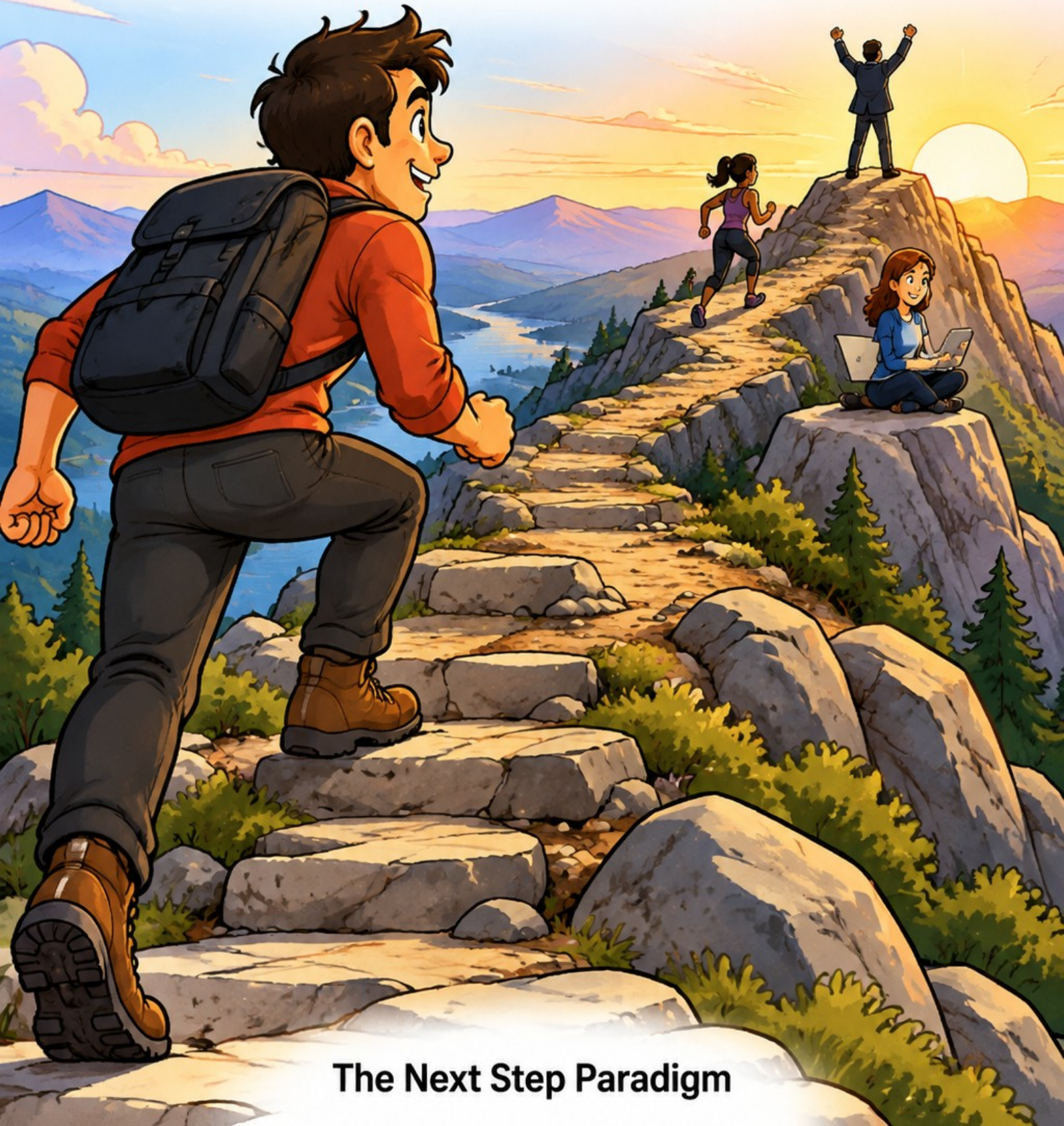
TAKE YOUR NEXT STEP TO GREATNESS EVERY DAY

For the person who knows exactly what they want
and is done waiting to feel ready



The Next Step Paradigm

INSIDE

Why a day of doing nothing leaves you so tired **5**

Shrink the goal until you can see your first step **6**

Move before your mind starts arguing **8**

The Heaviest Door **10**

The Tally on the Doorframe **13**

What the toughest people alive do when they want to stop **16**

Why top performers sleep more and book less **18**

The morning after you miss a day **20**

In 1964 a young runner lined up for the Olympic 10,000 metres final in Tokyo, and almost nobody watching knew his name.

He had never run the distance in under 29 minutes. In the heats he finished about a minute behind the world-record holder.

He was an orphan from the Oglala Lakota nation and a US Marine, and the experts saw him as a man who was there to fill a lane.

With one lap to go he was in fourth place. He got pushed twice and was forced out into lane four.

He won.

His time was an Olympic record, and it was about 50 seconds faster than he had ever run in his life.

His name is Billy Mills, and what grabs me is what he has said about it since.

He had already run that last lap many times in his head, and he had rehearsed the feeling he would have when he got there.

So when the shove came, his next move was already waiting for him.

Now think about the thing you keep circling.

Maybe it’s the business you keep meaning to launch, the book that’s half written, the body you want, or the call that could change your whole year.

You know what it is, and you know you’re capable of far more than you’ve shown so far.

I wrote this for the person who already knows what they want and is tired of watching good days slip by.

You want to stop stalling and start stacking wins every single day, and I want that for you in a big way.

So here's where I stand. I believe motivation is the most overrated idea in self-improvement.

You don't have to feel like it, because the feeling shows up after you move.

I believe the thing you're avoiding hardest is the very thing you should do first, because that pull to look away is the best map you'll ever get to what matters to you.

And I believe you don't need more confidence before you start. You need one finished rep, then another.

The research behind this is striking.

In a study of more than 2,000 gym members, how motivated people felt explained about 6% of whether they kept showing up, while what they had already done explained 64%.

Simple if-then plans have lifted follow-through by a big margin on things people usually put off, like health checks.

And people who spent five minutes writing a specific list for tomorrow fell asleep about nine minutes faster.

Inside, you'll find out:

- How to turn a big, foggy goal into a first step so clear you can do it in the next ten minutes.
- How to get moving before your mind builds its case for waiting, with a count that takes five seconds.
- Why the task you dread most is pointing straight at your next breakthrough, and how to walk through it first.
- How to build real, lasting confidence without a single pep talk.
- What some of the toughest people alive do on the days they want to quit.

- Why many of the world's top performers sleep more and book less than you'd ever guess.
- What to do the morning after you miss a day, so one slip never turns into a lost month.

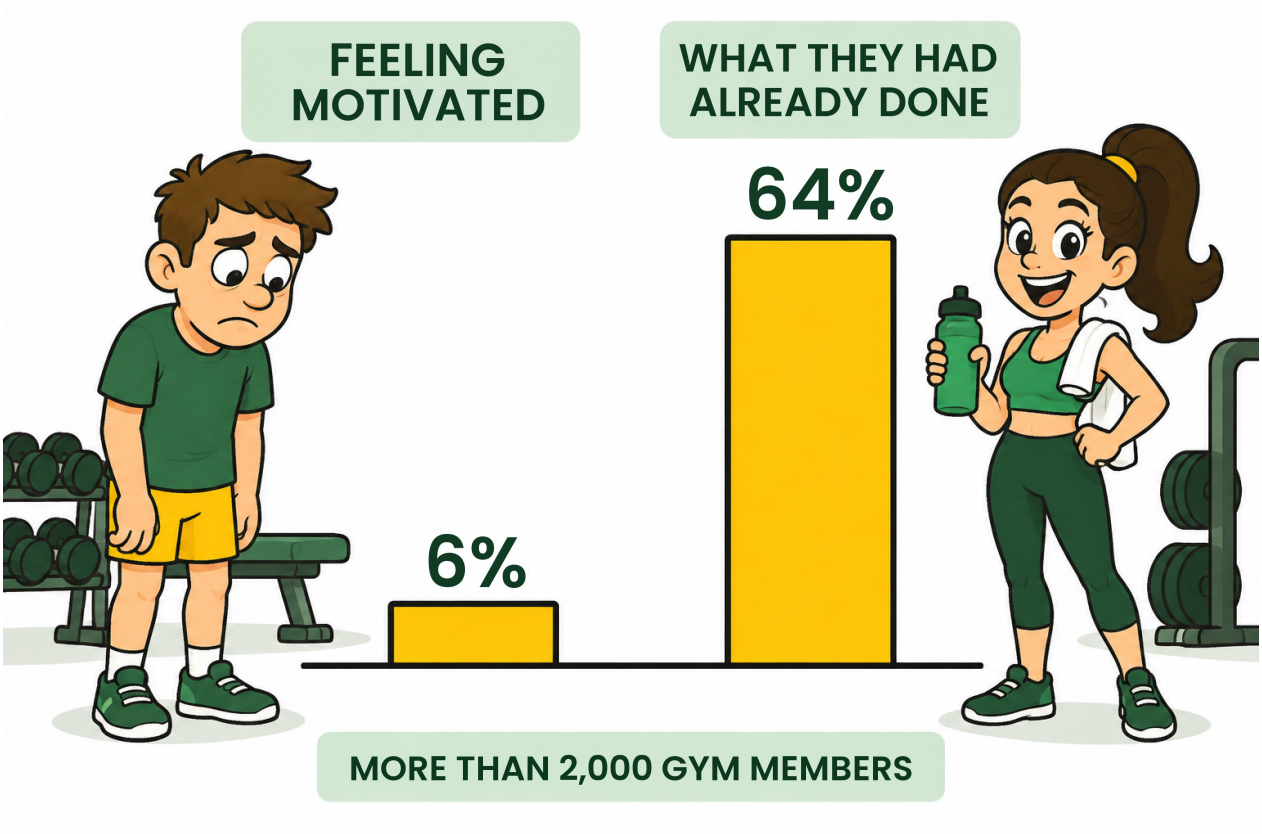
Starting is easy. Tomorrow's first step can take three minutes, and the countdown you'll learn takes five seconds the first time you use it.

Jump ahead six months. You wake up knowing exactly what your next step is.

The work you used to dodge gets done before lunch, and there's a long column of marks on your wall that proves who you've become.

That's **The Next Step Paradigm** in action, and it starts with one move.

Billy Mills had his last lap ready before the gun went off. Let's get yours ready.



Why a day of doing nothing leaves you so tired

Look through any online forum about getting things done and you'll see the same question again and again: how can I be exhausted when I did nothing all day?

People describe whole days on the couch, scrolling, which many now call 'bed rotting', and they finish more drained than if they had worked.

Those days weren't empty. You spent them avoiding something, and avoiding is hard work.

Researchers who have studied putting things off for more than 20 years describe it as a way of handling feelings, much more than a problem with time.

The task makes you feel bad, so you push it away.

Pushing it away gives you a little relief, and that relief teaches your brain to do it again next time.

On top of that, people expect the task to feel far worse than it does.

Once they actually start, it's rarely as bad as they predicted.

Getting this right pays.

In a study of more than 22,000 US workers, the people who put things off less earned noticeably more, roughly $15,000 a year for each step down the scale.

So the real skill is learning to move while the feeling is still there, and every part of this guide is built on that.



Shrink the goal until you can see your first step

A huge goal far in the future feels exciting, but it doesn't tell you what to do this morning. A close, clear goal does.

So keep your big dream, and then give yourself a target for today that's small enough to see.

In a classic study, children who had been struggling with maths got one of three things: a small goal for each session, one big goal for the end of the programme, or no goal at all.

The children with a goal for each session finished with the most skill, the most belief in themselves and the most interest in maths.

The big end goal did barely better than having no goal.

That means your daily step is what does the heavy lifting, while the dream is there to give it direction.

A clear plan also quiets your head. In a set of five studies, unfinished goals kept popping into people's minds and pulling at their attention.

When people made a specific plan for how and when they would do the task, those thoughts stopped, even though the task wasn't finished yet.

A sleep study found the same thing at night.

Young adults who wrote tomorrow's to-do list for five minutes fell asleep faster than those who wrote about the day that had passed, and the more detail they put in their list, the sooner they dropped off.

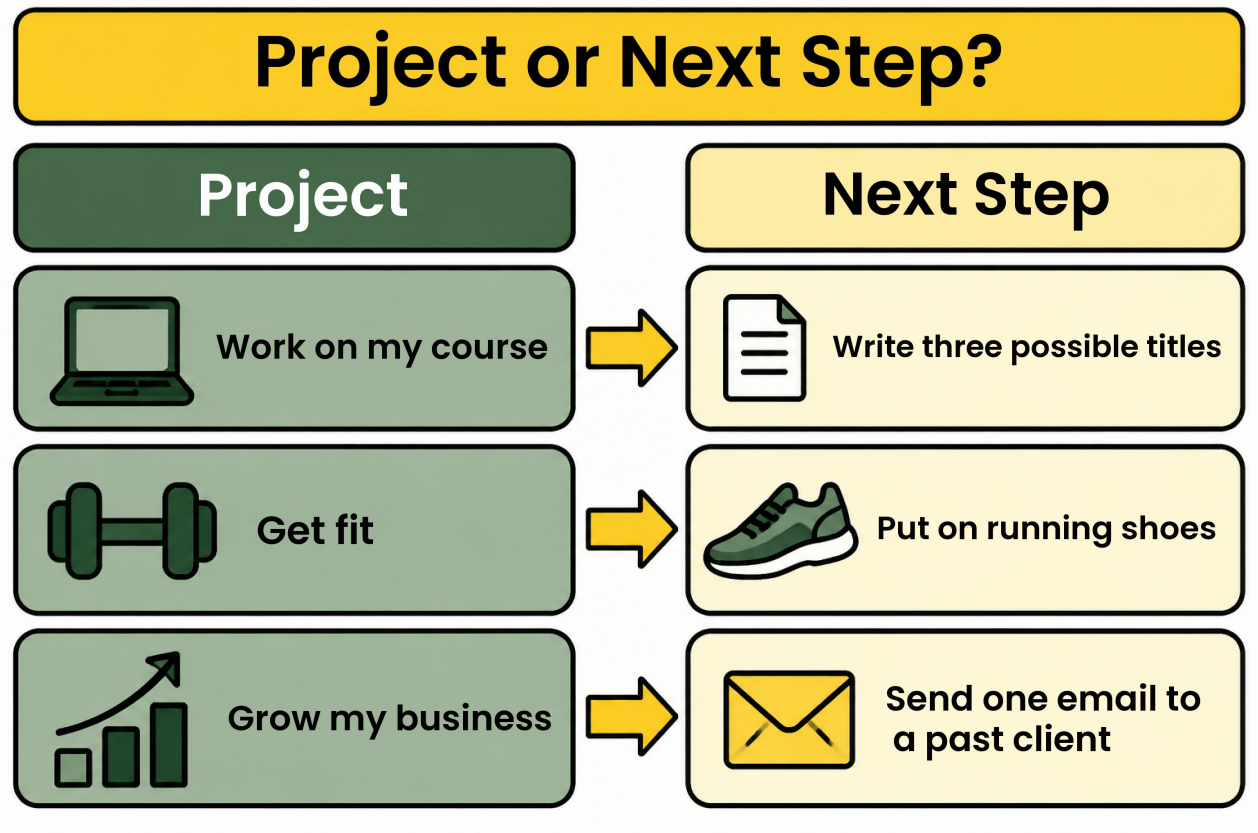
So you don't have to finish something to stop worrying about it. **Plan it, and your mind lets go.** The greats think this way too.

Katie Ledecky has described planning her whole race day down to the minute, right down to when she arrives and when she warms up.

The mistake even smart people make is writing a project down as if it were a step.

When you write 'Work on my course', your mind sees a mountain and backs away.

When you write 'Open the document and write three possible titles', you can do it before your coffee goes cold.



If you can't picture yourself doing it in the next ten minutes, it is still a project.

How to start

1. Tonight, write your big goal at the top of a card.
2. Under it, write the very first physical action toward it, small enough to do in ten minutes.
3. Write when you'll do it tomorrow, and put the card where you'll see it in the morning.
4. You'll know it's working when you sit down tomorrow and don't have to decide what to do.

Move before your mind starts arguing

When the idea to act pops into your head, you have only a few seconds before your mind starts handing you reasons to wait.

So use those seconds.

Count backwards, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and move your body on 1: stand up, open the laptop, pick up the phone.

Counting keeps your mind busy so it can't build the excuse.

The count won't change your mood, and it doesn't need to, because its whole job is to get your body moving.

Once you're moving, something useful takes over. A large review pulled together 20 studies on what happens after a task is interrupted.

People went back to finish it about two times in three, and that held for adults and children, and even when something more fun was on offer.

In plain words, **start it and the pull takes over.**

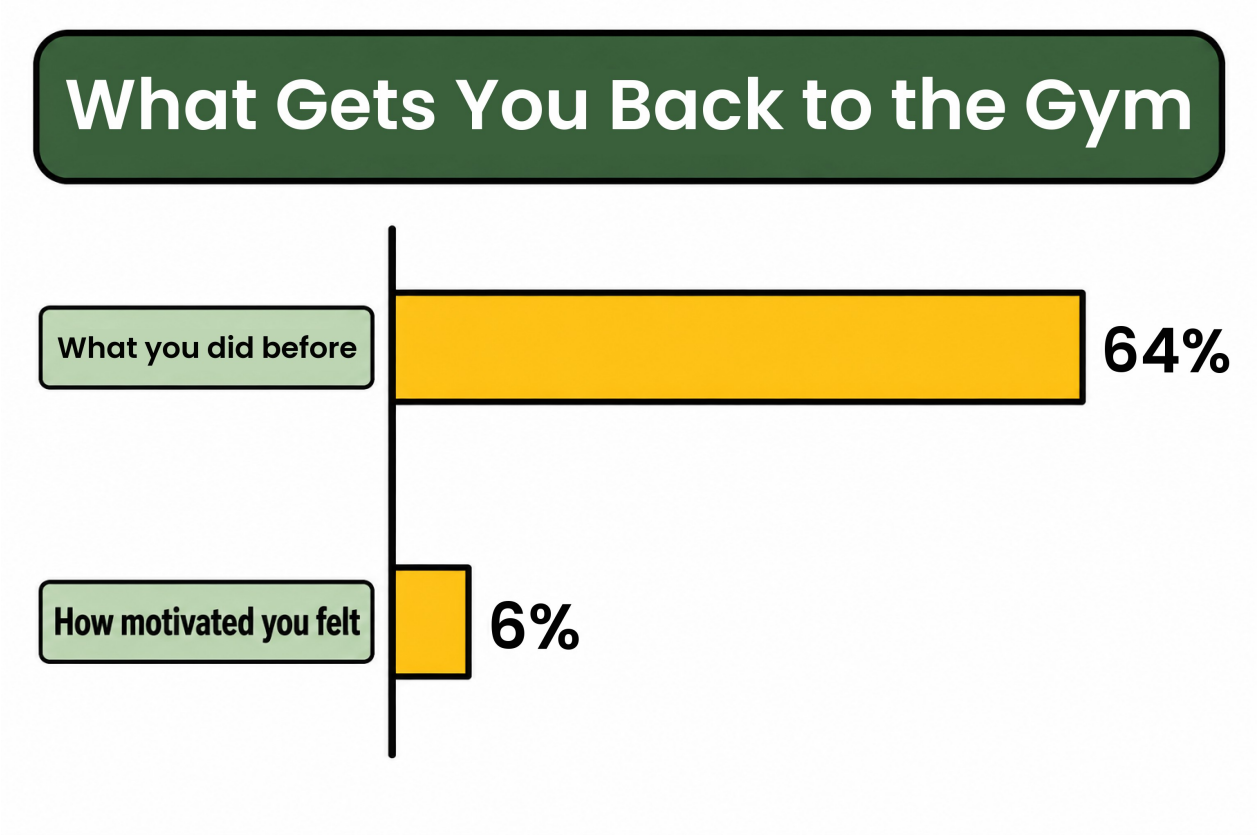
Be careful about bribing yourself early, though.

In one study, simply telling people they were being paid made them less likely to go back to an unfinished task.

The pull to finish is strong on its own, so let it do its work.

Then make starting automatic with an if-then plan tied to something that already happens. 'If it's 8:30 and the coffee is made, then I open the script' works better than 'I'll write at 8:30', because the coffee becomes your cue.

Across hundreds of tests, plans worded this way have had a solid effect on whether people actually do the thing.



In a study of more than 2,000 gym members, past sessions predicted the next one far better than motivation did.

That chart is great news for you. Every time you show up, you make the next time easier, whether you felt like it or not.

> **Shrink it until it's silly** On a hard day, make the step so small you'd feel foolish skipping it: floss one tooth, put your running shoes on, write one sentence. Once you've started, you can do as much or as little as you like, but you do something every day.

The Heaviest Door

Some tasks feel heavier than others for no clear reason, like the email to the big client, the first page of the book, or the price you've been scared to raise.

I call this **The Heaviest Door**: the task you resist most is usually the one that matters most, so you treat the resistance as a pointer and open that door first, before the urgent jobs that fill your day.

> **The more important a call or action is to our soul's evolution, the more Resistance we will feel toward pursuing it.**
>
> A novelist who has written about creative resistance for decades

That's a writer's hard-won rule, and anyone who has ever stared at a blank page will know it's true.

The same writer says the professional knows fear never fully goes away, so they get to work with it there.

He also warns that the pull to look away is strongest right near the finish line, which is why so many people stall just before the thing gets done.

When you notice yourself avoiding, name the feeling in a few words: 'this is fear of being judged', or 'this is fear of it not being good enough'.

Putting a feeling into words takes some of its sting away while you're still feeling it.

In a set of four experiments, people who named their feelings felt less upset in the moment, yet beforehand they had predicted naming would make them feel worse.

So it works even when it feels like it won't.

Your name for the feeling also shows you the belief that's been holding you back.

A psychiatrist once described a stand-up comic who skipped a meeting with a club owner.

The comic said he wasn't a morning person and that his job was only to be funny.

The real reason was that he hated situations where his future depended on someone else.

Once a belief like that is out in the open, you can plan around it.

The order you do this in matters. First picture the result you want, vividly. Then name the obstacle inside you.

Then turn that obstacle into the 'if' of an if-then plan: 'If I feel the urge to check email first, then I open the pitch and write one line.'

Tests of this method found that thinking about the obstacle first and the result second does nothing, so always lead with the result.



The door you keep walking past is usually the one that leads somewhere.

You can even make the nervous feeling work for you. Students sitting a big entrance exam were told that a racing heart helps you perform.

Their bodies were just as fired up, but they scored better, on a practice test and on the real exam one to three months later.

That belief grows from saying it to yourself again and again before every hard thing, until your racing heart feels like your body getting ready.

How to start

1. Each morning, ask yourself which task on today's list you'd most like to skip.
2. Name the feeling behind it in a few words, out loud or on paper.
3. Write one if-then line for the moment you'll want to dodge it.
4. Open that door first, before email or errands, even if it's only for ten minutes.
5. You'll know it's working when your most important work is done before lunch most days.

The Tally on the Doorframe

Parents used to mark a child's height on the kitchen doorframe, and every new line was proof of growth you could see.

The Tally on the Doorframe works the same way for you.

Every time you finish a small step on your own, make a mark where you'll see it every day: a line on a card, a tick on a wall chart, a coin in a jar.

Skip the pep talk and let the growing column do the convincing.

Real confidence grows from evidence. A study of 335 adults ranked where belief in your own ability comes from.

Doing the thing yourself came first by a clear margin, and being told you can do it by other people came last.

Other research found that what you've already done predicts how confident you'll feel later more strongly than the other way round.

So the marks have to be yours.

A win where someone else did most of the work builds far less belief than a smaller win you got on your own.

Small wins feed motivation too. Researchers read about 12,000 daily diary entries from 238 people working on creative teams.

The single biggest thing that lifted people's mood and drive at work was making progress on work that mattered to them, and small steps forward counted.

Yet when hundreds of managers ranked what motivates people, they put progress last.

Hardly anyone around you is going to notice your small wins, which is exactly why The Tally on the Doorframe puts them where you can see them.



A column you can see every morning does more for your belief in yourself than any speech.

How to start

1. Pick the spot you pass most each day, like the fridge, the bathroom mirror or the doorframe by your desk.
2. Each time you finish your next step on your own, make one mark there straight away.
3. When doubt creeps in, look at the column before you think about the task.

4. You'll know it's working when you start wanting to protect the streak.



Each pass around the loop makes the next one easier, because every mark becomes proof for tomorrow.

What the toughest people alive do when they want to stop

The people at the very top of endurance and sport share one habit: they remove the option to argue with themselves.

David Goggins did 4,030 pull-ups in just over 17 hours in 2013, and it was his third attempt at the record.

He has described getting up around 4 a.m. and running before breakfast, and talking to himself out loud in the mirror each morning about what he's avoiding, which he calls the Accountability Mirror.

He also lives by his 40% Rule: when your mind says you're done, you've used only about 40% of what you have.

His daily advice is to do something uncomfortable every day, on purpose, and that's The Heaviest Door in its toughest form.

Kobe Bryant described an off-season he called '666': six hours a day, six days a week, for six months, almost all of it where nobody could see.

Michael Phelps won the 200m butterfly at the Beijing Olympics in world-record time with water leaking into his goggles.

His coach has told how, years earlier, he saw the young Phelps had forgotten his goggles before a race and let him swim without them, as practice for things going wrong.

Like Billy Mills, Phelps had rehearsed the disruption and his next move, so the bad moment was already familiar.

The most extreme case of all comes from Mount Hiei in Japan, where monks walk the mountain for a total of 1,000 days over several years.

After the first 100 days, a monk asks to finish the rest, and from then on, quitting was historically not allowed.

Once there was no way out, all their energy went into the walk.

You don't need a mountain to use this. Decide your next step the night before, and treat it as already settled when morning comes.

There's nothing left to debate, so you count down and go.



Why top performers sleep more and book less

The hustle story says sleep less and fill every hour. Many of the most successful people alive do the opposite.

Jeff Bezos has said he protects eight hours of sleep because he thinks better, has more energy and is in a better mood.

He pointed out that four hours would buy him more time, then asked whether that was worth it if his decisions got worse.

Roger Federer has reportedly slept 10 to 12 hours, and Phelps slept eight hours plus an afternoon nap in heavy training.

Keeping your sleep regular matters even more than the number of hours.

A large recent analysis found irregular sleep was linked to far more health problems than short sleep was.

So if you want an early start, move your bedtime earlier along with your alarm, and keep both steady.

They also keep space in the day.

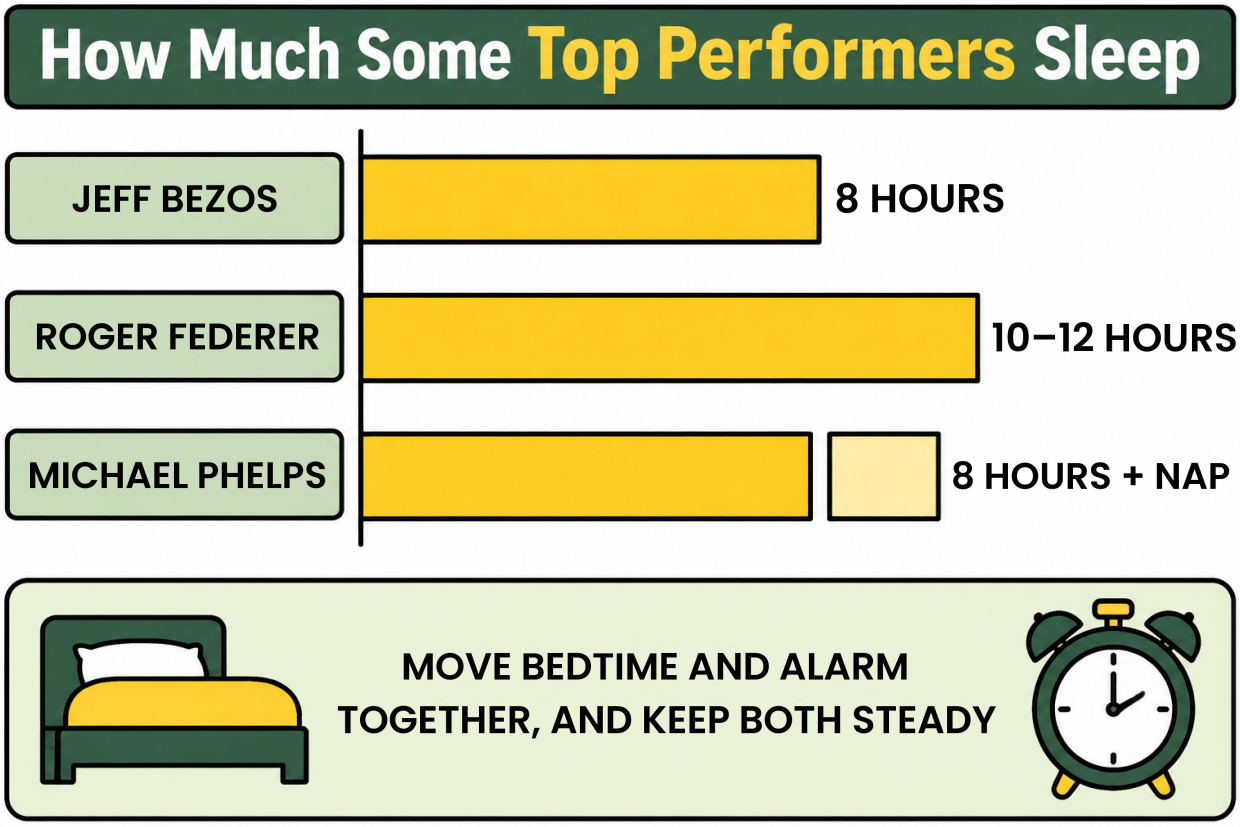
When Warren Buffett showed a TV host his paper diary, it was close to empty, with only three entries for a whole week in April.

Bill Gates has said filling every minute isn't proof of how serious you are, and he takes whole weeks away just to think.

Maya Angelou rented a bare hotel room, arrived early and wrote until midday.

So keep your calendar clear and keep one place for one job, because that leaves room to open The Heaviest Door.

Every hour you protect is one less hour for avoiding to fill.



The morning after you miss a day

When you miss a day, what you do next matters far more than the miss itself.

In a study of 96 people building a new daily habit, missing a single day made no real difference to how the habit formed.

So forgive the miss and come straight back.

In a study of 134 students, those who forgave themselves for putting off study before their first exam put it off less before the second one, and they scored better.

Beating yourself up only piles more bad feelings onto the task, and that makes it harder to face.

The rule is simple: **never miss twice.**

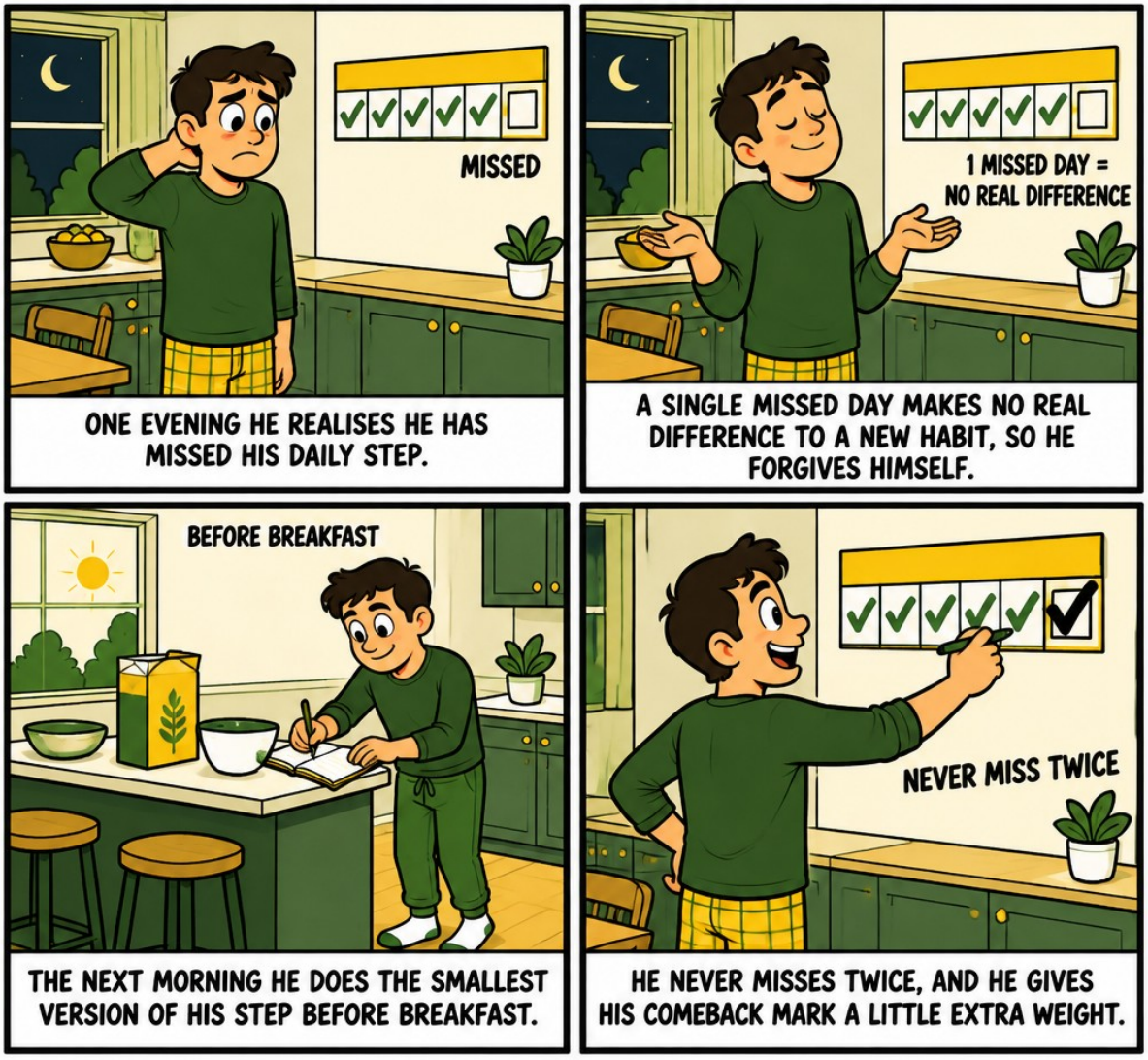
Write your comeback as an if-then plan now, while you feel good: 'If I miss a day, then the next morning I do the smallest version of my step before breakfast.'

And if you're the kind of person who holds yourself to very high standards, keep that comeback step tiny, because big plans can make perfectionists freeze.

When you come back after a miss, give that mark on the doorframe a little extra weight.

The return is the rep that proves you're someone who keeps going.

AFTER YOU MISS A DAY, FORGIVE YOURSELF AND DO A TINY VERSION OF YOUR STEP THE VERY NEXT MORNING



Sources

1. Cid, 2025. Study of motivation versus past behaviour as predictors of future gym attendance. 2,180 exercisers, objective gym attendance data.
2. Scullin et al., 2018. Writing a to-do list versus writing about completed activities before bed and sleep onset. Baylor sleep lab; 57 healthy adults aged 18–30, one night.
3. Bandura & Schunk, 1981. Proximal versus distant goals and children's self-efficacy, skill and intrinsic interest. Children with a history of maths failure.
4. Masicampo & Baumeister, 2011. 'Consider it done!' Plan making can eliminate the cognitive effects of unfulfilled goals. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Five studies. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21688924/
5. Ghibellini et al., 2025. Interruption, recall and resumption: a meta-analysis of the Zeigarnik and Ovsiankina effects. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications. 59 studies (38 Zeigarnik, 20 Ovsiankina). nature.com/articles/s41599-025-05000-w
6. McGraw & Fiala, 1982. Effect of being told of payment on resumption of an interrupted task.
7. Sheeran, 2024. Contingent if–then plans versus scheduling-only plans.
8. Sheeran, Listrom & Gollwitzer, 2025. Meta-analysis of if–then plans (implementation intentions). 642 tests.
9. Lieberman et al., 2011. Affect labelling and distress, with predicted versus actual effects. Emotion. Four experiments.
10. von Weichs, Krott & Oettingen, 2021. Mental contrasting versus reverse contrasting.
11. Jamieson et al., 2010. Reappraising arousal and exam performance. GRE candidates, practice test and real exam 1–3 months later.
12. Egele, 2025. Dominance analysis of the sources of self-efficacy. Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine. 335 German adults aged 18–68.
13. Talsma et al., 2018. Meta-analytic cross-lagged panel analysis of self-efficacy and performance.
14. Lally, 2010. How habits form in the real world. 96 participants over 12 weeks.
15. Wohl, Pychyl & Bennett, 2010. Self-forgiveness for procrastinating and later procrastination and exam performance. 134 students.
16. Powers, Koestner & Topciu, 2005. Plan-making and socially prescribed perfectionism.