

## SMALL CHANGES **BIG RESULTS**

Why not make this the year you achieve your wildest dreams? The secret lies in your approach. We'll show you how to set doable, practical goals and actually accomplish them, with time and energy to spare

Beyond the busy world of to-do lists, daily chores, obligations, and commitments lies the dreamy realm of aspiration. You know the place: It's where you'll finally have time to write your memoir, lose 40 pounds, complete a road race, and realize a host of other long-held ambitions. But every time you think about starting, there's something—laundry, family emergencies, an unexpected snag at work—that inevitably pops up. “Someday,” you think, “when I’m not so busy.” ¶ As you’ve probably discovered, however, putting things off until “someday” keeps them in perpetual limbo. The future is an abstraction, after all; the only real time we have is right now. So what if you could take steps toward achieving and creating the things that you’ve always wanted? **BY TIMOTHY MAHER | ILLUSTRATIONS BY SARAH WILKINS**



## CRUNCH THE NUMBERS

Time is tight, right? Luckily, you don't need much of it. Learn how easy it is to reach your goals by doing a little every day.



### GET MORE EXERCISE

You've never been big on running, and getting to a 90-minute yoga class more than once every couple of weeks is tough. The result? You end up skipping exercise altogether. But the amount of get-fit time you need is probably less than you think. And it's about as easy as putting on your sneakers and walking out the door.

#### How Use a pedometer.

First measure how many steps on average you take each day. Then add 2,000 to that total, whether by extra walking throughout the day or by taking a 20-minute fitness walk before or after work.

**In a year You'll have walked as many as 350 extra miles, and you'll have burned off about 22,000 calories.**

### LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

You've always dreamed of learning Italian, but up and moving to Florence is not exactly in the cards right now.

**How Practice 30 minutes a day.** Sure, it sounds daunting. But don't worry about all the rules of grammar and verb conjugations. Experts say the best way to learn is the way a child learns, through listening. Find a good collection of language CDs at the library. Make flash cards and give yourself a goal of mastering at least 20 new vocabulary words a week.

**In a year With more than 180 hours of study under your belt, you'll have a vocabulary of more than 1,000 words.**

### SAVE MONEY

It would feel great to have a little cash stashed away, but just when you think you're about to add an extra zero to the end of your savings account balance, the mortgage is due, your car needs work, and the cable bill arrives.

**How Transfer \$20 directly into your savings each week.** Sound like a lot? It's the cost of a T-shirt or movie tickets. Here's a tip: Make it an automated transaction, and you won't even feel it.

**In a year You'll save more than \$1,000.**

WHAT IF YOU COULD master your goals, even the most ambitious ones, rather than just pine for them? You can. We consulted experts in the art of self-actualization to help us map out simple ways to get you further down the road toward your dreams. From cooking more often to saving money, from wasting less energy to reading more books, here's the breakdown on how to get clear, quantifiable results. Make this the year you stopped dreaming—and started *doing*.

### CHANGE YOUR STORY

Chances are good that for every goal you've got, you also have several reasons you don't think it could happen. ("How could I go back to school? We have only one car." "How could I learn the piano? I have no space for one in my apartment.") Problem is, when you trot out the same old reasons again and again, they slowly acquire the weight of truth—and you actually start to believe them. "We all have a library in our heads of familiar stories," says Ariane de Bonvoisin, speaker and author of *The First 30 Days*. "I had a story about why I couldn't lose weight, about why I hadn't yet found the relationship I was looking for. But none of those stories were really true; they were just excuses."

The best way to ditch those excuses? Don't think about why you can't do something. Focus on the fact that you will—even if you haven't quite figured out all the details. "Sometimes reaching your goals comes down to having the courage to make a different choice first thing in the morning," says de Bonvoisin. So make the choice, right now, to say "yes." Every time you lapse back into excuse mode, reaffirm that yes by taking some small action—any step—toward your goal.

An example: Eva Cummings of Weymouth, Massachusetts, hadn't taken yoga in ages, and she missed it—but she'd stockpiled excuses for why she hadn't taken a class (chief among them: a demanding full-time job and two small children). One day, while having lunch, she noticed a new yoga studio across the street. She picked up a schedule and found an hour-long session on Tuesdays. Rather than allow her many reasons to run roughshod over her ("But won't I be all sweaty in the office afterward?"), she showed up. And she's been there every week since. Success came with the decision to act instead of think. "If I'd left it to my brain to 'figure out' if it would work," she says, "I would never have gone."

You can't achieve a dream garden in a day. Cultivate patience with yourself, and realize that the journey is part of, not just a prelude to, the goal itself.

### BREAK IT DOWN

Once you're ready to take action toward a goal, it's tempting to try to accomplish everything all at once—which will have you right back at square one again. Instead, approach things with this in mind: Any big goal amounts to little more than a bunch of many smaller steps. "When you break it down into incremental actions, it's not so difficult," says Robin Koval, coauthor of *The Power of Small: Why Little Things Make All the Difference*. "You thought you could never write that big proposal, but if you just sit down and think, 'Okay, I can't do the whole thing today, but I can write the agenda,' bit by bit you get it done." Or, as Mark Twain put it: "The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex, overwhelming tasks into small, manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one."

### ENJOY THE RIDE

For better or worse, our convenience-driven culture has convinced us that we can have what we want immediately, and that hurts us when it comes to actualizing our dreams. "We're too used to getting everything right this minute," Koval says. "People have these big plans, they get all excited, but then if it doesn't happen right away, they fall off the wagon." It's important to remember, she says, that when we plant seeds for something new, it always takes time for them to grow.

You probably can't knit your first sweater in a single sitting, nor can you achieve the perfect garden in a single day. Cultivate patience with yourself; realize that the journey is part of, not just a prelude to, the goal itself. We like finish lines, says de Bonvoisin, but that middle zone, where you can see the effort but not the result, is crucial. "Get good at the in-between stage, when you're not here or there, and yet it's okay." That's the approach Kathy Oda of Matthews, North Carolina,

### MASTER YOUR GADGETS

As thrilling and desirable as that new iPhone and BlackBerry might be, actually figuring out how to use these and other digital toys can prove exceedingly difficult.

#### How Learn one new function a day.

You don't have to aspire to more than that. Maybe first you get good at making and receiving calls. Then another day you figure out how to access your e-mail, and still another, how to set the alarm, and even how to use the calendar. Then, it's on to demystifying your DVR.

**In a year You'll know more than 300 features.**

### RUN A 10K

You've seen those svelte runners on race day and thought, "I'd like to run one of those someday—when I'm in better shape." The thing is, the only way you get into that kind of shape is by hitting the pavement.

#### How Start with 10 minutes.

A 10K is a little over six miles (but don't think about that now). Begin with intervals, running for as long as you're comfortable, then walking, and then running again. You need only 10 minutes to start. Get to the track twice a week and make it your goal to run 12 laps after 12 weeks. From there, says Danny Dreyer, founder of ChiRunning, you should be able to add two laps a week without stressing your body.

**In a year You'll have mastered the 10K after four months and made running part of your routine. You may even be seriously considering a half-marathon.**

### READ MORE BOOKS

A friend recommended a smart new best-seller; your mother passed along a must-read novel. Before you know it, you've got a pile of books by your bed, and while you'd love to lose yourself in them, the idea of tackling the stack seems impossible.

**How Read 10 pages a day.** That'll take you about 20 minutes. See each book as a series of pages, not a whole work to swallow at once.

**In a year You'll have read 3,650 pages, or about 18 200-page books. That's a pretty big chunk of your "unread" stack.**



## WRITE A BOOK

You've thought about that memoir or novel for years. You know you'll get to it—as soon as the kids are out of the house and you win the lottery and you've bought that quiet cabin in the woods. But perhaps it's not as difficult as you're making it out to be.

**How** Draft 300 words a day. Whether you prefer a notebook or a laptop, commit to writing just this much every day (about a page typed and double-spaced).

**In a year** You'll have written more than 100,000 words, about the length of a 300-page book.



## BECOME A GOOD COOK

Maybe you've always thought that cooking at home seemed complicated and time-consuming. Maybe you assumed that you'd be bad at it. But neither has to be true. You already know what you love (garlic, onions, asparagus). Learning to cook is simply a matter of finding new ways to put these ingredients in the form of a meal.

**How** Master one new recipe a month. One time it might be veggie lasagna, another it's risotto. There's no shortage of sources for simple, straightforward recipes that anyone can do in very little time. Opt for the simplest (and the best-tasting).

**In a year** You'll have 12 delicious, homemade entrées in your repertoire.

## LOSE WEIGHT

You've been carting around that baby weight for years, and you're starting to think it'll never go away. Between the kids and your full-time job, how will you ever find the time to get back on track?

**How** Focus on cutting 200 calories a day. This comes down to one slice of pizza, a bagel, or a 20-ounce soda.

**In a year** Without altering your workout schedule, this small change will save you 70,000 calories, and you'll have dropped about 20 pounds (since 3,500 calories equals about 1 pound of fat)—or more if you also increase your exercise.

Missteps and false starts are part of any process. The key to staying on track lies in viewing each one as a minor glitch instead of a system failure.

took last year when she decided to face up to her weight problem. Her goal was positively daunting: Lose 150 pounds. But instead of staring down that one huge number, she aimed for the next pants size down. "I'm a women's size 16 right now, and my ultimate goal is a misses' size 10," Oda says. "I buy a smaller pair of jeans as soon as I achieve each step so that I have something to keep trying on every week until my goal is achieved."

## CONNECT TO YOUR INTERNAL GPS

Missteps and false starts are part of any process. The key to staying on track lies in viewing each one as a minor glitch instead of a total system failure. One solution? Take a cue from your car's global positioning system, says de Bonvoisin. To get you from point A to point B, the GPS doesn't need to know where you were yesterday or if you got lost three turns ago. It needs to know only where you want to go now. Apply this practice to your own goals. It doesn't matter if you didn't eat a single green vegetable last week, or if you spent (instead of saved) \$20. "There's zero focus on the past," de Bonvoisin says. "You get to ask only, 'Where am I today with the meditating thing? Where am I with looking for my dream job? And where do I really want to go right at this moment?'"

Janis Rothermel of Longport, New Jersey, kept this idea in mind when she quit smoking. She'd always thought of herself as a smoker. Unfortunately, that's the way other people saw her, too, as she found out one year when three people gave her a cigarette case for Christmas. She realized it didn't matter if she smoked yesterday or earlier that day; she wasn't going to smoke from this point on. "I told myself, 'I've gone five minutes. I can go another five.' Then it was, 'I've gone three days, two hours, and five minutes.' I haven't gone back in 25 years." Rothermel learned, as many of us do, that you can get exactly where you want to go, one moment at a time.

