

REVISED AND UPDATED

#1 WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLER

MICHAEL HYATT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



YOUR

A 5-STEP PLAN FOR

BEST

ACHIEVING YOUR MOST

YEAR

IMPORTANT GOALS

EVER

“A simple program, backed by the best modern research,
to reach your dreams!”

—TONY ROBBINS

“When it comes to achieving big goals, a lot of the conventional wisdom is flat wrong. In *Your Best Year Ever*, Michael Hyatt lays out a simple program, backed by the best modern research, to reach your dreams!”

TONY ROBBINS, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Unshakeable*

“Generous goals work (if you write them down), and powerful books work (if you read them). Michael Hyatt has created a fun, fast way to find your dreams and then turn them into reality.”

SETH GODIN, author of *Linchpin*

“*Your Best Year Ever* is full of compelling, real-life stories of average people who have achieved extraordinary results. Please take my advice and buy this book only if you want to be able to look back in twelve months and say, ‘Now, that was my best year ever!’”

JOHN C. MAXWELL, author, speaker, and leadership expert

“The best part of this book is that before he wrote it, Michael spent decades living it. This is Michael Jordan writing a book about basketball.”

JON ACUFF, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Soundtracks* and *All It Takes Is a Goal*

“Let’s be honest . . . resolutions just don’t work. That’s why a lot of gyms are empty and even more budgets are blown by Valentine’s Day every year. If you really want things to change over the next twelve months, look at what *Your Best Year Ever* has to say—then do what it says.”

DAVE RAMSEY, bestselling author, nationally syndicated
radio show host

“Michael has been a trusted friend and guide of mine for a long time. This is a playbook for success in the relationships, endeavors, and beautiful ambitions you have for yourself and the ones you love the most.”

BOB GOFF, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Love Does*

“Many people talk about goals, but listen to Michael. He grounds this advice in sound research. A great guide.”

DR. HENRY CLOUD, psychologist, *New York Times*
bestselling author

“Not only am I having our whole team at FranklinCovey read *Your Best Year Ever*, I am having my three college-age children read it as well. Michael gives us a profound road map for both hope and achievement! This is rare wisdom from an extraordinary leader whom I am grateful to call a friend!”

CHRIS MCCHESENEY, coauthor of *The 4 Disciplines
of Execution*

“Throughout your life, you’ll meet three types of leaders. The first inspires ambition, without results. The second improves results but ignores the spirit. In *Your Best Year Ever*, Michael Hyatt proves he is the rare third type of leader—one who both raises our performance and lifts our soul.”

SALLY HOGSHEAD, *New York Times* bestselling author,
creator of *How to Fascinate*

“Over the last few years, I’ve referred hundreds of people to Michael Hyatt to help them create their best year ever. Why? His work is based on the best science available, plus the real-world experience of helping more than twenty-five thousand

people design their ideal year. I love that he’s distilled the best of his work into this book.”

JEFF WALKER, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Launch*

“For more than a decade, I’ve known Michael as a successful leader and entrepreneur. In *Your Best Year Ever*, he shares the simple, proven system he uses to achieve his most important goals. This book can help you achieve even more than you thought possible.”

ANDY STANLEY, senior pastor of North Point Community Church, author of *Visioneering*

“Twenty-five thousand students. Twenty years of insight. Fifteen carefully curated chapters. Five unconventional steps. All in one book that will lead you to your best year ever. What could be more essential than that?”

GREG MCKEOWN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Essentialism*

“Michael Hyatt has written a smart, evidence-based, and often surprising treatise on how to set the right goals and then see them through to completion. A must-read for anyone looking to take systematic steps toward improving their life.”

CAL NEWPORT, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Deep Work*

“Michael Hyatt’s *Your Best Year Ever* is the best resource on goal setting I’ve read. It also helps you emphasize your core purpose, which is important because purpose-driven goals are

much more likely to be achieved. Get this book. It will show you how to turn your goals into reality.”

JON GORDON, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *The Energy Bus*

“We all want good things: a rewarding marriage, business, family, spiritual life. Getting them is another story. Thankfully, Michael Hyatt shares what works not only for him but also for the tens of thousands of his Best Year Ever students. I’ve used this system for years for one simple reason: it’s the best available.”

DONALD MILLER, *New York Times* bestselling author,
founder and CEO of StoryBrand

“Michael Hyatt has a knack for making the complex simple. Even better, he makes it useful. Nothing exemplifies that better than *Your Best Year Ever*. Anyone can put these five steps to work in their own lives today.”

DAN SULLIVAN, president of The Strategic Coach Inc.

“I am a Michael Hyatt follower. I have lived out as much of what he teaches as possible. I have paid off all my debt, written books that never would have been published without his inspiration, and taken his advice in many other areas of my life. Now you can do it too. The price of *Your Best Year Ever* is extremely cheap for the *best advice ever*.”

STEPHEN ARTERBURN, *New York Times* bestselling author,
founder of New Life



**YOUR
BEST
YEAR
EVER**

**A 5-STEP PLAN FOR ACHIEVING
YOUR MOST IMPORTANT GOALS**

REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

MICHAEL HYATT



BakerBooks

*a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Michael Hyatt, *Your Best Year Ever*, Revised and Updated
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2023. Used by permission.

© 2018, 2023 by Michael Hyatt

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hyatt, Michael, 1955– author.

Title: Your best year ever : a 5-step plan for achieving your most important goals / Michael Hyatt.

Description: Revised and updated edition. | Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023009786 | ISBN 9781540902696 (cloth) | ISBN 9781540903969 (paper) | ISBN 9781493443253 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Intentionalism. | Motivation (Psychology) | Goal (Psychology) | Self-realization.

Classification: LCC BF619.5 .H93 2023 | DDC 153.8—dc23/eng/20230313

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023009786>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2016

Some names and details of the people and situations described in this book have been changed or presented in composite form in order to ensure the privacy of those with whom the author has worked.

The author is represented by Alive Literary Agency, 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, www.aliveliterary.com.

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Your Best Is Yet to Come 9

STEP 1 BELIEVE THE POSSIBILITY 26

1. Your Beliefs Shape Your Reality 29
2. Some Beliefs Hold You Back 39
3. You Can Upgrade Your Beliefs 51
Step 1 Action Plan 70

STEP 2 COMPLETE THE PAST 72

4. Thinking Backward Is a Must 75
5. Regret Reveals Opportunity 89
6. Gratitude Makes the Difference 101
Step 2 Action Plan 112

STEP 3 DESIGN YOUR FUTURE 114

7. Great Goals Check Seven Boxes 117
8. Seriously, Risk Is Your Friend 135

- 9. Achievements and Habits Work Together 151
Step 3 Action Plan 162

STEP 4 FIND YOUR WHY 164

- 10. Your What Needs a Why 167
- 11. You Can Master Your Own Motivation 185
- 12. The Journey Is Better with Friends 197
Step 4 Action Plan 208

STEP 5 MAKE IT HAPPEN 210

- 13. One Journey Is Many Steps 213
- 14. Visibility Is Essential 223
- 15. You Can Trigger Success 237
Step 5 Action Plan 244

The LEAP Principle 247

Plug-and-Play Goal Templates 254

Recommended Reading 261

Notes 264

Thanks 277

Index 280

Your Best Is Yet to Come

Your task is not to foresee the future, but to enable it.

—ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

It isn't where you came from; it's where you're going that counts.

—ELLA FITZGERALD

When Edmund Hillary decided he would someday climb Mount Everest, no one really believed he'd do it. Why would they? He was just a beekeeper in New Zealand, a world away. Mountaineering was only a hobby for Hillary. Any talk of climbing the world's tallest, most forbidding mountain sounded crazy. What's more, there had already been several prior attempts on Everest. None had succeeded, and many climbers had died trying. Still, Hillary held on to his dream.

Discharged from the military after an injury in December 1945, Hillary started making that dream a reality. He learned advanced rock and ice climbing and mastered the use of the ice pick, ropes, and other gear required to reach the top, including oxygen equipment for the high altitude. He practiced by

climbing peaks in New Zealand and Europe. Finally, in 1951, he got an invitation to the Himalayas on an expedition scouting a path up Everest.

The race was on. Many others in the group were also jockeying for the distinction of being the first to the top. Working with Sherpa guides, the expedition identified the best route up the mountain. They survived avalanches and icefalls, brutal cold, and oxygen deprivation. Then, in 1953, they made another attempt. On May 26, two climbers in the same expedition almost made it to the top, but they failed just a hundred yards from the summit.

Not Hillary. Three days later, on May 29, Edmund Hillary reached the top. He and his Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay, finally crested the 29,000-foot peak. “A few more whacks of the ice-axe, a few very weary steps, and we were on the summit of Everest,” Hillary said of the final moments.¹ As far as we know, they were the very first two people in the world to crest the mountain. “We stepped up,” Norgay said. “We were there. The dream had come true.”²

What about you? What’s your dream?

Do you have an Everest you want to climb? Is it starting a new business? Getting your health back on track? Doubling your family income? Writing a book? Getting out of debt? Spending more time with family and friends? Mastering a difficult new sport or hobby? Learning a second language so you can experience another part of the world—or more of the one you already inhabit?

Dreams are as diverse as their dreamers. And I believe any dream that inspires you and enhances your life is worth pursuing. You might be pursuing several already. But we all face setbacks. It’s part of the pursuit. There’s no achievement without some friction, some resistance—maybe lots of it.

Maybe those setbacks lie in your past, informing your present experience. Maybe you're fighting through a major setback right now. If so, you'll identify with Heather Kampf. I think we all can.

Tripped Up by Life

Heather Kampf is a highly decorated runner with an impressive string of accomplishments, including three USA championships for the road mile. But what's most impressive is the time she won first place in the 600-meter final at the 2008 Big Ten Indoor Track Championship after falling flat on her face. For the 600-meter dash, runners make three laps around a 200-meter course. As the third and final lap approached, Kampf was in second place and ready to take first. Then, in a split second, everything changed.

"I was making a move to pass . . . and probably just didn't account for enough space for my long stride," she recalls. "I felt my heel get clipped once, and then on the second time I knew I was going down."³ More than going down, she went sprawling. Kampf skidded along the ground, her face bouncing on the red track as her momentum tossed her legs up behind her. Spectators gasped. It was a hard fall that instantly knocked her to the rear of the pack with virtually no hope of catching up.

When it comes to achieving our goals, I know a lot of us feel like that. We start out strong and make huge strides, gathering momentum as we go. Then we get derailed or fall short of our hopes. Not always—but often enough that most of us can point to a handful of setbacks or failures with disappointment and regret.

Nothing symbolizes this kind of frustration like New Year's resolutions. People have been making them since forever. Some make them every year, and most of us have made them in the past—six in ten Americans set resolutions at least some years.⁴ But just because something is popular doesn't mean it works.

A Faulty System

Hashtags like #resolutionfail start trending on social media hours into the new year. “Got ready for the gym, packed my gear, and went for a burger instead #resolutionfail,” a woman joked on January 3. “Bought my twin sister workout clothes for our birthday, and we have yet to lift anything but a fork,” another said the next day.⁵

I bet most people can identify. We can usually stick it out a few weeks, but fewer than half are still going after six months. No wonder half of us say resolutions are pointless, and fewer than a quarter of us agree that resolutions have helped improve our lives.⁶ The numbers vary depending on the surveys you consult, but ultimate success is elusive to all but a few. In fact, many of us stop making resolutions because we've failed at them in the past.

Welcome to the club. We're like hatchling turtles, bursting with determination to make it over the dunes to the ocean beyond. Then the seagulls swoop in and start picking us off one by one.

Some industries bank on our failure. Fitness centers sell year-long contracts, knowing the majority of customers won't come more than a few weeks. NPR covered a story about one chain with 6,500 members per location but only room for 300 at a time.⁷ Gyms can afford to vastly oversell their capacity because

they know we'll get distracted or discouraged and lose interest. How does it feel knowing people assume we'll fail—and then benefit when we do?

This is about more than funny tweets and sad statistics. Our goals reflect many of our most important desires and aspirations—our determination to make a change and improve our lives. Consider some common resolutions people set:

- Lose weight and eat healthier
- Be a better person
- Spend less, save more
- Deepen their relationship with God
- Spend more time with family and friends
- Exercise more often
- Learn something new
- Reduce stress
- Do more good deeds for others
- Find the love of their life
- Find a better job⁸

Generally, we're talking about our health, wealth, relationships, and personal development. I get that. My governing assumption in this book is that you're a growth-minded person who wants to excel personally, professionally, relationally, intellectually, and spiritually. And that matters.

When people like you reach their full potential, the world has more happy marriages, kids have their moms and dads at night, businesses have leaders worth admiring and emulating, and you have the health and vitality necessary to fuel your dreams. Through one intentional choice at a time, you make the world around you better. That's exactly why we need a far

better plan. Aspirations such as these are too important to entrust to a faulty system.

A Far Better Plan

Some people say the best way to achieve our goals is to play it safe and set only one or two. But for me that's leaving too much on the table—probably for you too. Whether you're an entrepreneur, executive, lawyer, salesperson, designer, marketer, doctor, coach, mom or dad, husband or wife, or several of those things, we're talking about the most important stuff in life. So, why leave so many hopes unfulfilled? Instead of scaling back, we need a system geared to work. We need a proven method to set and achieve our goals.

I've been studying personal development and professional achievement for decades. And I've been practicing both at home and at work. As the former CEO of a \$250 million corporation and, today, the founder and chairman of Full Focus, a goal-achievement and coaching company, I utilize a proven system that incorporates safeguards for many of the pitfalls and failings of typical goals and resolutions.

Over the years I've seen amazing results in my own life and in the lives of countless people with whom I've shared the system. I lead thousands through this process every year in our annual Your Best Year Ever Live! event and our Full Focus Goal-Setting course. Not to mention the hundreds of thousands who've learned bits and pieces of the system through our Full Focus podcasts—*The Double Win* and *Focus on This*—and who have put it to use in their own lives with the *Full Focus Planner*[™], which has sold more than a million copies as of this writing.

This book emerges from all that learning, living, and teaching. Based on decades of practical experience and the best current research on goal attainment and human achievement, this book is designed to help you find the clarity, develop the courage, and leverage the commitment you need to accomplish your most important personal and professional goals.

Your Breakthrough Year

When Heather Kampf hit the ground, she could have stayed down. She could have easily become discouraged and admitted what everyone was already thinking—that her race was over. “It was as if a vacuum had sucked all the energy out of the place,” she says of the moment she collapsed. One of the announcers even tried softening the blow. Since Kampf’s teammate had moved into the lead, he said it might be okay if she came in last.

But she didn’t.

“The first thing I remember seeing after feeling like I was falling was seeing my hands on the track when I was pushing off to go again,” Kampf says. She leapt up as fast as she fell down and began closing the distance. The crowd responded. “As I started to gain momentum, it was like a crescendo of noise and excitement,” she remembers.⁹ To the amazement of the announcers and spectators, she passed one runner, then another, then finally her own teammate to take *first* place!

Kampf’s story provides a powerful picture of what can happen when we stay in the game and keep pushing. Maybe you feel a few steps behind. Maybe you’re at the rear of the pack and can’t see how you might regain lost ground and reach your goals. Hold that thought.

I want you to consider instead what a true breakthrough year might look like for you. Imagine it's twelve months from now, and you've accomplished your top goals in all of life's domains (more on those in a moment). Think about your health. How does it feel to be in the best shape of your life? How does it feel to have the stamina to play for hours with your kids, pursue your favorite hobbies, and have energy to spare?

Are you married? What's it like to have deepened and enriched your most significant relationship, to feel you can't wait to spend time together? Imagine your life full of intimacy, joy, and friendship with someone who shares your most important priorities, your most significant goals, and who gives the encouragement and support you've dreamt about for so long.

Consider your finances. How does it feel to be debt-free, to have money left over at the end of the month? Imagine having the resources you need to meet your expenses, protect yourself against the unexpected, and invest in the future. Think how reassuring it is to have deep savings and how satisfying it is to provide your family with the life they desire and deserve.

Reflect for a moment on your spiritual life. Imagine you have an abiding sense of something transcendent, of a connection to a larger purpose and a bigger story. Imagine waking up grateful and going to bed satisfied. How does it feel to face life's ups and downs with peace in the deepest part of your soul?

Imagining these possibilities can be difficult for some. Life can feel chaotic and uncertain, and disbelief is one way to brace ourselves for the worst. But I think the reason goes even deeper. Most of us have a long history of not getting what we want out of life. Perhaps we set some big goals we didn't achieve, or the future turned out differently than we planned. Life throws curveballs. We've all been there. Disappointment turns to frustration,

to anger, to sadness, and finally twists itself into cynicism. You might feel it rearing its head right now.

I get it—and it’s totally normal, even necessary. “The reason we need failure to learn is straightforward,” says University of North Carolina professor Bradley Staats. “Learning requires trying new things, and sometimes new things don’t work as expected.” The good news, he says, is that “failure creates a powerful learning cocktail, mixing new ideas with novel information and a motivation to experiment.”¹⁰ But only if you keep an open mind.

Stick with me. Whatever has happened in your past—good or bad—it is truly possible to make this your best year ever, even in those areas where you’ve suffered serious setbacks. I’m going to show you how. Consider this book an invitation to make the next twelve months the most meaningful and significant you’ve experienced in your life so far. You might have one or many Everests to climb—and you can reach the top by implementing the system and principles of this book.

What’s Your LifeScore?

Your Best Year Ever is based on five key assumptions. First, *real life is multifaceted*. Our lives are more than our work. They are even more than our families. The way I see it, our lives consist of nine interrelated domains:

1. Body: our physical health
2. Mind: our mental health and intellectual engagement
3. Spirit: our connection to God or something greater than ourselves

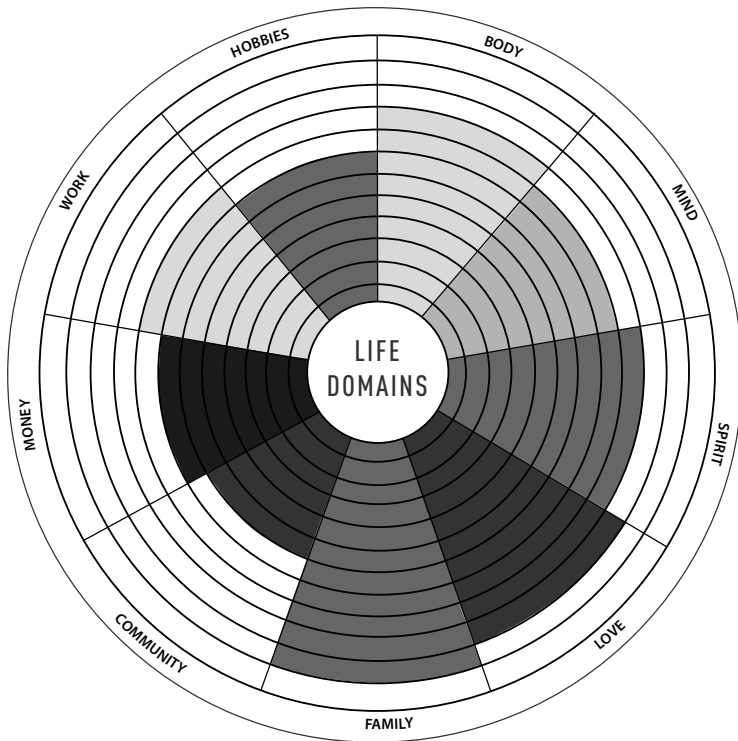
4. Love: our spouse or significant other
5. Family: our children, parents, and others near and dear to us
6. Community: our friends, associates, and the wider groups we are a part of
7. Money: our personal or family finances
8. Work: our profession or career
9. Hobbies: our pastimes and personal pursuits

Second, *every domain matters*. Why? Because each one affects all the others. For example, your physical condition impacts your work. And stress at work impacts life at home. All this interplay means you've got to give each domain the appropriate attention if you want to experience progress in life.

Third, *progress starts only when you get clear on where you are right now*. Maybe you have a vague sense that things are off track in your career but haven't come to grips with the truth of your situation. Or maybe you sense your marriage has become rote or routine, but you haven't had the courage to just admit you're stuck.

Fourth, *you can improve any life domain*. No matter what's going on in the world or how off track and frustrated you feel, you don't have to settle for what is. Progress and significant personal growth are truly possible. Yes, some things are out of your control. But there's more within your power than you probably realize; it just takes getting started.

And that takes me to the fifth and final assumption: *confidence, happiness, and life satisfaction are byproducts of personal growth*. One of the best ways to overcome all the uncertainty you experience in the world and make progress on your most important goals is to become fully aware of how much



Life consists of nine interrelated domains. Understanding the relative health of each can help you make progress across them all. The example gradations represent relative health in each of the nine life domains for an individual.

agency and control you actually have. It's far more than you think, and it'll grow as you flex it.

To get a sense of where you are right now, I encourage you to take a quick and easy online quiz called the LifeScore® Assessment. You can intentionally engineer massive growth over the next year in the most important domains of life. But you need a baseline on where you are now so you can identify which domains need the most attention. Maybe you're succeeding at work but your health is suffering. Or maybe you're doing a

great job connecting at home but don't have an actionable plan to build your savings for an emergency.

I designed the LifeScore Assessment to help you quickly spot areas of improvement and measure your personal growth over time. If you haven't taken it yet, use the QR code or follow the URL at the end of this chapter and get your score. It's fast and easy—just ten minutes. Best of all, it will give you the insight you need to begin your best year ever.

But that's just the start. Let me give you an overview of where we're going next.

The Path Ahead

I've divided my goal-achievement process into five simple steps. In Step 1, I'm going to help you overcome any doubts you might harbor about experiencing your best year ever. Unless we believe we can reach our goals, we're sure to miss. This step will help you shed limiting beliefs and imagine what a breakthrough year might mean for your life.


In Step 2, I'm going to talk to you about getting closure on the past. Dragging the worst of the past into the best of the future is another reason our goals fail. If we get closure on the past, especially those efforts that went unnoticed and unrewarded, we're able to climb our Everests and step into the future. I'm not talking about digging deep into your childhood, just the last few years. I'll give you a four-stage system to analyze what worked and what didn't so you can move forward with the wisdom and insight you need to design the year to come. I'll even show you how some of your biggest frustrations in the last year point to your greatest opportunities in the next.

Then, in Step 3, I'm going to give you a seven-part framework for setting goals that really work. This is where you watch your dreams come to life as you cast your vision for the months ahead. Part of the problem with typical goals and resolutions is that they're poorly designed. Goals like "exercise more often" or "spend less, save more" fail on several counts. Among other things, effective goals are specific and measurable. Goals poorly formulated are goals easily forgotten. This proven framework, on the other hand, will give you a portfolio of meaningful, effective goals.

Another major reason goals fail is that we're not motivated enough to attain them. Without a compelling reason to persist, we lose interest, get distracted, or forget what we purposed to do. In Step 4, I'm going to introduce you to the most powerful motivator I know: your why. Once you nail this piece, you'll be unstoppable, even when the going gets tough and obstacles appear in your path. I'll also show you a foolproof trick for staying motivated while cultivating beneficial new habits.

Finally, in Step 5, we're going to put all the pieces together and empower you to take action with the three best tactics I know for accomplishing the goals you've set. Most goals fail because we're missing proven implementation tactics. Winning a battle takes both strategy and tactics. But unless someone shows us what works best for attaining our goals, we're left to good luck and hard knocks to figure it out on our own. This step will help you flatten the learning curve. This is where you'll learn the power of low-bar next steps, regular goal review, and activation triggers for beating the hurdles that get in the way.

Is this next year just going to be another year, not that different from the rest, or are you going to make this your breakthrough year? You don't have to spend one more year discouraged or disappointed that you're not making the progress you

A stylized white rocket ship silhouette is positioned on the right side of the page, set against a light grey background. The rocket has a pointed nose, a circular window, and a tail section with a small fin. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

Goals poorly
formulated
are goals
easily
forgotten.

want. If you want to go from frustrated and confused to clear, confident, and empowered, I'm convinced *Your Best Year Ever* has the answers you're looking for.

Let's dive in.



Take Your LifeScore® Assessment
BestYearEver.me/LifeScore

ACTION PLAN

SPARK YOUR ASPIRATIONS

Let's start with one simple step toward your personal Everest right now. Get a notebook, journal, or your *Full Focus Planner*, and jot down a few aspirations. Consider each of the nine domains: body, mind, spirit, love, family, community, money, work, and hobbies. If you've taken the LifeScore Assessment, look at your report. In which domains are you struggling? In which are you thriving?

Let that guide you as you dream and write. To what do you aspire? What mountain(s) will you scale? If you're facing an ambitious Everest like Edmund Hillary was, know that all that matters is placing one foot in front of the other to reach the top. If you've suffered setbacks, be inspired by Heather Kampf. No failures are truly final; they're merely the prelude to what you'll do next.

Start a list of aspirations and keep it with you as you continue reading. Add to it as new ideas come to you.



BELIEVE the POSSIBILITY

There's an old saying: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes." That's especially true when we're thinking of our personal histories. Why? The circumstances of our lives change week by week, year by year. But we're still us. And our habits of thinking tend to produce consistent results no matter what's going on in our work, our relationships, or the world around us.

If our habits of thinking are beneficial, we tend to experience positive results, such as happiness, personal satisfaction, even material success. If our habits of thinking are counterproductive, on the other hand, we usually experience the opposite: unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and the nagging feeling that the deck is somehow stacked against us, that we're just walking in circles and getting nowhere.

In 2009, researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics set out to determine whether humans

could walk in a straight line without external cues or pointers. Participants were told to walk for hours in fields, the desert, and forests during various times of day. If they could follow the sun or the moon, people tended to stay on a relatively straight path. But once clouds covered the sky, even if people thought they were going straight, their perception was fallible. Small, random errors veered them off course. Over time, their own paths would cross and loop. The study concludes that people walk in circles due to “increasing uncertainty about where straight ahead is.”¹

Our whole lives, we’re asked to walk straight lines without a guide. If you’re tired of going in circles, making little progress in life, the good news is that you can change your path. Your aspirations can serve as a compass to keep you moving in the right direction, especially if you take the extra step of turning them into explicit goals, but—and this is the essential point—only if you *believe* those goals can be realized. Beliefs are that powerful, and we’ll discover why in the chapters ahead.

Upgrading your beliefs can help, even if your habits of thinking are already serving you well. Whether you’re stuck or simply want to level up some area of your life, you can experience transformative personal improvement in all areas of your life by expanding your sense of what’s possible. Let’s start.

Your Beliefs Shape Your Reality

We live by what we believe, not by what we see.

—ANGELA AHRENDTS

What happens is of little significance compared with the stories we tell ourselves about what happens.

—RABIH ALAMEDDINE

Several years ago, my wife, Gail, and I had an English setter named Nelson. He was gentle, patient, and great with the grandkids. He had only one fault. Whenever the front door would open, he would bolt like a prison escapee. It could take twenty minutes to chase him down and bring him home. The scariest thing was watching him narrowly escape an oncoming car. We didn't know what to do. Until we discovered Invisible Fence.

It was the breakthrough we needed. It works by pairing an underground perimeter wire to an electronic collar. If Nelson approached the boundary, his collar delivered a warning vibration to stay back. With some additional training, he quickly learned where the line was and avoided it. No more bolting out the door. We could actually leave him in the yard without fear he would run away.

But here's what's interesting. After a while we realized the collar was no longer necessary. If we stood on the other side of the barrier and called, he wouldn't come. If the kids tried to entice him with a treat, he wouldn't budge. The barrier had moved from the external world of an electronic device to the internal world of Nelson's head.

The Power of Beliefs

Our beliefs play a massive part in how we approach life. Why? We tend to experience what we expect. And we've known this for a long time.

"If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences," sociologist William I. Thomas said in 1928. Reflecting on "the Thomas theorem" twenty years later, sociologist Robert K. Merton coined the phrase "self-fulfilling prophecy." In 1957, philosopher Karl Popper labeled it the "Oedipus effect," after the mythic hero whose life fulfilled a tragic prophecy. More recently, science writer David Robson has described what he calls the "expectation effect," diving deep into the impact of mindset and perspective on the results we experience.¹

As Chris Berdik, another science writer, says in his book *Mind Over Mind*, "Our real world is in many ways an expected world. What we see, hear, taste, feel, and experience is produced from the top down as much as it is from the bottom up. Our minds organize chaos. We fill in blanks with well-learned forms, patterns, and assumptions. Our predictions for the near and distant future bend reality."² How?

It's not fantasy. Nor is it related to any supposed law of attraction, as some might think. It's actually far simpler than that. Because our expectations shape what we believe is possible,

they shape our perceptions and actions. That means they also shape the outcomes. And that means they shape our reality.

Remember the old Tiger Woods? The pre-meltdown Woods who burnt up the record books year after year? Some of his clutch shots are legendary. At the 2003 Presidents Cup in South Africa, for example, he sunk a fifteen-foot putt in the near dark. It seemed like an impossible shot. Everyone thought so—but not Woods. Listen to what his teammate Mike Weir has said about that shot: “He knew he was going to make it. . . . That’s probably what separated him more than anything else: his belief.”³ Do you hear what Weir is saying? Many other golfers had the skill to make those shots, but they lacked the belief they could pull it off.

That’s true for a lot of us.

Our expectations come from our mindset. According to Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck, there are two primary orientations: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset.⁴ We can have a mix of both, depending on our circumstances.

It’s probably safe to say that neither is inherently good or bad, but a growth mindset has been shown to better serve goal achievement. Building on this idea, psychologist Kelly McGonigal says that “changing our minds can be a catalyst for all the other changes we want to make in our lives,” but the trick is that we first “need to convince ourselves that such change is possible.”⁵ We need to believe that we can pull it off.

The Problem with Doubts

What’s one of the biggest reasons we don’t succeed with our goals? We simply doubt we can. We believe they’re out of reach.

When pollsters asked respondents to an *Economist/YouGov* survey how confident they were about sticking to their New

Year's resolutions, only 37 percent said "very confident." Six in ten were only somewhat confident, not very confident, or not at all confident.⁶ Is it any wonder we struggle to make progress?

Polls show the percentage of people in their twenties who achieve their New Year's resolutions is far greater than those over fifty. In fact, while eight in ten millennials set resolutions, almost seven in ten adults over sixty-five say setting resolutions is "a waste of time," according to a Harris Poll.⁷ Why? It's sad, but the greater the number of setbacks we've experienced in life, the less likely we are to believe we can prevail. Doubt is a goal toxin.

To shield ourselves from future disappointment, we develop a cynical, self-protective attitude toward life. We're like my dog Nelson. We've tried to step out in the past and have been zapped—or far worse. Maybe it was only once. Or maybe it was several times. Regardless, now we stand still even when there is no actual barrier. The one in our heads is strong enough to keep us stuck.

You know what this looks like:

- You say, "I need to apply for that new job." But then you think, *There's no way. I don't have enough experience or enough education.*
- A friend says, "Hey, you and Bill should go to that marriage retreat this weekend." And you think, *Are you kidding me? I can't get him off the couch for an evening, let alone a whole weekend.*
- Somebody says, "I think it would be awesome to run a 5K." And you think, *Maybe I should.* But then the cynicism sets in. *I'm 40 pounds overweight, you think. I've got a bum knee. There's no way I could possibly run a 5K.*

One thing these three examples have in common: doubt. Another thing: subsequent inaction. Take any idea that might take you to the next chapter of your story, apply some doubt, and the whole thing just withers and dies.


Some doubt comes from self-protection. It's hard to get your hopes dashed if you never get them up to begin with. You can see this sort of thing in the numbers. When asked how they think a new year would compare with the prior one, only 38 percent of poll respondents said they think their life would improve. Sixty-two percent said their life would either stay the same or even get worse. Think about that: the majority of the population expects either stasis or decline!⁸

That kind of attitude poisons our souls and sabotages our results. Our beliefs about what's possible have a direct impact on our behavior in the present and the reality we experience in the future. But what if you could change your sense of what's possible?

A Different Frame

Triple-A baseball pitcher Steve Mura was starting one night in an away game, but he almost lost before leaving the dugout. Why? "I can never win on this mound," he told his pitching coach, Harvey Dorfman. Dorfman didn't buy that for a second. But he could see Mura was already preparing to lose. So Dorfman pushed Mura to explain his belief. The pitcher said the angle of the mound was wrong. And for Mura, that settled it. But not for his coach. It was just a jumping-off point.

Dorfman asked what kind of adjustments he could make. Sounds simple, I know. But it was like a switch. That one suggestion created a new sense of possibility. Before the game, Mura



What if
you could
change
your sense
of what's
possible?

came up with a new strategy to deal with the unfriendly slope of the mound. “There is a difference,” Dorfman told Mura, “between, ‘I have not won’ and ‘I cannot win.’” The past didn’t determine the future—unless Mura’s belief led him to act like it did. “You don’t think about strategies when you think that outcome is inevitable,” Dorfman said. But by changing his belief, Mura was able to change his strategy and the outcome. He pitched an almost-perfect game that night—just two hits and no runs.⁹

Mura faced a major challenge. But like Nelson, it was in his mind, not on the field. I find that’s true for almost all areas of life. “Many of the circumstances that seem to block us in our daily lives may only appear to do so based on a framework of assumptions we carry with us,” say Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander. “Draw a different frame around the same set of circumstances and new pathways come into view.”¹⁰ Changing your thinking is like flipping a switch; it creates a new sense of possibility, along with different results.

There’s a popular story about a shoemaker who sent two salesmen to Africa to size up the market. The first reported back, “No one here wears shoes. There’s no market.” But the second said, “No one here wears shoes. Huge opportunity! Send inventory!” Facts are facts. But we can look at them in different ways.

I’m about 99.9 percent certain that story is made up, but there’s a real version of the tale that demonstrates the same point. In 1999, Nick Swinmurn thought he could sell shoes online. But investors thought it would never fly: too many logistical and customer-service challenges. And the opportunity seemed minuscule; at the time, the nearest comparison was mail-order shoe sales, which was a measly 5 percent of the market. Not surprisingly, most investors wouldn’t return his calls.

One investor, however, heard something in Swinmurn’s pitch that made his ears perk. The mail-order business was

only 5 percent of the market, but that market was \$40 billion! If catalog sales were already \$2 billion, the logistical and customer-service challenges must not have been that big a deal. The market was potentially massive. And just like that, Zappos was born. Amazon purchased the company a decade later for \$1.2 billion.¹¹ Investors all heard the same original pitch. Only one brought a different sense of possibility to the facts.

History is full of similar stories. What's amazing is that once people realize something is possible, others quickly come behind and duplicate or even best the feat. We started the book with Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's achievement at Everest; as of this writing, more than six thousand others have also now done the once impossible and summited Everest.¹²

Pilots once thought it was impossible to fly faster than 768 miles an hour (the speed of sound at sea level). But Chuck Yeager figured he could do it and officially broke the sound barrier on October 14, 1947. Planes have only advanced since then, and pilots regularly fly two, four, even six times the speed of sound.

Before 1954, runners assumed it was impossible to run a mile in less than four minutes. Then Roger Bannister ran it in three minutes, fifty-nine seconds, and change—a record that has since been beaten by other runners.

For a long time, the idea of running a marathon in under two hours seemed impossible. But in 2019, Kenyan runner Eliud Kipchoge shocked the world by breaking the two-hour barrier at an unsanctioned exhibition marathon. He finished in one hour, fifty-nine minutes, and forty seconds. That doesn't count for the record, but it's ridiculously fast regardless.

When it comes to sanctioned races, Kipchoge is faster than anyone else in the world. In September 2022, Kipchoge ran the Berlin Marathon in two hours, one minute, and nine seconds.¹³ The distance between Kipchoge's official record and his doing