“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.”  
**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

“Don’t wait. The time will never be just right.”  
**Napoleon Hill**

What makes dreams into reality?

I believe that perhaps the most important – and an often ignored – thing is simply taking action. I used to be really bad at it when I was younger. Back then I usually got stuck. I got stuck in my dreams about what I wanted to do. I got stuck in analysis paralysis due to my habit of overthinking things. I got stuck in procrastination and in pessimism.

Things have changed a lot since then though. I have added many new habits that help me to take much more action than I used to. I hope this week’s article will help you to do the same.

1. **Get your day off to a great start by doing the most important thing.**

I first learned about this about 15 years ago when I used to sell computers. The boss told us that if we took care of the most important task of the day – often one of the more difficult ones too – right away in the morning the rest of the day would be a lot easier and lighter.

He was right about that. When that first and most important task is done you don’t have to worry about it. It won’t weigh down on your day. You feel good about yourself. And you’ll have less inner resistance to taking action for the rest of the day.

2. **Just take responsibility for your actions and the process.**

I love this quote from the ancient Sanskrit Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita:

“To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction.”

Why? Because every time I look at it or remind myself of it I feel a sort of freedom and relief. This quote reminds me to understand that I cannot control the results of my action. I can’t control how someone reacts to what I say or what I do.

It reminds me that it usually works better for me to stay motivated to keep doing what I do if I do something I really like doing. Basically, I do what I think is right and that is my responsibility. And then the rest (the possible results), well, that is not up to me to decide about or try to control.

I let it go.

Taking action becomes a so much lighter activity when you only have to take responsibility for doing what you think is right.
3. Don’t feel like doing it? Start small.

Getting the most important thing done first thing in your day and setting yourself up for an action-packed day sounds great in theory.

But in reality you will have unmotivated days. Days when you feel emotionally low or when you are confronted with having to do something you don’t want to do.

That’s life. But no reason to let that sink your day into inaction and feeling sorry for yourself. I have found that the best thing for these situations is to start very small. To just…

- Write for 1-2 minutes.
- Lift free weights for just a few repetitions.
- Spend 1 minute with getting started on something that scares me.

After that I have the choice to go do something else. But I seldom do. I just need an easy way to get started and then, when I am in motion, I usually continue taking action for a while longer.

4. Don’t hurt yourself.

This is a powerful motivator for me to grow and to become a better person.

If I don’t do what I deep down think is the right thing to do then I hurt myself and my self-esteem.

What I do – or do not do – during my day sends powerful signals back to me about what kind of person I am. There is no escaping yourself. And there is always a price to pay when you don’t do what you think is the right thing.

5. A reminder for focus.

If you don’t remind yourself often about what you need to focus on and why you are doing it then it is easy to let days slip away or to spend too much time on less important things. So create a simple reminder on a piece of paper. On it you can for example write down:

- Your top 3 priorities in life right now.
- Your most important goal or new habit for the next 30 days.
- A motto or quote you want to stay focused on and live by at this time in your life.

6. Stay accountable to the people in your life.

An accountability buddy can help you to stay on track and to keep taking action towards your goal or dream even when the initial enthusiasm has dissipated. For example, many of you as readers help me to stay accountable to provide helpful content. I get feedback all the time about if I do things in a helpful or less helpful way. I get a ton of encouragement. People closer to me in my life help me to stay accountable to for instance not eating too much unhealthy stuff, to working out and to not working too much.

Find someone in real life or online who wants to get in better shape too. Or start a business online. Motivate each other.
Manage Stress TIPS

Keep each other accountable so you take action and take steps forward each week.

7. **Cycle fully focused work and fully relaxing rest.**

Get your kitchen timer or access the stop-watch function on your cellphone. Set the timer for 45 minutes. During those minutes just work on your most important task/small step forward. Nothing else. No distractions.

After those 45 minutes are up, take a relaxing break. Distract yourself on Facebook if you like. Or step away from your work space and take a short walk, stretch or go for an apple for the next 15 minutes.

By working these fully focused periods of time you’ll:

- Get more done and do work of higher quality.
- Be able to concentrate for a longer time in your day and week and get less tired.
- Train yourself to focus on one thing at time, instead of getting stuck in your mind between work and relaxation and building up friction and stress within.
- Be able to enjoy your rest periods without a guilty conscience.

45 minutes of work too much? Try 25 minutes instead.

Procrastinating half-way into your 25 minute period? Set the timer for 10 or 5 minutes and build up the time that you can fully focus on the work over the next few weeks and months.

8. **Focus more on the how to and less on the what-ifs.**

If your thoughts starts spinning as you are thinking about taking action then in your mind shout: STOP! Don’t allow yourself to get stuck in the negative spiral of analysis paralysis.

Sure, it is smart to think before you act in many cases but overthinking things tends to become a way to try to control things you cannot control or to simply stay away from action because you are scared in some way.

After you have said stop to that train of thought open up your mind to what you CAN DO instead of all the things that could go wrong in the worst case scenario.

Ask yourself questions like:

- What is one small step I can take today to move forward towards my goal or out of this situation?
- What is one thing I can learn from this situation?

Write down the answers you come up with and take action on them.

9. **People don’t care that much about what you do so don’t let that hold you back.**

When I was younger I almost always let what people may have thought or said if I did something hold me back and I got stuck in inaction.
It was more of a self-centered than accurate belief.

In reality people have their own things going on in busy lives. They think about the job, kids, a partner, the cat, a vacation, what to have for dinner and they worry about what you and other people may think about them.

You are probably not the main character in other people’s lives. Even if you are that in your own life.

A realization that can be a bit disappointing but something that can also can set you free from self-imposed bonds.

10. Tap into enthusiasm.

When you dream and when you get started with something new in life then the enthusiasm flows like a fountain. A few weeks later it may have gone down quite a bit. Don’t let that lead you to quitting if you think this is something you want to continue doing.

Tap into enthusiasm in your surroundings instead.

- Let the enthusiasm of your accountability buddy flow of over to you and create a flow back to him or her by being enthusiastic about his or her goals and dreams.
- Listen to podcasts or audiobooks by inspiring people.
- Read blogs, websites and take courses that help you to get a dose of enthusiasm every week.
- Let the enthusiasm from friends, children or pets flow over to you.
- Listen to music and watch movies that increase your joy for life. Bring the enthusiasm of the rest of the world into your life.

11. Add the fun.

Some tasks simply are boring or not much fun at all. Then try this while you are doing them to add a bit of fun:

Add some music that gives you energy and inspires you.

Make it into a game where you compete with friend about who can finish something first or do the most amount of something in 10 or 30 minutes.

Change your perspective on what you are doing, lighten things up a bit and it tends to become quite a bit easier to take a lot of action on what you may have procrastinated on for some time.

12. Celebrate what you did today.

Take 2 minutes at the end of your day to think about, appreciate and celebrate what you have taken action on today. No matter how small the action may have been.

It will:
Manage Stress TIPS

Motivate you to get going tomorrow too.

Increase your self-esteem over time.

Make you feel good about yourself and that feeling will spread to the people in your life too.