

Step 1: Discovering Who You Are

Your answers to these questions need to come from your heart, not your head. Don't write something down because you think you should. This isn't about what everyone else thinks you "should" be. It's about finding out who you are. The key to finding your meaning is authenticity, so really listen to yourself as you think about all the questions. Remember, you are here for one reason and one reason only: to be you, no matter how long it takes to figure out what that means.

1. Professionally, do you like the structure of a corporate environment, or do you prefer a more casual setting? Do you like the adventure of a start-up or the relative stability of something more established?

2. Have you enjoyed giving back to the community in a particular way (e.g., helping the Humane Society, delivering meals to the housebound elderly, etc.)?

3. When it comes to hobbies and interests, did you enjoy some pursuit in the past that you have since abandoned?

4. In your "ideal" day, what do you picture yourself doing?

Step One: Master the Dream

It's time to fine-tune your goals. Many people assume once you have a general direction you are all set — not so! Once you have a vision for your life in place, you need to break it down into smaller goals: clearly defined milestones that help measure your progress and keep you on track. Let's look at the fine points and details of your dream. What does your dream really look like?

1) Create a realistic vision. Jot down your goals and dreams. Now ask yourself, "Are these realistic for me?" Rework any goals that are not realistically attainable. (If you are five foot three and love basketball, being drafted into the pros is not a realistic vision. You can become a great player, though, and join a local amateur league — maybe even coach.)

2) Be specific. Explore the details of your dream — the more detail you can add into your vision of success, the better. What does success look like? Use your current life as a template, how will things change moment to moment?

3) Feel it. Connect to your visualization emotionally. Attaching feelings to your visions will make them more real to you. Indulge in the feelings associated with experiencing exactly what you want. Picture the excitement you will feel when you achieve your goal. Really enjoy this and let your emotions sweep you up. What other emotions do you feel living the dreams you have visualized?

Step One: Master the Dream (Cont.)

4) Sense it. Feel the physical sensations of your vision. Feel your vision as if you're already there and it is actually happening to you. Write down your physical sensations: What do you smell, see, hear, feel, taste?

5) Get excited about the process. Think about what you're actually going to have to do to get where you want to be and feel the joy that doing these things will bring you. (If you can't get excited about the work, then your ultimate vision may be out of alignment with your essential being. You don't have to love every step of the journey, but you have to be able to see yourself going through the process and finding happiness within it.)

6) Create a vision board. The idea is simple, although you can get as creative and elaborate as you want. Get a corkboard and assemble images and pictures of your goal. Put anything and everything you want on there. (Seriously. Houses, cars, awards, luxury travel, six-pack abs — go to town!) Keep adding to it as you see a picture of something else you want too. Keep your vision board where you will see it as often as possible, the more exposure you have to your goal, the more it will become a reality in your subconscious mind. Why not share it? Upload it and talk about it on the Unlimited message boards.

Step Two: Identify Your Self-Destructive Behaviors

We're all carrying around years of emotional baggage that can seriously sabotage us. And in many cases we don't even realize it. To change our lives, we first have to change our behavior. And to do that, we first have to wake up to it. This step is all about identifying the self-destructive things we do every day and getting to the root of the negativity behind them so we can break free and move forward. If you answer them honestly, these four questions will tell you everything you need to know about how you undermine yourself and why.

1) What self-destructive behaviors in your life do you want to change? Think about things you know you do and know you shouldn't and yet feel compelled to do anyway. (For example, do you drink or eat too much? Gamble or shop compulsively? Cheat on your spouse? Work too much? Yell at your kids? Push people who love you away?)

2) What harmful dynamics, behaviors, and scenarios do you see repeating in your life? These are things that you perceive as happening to you, even though in truth you are creating them. (For example, do you keep dating assholes? Do you keep getting fired from jobs? Do you feel like no one listens to you? Do you surround yourself with unsupportive people?)

Step Two: Identify Your Self-Destructive Behaviors (Cont.)

3) How do these patterns and dynamics make you feel? Angry? Neglected? Stupid? Alone? Unlovable? All of the above and more?

4) What other times in your life have you felt this way? And how far back in your life can you trace these patterns? Dig deep into your emotional memory, as far back as you can. It's going to be painful, but that's how you'll know it's working. Be brave, and know that the only way to go from here is up.

Step Two: Can You Find Forgiveness?

The next step is to work on forgiving the people who created the issues from your past that are messing up your present. You **MUST** find a way to forgive all the people who have wronged you. Forgiving the jerks aren't for their well-being, it's for yours. If you can't forgive the things that have been done to you, then you won't be able to move on with your life. This activity will help you navigate the psychological landscape of forgiveness — it's a tough journey, but one that will yield powerful and permanent results.

1) Write down all the attributes that upset you about each person you are trying to forgive. It could be greed, selfishness, cruelty — you name it. Fire away.

2) Examine and write down how, where, when, and why these qualities might have developed in them. Get your detective cap on and research the background of your “offenders.” If you don't have access to background information, your best bet is to look at the present state of their lives and relationships to see if there is a behavior pattern of poor treatment of others besides you.

Step Two: Can You Find Forgiveness? (Cont.)

The next step is to work on forgiving the people who created the issues from your past that are messing up your present. You **MUST** find a way to forgive all the people who have wronged you. Forgiving the jerks aren't for their well-being, it's for yours. If you can't forgive the things that have been done to you, then you won't be able to move on with your life. This activity will help you navigate the psychological landscape of forgiveness — it's a tough journey, but one that will yield powerful and permanent results.

3) Now that you understand more about the people who hurt you, and perhaps why, imagine yourself as them. Write down what that is like. See yourself walking in their shoes, living their lives, feeling their feelings. Feel their sadness for their misfortunes, and find empathy for your offenders. Can you see them not as evil, but as misguided and/or lost?

4) It is time to forgive — it is hard and painful to learn to forgive, but you need to do this work to reclaim your power and your life. There are varying degrees of forgiveness based on what was done, of course. Still, you must let go, learn from the experience, and move on as a stronger and wiser person with empathy and compassion. How does it feel to forgive? What have you learned from this experience?

Step Two: What's Your Problem?

Take a minute and write down all the problems that are plaguing you at this moment, from big to small. Now, ask yourself how you contributed to creating your current situation. Did the professor fail you because you never went to class? Were you diagnosed with lung cancer because you smoked like a chimney for 20 years? It may seem unsympathetic, but at some point you have to stop acting as though life is happening to you and acknowledge the ways you are happening to it. Once you take responsibility, you grant yourself the power to improve your life by simply acting and behaving differently.

Step Two: Do You Need an Attitude Adjustment?

It's time to start the process of laying the real foundation for change. I can put together a step-by-step plan for you to follow to reach your goal, but unless you do the internal work, you won't get anywhere. If you are going to change your reality, then you have to give your attitude an overhaul from the ground up, too. This exercise will deal with your inner 'tude, and then we can move on to the outside realm.

1) What are you afraid of? Write down your innermost fears and insecurities. This will help you make the connections between what you fear and what you live. Look at your present circumstances and list some of your current problems. Really ruminate on them. Take a deep inventory of your life.

2) List all the things that are currently out of whack in your life.

3) What have you done to contribute to these scenarios? How could your behavior be creating your existing problems?

Step Two: Do You Need an Attitude Adjustment?

4) Break down all the negative interactions you have or don't have with people on a daily basis, and examine how you approach every situation, person, place, or thing that intimidates, upsets, overwhelms, or scares you.

5) Recognize your part in creating the problems that keep sabotaging you. You are the only person who can end your own crazy cycle of self-destruction. Recognize them for what they are; take this time to pinpoint as many of your self-sabotaging behaviors as you can.

Step Two: Break Free of Limitations

We limit ourselves by boxing ourselves into roles we think we're supposed to be playing. It's time to throw our roles out the window. Here are some questions to help you break free from the limitations you may be placing yourself in without even realizing it:

1) What is your role in your own life story, and how is it imprisoning you and holding you back? Are you fat because you think you're lazy? Are you in a dead-end job because you think it's too late to change careers? Write down all the ways in which your self-definitions keep you from the life you want.

2) Is there any truth at all to this story? Think long and hard about it. Are you really too lazy to start an exercise regime and lose weight? Are you really too old to go on job interviews or go back to school? Probably not. This is the time to identify your self-imposed limitations, whatever they may be, and kiss them good-bye.

Step Two: What Are Your Fears?

Our most destructive fear, one that we all wrestle with, is the fear of change. By resisting change, you stunt your evolution. By allowing yourself to be pulled toward the unknown, you create space — literally and figuratively — for good things to come in and shape your life. With the right attitude, you can retool your fear mechanisms so that they're working for rather than against you. Here is an exercise to help you build your tolerance for fear, especially fear of the unknown.

1) Take a moment to write down the things that you fear the most in life at this very moment.

2) Now make a list of all the things that would happen if this fear came true. Ask yourself, are these things really that awful? Would you still be thinking about them next month, next year, or in five years? Are they unfixable in the long run?

3) Play out the worse-case scenario of your fears. Map it out step-by-step, and weigh the pros and cons rationally. How much of your fear is unfounded or negligible compared with the possible reward?

Step Two: What Are Your Fears? (Cont.)

4) Review the fears you wrote down before, but instead of imagining all the bad things that could happen, imagine just the opposite, and think of all the great possibilities that could play out. What rewards could await you?

5) There are people in this world who have lived through the very thing you fear — how did they pull through it? What did they do to turn things around? And what could they have done better? Pick a person who has walked before you, and observe closely. Study his or her path and process. Imagine yourself in the same scenario.

Step Two: Feeling Your Failures

Examining what went wrong will guide you specifically to what you need to work on. Don't be scared. This stuff can really hit the ego hard. But you will grow stronger and smarter, and you will be ready for something better when it comes along.

1) How much of your fear of failure is irrational? Are people in your life really going to think less of you if you fail, or are you just projecting your insecurities onto those around you? If some of them really would judge you for trying and failing, are they truly the people you want in your life?

2) Think of a time when you have failed (we have all failed at some point!). Write down how you failed and how you survived it.

3) Do not avoid pain and suffering — be aware of your feelings and honor them instead of stifling them. Record your emotions here and acknowledge them.

Step Two: Release Shame and Guilt

This is an exercise to help release shame and guilt. Forever. It will require revisiting some dark moments and getting close to some scary feelings, but it's important to pull these things out by the roots. Once you do, you'll clear the way for a new, strong, loving sense of self-worth that no one will be able to destroy.

1) Start a "Shame and Blame" list, so that you can identify where other people have piled their crap on you and where you have piled your crap onto others.

2) For each item on the list, ask yourself the following questions:

A) Was this my fault? If so, how can I take responsibility for it, make amends, and fix it?

B) If it wasn't my fault, whose issue is it really? Am I taking on someone else's stuff or trying to keep someone else from being angry, upset, or disappointed?

C) What do I contribute to making the issue worse? Do I beat myself up over it? Speak negatively about myself or deprive myself of love and nurturing?

D) If I could get rid of my feelings of shame and guilt, what would the issue look like and how would it impact my life?

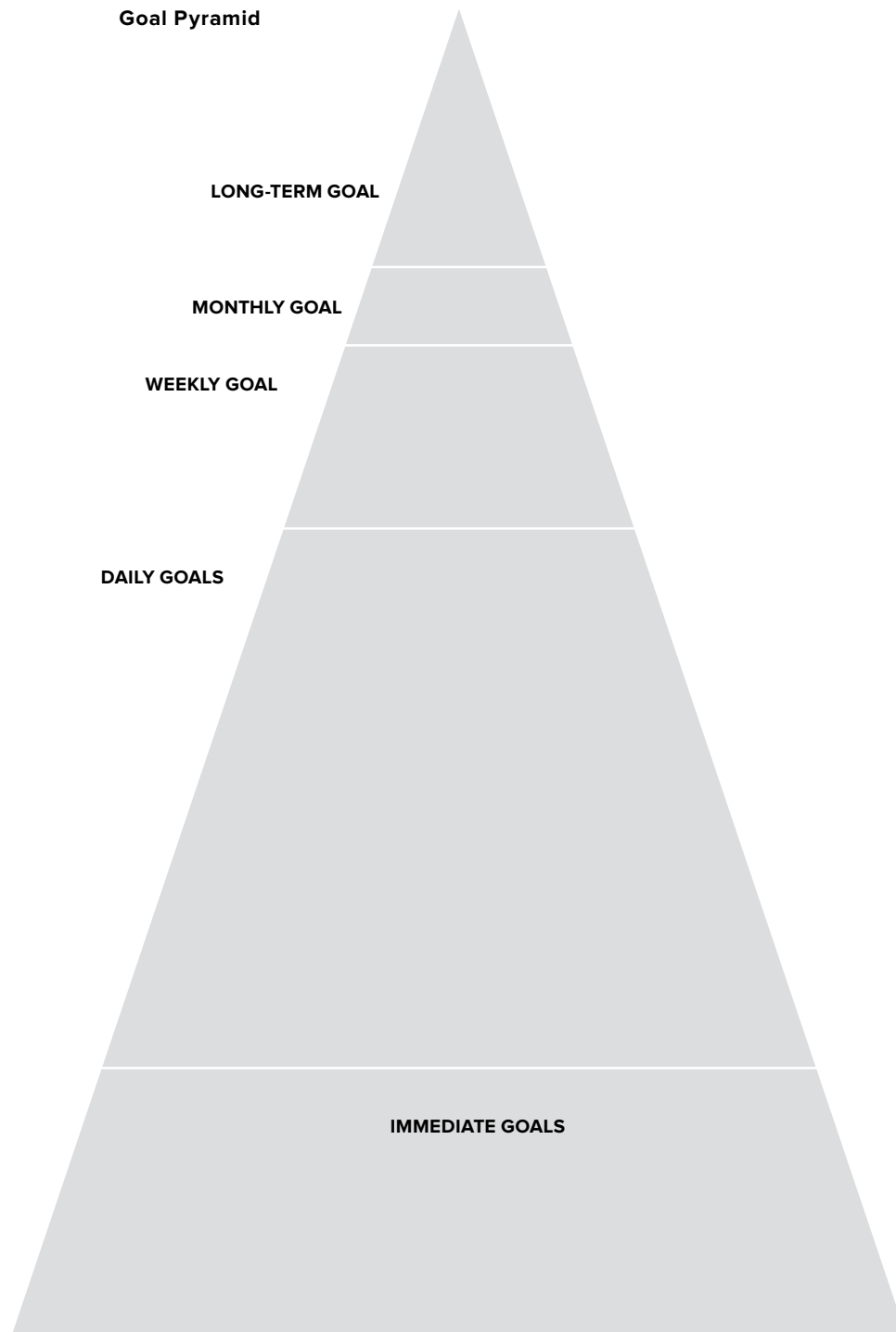
Step Two: Release Shame and Guilt (Cont.)

3) Make amends. If you have done something hurtful to someone else, go to the other person and accept responsibility. Offer a sincere apology. See if there is anything you can do to right the wrong. What can you learn from this mistake?

4) Forgive yourself, whether the other person forgives you or not. Reflect on who you are inside and what was really going on with you when you did the things you regret.

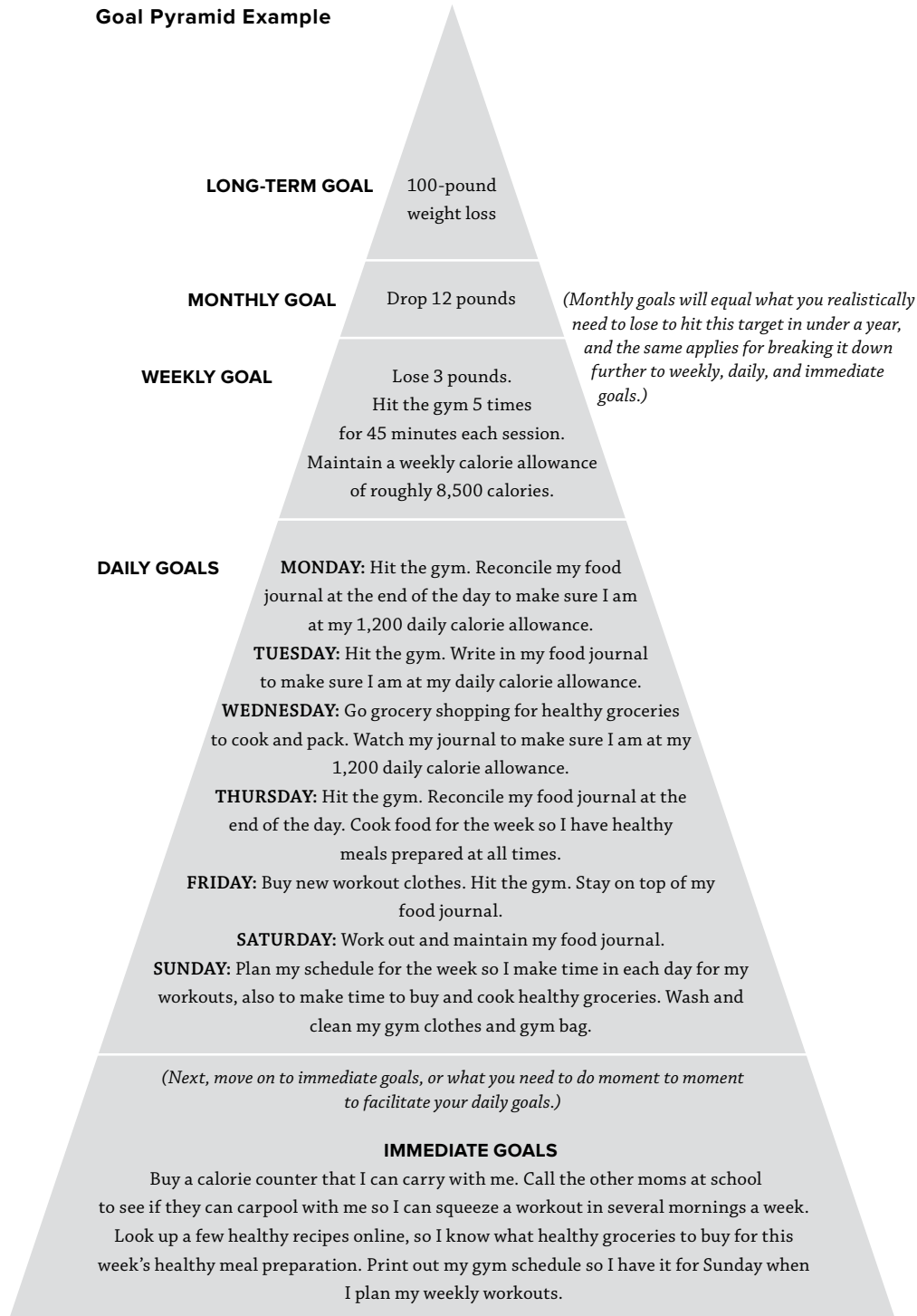
Step Three: My Goal Pyramid

Writing down tasks and organizing them by scale and time frame is an invaluable tool when it comes to achievement. Reviewing your goals regularly is a crucial part of your success and must become part of your routine. It's time to get cracking! After you have filled in the blank chart below, keep a copy with you at all times to remind yourself of what you need to do to keep on track.



Step Three: My Goal Pyramid (Cont.)

Take a look at the filled-in pyramid below first to help you get the idea.



Step Three: Discover Your Daily Saboteurs

More often than not, powerful influences in our environment are invisible to us. This lack of awareness can destroy your good intentions. Look around your environment and identify things that trip you up. Take some time, and make a list of all the things in your daily life that have the potential to set you back or do you damage in any way. Remember, be thorough!

Things that sabotage me at home:

Things that sabotage me at work:

Things that sabotage me in general:

Step Three: Potential Setbacks

Take your list of things from your “Daily Saboteurs” worksheet. For every object in your environment that has the potential to set you back, come up with something you can replace it with or a behavior you can counteract it with. Things don’t talk back or resist change or have an agenda of their own; once you change them, they stay changed. But people? Not so much.

Step Three: Master Communication

Most of us spend the majority of our waking hours interacting with other human beings, so it's pretty much guaranteed that other people are going to play a role in your success or failure. And like it or not, most of our interactions come down to negotiation of some kind. To master negotiation, you'll need to hone both your speaking and your listening skills. And as with everything, preparation is key.

1) Consider your goals and the goals of the other person. What do you want to get out of this situation? What do you think the other person wants out of it?

2) Think about what you are willing to give up. Compromise is pretty much always necessary. Prioritize the things you want to achieve, and think about what you are willing to sacrifice to arrive at a resolution.

3) If things don't go the way you hoped, you don't want to be thrown off. Have a back-up plan so you'll be coming from a place of strength rather than of weakness. If you can't reach a win-win agreement, what other options do you have? What are the ramifications of each?

Step Three: Master Communication (Cont.)

1) Is there a history you can learn from, or precedents you can look to for guidance? Have you or the other party had similar negotiations in the past? If so, what was the outcome, and why?

2) Make a list of all possible solutions. Based on all these considerations, what possible compromises could be reached to arrive at a win-win finish line?

Step Three: Conscious Choice-Making

By now you have realized the tremendous importance of the power of choice. Here, we will practice how to make powerful, positive choices to effect powerful, positive change. By becoming aware of your unconscious decisions, you can bring your best intentions to those choices, which will help direct your life toward the desired result.

Here are a few exercises to help you take control of your destiny:

1) Stop and question what you're doing before you take action. Ask yourself, what am I doing in this moment? Is there a choice to be made here? If so, what choice am I making? Will this choice bring me happiness and bring me closer to my long-term goals?

2) See every action and choice as a moral quest or personally defining moment. Don't brush off smaller moments in life, as they add up to our ultimate happiness — give every decision and action the respect it deserves. Once you think a choice through, you don't have to contemplate it each time.

3) Listen to your gut! When you are about to make a bad choice, your body lets you know. If contemplating a specific decision makes you feel uneasy, don't do it! Or take a step back and revisit the "press pause" advice. Conversely, if a feeling of calm comes over you, it could be a sign to move forward or explore the choice in more depth.