice, and there's now an opportunity to get stymied. I will tell you just the opposite. If you've got two projects you want or need to do, do both. You have more time than you think, especially when you DPDR.

Two months after my dinner party rant to Jacob, I ran into his parents again. "Jon, you are not going to believe what happened!" they practically shouted with excitement. "Remember when you told our son there was no such thing as work-life balance for people his age? He really took that to heart. He picked up the pace at work and was given a massive raise. He was the only one on his team who got it!"

The next day, Jacob and his dad were driving to Atlanta to pick up a new car for him. When the transmission of his old car died, Jacob didn't panic. He had the money and now the freedom to shop for a different option because he sold himself on a whole lot of action.

That's remarkable.

Don't retire until you've got the next adventure picked out.

If you're bored, try a new dream.

Don't listen to anyone, including yourself, who says it's too late.

Avoid work-life balance if your dream is worth it, especially in your twenties.

Above all, give yourself permission to do both.

You've got both in you. I know it and so do you.

Put your shoes on first

Life requires shoes.

My kids know this. When they were young, they picked up the concept of shoes pretty quickly. There should be a Hallmark card for the day your kid learns how to put on their own shoes. It's one of the greatest, most underappreciated accomplishments on the planet.

Despite years of shoe expertise, though, when we go anywhere, they walk to the car barefoot.

Rain, sleet, snow, blistering heat on an uncomfortable driveway—they come barefoot with shoes in hand. Eventually, we decided to fix that situation with a new system that eliminated this biped procrastination. Here it is:

“Put your shoes on first.”

That's the whole system. If we need to leave the house in thirty minutes, my kids don't want to get ready yet. They would like to scroll Instagram for the next twenty-nine minutes and then have a panicked minute at the end where they sprint around the house, inevitably forgetting to bring something they need.

The twenty-nine minutes of scrolling isn't that enjoyable either because they know they're supposed to be getting ready. I am reminding them, “Ten minutes until we leave . . . Five minutes until we leave . . .” They feel a bit of pressure as they put off getting ready, like we all do when we procrastinate. It doesn't feel good to put something off. You're relaxing, but the moment isn't pure. It's tainted by what you're supposed to be doing.

The bigger the item, the more frequent the gnawing feeling you get that you should be doing the thing. The thing is lightly tapping

at your door. The thing starts knocking. The thing starts kicking at the door eventually.

What would happen if you put your shoes on first?

My kids would tell you that it takes a lot less time than you think and then you get to enjoy twenty-nine minutes of scrolling Instagram without thinking about the thing.

The thing is standing between you and being able to fully relax.

When you give yourself permission to do, you put your shoes on first—whatever the thing is—and then watch all the Netflix you want. You've already practiced this principle a few times. The pre-vacation boost of work we all do makes the actual vacation so much more enjoyable. You've cleared the deck and can relax more deeply without all those undone projects milling about on your front porch. Don't wait for a once-a-year vacation to do that. Do it every Friday afternoon and watch how much more you enjoy the weekend.

Put your shoes on first.

The Blow Pop trick

I asked 167 people about which part of projects they procrastinate the most with, and the results were not surprising.

The messy middle: 22.2 percent

Finishing it: 23.4 percent

The beginning: 54.5 percent

If the beginning is what trips you up too, buy a bag of Blow Pops. Brittany Nelson came up with that trick.

She is a mom, a wife, and a small business owner. She has three little girls, volunteers regularly, and has the same thirty-eight seconds of free time you do in an average day. In order to run her leadership company, Brittany has to make the most of her time, but procrastination makes that difficult.

There are just some days when she doesn't feel like doing it.

This is one of the most common types of procrastination because now you're asking your feelings for permission to move forward. Guess what feelings will usually tell you?

"Nope."

"Not today."

"Don't do it."

"Wait until you have the right feeling."

What a lie. If I only wrote the books I felt like writing, I'd never have written a book.

Brittany knows her dream: to build her Deeper Kidmin business. She knows what she needs to do. She also knows that procrastination will dissipate in a matter of minutes if she tries. She

just needed a new permission that would help her start. So here's what she decided to believe:

"I can do anything for the length of a Blow Pop."

Procrastination tells you, "This will take forever." No matter the task, no matter the chore, it describes the time frame as "forever." I hope you've got a solid ten hours of effort in you today, because as soon as you get started, you're going to look up and it's going to be next Tuesday. Do you really have the whole week free to focus on this?

Brittany couldn't silence her procrastination, so instead she just bought a bag of Blow Pops. She says,

When I'm having a hard time motivating myself to work on something, I grab a Blow Pop and tell myself I have to focus all in for the length of time I'm eating it. If I finish it and am ready to move on or be done, I can do that. Most of the time, my brain gets into the work and I'm in a good groove once I finish the Blow Pop. I don't want to stop and don't have trouble focusing anymore.

The day Brittany told me that, I bought a bag of Blow Pops. With a fair deal of skepticism, I sat down at my desk, unwrapped a watermelon Blow Pop, and jumped into ten treacherous emails I'd been putting off for weeks.

Ten minutes later—because of course I timed it—I was done with the Blow Pop. I finished the emails and had beaten procrastination. The Blow Pop permission works because you shrink the time associated with the task down to ten minutes. That's a manageable time frame. It's easy to tell yourself, "You can do anything for ten minutes," because it's true. Once you try it a few times, you'll naturally want to see if you can expand it a bit. The answer, of course, is yes.

If you can do ten minutes, you can do an hour

Procrastination loves vagueness. "I'll get to that eventually." What does eventually mean? Nothing. What will you accomplish? Nothing. We need to add a greater deal of specificity to what we're doing. That's easy.

Just find one hour in the next three days to do.

Oof. An hour? If only, Jon. Must be nice to have all this free time on your hands.

Stop. You have the time and it only takes thirty seconds to find it.

Open up the screentime settings on your phone. Pick your greediest, hungriest app and take an hour back. That's all you have to do. Think of the list of apps like a restaurant menu and you're just ordering the hour you want. The first time I did this I realized that I had spent ten hours on Instagram the previous week. Think I was able to cut that back to nine hours and still survive?

Once you find an hour to work with, ask yourself two questions:

1. What would make this week remarkable?
2. How can I sell myself that?

Instagram didn't steal those hours from me. They sold me distraction. They sold me a quick break from a boring task that is never actually quick. They sold me dopamine. They sold me the allure of shallow connection.

I got sold because they are amazing at selling. The entire world used to be better than I was at selling, which is why I never got

anything I really cared about done. I had to give myself permission to do so that I could sell a remarkable life to myself.

This is an unusual exercise on purpose. If you read a lot of books about procrastination, you notice that one of the techniques they have in common is that you should make a list of everything you're procrastinating on. I think that's helpful in theory but dreadful in reality.

Every time I did that, the list made me feel more overwhelmed, not less. "Do you feel like a failure? Make a list of all the things you're failing. That will make you feel better."

It didn't. Using DPDR to sell myself a remarkable life did.

Today I sold myself on writing this chapter. It was a Friday, so I had to be extra persuasive because my procrastination loves that day as much as The Cure. (I'm an easier sell on Mondays because they naturally feel like workdays.) I also thought writing books would get easier the more books I wrote. The exact opposite happened. All the stories that were close to the surface have already been told in the first ten books. The low-hanging fruit has long been picked off the trees. I had to climb high for this one.

Despite my penchant to procrastinate, I want to write. Deep down I know it brings me immense joy to spend a few hours scribbling down words, but sometimes I'm like a toddler who refuses a nap. I fight the very thing that would fix my grumpiness. "It's hard to live with a writer who isn't writing," my wife once said. She's right and the broader point is also true. It's hard to live with anyone when they're not doing their mission. Writing is one of mine, and I've learned to be a phenomenal salesman.

What would make this week remarkable?

Turning in this chapter to my editor.

How can I sell myself that?

Here are the exact sales techniques I employed today.

1. I scheduled a ninety-minute writing appointment on my calendar the day before.

I don't like to guess what I'm doing when I wake up. I like to know so that I can jump into my day without slowing down to

plan. Today that meant writing from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m. I double the odds of keeping my commitments when I precommit to them.

2. I used a countdown timer on my phone.

I can't hold my breath for ninety minutes, but I can encourage myself to work on one project for that long if I set a timer. I've used this technique for twenty years and it always works. By keeping fifteen-, thirty-, sixty-, and ninety-minute timers, not only do I write more but I guarantee that multiple times a day I get a burst of adrenaline when I finish that micro project.

3. I wore noise-canceling headphones and listened to an ambient loop.

I only wear these headphones when I need to focus. I don't run in them. I don't use them to watch movies on my phone. When I put them on, it's a physical cue that it's time to go. In the book *Winning Ugly*, Olympic medal winner Brad Gilbert describes how meticulous he is about his tennis bag. He dedicates nearly a whole chapter to the dozens of items he keeps in it so he can focus out on the court. The collection of items I use to write is simpler than that, but they serve the same purpose.

4. I wrote in a notebook, not on a laptop.

Pens are less efficient than keyboards, but I've been selling to this client for a long time and I know how he works best. I find it a lot easier to write first drafts on paper. You can't jump back up the page and delete chunks of what you've written when you're dealing with written words. The only direction you can move is forward. The page naturally urges you on. Plus, do you know what else my notebook doesn't have? Instagram, Facebook, and text messages. Paper kills procrastination.

Today's sales pitch was a success. I closed the deal. The pages were written. The client was thrilled. So was I. Who am I? The greatest Jon Acuff salesman in the world.

Find an hour. Start selling.

The B-word

The most frustrating part of procrastination is that it's the most defeatable villain that has ever existed. Dan Wieden solved it in 1988 when he created the Nike slogan: "Just do it."

The fastest way to beat procrastination is to do the thing you're avoiding.

The easiest way to do that is to shrink the task down so small that you can practically do it in your sleep. I just gave you a new way to do that using a Blow Pop. This is not rocket science. So then why is it so hard to do a tiny bit of a project even though we know getting started would solve most of our issues?

Fear is the obvious answer, and we've already covered that a dozen times in this book. But there's another reason that no one ever talks about. I've read hundreds of self-development books and I've never seen anyone admit this:

Excellence is boring.

It is. There are definitely exciting moments, but there's an awful lot of boring too. Writing thank-you notes is boring. Following up with people is boring. Responding to emails promptly is boring. Rereading emails before you send them to make sure you're communicating clearly is boring. Meetings are boring. Tracking calories is boring. Getting enough sleep is boring. Eating a salad is boring. Doing push-ups is boring.

Wait a second, Jon—I love a lot of those things!

Good for you, that just means your list of boring is different from mine.

Remarkable requires an awful lot of boring.

Do you know what's even more boring than just regular old boring? Small steps on tasks you've been avoiding. That's even more boring because the progress doesn't add up quickly. It doesn't feel like enough. Baby steps feel like they're built for babies. You'll get bored of them and give up before they have a chance to stack up. I bet I could teach you how to write a fifty-thousand-word book. The hard part would be convincing you that one hundred words a day was enough for the first week. That would be boring.

Holding the finished book would be pretty exciting though.

Stepping on the scale in week 18 when the weight is gone would be pretty exciting.

The first year where your side hustle revenue exceeds your day job salary is pretty exciting.

The road to remarkable is paved with a whole lot of boring. When you run into it, make sure you know which part of the movie you're in.

The montage part of your movie

Before you achieve remarkable, you go through an awkward phase like a middle schooler with a wispy mustache, not nearly enough deodorant, and an attitude if you suggest he not wear shorts in the dead of winter.

The middle of remarkable is always hard, messy, and a bit tedious. For example, I love publishing books. I hate the middle. There are three problems with that:

1. It's my job.
2. The middle is five hundred hours long.
3. I always forget it happens.

My résumé has so many holes in it that it looks like Swiss cheese. For the first thirteen years of my career, I quit every job the second I got bored. But when I started my own company twelve years ago, I painted myself into a corner. I can't quit me. I've worked so long for myself that I'm unemployable at this point, and my boss is always with me. If the middle of this project feels difficult, there's no pulling the rip cord and jumping to a different job to enjoy that first ninety-day high of "everything is going to be totally different at this one." I *am* the job.

The second problem is that the middle is so long. If I write ten hours a week, it takes me fifty weeks to make it through the awkward phase. That's a lot of awkward for someone with an attention span as microscopic as mine. Focus is hard for me. I should have confessed that earlier in the book but I got distracted.

I'm a hummingbird of hyperactivity, known to wear holes in the butt of my jeans because I can't sit still. I also tear rips in the bottom of our bed sheets because even while I'm asleep I'm sprinting. That's a fun conversation with your wife.

Jenny: "This is the third set of sheets this year, Jon. Why can't you stop wiggling so much?"

Me: "Why can't they make tougher sheets for night runners like me?"

A coworker once told her scattered high schooler, "Don't worry, you'll do fine in life. Look at what Mr. Jon has accomplished and he's . . ." She didn't finish the sentence. What? Intense? Unfocused? High-strung? A stress ball who vibrates with pent-up energy if a dinner party goes too long? All true.

Is that nature? Nurture? The fault of social media? I'm not sure. I just know I run hot.

I'm an anxious achiever, an overwhelmed opportunist, a procrastinating performer, and above all, an alliteration addict. I'm a distracted focused person, and if you are too, I'm about to teach you a permission that gets me through the middle.

Whenever I find myself in the quicksand of discouragement, I give myself permission to say the soundtrack "I'm in the montage part of my movie."

We love a montage scene in a movie because it allows us to skip the boring parts of the hero's journey. Unfortunately, that's where all the real progress happens.

The most famous montage scene from my childhood was undoubtedly *Rocky IV*. In the film, Sylvester Stallone travels to Russia to fight his biggest opponent yet, Ivan Drago, a mountain of a man who represented everything we hated about the Cold War. The montage is split between Rocky, our noble hero, carrying logs on his back in knee-deep snow, and that cheater Drago using the latest technology and steroids. I'm getting angry just typing this.

In the final scene, Drago sprints on a treadmill with electrodes attached to a room-sized computer while Rocky sprints to the top of a snowy peak. As the sun goes down and he stands alone for what

looks like hundreds of miles of Siberian wilderness, he raises his hands and shouts, “Dragoooooooooooo!”

The entire clip is 7 minutes and 38 seconds long.

Heavyweight professional boxers spend eight weeks at training camp when they prepare for a big bout. Rocky spent two months getting ready, and we witnessed less than eight minutes. Rocky trained for 80,640 minutes. We saw eight.

What if that ratio was true with social media too? What if every Instagram reel that remarkable people post was just a montage and we were missing 99 percent of the work? If I showed you all the hours I spent on a book, you’d be bored out of your mind. Today I got up at 6 a.m. to make a list of words I’ve never used before in any other books so that this one was guaranteed to feel fresh. When you’ve written ten books, it’s easy for the eleventh to become a derivative of the others. That’s an egregious mistake languorous writers make that I must eschew. How boring would it be if I made a video about that process?

The answer is very.

No one wants to see the whole process. We want the montage.

We love the montage . . . until we’re in it.

But unfortunately it’s the only way to truly be remarkable. If DPDR was a pie chart, here’s how it would look:

The Percent of Time Each Stage of Dream Plan Do Review Requires on an Average Project



That’s a lot of montage.

Good, it's supposed to be. If you put in that much doing, it probably means you're going to win the fight just like Rocky did. Climb the mountain. Brave the snow. Shout the villain's name. You're in the montage part of your movie.

Create a Motivation Portfolio

“Climb the mountain” is mighty fine inspiration, but what do you do with that on a Tuesday? That’s always what I think about when I give a keynote speech to an audience. Everyone sitting there in the Gaylord Orlando is headed back to a real Tuesday, in a real job, with real challenges. How do those people turn intentions into actions? How do you make it through the montage?

You’re going to start. I know that. The question isn’t “Will you do it?” You’re going to do it if you’re still reading. The slackers quit this book a long time ago. The question is “Will you keep doing it?” That’s what separates average people from remarkable people. Remarkable people keep doing it.

They don’t quit. They lean in when it gets challenging. They refuse to let procrastination gain even the tiniest foothold. The key to that type of consistency is the M-word. We’ve barely used it in this book, but it’s time. We have to talk about motivation.

This is the most important, most misunderstood word when it comes to building a remarkable life. It’s important because it suffocates procrastination. It’s misunderstood because we believe two myths.

Myth #1: Motivation grows during a goal.

We think that the longer we work on a goal, the bigger our motivation will be. That we’ll naturally get more excited as we work our way through DPDR. If only. The truth is motivation is the very first thing to leave when you build a remarkable life. When you do

and the wish you made during dream turns into actual work, motivation skedaddles.

Myth #2: Motivation is outside of my control.

This is the belief that motivation is a feeling. It shows up when it wants. It's the muse—who can possibly tell when it will deem us worthy of help? What a discouraging way to go through life that would be. Imagine how you'd feel if I said:

1. Motivation is critical to your remarkable life.
2. You have no control over it.
3. Good luck.

Wah-wah, sad trumpet. Worst book ever. Fortunately that's not the case. On the contrary, you are the CEO of your motivation. The headquarters of Motivation Inc. has your photo on the walls. You're in control of motivation and it can grow during DPDR, but only if you create a Motivation Portfolio.

This counterintuitive approach transforms motivation from a fuzzy, emotional topic into a practical, actionable tool anyone can use. Simply put, a Motivation Portfolio is a written list of inspirations that fire you up when the fire goes out. Creating one is a breeze. Just list out anything that encourages you. I mean anything—a song, a friend, a movie clip, a Zillow listing of a beach house you'd like to own. You can put anything in your Motivation Portfolio. Collect as many ideas as you can and then review them whenever you're in the montage.

Remarkable people always have robust Motivation Portfolios.

They know that some days the first ten items in their portfolio won't even move the needle.

Your procrastination will be on such a rampage that it won't be until item number 17 that you get excited about the dream again. That's when you'll be glad you have a big, ever-evolving Motivation Portfolio.

I love to make people laugh and think. Live events are a big part of my dream! Guess what I completely lost access to in 2020? Live events.

I had to switch to virtual. I lost my chief form of motivation for doing my job. Virtual events were tough. They were usually done on Zoom, and sometimes the person running it would leave the room. They'd go to the bathroom, and all of a sudden I'd have to give a sixty-minute keynote to an empty chair. If my only form of motivation for being a remarkable public speaker was hearing your laughter, I would have been doomed. Fortunately, I had my Motivation Portfolio to rely on.

My list included:

1. Financial stability

Virtual events only paid about 66 percent of what a live event paid, but boy, that sure beat 0 percent. Have you ever tried to pay your mortgage with a dream? Turns out the bank only accepts do. My financial commitments gave me plenty of inspiration to pursue virtual events.

2. New skills acquisition

I don't like change, but I love getting paid to learn new skills. When I was forced to do virtual events, I chose to see that as an invitation to learn skills I might have dragged my feet on otherwise.

3. Hills pay the bills!

When I feel overwhelmed, I say that soundtrack out loud. Challenges are the best time to shine. When you run hills others won't, you get to see vistas others don't. Canceled events were just a new hill for me to run up.

4. How tough it is for other people

Thinking of others keeps my own challenges in perspective. When I have a flight canceled and have to fly the next day at 5 a.m., I look at all the airport employees who show up every day at that time. I'm getting on a plane and taking a nap. They're outside in the freezing cold packing suitcases on a

plane. They're doing a harder job than me. In 2020 I thought about how tough it was for my neighbors who are musicians in Nashville. They were out of work too, but they couldn't do consulting for teams like I could. That motivated me with gratefulness.

My Motivation Portfolio carried me through the pandemic, and yours will carry you through your next montage.

The key to this is understanding that you don't feel motivated. You practice motivation.

Huge difference.

How to do things you don't want to do

Exercise is probably my least favorite montage.

I don't want to work out most days, but at fifty I don't have much of an option anymore.

When you turn forty, your metabolism just leaves. No announcement, no going away party, no indication you're breaking up. You just wake up one day and the same amount of exercise that used to keep you in shape doesn't make a dent anymore. At forty-five, muscle mass goes wherever it is your metabolism went. Maybe Scottsdale—a lot of people are retiring there.

In my late forties I woke up with a bit of a dad bod and the muscle tone of a man who *thought* about working out a lot but wasn't actually working out. I was great at the dream part of exercise but not the do part.

It became abundantly clear to me that I needed to work out, but that's definitely on my list of "boring activities that lead to a remarkable life." How do you sell yourself something boring? With a Motivation Portfolio.

I have dozens of ideas in mine. If you want a copy, you can get it right here: JonAcuff.com/motivation. Sometimes I only need to use one or two to convince myself to do something I'm avoiding. Setting a thirty-minute timer and cleaning off my desk is usually enough to convince myself to respond to emails. But for more pernicious tasks—the ones I think are not only boring but also physically or mentally difficult, like working out—I have to dig deep into my Motivation Portfolio.

For example, here's what I do to sell myself on working out:

1. I listen to audiobooks during the bulk of my workout so that my mind is entertained.
2. I listen to the same angry, motivational song for the last ten minutes of the workout. I don't even waste time trying to find the "right" song. For years it's been "Busy Child" by The Crystal Method.
3. I had a friend who owned a CrossFit gym create a simple program for me that I could follow. If I tried to go down the rabbit hole of researching what's the "best exercise program," I'd be doomed.
4. I printed the workout and keep it in a manila folder. Seeing the folder grow thicker over the year as I add new sheets motivates me.
5. If I'm traveling, I do a thirty-minute bodyweight workout in my hotel room, so I can't even complain that "the hotel gym didn't have the right equipment." If you have a floor, you have a gym. Make a travel-sized version of the workout. You don't stop brushing your teeth just because you're traveling. Why would you stop doing anything else?
6. I text a photo of my completed workout to my buddy after each session. I texted him 137 times last year. That's 137 moments of accountability.
7. I bought an expensive sport coat that perfectly fits in-shape me. If I stop working out, that coat stops fitting.
8. I post my results weekly to 500+ people in my mindset community. They might not notice if I stopped, but I would. (You can find out more about the community at JonAcuff.com/community.)
9. I run with three friends every few weeks. If I can't hold a conversation while we're jogging, I need to train more. Have you ever met me? I love to talk. Not being able to add to the conversation because I'm out of shape would be devastating to me.

10. I encourage myself during the workout. My neighbors probably think I'm a lunatic, but I really only care if their dogs like me. It's not unusual to hear me saying, "You've got this! Let's go, buddy. You can take this hill!"

Jeez, all of that just to work out?

Yeah, I really don't want to work out some days.

I didn't write this book because remarkable comes easy to me. I wrote it because for most of my life procrastination ate my lunch and I had no other option but to figure out ways to beat it.

I give myself permission to rely on my Motivation Portfolio when it comes to tasks I'm avoiding.

I'll do whatever it takes.

Sometimes it takes ten different sales pitches.

If you have a task that needs even more, check out the full list right here: JonAcuff.com/motivation.

This week, give yourself permission to put anything you want in your Motivation Portfolio.

There's no wrong answer. This is the easiest exercise in the entire book. The more you add to your portfolio, the easier doing becomes, especially when you need to throw the kitchen sink at your dream like Matt did.

Matt throws the kitchen sink

Matt Thomson was having his worst year in real estate since 2008.

If you remember 2008, that's saying something. When we finally sold our house in Atlanta during that recession, we had to pay a \$5,000 bonus to the agent who brought us the buyer. I don't mean the commission. We paid that too. I mean we had to add a \$5,000 bounty to anyone who could find us a buyer. Our house was only \$170,000, so that stung a bit.

Matt, an agent in Denver, Colorado, was having that type of year in 2024. During a group coaching call with a real estate educator, Matt received a new dare. His coach challenged him to call every single person in his database in the month of June.

You know how you hate cold calls? How about making 157 of them? Does that sound fun? It doesn't. Before Matt picked up the phone, procrastination launched another advertising campaign. It told him,

"No one answers the phone."

"Phone calls don't work."

"Millennials hate the phone. What, are you Amish? Why don't you just whittle something out of wood or send a carrier pigeon?"

"Texting is enough."

Matt had every terrible excuse to procrastinate on that task. For starters, it was boring. Showing houses, writing up contracts, taking potential clients to lunch was a lot more fun. It was also overwhelming. Staring at his entire database looked like facing a mountain. And it was scary. Nobody looks forward to cold calls.

Matt pushed through. He came up with a simple permission. He gave himself permission to believe "phone calls work." It was just

three words, but it was all he needed to jump in. He didn't need permission to do a little more in this situation. When you're drowning, a little more kicking isn't going to save the day. He also wasn't a new agent starting a new career. He'd been in the industry for more than twenty years. What he needed was permission to throw the kitchen sink at procrastination, and that's what his coach gave him when he said, "Call everyone in your database in June."

That's a lot to do, but Matt got started with that first call and didn't stop.

Of the 157 calls he made, 55 turned into conversations. Remember when procrastination said that no one answers the phone? Turns out the truth is that 33 percent of people answer the phone. I feel like 33 percent is very different from 0 percent. Never forget that procrastination is a liar.

What was the result of all that effort? Well, before he acted on that permission to do a lot, Matt had "a whopping two transactions closed for \$28,000 for the year." He only had one active listing, nothing under contract, and was in "pretty much full panic mode." After he made all those calls, he had "five new listings and closed \$5.9 million worth of real estate."

One of the reasons that we still fall for procrastination is that it's hard to estimate what it costs us. If we don't write a book, start a business, ask that person out, or attempt any project, it's difficult to miss because none of it existed in the first place. You can't miss a meal you never ate or a city you've never visited.

In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, Clarence the almost-angel has to show George Bailey the world that would have happened if he didn't exist, because he couldn't imagine it. He had to walk in the streets and talk to people to fully understand what a hole his absence would have made in Bedford Falls.

Our life is not a movie though, despite our montages, and the only way we can see the true cost of procrastination is when we beat it and review our results. In Matt's case, he would have missed \$5.9 million in sales. The price tag on his procrastination was \$5.9 million. Would anyone willingly pay that if it was that obvious? Imagine if I tried to sell Matt on that.

Me: Would you like to buy some procrastination? You don't have to make any cold calls. You can avoid rejection from clients and use that extra time to golf.

Matt: That sounds like a great deal! What does it cost?

Me: \$5.9 million.

Matt: What did you say?

Me: \$5.9 million.

Matt: I still can't hear you.

Me: It's \$5.9 million and eventually you will also lose your job. Do we have a deal?

Matt would have laughed in my face. Break it down a different way to see how absurd the situation is. He made 157 calls, which means each one was worth \$37,579. Nobody likes cold calls, but if I paid you \$37,579 to make one, would you? That's what procrastination is stealing from you when you don't give yourself permission to throw the kitchen sink at it.

The other math procrastination hopes you never find out about

I struggled with math as a kid. I took my last math class as a freshman in college and was thrilled to see it fade into the rearview mirror of my life. But the older I get, the more I find myself appreciating math because of its unfailing consistency. Math just works. Every time.

If you give yourself permission to throw the kitchen sink at procrastination, you win more often. That's just math.

Let's say you do five times and fail 80 percent of the time. You only win once. You feel that thrill just one time. Four failures and one win.

But what if instead of trying five times you tried twenty times? You quadrupled your efforts. If the rate of failure stayed the same at 80 percent, how many times would you have won? Four times. Now you have four occasions to call your spouse and tell them the good news. Now you have four times to high-five a coworker. (Can you tell I've worked at home for more than a dozen years? Are you guys still high-fiving in offices?) Now you have four times to be recognized in a meeting by your boss instead of just one.

Expand it even further. What happens if you try a hundred times? Same thing, only now you've won twenty times!

Instead of one cause for celebration, you have twenty.

The feeling of failure changes too when you try a lot. If you only try five times, those first four failures really hurt. Let's not lie about that. But if you try 100 times, do you think that failures 40 to 44 hurt that much? Or are they just part of the process? Researchers call this "building self-efficacy," which is really just a fancy way to say

“permission to do again.” It’s the belief that even though it didn’t work this time, it’s worth trying another time.¹

After a few dozen times, you’re not devastated by failure. You instead see it as a normal part of getting to the win.

The best emails I get have the subject line “Firm Offer” because that means a client has signed a contract to book me to speak. The worst emails say “Release Hold” because that means the client decided not to book me. (A “hold” means a client asked me to block a date for them.)

Losing a hold devastated me when I first got started. I’d write my speaking agents crestfallen messages. “What happened? Why didn’t they choose me? Was it my face? Tell them I can change my face.” Now that I’ve received more than a thousand “Release Hold” emails though, I’m used to them. Like exposure therapy helps an arachnophobe slowly work their way up to holding a tarantula by spending time with smaller spiders, the fear has lost its bite.

I can even laugh at some of the reasons I lose gigs now. One time I lost an offer because at the last second the CEO saw the new *Top Gun* movie and got “fighter pilot fever.” He only wanted to book a motivational speaker who had flown an F-18 Super Hornet. Fair enough.

When you try a lot, you win a lot, and the failures hurt less. That’s a pretty fantastic set of benefits, and it’s the reason doing is where you should spend 70 percent of your time.

¹ Albert Bandura, “Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change,” *Psychological Review* 84, no. 2 (1977): 191–215, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>.

Can we bring back bullying?

I can't speak for everyone, but sometimes I need to be bullied a little bit.

Is that the wrong word? Should I have said "coaxed"? Would "encouraged" or "convinced" have been more tolerable? Maybe. But those words aren't strong enough to capture the amount of nudging I need.

I need to be bullied.

I didn't want to go buy new jeans the other day. The jeans I have are old and tired—and not in the good way that makes them seem like I get after it often, like a cowboy. They look like dad jeans, best paired with easy-fit, slip-in Skechers. So one of my favorite bullies, Jenny Acuff, called me out.

"You can't stand onstage looking like an uncle who has given up," she said.

I hate shopping, so I tried to talk my wife out of making the trip to 12 South, a hipster neighborhood near downtown Nashville. My friends moved there because it's charming and then got mad when other people also recognized its charm. Now there's no parking.

That was part of the reason I didn't want to go. It was cold. The streets would be flooded with bachelorette parties. We'd have to pay for parking. (First hour: Free. 1 hour and 9 minutes: \$40.) I threw every excuse at Jenny that I could, but she bullied me with one of her favorite soundtracks.

"You'll be fine."

She says that anytime I try to procrastinate doing really easy tasks.

"You'll be fine."

Know what? I was. I was more than fine. I ended up loving that little errand. We had lunch at Bar Taco, a Mexican restaurant we hadn't been to in years. We found a new bookstore. We bought a pair of jeans that I love so much I might never take them off. I couldn't even if I wanted to because they're raw denim and I have to wear them fifty times before I break them in. I can't tie my shoes in them. Gosh, I look so cool.

Sometimes we need friends who love us enough to bully us a little.

"It's not that cold," they say when we don't want to run.

"That idea is confusing. I think you can do better," they say before a big meeting.

"You talked too much during that podcast. It wasn't a real conversation. Ask the host some questions next time." A bully said that to me just the other day.

He was right. I thanked him for saying it.

I don't think I'll get very much traction on my "Bring Back Bullying" campaign, but that's a shame. If you're really stuck, you could probably use a little.

You'll be fine.

Someone else will do this later

If you ask me to do something tomorrow, I am quick to say no. That day is firm. I have it planned. I can see it. It's real.

If you ask me to do the same thing three months from now, I am quick to say yes. That day is faint. I probably don't want to do it and am agreeing in the moment because I want you to like me, but I'm also hopeful that someone else will do whatever I agreed to in the future.

What I've learned over the years, though, is that the person who has to do it later is still me.

I can empty my inbox today or I can do it tomorrow, but the person who has to do it has not changed. I can say yes to a meeting with a friend of a friend for next month, but the person who has to do it has not changed. I can skip the workout today because the flight back from Dallas was long and maybe I could do it at the end of the week, but the person who has to do it has not changed.

The person who has to do it later is still me.

Don't fall for procrastination when it tells you that in the future someone else will do it.

You're the someone.

There's no later you.

There's just tomorrow you, and he's going to be frustrated that you keep assigning him so many sucky tasks.

Doing is easy when you reduce your requirements

Remarkable people have plenty of preferences but very few requirements.

That means that they'd prefer to work out in the morning, but if they have an early meeting, they can move the gym to after work. It's a preference, not a requirement.

They'd prefer to have sixty minutes to review the plans for the presentation, but if there's an emergency and they have only ten minutes to scan the documents, that's OK. The hour was a preference, not a requirement.

They'd prefer to respond to emails from the comfort of their home office, but if the car rider line is the only fifteen-minute window they have, that's what they'll use. The office was a preference, not a requirement.

Procrastination will often tell you, "These aren't the right conditions." It loves creating rules around your performance. You can't do what you need to do unless the conditions are perfect. It will try to convince you that preferences are actually requirements and if they're not met, you should wait until they are.

The fewer requirements you have, the more you get done.

How have I written eleven books?

I stopped saying, "I can only write if I have a ninety-minute chunk of time to focus." That is certainly my preference, but it isn't a requirement. If I can get thirty minutes here or thirty minutes there, consider it done.

Never confuse preferences with requirements.

Do it everywhere

Speaking of requirements, I wrote my first book in a Burger King.

This was long before there was a Starbucks on every corner, and it was the only quiet spot near our house that I could hide out from my family to focus. Toddlers don't understand the sentence "Dad needs to write for an hour," so my wife volunteered to manage the home front if I got busy on my first book. At a Burger King. Have it your way indeed.

Don't wait for a writer's cabin, a perfect home gym, a beautiful website, a boss who instantly understands all your brilliant ideas, or any other fantasy requirements you're putting on your dream.

I wrote my first book in a Burger King.

I wrote my eleventh in a cabin perched on an island bluff overlooking Puget Sound.

I'm just kidding. I wrote this at gate A19 of Midway Airport in Chicago. Something about the depression-generating fluorescent lights, the gray show-no-stain carpet, and the family with nineteen kids with "juicy coughs" sitting next to me really inspired me creatively.

Give yourself permission to do it everywhere.

If procrastination is crushing you, it's also OK to leave ugly behind

Do it everywhere is true. You dramatically increase your odds of finishing that task if you are able to work on it wherever you are. But what if a project is really kicking your butt right now? If you're having a hard time being productive somewhere ugly, go somewhere else.

Do things that are challenging in places that aren't.

If you've been avoiding a project, work on it in your favorite coffee shop.

Run somewhere beautiful.

Hold meetings in rooms with lots of natural light.

Make the environment easy if the task is hard.

Run toward fear

Fear is not the foe of bravery.

Fear is the factory for bravery.

It makes bravery.

Bravery wouldn't even exist unless fear did first.

There's a generous amount of fear wrapped up in procrastination. It's a chicken-and-egg thing. Which came first, the fear or the procrastination?

I don't know and I really don't care.

If you want to get braver, run toward what you're afraid of. If the gym scares you, go more often. If writing is a worry, do it every day. If there's a hard conversation that's terrifying, have it right now.

Fear has a bad reputation, but if you run toward it, you can learn a lot in the process.

Fear is a flashlight. It will open your eyes and illuminate what's really going on if you let it. What do you really care about? Fear will show you. You wouldn't be afraid if it didn't matter to you. But if you stare at it too long, much like looking straight into a flashlight, it will blind you. Look at it but don't obsess about it. It's a dance for certain.

I used to think I was afraid of success. For decades I told people that. I actively limited my success because I was certain I was afraid of it. But I was wrong. There's no such thing as fear of success. That's just fear of failure playing dress-up. You're only afraid of success because if you win, the opportunities might get bigger and then you could really fail.

You're not afraid of success. No one is.

You're afraid of failure. Everyone is.

I am too, but a lot less than I used to be.
When it pops up, I run toward it.
You should too.

Tracking progress is the only way you can review

We can't do the final permission, review, if we don't have anything to check.

That means while you do, you have to take notes. You're going to want to complicate it. We all do. But I beg you to keep it simple.

There are three factors you can track:

1. Actions
2. Hours
3. Results

When I finish running, my Garmin watch asks me to rate my perceived effort on a scale of one to ten and my feelings on a scale of sad to happy. That's too much. I don't need to track "kind of happy," which is the second lowest of the five emoji faces they give me. That's not data. That's a distraction.

Don't distract yourself with too much detail when you're tracking. A simple rule of thumb is that the tracking should never take longer than the doing. If you have to spend more time updating your productivity system than you do actually being productive, the system is too complex.

We're keeping it simple.

Just pick one, two, or all three of these factors to track.

1. Actions

How many clients did you call? How many times did you go for a walk? How often did you sit down to write? How many days

did you vacuum? How many times did you read or pray or stretch? Write down your actions.

2. Hours

How long did you write? How long did you work out? How long did you read? How long did you focus on your business plan? If you don't feel like counting hours, expand it and count days. How many days did you do your dream?

3. Results

What happened? How many clients bought your product? What was the revenue? How many words did you write? How many miles did you run? At what speed? How many bags of garbage did you empty out of your garage? How many tickets did you sell? What were the results of your actions and your hours?

That's all you have to track. When you do, just make sure you do it:

1. Quickly
2. Consistently
3. Visibly

The minute you do the action, write it down. Don't let any time pass between the completion of the action and the tracking. If you tell yourself, "I'll record this later today," you won't. When I finish an hour of writing, I immediately write it down.

Consistency means you use the same system again and again. Once you figure out what works for you, don't bounce around. If it's tracking hours in a notebook, do that. If it's tracking results in an app on your phone, do that. Stay consistent with the metric you pick.

Finally, make it visible. One of the best parts of tracking is watching your progress add up. I stare at my progress sheet like it's a poster of a sports car. *Ohhh, look at those hours. Let's go!* Don't hide it in your desk. Put it up on your wall. Let data drive you forward as you claw your way through the montage.

You know what happens when you track while you do?
You hook up your future self.
You make tomorrow easy today.
Review You is going to be so grateful.

How do hustlers exit do and enter review?

A friend of mine listed the seven different podcasts he was actively listening to. The majority were CEOs talking to other CEOs. Some were endurance athletes interviewing physicists about quark theory. A few others were real estate investors chatting it up with house-flipping millionaires. They all sounded wonderful.

But what did my friend do with all that information about being successful?

Nothing.

I'd known him for years. He hadn't changed his life one bit in the last twelve months. He was what I sometimes am: a success voyeur.

Like a little kid standing outside a toy shop, he was peering through the window watching other people enjoy remarkable lives. It was Robin Leach's *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* with a little bit of self-improvement thrown in for good measure.

This is what always happens to hustlers who refuse to leave do and never give themselves permission to review. The truth is, this book would not exist if I didn't learn how to review what I was doing in my own life.

I read one hundred books in 2024. That sounds impressive but it's really not. To consume that amount of content, you have to fly through it. It all runs together. Do you think Joey Chestnut, the hot dog eating champion, could tell you how hot dog number 17 tasted? He is a binge eater. I was a binge reader because I was a success voyeur.

What a subtle trickster procrastination is. No one except for my wife would have suspected I was avoiding writing this book by

reading so many other books. We think procrastination is just video games and Netflix. It can be those things, but it can also be wasting time watching other people be successful while at the same time not changing our own lives.

Again, procrastination doesn't mean you're lazy. Some of the hardest working people I know are procrastinators. They're just busy doing a whole lot of things that don't matter. Everyone is detailed and deliberate about some parts of their life. The husband managing seven fantasy football teams is not disorganized. He could tell you the emotional state of a backup kicker for the Cincinnati Bengals. "His dog died this week in a hunting accident, so I'm thinking about starting someone else."

He is very busy doing, he just never reviews to see if his life is headed where he really wants it. I'm not throwing any shade here. At first I didn't make time for review either. When I did, I was horrified by what I found.

Do you know why I was reading so many books?

1. I wanted to impress you. It was a vanity project, nothing more. I liked how it felt to post online that I read a hundred books every year. It made me feel smart and successful.
2. It was a lot easier than writing my own book.

It's as simple as that.

Once I reviewed my reading habits, I started reviewing other parts of my life too.

Next up was my morning routine, which had ballooned to eleven different activities that took me a quick fifty minutes to start the day. Yikes. I was a busy boy each morning. From tracking every calorie I ate to long meditation sessions, I was trying to be perfect.

I was the king of hustle and the jester of progress.

Eventually, the looming deadline of this book forced me to do a review.

I cut my reading goal from one hundred books to fifty-two books. I stopped tracking my calories.

I paused my meditation plan for six months.

I cut the dreams I was auditioning by 50 percent.

You think planning will give you a crystal ball, but it doesn't.

The review is what reveals all.

Hustlers are too busy for that though. I get it, but we've put it off long enough. It's time to see how all our doing is really going.

REVIEW

Did it work?



It's all so simple—and short!

If you've never given yourself permission to review your life, I have some wonderful news for you. This is the simplest of the four permissions.

When you review, you discover one of three things:

1. I'm headed in the right direction.
2. I'm headed in the wrong direction.
3. I'm not headed in any direction.

Great results, bad results, no results.

That gives you just three possible options. This is where the loop metaphor of DPDR really shines.

If you're headed in the right direction, go back to do and continue everything you're working on. Repeat what's working. Keep your foot on the gas pedal. This is the smallest loop of all—just do and review back and forth in a tight circle.

If you're headed in the wrong direction, move back an extra step to plan. Give yourself permission to look at the plan again. Maybe you need to adjust it. I tell people to review their New Year's resolutions in March because March You is smarter than January You. The review will teach you what's really happening with all your efforts in do.

If you're headed in no direction, maybe you need to go all the way back to dream. If there's zero progress and your one-month audition didn't turn up an inch of forward motion, maybe you need a new dream. This doesn't happen often, because if you give yourself

permission to do a lot, there's usually enough results to indicate the right or wrong direction. Zero progress is nearly impossible.

To that point, be careful that you don't redream too soon. Many a procrastinator has pinballed back to a new dream too quickly without giving the current one a chance to work.

This is the shortest section of the entire book for a reason: You should spend the least amount of time in review. Remember the breakdown of DPDR in any project when it comes to time and effort:

Dream = 10 percent

Plan = 15 percent

Do = 70 percent

Review = 5 percent

We want to get back on the field as fast as possible. We're not stopping in review. We're regrouping before we head back out to dream, plan, and do.

Those are the three permissions you give yourself after a review. Which one will you pick? Well, first, let's make sure you do the review.

Why you'll be tempted to skip this permission even though it's simple

"I didn't go to the doctor because I was afraid to find out I was sick."

Have you ever heard anyone say something like that? It's usually followed by this sentence: "Eventually, I got so sick I couldn't ignore it any longer and had to go in."

We'd rather die than review our lives because we're afraid of what we'll find.

What if the results aren't positive? What if I feel embarrassed when I see how poorly this project is going? What if the review discourages me and makes me want to procrastinate even more?

When I shared DPDR with Bill Luth, an executive vice president at Signet Jewelers, he immediately pointed out the problem with review. "Sales teams don't like reviews because they take the results personally. They see low numbers as a knock on their identity or ability."

I understand that. It always bothers me when friends say, "I think you've got too much of your identity wrapped up in your book." Well, it does have my name on it. It does have my picture on it. The stories inside are about my life.

I fought reviews for years, but when I realized they are a critical part of a remarkable life, I bit the bullet. If I wanted to beat procrastination and become as remarkable as I could be, I had to review.

The scariest one I did was hiring a trainer to break down my keynote and help me rebuild it even stronger. I was fifteen years into my speaking career when I did that. I was already an INC Top 100

Leadership Speaker. I'd been on nearly a thousand stages around the world, but I knew I was hiding from this critical part of DPDR. I wouldn't even watch other keynotes from other speakers because I was afraid to find out they were better than me. I never looked at audience surveys or feedback forms. I was a DPD machine, but I didn't spend a minute on R.

Then I paid a coach a significant amount of money to watch my speech with me, minute by minute, and tell me what could be stronger. It was hard not to take it personally. You know how you don't like to hear the sound of your own voice on a recording? Multiply that feeling by a thousand.

Unfortunately, the review worked.

I say "unfortunately" because now I knew how valuable a review is and I couldn't hide from it in other parts of my life. I started reviewing everything. I added the R to my DPD, and I wish I had done it sooner.

I won't tell you not to take it personally, because you will. I won't tell you it's not scary, because sometimes it is. I won't tell you that you won't get discouraged with some of the results you find, because that happens.

What I will tell you is that it's worth it.

You can bloody procrastination's nose if you dream, plan, and do. You can build a good life and get a lot done. No one will make you review, just like no one made me hire a speaking coach. But if you really want to send procrastination to an early grave, if you really want to build a remarkable life, you have to review.

It's worth it.

The review is still part of the sales process

The reason we avoid review is that we think the sales process is over and now it's time to beat ourselves up. We accidentally transform from compelling salesperson to disappointed principal reviewing all the ways we failed during the project. Avoid that mistake by bringing tremendous amounts of kindness to this stage of the process.

I didn't want to do that initially because I was worried I would "lose my edge." If you're used to beating yourself up and have also been successful, you might confuse the two situations. You might think there's a correlation. You start believing that one is related to the other. If you don't beat yourself up, will you still be able to succeed? What a question.

It's so bizarre when you see it written out, but I promise it made sense in my head. If you were trying to teach anyone anything, you would never say, "Step 1: Insult yourself. Step 2: Belittle your effort. Step 3: Minimize or ignore your wins. Step 4: Keep a detailed list of your mistakes. Step 5: Treat each action as a life-or-death matter, and make sure you don't have any fun."

Even the worst teacher you've ever had wouldn't write those rules on the blackboard because she'd get fired. Imagine how few copies a book titled *Success Through Shame* would sell.

That said, I was still nervous that if I gave myself permission to review my results with a degree of grace, I might lose that special edge called "crippling criticism." Have you ever met a retiree who lived their whole life with this mentality? They are miserable. Fifty years of mainlining fear, self-abuse, and anger is now all focused on

golf. The man who breaks a club over his knee has been breaking words over his back for years.

In order to make sure I didn't lose my edge by talking kinder to myself, I dipped my toe into the water and tested the theory on a project that was purely recreational—spending 1000 Hours Outside.

Ginny Yurich started the 1000 Hours Outside movement years ago when as a young mom she worried about the amount of time her kids were spending on screens. I'm so glad that I raised kids before iPads and Kindle Fires because now I can judge parents at Chili's as if I wouldn't have done the same thing. Ginny launched an Instagram account, a book, and a podcast all centered on getting families outside. Eventually, she even created an app that tracks your outdoor hours.

I purchased the app in December 2023 and tracked my hours in 2024. I focused on it like any other project, only this time I gave myself permission to be kind about it. Instead of tracking every minute perfectly, all sixty thousand of them, I gave myself a 5 percent error rate from the get-go.

If I forgot to turn on my timer when I went outside or failed to turn it off when I came back in, that was OK. That 5 percent error rate gave me a very generous buffer of fifty hours of mistakes. That initially made procrastination very upset, because now it couldn't use perfectionism against me.

I didn't care what procrastination thought because I knew if I beat myself up about tracking every minute perfectly, I would quit in January. Would I really scrap a thousand-hour goal just because I messed up one hour? Yes. That's what I do. I've thrown away whole notebooks because I made a mistake on page 11. It wasn't perfect anymore and it didn't matter that there were 230 blank pages left. Time to start over with a new notebook.

Not this time though. This time I went in with an error rate. I planned for that, and let me be clear—I believe in low pressure and high standards.

I'm not encouraging you to lower your standards. Not an inch. If anything, I want you to raise them higher than they've ever been. I believe you are capable of bigger dreams, more detailed plans, and

greater actions than you've ever imagined. I want you to have high standards. At the same time, I want you to lower the pressure so that you actually achieve them.

When it comes to procrastination and perfectionism, you have two choices:

1. 5 percent imperfection and 95 percent completion
2. 100 percent perfection and 0 percent completion

If you pick the second option, you will never write your book, you will never get in shape, you will never build your business, you will never beat procrastination.

If you pick the first option, you will experience a brief bit of discomfort. That 5 percent imperfection will bother you a little bit, but you will get over it the minute you hold your finished book, the minute your business makes the first \$1,000, the minute you run a 5K without stopping.

Choose the first option. When you do and you mess up, use the soundtrack I do for those moments: "No big deal."

Procrastination tells you just the opposite: Everything is a big deal. Everything is critical. It might look minor, but it's actually tied to your identity and entire future.

Procrastination has to posture this way because if you believed a task was no big deal, you'd just do it. The things you're avoiding have to seem like a big deal or they'd have been done yesterday.

I started practicing saying "No big deal" about everything I was tempted to procrastinate on, especially when I reviewed my progress and was unhappy with my results.

Didn't write as much this week as I wanted to? No big deal. I've got seven fresh days headed my way, time to do again.

Company didn't grow at the rate I wanted it to this month when we review the PNL? No big deal. That just gives me even more incentive to do more next month.

Didn't run the number of miles I wanted to this quarter? No big deal. That's why years come in four quarters, not just one. Time to

pick up the pace in the next quarter!

At first the words felt funny coming out of my mouth because for decades I listened to procrastination tell me everything was a big deal. That missed phone call? Big deal. Your inbox clutter? Big deal. Didn't sleep well last night? Big deal. The whole day is wrecked! Everything is a big deal, and you better get your act together or something terrible is going to happen.

Only it hardly ever does. I kept waiting for something terrible to show up. I kept believing procrastination when it said that disaster was right around every corner. But it wasn't. Most of life was no big deal. On the rare occasion when something significant did happen, how I thought about it and how I talked about it removed a lot of the pressure anyway.

Talk kindly to yourself. Your family will notice the change almost immediately, and you'll be a lot less likely to procrastinate, especially when it comes to reviewing.

When reviewing the past prevents you from dreaming about the future

God bless us analysts, because we're amazing at reviewing—we just end up reviewing the wrong thing when pessimism gets involved.

A pessimist is like an archivist for mistakes. They've accidentally curated a perfect museum of all the times something didn't work in the past. They don't play devil's advocate, they *are* devil's advocate, quick to point out all the reasons the next attempt might fail too. The pain of the past creates the procrastination of the present.

Procrastination's sales pitch when it comes to regret is very simple:

You can't do today because of something you did yesterday.

The "yesterday" could be last week, last month, or even last decade. When it comes to mistakes, procrastination doesn't believe in tattoo removal. That barbed wire you got inked around your bicep in Panama City Beach because you were sure the way you felt at eighteen was the way you'd feel forever cannot be removed. I understand that, but there's a question that deserves an answer.

If your past prevents you from changing your present, when did that stop being true?

Have you ever thought about that? If the past is that powerful, why isn't today that powerful too? After all, tomorrow, today will be the past. This has the potential to get as confusing as that time-jumping movie *Tenet*, so let's break it down even simpler.

If you believe you can't change now because of something you did a year ago, doesn't that mean you have the power to change next year today?

Regret tells you that you can't change today because of something that happened yesterday. Today will be tomorrow in a few hours though. Regret can't have it both ways. Either the past is powerful or the past is harmless.

Regret can't say past mistakes prevent you from having current victories while also saying current decisions prevent you from having future victories.

A year from now, today will be the past you either thank or berate based on what you do. Your approach today can change consequences from an enemy to a friend. Fighting the compound interest of your decisions is like arguing with gravity. What you do will work for you or against you. You will reap the remarkable benefits of your choices or suffer the consequences of your choices.

Today is as powerful as you'll let it be. Dream it. Plan it. Do it. Review it. Bring new eyes to this new moment that can see the possibilities in the future, not old eyes that can only focus on the mistakes of the past.

It'd be nice if winning shut procrastination up

The first time you win, you'll be surprised to find procrastination waiting for you at the finish line.

You'd think that a victory would make procrastination stop coming around so often. If only. I find myself more tempted to procrastinate now than I did thirteen years ago when I was stuck. It's obvious why that happens when you think about it.

Procrastination doesn't have to work that hard on people who aren't in motion. It doesn't have to bother you very often if you give up. If you get up, that's a different story.

If you dare to try, procrastination is forced out of retirement. A blinking light starts going off in the sector of the map that represents you. It stirs from its chair and knocks a hand against the monitor. "That can't be right," it says. "That one hasn't gone off in years. Machine must be on the fritz."

It's no mistake though. You are stirring. You are taking steps, perhaps cautious ones at first. You signed up for a week of free sessions at Solidcore. You set a timer for a mere fifteen minutes and dove into a demon of an inbox. You googled "Can anyone move to Portugal?" You opened a bill you've been ignoring for weeks.

These blips would barely register on most radar systems, but procrastination's is lighting up like a Christmas tree.

You should see what happens when you actually review your results and start to see some progress. Procrastination hates progress because an object in motion tends to stay in motion. Now you've got Newton's first law of motion on your side, and that can't be.

Do you know what procrastination will whisper when you review your results and like what you see? "It should have been faster. It took you that long to figure out how to do that? Everybody knows how to do that. It's great that you lost a few pounds, but don't you wish you had done this a year ago? It could have been faster, bigger, better."

Sometimes friends accidentally do procrastination's work to diminish your win. When our VIP tickets sold out at our live event, a colleague texted me: "Saw your email about your event VIP being almost sold out. You prob could have raised that rate (by doubling it or more). People would pay \$2,500."

He meant it as an encouragement, but now discouragement has entered the chat. "Sure, you sold a hundred tickets at \$997," procrastination says to me. "But you could have sold them for \$2,500 each. You didn't win in this moment. You left \$150,000 on the table."

Body blow.

Only I don't let procrastination get in my ear when I review. I don't waste a lot of time wishing something was bigger, faster, smarter in the past. I just learn and then lean into the next time. The goal of a good review is to make the next time even better. You know that difficult thing you've been putting off? That annoying task, monumental project, or goal that you desperately want to do but don't know where to start? Reviewing makes that easier.

Reviewing is navel-gazing if it doesn't help you improve. Reviewing is a superpower if it helps you make the next attempt faster, smarter, better, cheaper, or any other "-er."

Procrastination was right when it said it could have been faster, smarter, better—it just got the time frame wrong. It tried to apply those words to your past, not your future. In the future, meaning the next time you do, you can make everything faster, smarter, and better. You can't change the past a lick, but the future is all go.

Procrastination doesn't want you to do. That's its mission.

Don't let procrastination offer color commentary on your wins. You don't need its opinion. You need to learn and then do again.

The check oil light can't tell you how fast you're going

Most people review—they just only review one thing: feelings.

They give in to procrastination because feelings are the only thing they check on their dashboard. That's like covering every other bit of information in your car with a Post-it note and driving by only looking at the check oil light. If you drove that way, you'd definitely know when you needed to change your oil, but you'd also get a lot of speeding tickets. You'd constantly run out of gas. You'd probably rear-end somebody at the grocery store because you ignored all your parking sensors. You might even run into the side of your house because you thought the car was in reverse when it was really in drive. There's a lot of helpful information on your dashboard, but only if you review it.

Feelings are important, but they're only one bit of data you should review. Here are a few other things you should keep in mind:

Truth. What's really going on? Are you putting off something easy out of fear? Are you telling yourself a story that isn't true about a situation you're avoiding?

Time. How much time have you invested in this dream? Is it enough? Is it too much? If you're not getting the results you want, what would happen if you doubled the time you're putting in?

Commitments. Have you made a promise you need to honor even if you don't feel like it? Morning Me doesn't want to run, but Night Me made a commitment. Feelings be damned.

Numbers. Are there tangible results that encourage me to keep doing? Have I measured hours, actions, sales, dollars? Should I?

The Dream. What was the dream I started with? Is it still driving me? Have I gotten off course from my original intention? If I continue the way I'm going for another month, will I be closer to the dream or farther away?

You don't need to review all of these every time you pause to check your progress. Nobody has time for that. You usually only need to look at a few items on your dashboard. For example, I recently stopped putting off dealing with my insurance policy. My commitment mattered more in that situation than my dream did. Who has an insurance dream anyway? I made a commitment to be an adult and have insurance. I made a commitment to take care of that for my family. I didn't feel like figuring out the new policy, but the commitment and the truth—that it would take less time than I was imagining—won out in that review. The time wasn't an issue. I didn't need to review any numbers associated with this task. Commitment and truth propelled me to finish this annoying chore.

A review is your chance to get a broader view of what's really going on in your life.

How often should you do it? As we said earlier, as often as it's helpful.

How many points of data should you use?

Similar answer.

As many as are helpful.

Drive with your whole dashboard to make sure you end up where you want to go.

One last thought on feelings

Maybe the loudest sensor on your dashboard is your feelings. You can't notice indicators like truth, time, and numbers because your feelings are so powerful right now. That does happen. There will be plenty of days when you don't feel like being remarkable. There will be hundreds of moments when you don't feel like planning or doing. Good thing the easiest thing in the world to change is our feelings.

It took me a .2-mile run to change my feelings this morning. I can't change my finances that quickly. I can't change my health that fast. I can't change the weather at all.

But feelings? You can change those with a Snickers.

If you don't feel like doing it, change your feelings until you do. Never let feelings stand in the way of remarkable.

Another magic question

Imagine a new restaurant opens up in your town. It's Asian Fusion meets Tex-Mex meets small plates. I personally don't like tapas because it feels like you eat a whole bunch of nothing. I also have that scarcity mindset I'm still working on, and it jumps into overdrive when our table of six is served four fried raviolis.

I'm convinced tapas restaurants have an algorithm they use to make sure you never have the exact number of items you need for the table. "Jon and I will just split one," my abundance-minded wife always volunteers. Perfect. I was thinking earlier today how half a ravioli would really hit the spot.

You're better than I am at sharing, though, so you're excited to try the new spot. When the first dish is brought out, before you take a single bite, you pull out a saltshaker from a fanny pack. (Sorry, in this story you wear a fanny pack. It's not even a cool crossbody, just a straight up fanny pack.) You then proceed to pour so much salt on the dish that you can't even see it any longer. The plate looks like it's been snowed on, with a thick inch of salt covering everything.

You take your first bite and with disappointment proclaim, "This food is too salty."

Well of course it is. You added all that salt.

Every meal you ever had would be the same way based on what you added to it. No one would ever do that, but we do the equivalent in most of our conversations, business deals, meetings, and interactions with friends. We are adding machines, regularly putting emotion and expectation on anything we encounter.

That's why when you review, you should say the soundtrack "What did I add?"

I used to add “you idiot” to sentences my wife said to me. That’s a little embarrassing, but it’s true. She has never once said that phrase to me, but I sure heard it a lot. One afternoon I came downstairs and said, “I’m all packed for my trip to Chicago.” She looked up from a sudoku puzzle and said, “Did you check the weather?”

That’s a nice thing to ask. She wanted to make sure I didn’t leave Nashville, which has sixty-degree days even in January, and be underdressed in Chicago. The weather in Chicago is so cold that it feels mean, as if the planet is mad at you and has a personal vendetta. I have forgotten my coat dozens of times and Jenny was just trying to help me.

Do you know what I heard though?

“Did you check the weather, you idiot? You’re so disorganized I bet you forgot your coat. You would forget your head if it wasn’t attached to your shoulders.”

Whoa, where did that come from? I added an awful lot, didn’t I? Can you see how that could cause a silly argument in my marriage?

You might not do that same thing, but it’s human nature to add to interactions. People get offended online so easily because they are adding their own insecurities. People get in road rage incidents because they are mad at their boss and add that to someone who accidentally cut them off. People miss opportunities because they add worst-case scenarios or failures from the past.

When you review anything, ask, “What did I add?”

When our kids were in high school and would tell us a story about someone who hurt their feelings, we would often ask, “Did they really say that?” Most of the time the offending party hadn’t said exactly that. Sometimes the person hadn’t said anything like that, but their feelings added a lot of words that weren’t really there.

When you get good at asking the question “What did I add?” while you’re reviewing, you’ll learn to ask a slightly different version when you plan: “What will I be tempted to add?”

I use this question every time I turn in a book to my publisher. I know that I will be tempted to add the expectation that my editor won’t have any edits. That’s a wild expectation because “edit” is the first four letters in his job title! If I send him sixty thousand words

and he responds with a thumbs-up emoji, we've got a significant problem. But I know that when I turn in a book, my fear is that I'm out of words. Procrastination will say, "You better hope he loves every single sentence. Your expectation should be that he calls you crying and the *New York Times* bestseller list just decides to add the book without even reading it because the buzz alone is so good. This is your *Eat Pray Love*. Maybe Timothée Chalamet will play you in the movie."

I am only slightly exaggerating.

Procrastination is overhyping my expectations of perfection so that when the edits come back, I am overwhelmed and will drag my feet on responding. Remember, procrastination thinks it's doing me a favor. It believes that if I publish the book, I will open myself up to criticism, disappointment, and pain. It would much rather I not do something so risky, so it will employ any trick it can think of.

I know that though, so when I was planning to send this draft to my editor, I asked the question "What will I be tempted to add?"

Zero edits. That was the expectation I would add.

What did I want to do instead?

Make the edits that my expert editor believed would make this book even better for you.

I skipped the pity party altogether when I got the edits back and got out my stamp from way back in chapter 25.

"Not Yet."

I didn't get an F just because I received a lot of edits. I didn't even get a B-minus.

I got a "Not Yet."

Keep an eye on what you're adding. A review will show you if you pay attention.

Make sure the situation wasn't salty because of that terrible fanny pack you insist on wearing.

Take the before photo

Petra Nott wrote me a message on LinkedIn.

You don't know her.

I didn't either, until she told me a story about her son.

Her nine-year-old doesn't believe in procrastination. When he wanted to start a book club for kids his age, he just did. His intentions matched his actions. He is remarkable. There was a lot of interest. I don't know if second grade operates via buzz, but there was a buzz for the book club. He had several RSVPs and eagerly awaited the first meeting. He was the first to arrive. Do you think he sat facing the door? I would have. I'd love watching each of my classmates come in for the book club I started.

Five minutes of waiting turned into ten. Ten turned into twenty. Twenty turned into no one is coming. "He was sitting alone in a room full of empty chairs, and it was a hard moment for a kid," Petra told me. That's a hard moment for anyone, not just a kid.

His mom said I had encouraged him that day, and before I even read the rest of her message, I knew which story she was going to tell me.

The photo.

About eighteen years ago, I held my first meetup. My blog was doing well, and I thought it might be fun to hang out with readers. I told this story in *Soundtracks*, so I'll cut to the chase here. Only two people came. One was a friend who poked his head in to check on me and felt terrible at the turnout. The other was a dad who said, "My daughter reads your blog and made me come by." He stayed for about forty-five seconds.



For some reason, I asked my friend to take my photo that night. I wanted to remember that moment. I wanted a record of me in that room surrounded by all those empty chairs. I wanted the before photo.

That's the story she told her son. That I'd had empty rooms too. So did Jeff Bezos. There's a famous photo of him sitting alone in a depressing office. It's dark outside the window, giving you the impression that he's pulling an all-nighter trying to get this thing called Amazon off the ground. There's nothing in the photo that indicates it will be successful, but he took it anyway.

That's the trick.

That's one of the most hopeful things you can do for your remarkable life. Long before you have it, long before there's progress, long before any of it is working, take the photo.

Before there's any proof, take the photo.

Even if you're neck deep in procrastination right now, take the photo.

Tell yourself this is the before, which means there's going to be an after.

I don't know when it will come, and you don't have to either.

But take the photo.

Send it to me when you get a chance.

Send me the after too if you don't mind.

I know there will be a montage between the two, but that's OK.
I'll wait.
Just promise me you won't.
Start today.

CONCLUSION

What are you waiting for?



It can be so good

“What’s the present you wanted as a kid that you never got?”

My friend Scott asked that question at my forty-ninth birthday dinner. We were at the Sportsman’s Grille, a massive would-be ski resort complete with a stuffed moose head on the wall and a roaring fireplace. This is our winter Peach Pit. You don’t eat there in the summer because it would be like drinking a Guinness at the pool in July, but it’s the perfect spot for my December birthday.

My answer was easy: “The G.I. Joe aircraft carrier.” In one fever-dream moment of toy design, the mad scientists at Hasbro released a seven-foot-long ship to fight America’s greatest enemy—Cobra. Based on the commercials in the early eighties, it was big enough to curl up on with a sleeping bag when you came home after school to an empty house because you were a latchkey kid. Only one kid in our entire town owned one. His name was Louis. History has scrubbed most of my childhood memories away because no one owned cameras, but I still remember the name of a fourth grader who had that ship.

What would your present be? My daughters would probably say Kit’s Tree House from the American Girl doll universe. While most of the dolls’ backstories involved friends dying from yellow fever and world wars, Kit’s life seemed mostly happy. This was due in large part to her elaborate tree house. We were several financial stratospheres away from being able to afford it, but every time we’d visit the store, all four of us would stand in awe at its majesty.

We went around the table sharing our answers until the question came to Eric. He’s a giant. At six five and 225 pounds of six-days-a-week weight workouts, he’s hard to miss in a room. Eric once told

me that the hard thing about being that tall is that people always ask if you played basketball in high school. Oh, boo-hoo. I'd kill to be asked that just once. In the entire history of the NBA there have been only four people my height or shorter, and they all had nicknames like "Spud" and "Muggsy."

He was quiet for a minute and then said, "The Smurfs." His wife RuthAnn flinched at the word, as if she was well aware of the story that was about to fall out on the table.

"When I was seven," Eric started, "my parents got divorced. It was painful and confusing as a kid." Divorce is so common now that we forget it's also tragic. "My sister, who is fourteen years older than me, decided to throw me a birthday party to distract me from what felt like the disintegration of my entire world."

"All I wanted that year was Smurfs," Eric said. Saturday morning cartoons no longer exist, but back then the Smurfs were tiny blue kings. "They had little figures you could play with. Every time we'd go to our local toy store, I would stare at them with great anticipation. I told everyone I knew that was all I wanted. My aunts, my uncles, my grandparents, my parents, my sister, the mailman if he made eye contact with me. I was laser-focused on Smurfs."

Has your kid ever told you on December 22 about a gift they really want for Christmas? For a solid month you had interrogated them for gift ideas, but then at the last minute they drop something you've never heard them mention before. Eric did the opposite of that. For weeks he told everyone that he wanted those Smurfs.

"At the party, I opened every present one by one, convinced the next one would be the Smurfs. When I got to the last one and opened it, I was crushed. No Smurfs. I didn't have the ability to hide my emotions back then. I was seven. I wore my heart on my face, not just my sleeve. My sister, who had thrown the party, asked me what was wrong. I told her, 'All I wanted was a Smurf and I didn't get one.'"

In a Hallmark movie, the sister would pull out a small gift from behind her back and surprise him with Smurfette, the only female in the entire village, which really messes with your head if you think about it too much. Instead, his sister erupted. She launched a tirade

of anger that included sentences like “You’re so ungrateful,” “I worked so hard on this party,” and “You ingrate.”

Eric burst into tears, retreated to his room, and then proceeded to tell that story for forty-five years. That’s why his wife flinched at the word *Smurfs*. She’d heard it before. She knew what was coming.

But did it have to stay that way?

You can rewrite any story

As I drove home that night, a thought struck me: *I wonder if I can find those Smurfs on eBay?* The answer to any question that ends in the word “eBay” is yes.

In 2009, eBay ran a commercial that told that story brilliantly. In the opening scene we see a seven-year-old playing on the shores of Cape Cod with his favorite toy boat. His parents tell him it’s time to go home, and in a moment of haste he leaves his boat behind. It’s swept out to sea, eventually settling on the ocean floor.

Decades later, an Asian fishing crew empties their nets on deck and the old boat falls out on a flopping pile of fish. At a suburban home, we now see that little boy grown up into a thirty-year-old. He’s staring in wonder at an eBay listing for the boat he’s searched his entire life for. The voice-over asks, “What if nothing was ever forgotten? What if nothing was ever lost?”

What if indeed.

It took me about three minutes of searching to find a set of twenty-five Smurf figures from 1981. The whole thing cost less than forty dollars. They were at my house within a week. I scrubbed them with soap and warm water because they had been sitting in someone’s basement for decades.

On Christmas Day, at a dinner party where our wives exchange presents, I gave Eric a small gift bag. He and I don’t normally exchange presents, so he was already a little surprised. As he removed the tissue paper and saw what was inside, his face lit up. When he lifted the first Smurf out, his wife and college-aged daughter both burst into tears. Everyone there had heard Eric’s

story, and the room grew quiet. It was, in Eric's words, "the nicest act from anyone in my life."

It was a special moment for all of us, but what struck me the most was what I realized later.

That story would never be told the same way again.

We had written a new ending, and that changed everything.

Think about it—for forty-five years Eric told that story the same way. The divorce. The missing toys. The angry sister. The disappointment. He'd shared that story so often he had it memorized.

Most of us do. When it comes to memories like that, we've revisited them so often that they're automatic. If you go to the same beach condo in the same small beach town the same week every summer, you know that area like the back of your hand. You've visited it so often that even smelling coconut in the dead of winter reminds you of sunscreen and puts you right back on the beach. The same thing happens when we vacation in old memories.

But now his story has a new ending, and the ending is the most important part of a story. The ending used to be, "My sister yelled at me. I burst into tears and ran to my room. I learned it's dangerous to tell people what you hope for."

Now the ending is, "But then, forty-five years later, my friend Jon gave me Smurfs he found on eBay. It was the kindest thing anyone had ever done for me." Completely different story.

The best part about stories is that they're never over. You have permission to change the story at any time. Even the bad stories are just waiting to see if you'll write a new ending. There's that word we wrestled with in this entire book—*waiting*.

Procrastination is just waiting. It's nothing more complicated than that. Most of the time we don't even know we're waiting because we think the story is over. Eric didn't know he could write a final chapter to that story. The emotion might have been different if he'd bought his own Smurfs, but would the impact have changed that much? I don't think so.

What if instead of me buying them, he said, "But when I turned fifty, I decided that was enough. The Smurfs needed a new story. I

found them on eBay. I felt a little bit ridiculous, but I put them on my desk as a reminder that even old stories can become new.” He would have lost the friendship angle of the story with me perhaps, but he would have gained a personal sense of accomplishment, which is its own victory.

Procrastination is not just a minor villain that prevents you from emptying your inbox or mowing the lawn. It’s a demon of Nordic proportions that stopped being a helpful solution to your problems a long time ago.

My sober friend Kyle tells me that in AA, they often say that when you quit alcohol it can feel like you lost your best friend. The whiskey, the wine, the beer was a solution to a problem you are avoiding, and when it’s gone, there’s a feeling of loss at first. But, Kyle says, the alcohol hasn’t been your friend for decades. That wine might have started out as a buddy forty years ago, but thirty-five years ago it started chipping away at the best things in your life. When you quit the booze, don’t remember the friend you lost. Remember the villain who stole your job, your marriage, and your health. The friend is long gone.

Am I taking procrastination too seriously? Maybe, but it’s not an exaggeration to say it costs you your life because it costs you time, and what else is life made of? I’m serious about procrastination because it’s serious about me.

I’m going to fight procrastination like a wild man because it’s holding you back from new stories just like it did Eric. I might not be able to buy you Smurfs, but I can definitely give you the permission to buy your own.

What are you waiting for?

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JON ACUFF is the *New York Times* bestselling author of eleven books, including *Soundtracks: The Surprising Solution to Overthinking* and the *Wall Street Journal* #1 bestseller *Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done*. His books have sold more than a million copies in dozens of languages around the world. When he's not writing or recording his popular podcast, *All It Takes Is a Goal*, Acuff can be found on a stage as one of INC's Top 100 Leadership Speakers. He's spoken to hundreds of thousands of people at conferences, colleges, and companies around the world, including FedEx, Range Rover, Microsoft, and Comedy Central. Known for his insights wrapped in humor, Acuff's fresh perspective on life has given him the opportunity to write for *Fast Company*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and *Time* magazine. Jon lives outside of Nashville, Tennessee, with his wife, Jenny, and two daughters, the authors L.E. and McRae. To learn more, visit JonAcuff.com.

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—Clara Park, Walmart International Support Team

"Akamai's marketing and sales leadership teams are still buzzing about Jon's talks. It's a testament to not only his obvious talent with humor and impactful storytelling in front of a crowd, but how he was willing to listen and adapt the content to what the teams needed to hear."

—Ari Weil, VP Product Marketing, Akamai

Jon is one of INC's Top 100 Leadership Speakers. He's spoken to hundreds of thousands of people at conferences, colleges, and companies around the world, including FedEx, Nissan, Microsoft, Lockheed Martin, Chick-fil-A, Nokia, and Comedy Central. Known for his insights wrapped in humor, Jon always provides a mix of inspiration and instruction that leaves audiences ready to turn their ideas into actions.

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THIS WILL BE EASY.

Before I tell you the system that beats procrastination, I need to assure you, this is easy.

An influencer recently told me that I should start the day with a cold shower because it tells my brain I can survive difficult things. So does slamming my hand in a car door, but that seems like a dumb way to start the day.

Life is preset to hard. Life's default is challenging. Why would we use any system that makes it harder?

If you're worried it will take a newfound level of willpower, persistence, or sacrifice to beat procrastination, I assure you it won't. As I'll say a dozen times in this book, procrastination isn't a laziness problem. Therefore, hard work won't fix it any more than brushing your teeth would fix a broken arm. You don't need to try harder. You need a completely different system, a system that works just as well on the days you have zero willpower as it does on the days you're firing on all cylinders.

I found that system. You will too.

Give yourself permission to read the first page and watch what happens next.



JON ACUFF is a *New York Times* bestselling author whose books, including *Soundtracks*, *Finish*, and *All It Takes Is a Goal*, have sold more than one million copies. Named one of *INC*'s Top 100 Leadership Speakers, he's delivered keynotes to companies such as Microsoft, Walmart, and Comedy Central. Host of the popular podcast *All It Takes Is a Goal*, Jon has inspired hundreds of thousands of people to overcome overthinking and finish what matters most. Jon lives outside of Nashville with his wife and two daughters.

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"Jon reminds us that true leaders act, not just plan. This book gives you the courage and clarity to move forward today, not someday."

—John C. Maxwell, *New York Times* bestselling author and leadership expert



IF YOU READ THIS BOOK, YOU'LL NEVER PROCRASTINATE AGAIN.

I waited thirty-four years before I finally wrote my first book. But once I discovered what's inside the pages of this one, I wrote eleven more. How? I tapped into the storehouse of creativity and energy all procrastinators have.

It's true. You're sitting on a gold mine right now.

We've never met, but I have a prediction about your life. When you finally stop procrastinating and give yourself permission to be remarkable, you will wish you started sooner. If I had a drum, I would be beating it right now for added emphasis.

You will wish you started sooner. Everyone does.
I won't let that happen to you.

This book is a celebration of sooner.

This book is a road map to sooner.

This book is a slingshot to sooner.

The advice is immediate. The pace is urgent.
And the solution to procrastination only takes one word.

What are you waiting for?

