



**YOUR
BEST
YEAR
EVER**

A 5-STEP PLAN FOR ACHIEVING
YOUR MOST IMPORTANT GOALS

MICHAEL HYATT



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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Your Best Is Yet to Come

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 was 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 recalled. “I felt my heel get clipped once, and then on the second time I knew I was going down.”¹ More than going down, Kampf went sprawling. She 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.² 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,” said another the next day.³

I bet most can identify. We can usually stick it out a few weeks. But fewer than half are still going after six months. Less than 10 percent are ultimately successful.⁴ 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 yearlong contracts knowing the majority of

customers won't come more than a few weeks. NPR covered one chain with 6,500 members per location and only room for 300 at a time.⁵ Gyms can afford to 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. Let's be honest. At whatever point in time we determine to make a change and improve one or more areas of our life, our goals reflect many of our most important desires and aspirations. Consider some common resolutions people set:

- Lose weight, eat healthier
- Be a better person
- Spend less, save more
- Deepen relationship with God
- Spend more time with family/friends
- Exercise more often
- Learn something new
- Do more good deeds for others
- Find the love of my life
- Find a better job⁶

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 an educated high achiever who wants to grow personally, professionally, relationally, intellectually, and spiritually. And that's important because 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. One intentional choice at a time, you make the world around you better.

And that's exactly why we need a far better plan. Dreams like 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 set just 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 discussing the stuff that matters most, right? So why leave so many hopes unfulfilled? Instead of scaling back, we just need a system geared to work.

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 now the founder and CEO of a high-growth leadership development firm, I utilize a proven goal-setting 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 the lives of countless people with whom I've shared it. I lead thousands through this process every year in one-on-one coaching, group workshops, and a successful online course called *5 Days to Your Best Year Ever*TM. Not to mention the millions who read my blog and stream my podcast.

“One intentional
choice at a
time, you make
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around you
better.”

This book comes out of all that learning, living, and teaching. Based on decades of practical experience and the best current research on goal attainment and human achievement, this program 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 said 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 said. 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 remembered.⁷ 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.*

For the moment, I want you to consider instead what a truly 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. 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, one where 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 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 for 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 in your life, 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.

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.

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 ten interrelated domains:

1. Spiritual: Your connection to God
2. Intellectual: Your engagement with significant ideas
3. Emotional: Your psychological health
4. Physical: Your bodily health
5. Marital: Your spouse or significant other
6. Parental: Your children if you have any
7. Social: Your friends and associates
8. Vocational: Your profession
9. Avocational: Your hobbies and pastime
10. Financial: Your personal or family finances

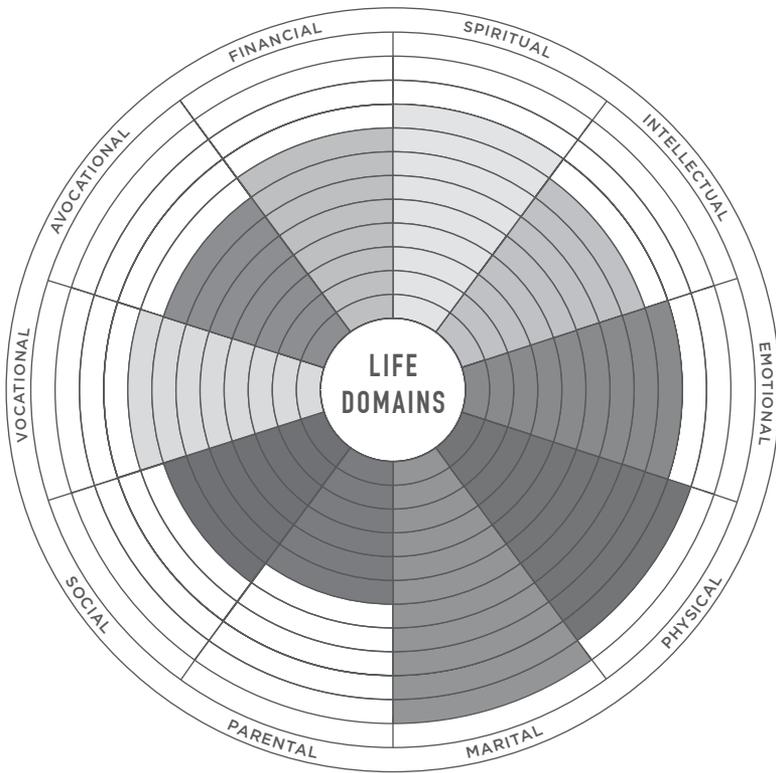
Second, *every domain matters*. Why? Because each one affects all the others. For example, your physical condition impacts your work. And stress at work impacts life at home. All this interplay means you've got to give each domain the appropriate attention if you want to experience progress in life.

Third, *progress starts only when you get clear on where you are right now*. Maybe you have a vague sense 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 dead 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.

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 we experience in the world and make progress on your most important goals is to become fully aware of how much agency and control you actually have. It's far more than you think.

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.



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

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, point your web browser to BestYearEver.me/lifescore and get your score. It's fast and easy. The whole process takes 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.

The Path Ahead

Let me give you an overview of where we're going. 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.

For 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 more confidently 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. "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.

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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 or 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-action steps, Activation Triggers™, and regular goal review for beating the hurdles that get in your 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 you're not making the progress you want. If you want to go from frustrated and confused to clear, confident, and empowered to achieve your best year ever, I'm convinced *Your Best Year Ever* has the answers you're looking for. Let's dive in.



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, however, we often experience the opposite: unhappiness, dissatisfaction,

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4

STEP 5

and the nagging feeling that the deck is somehow stacked against us.

The good news is that you can change the rhyme scheme. Even if your habits of thinking are already serving you well, you can experience transformative personal improvement in all areas of your life by upgrading your beliefs. When we focus on belief improvement, often our circumstances follow suit.

1

Your Beliefs Shape Your Reality

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

RABIH ALAMEDDINE, *The Hakawati*

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 bolted 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. We tend to experience what we expect. We've known this for a long time. "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences," said sociologist William I. Thomas in 1928. Reflecting on "the Thomas theorem" twenty years later, sociologist Robert K. Merton coined the phrase "self-fulfilling prophecy." And in 1957 philosopher Karl Popper labeled it the "Oedipus Effect," after the mythic hero whose life fulfilled a tragic prophecy.¹

As science writer Chris Berdik said 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

“What if you
could change
your sense
of what’s
possible?”

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

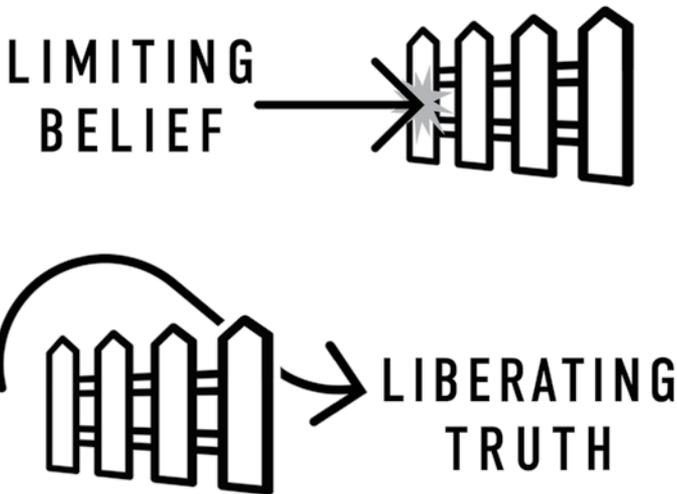
Remember the old Tiger Woods? The pre-meltdown Woods who burnt up the record books year after year? Some of his clutch shots are legendary. At the 2003 Presidents Cup in South Africa, for example, he sunk a fifteen-foot putt in the near dark. It seemed like an impossible shot. Everyone thought so—but not Woods. Listen to what his teammate Mike Weir 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.

The Problem with Doubts

One of the biggest reasons we don’t succeed with our goals is we doubt we can. We believe they’re out of reach. Polls show the percentage of people in their twenties who achieve their New Year’s resolutions is far greater than those over fifty.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.

As I said earlier, most of us have a long history of not getting what we want out of life. To shield ourselves from



We all face obstacles. While limiting beliefs prevent us from overcoming them, liberating truths help us transcend obstacles and improve our circumstances.

future disappointment, we develop a cynical, self-protective attitude toward life. We're like Nelson. We've tried to step out in the past and 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.” Suddenly, an idea that might take you to the next chapter of your story just withers and dies. Or maybe 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.” Or 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 forty pounds overweight,” you think. “I’ve got a bum knee. There’s no way I could possibly run a 5K.”

It’s hard to get your hopes dashed if you never get them up to begin with. But that kind of cynicism poisons our souls and sabotages our results. Our beliefs about what’s possible have a direct impact on the reality we experience. 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 dug-out. 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 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,” said Dorfman. 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.⁶

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."⁷

History's full of similar stories. 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.

People have dreamt about human-powered flight for millennia. But then in 1977 someone developed an engineless plane capable of sustained, controlled flight. That was just the start. In 1988, Greek cycling champion Kanellos Kanellopoulos flew more than seventy miles over open sea all by pedal power.⁸ And he's not the only one. Building and flying people-powered aircraft is a weekend hobby for some nowadays.

Here's another example. In the middle 1980s, skateboarder Mike McGill did the first ever 540-degree aerial turn in his sport. That's a full rotation and a half. No one thought it

could be done, but once McGill finally did the “McTwist,” others began doing it too, pushing it further still. Tony Hawk did the first-ever 720-degree turn. And then in 2012 Tom Schaar—at just twelve years old—did the first-ever 1080. That’s three full rotations in the air! As Schaar told ESPN, “It was the hardest trick I’ve ever done, but”—and get this—“it was easier than I thought.”

“Whatever you think can’t be done, somebody will come along and do it,” jazz pianist Thelonious Monk said.¹⁰ The impossible only seems so on the front end. Yeager, Bannister, Kanellopoulos, McGill, and Hawk showed the rest of us that more than we previously believed was attainable. Will you be the next Schaar and take it even further?

A Failure of Imagination

The first key difference between an unmet goal and personal success is the belief that it can be achieved. Listen to what famed futurist, sci-fi author, and inventor Arthur C. Clarke said: “When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.” As Clarke said, it’s a “failure of imagination.”¹¹

And it’s not just scientists. That failure of imagination affects athletes, parents, leaders, managers, teachers, and the rest of us to one degree or another. The good news is that it doesn’t have to. Broadly speaking, there are two ways to look at life. One leads directly to this failure of imagination. But the other can revive and amplify our sense of possibility. We’ll look at the difference next.