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# One step at a time

Over the years I've made some amazing strides in personal development. It is always fun to look back a decade or two and see how far I've come. In spite of all the gains I have several areas where the improvements don't stick. Time and time again I get committed to change only to see it unravel a couple weeks later. Heck, sometimes it comes apart in days!

## ***Frustration***

I'll be the first to admit that this drives me crazy. The worse part is that these are basic areas that would have a significant impact on my life. For example, I have had an enormous problem when it comes to time management. I start most weeks off with a bang, but run out of steam midweek. It doesn't matter what tool I use. My wife jokes that I own more day runners than the average Franklin-Covey store!

## **The solution that I didn't grasp at first**

For quite a while I've been reading Leo at [Zen Habits](#). Leo is a big proponent of breaking your goals into mini-goals and focusing on them one at a time. Ah, it all seems so clear now, but at the time I had the opposite opinion. I always tried to build mega goals that wrapped several smaller goals into one. Kill two birds with one stone was my mantra. Yet I fell down time and time again.

Then a couple weeks ago Leo posted [Autopilot Achievement: How to Turn Your Goals Into Habits](#).

## **One thing at a time**

When you are making a major change you really are setting many smaller goals. His premise is that we can only focus on a limited number of things at a time. Take weight loss as an example. This is a simple sounding goal, but when you look at what it involves it is really a series of steps:

- Daily exercise
  - Resistance training to build lean muscle mass
  - Cardio/interval training
  - Stretching
- Nutrition
  - Monitor your caloric intake.
  - Eat the right balance of food.
  - Multiple meals
- Stress reduction: stress hormones interfere with fat reduction and increase fat storage.
- Consistency: you need to eat well and exercise daily.

Is it any wonder this "simple goal" is so hard to obtain? It is really more than eight distinct goals!

## **Turn that goal into a habit**

The solution that Leo offers is to break these major goals into what I call micro-goals. You then focus on one goal at a time for three to four weeks until it becomes a habit. Only then do you move onto the next micro-goal and repeat the process.

What ends up happening is that you actually create lasting change in your life. It is easy to maintain a habit once it is developed.

## **But it takes so long!**

This is what kept me from using this technique until now. I understand how it is hard to wait. You see the change you desire and want it *now*. So you make a major change and hit the ground running. The big question is how long will it last? A day or two? A week? How many times will you make the change only to fall back into bad

habits? How long does that take?

## **It's a marathon not a sprint**

We need to change our mindset from instant gratification to long term gain. On the surface it looks like the slow and steady approach takes too long. It is only when you look to the future-and at our past failures-that we realize how quick this really is.

This is where your goal setting comes in. What do you want to accomplish or become? Break your goal into micro-goals. Prioritize those micro-goals and focus on changing one thing. Wait, this sounds awefully familiar. This is continuous improvement on steroids!

## **My change...**

For the next three weeks I will be focusing on one thing. I will start each day with a plan. Will I execute that plan? Will I procrastinate? Will I let minor things intrude? These questions don't matter. Right now I am working on having a daily/weekly plan. I can work on my execution in a few weeks once I've developed this habit.

## **My challenge to you**

What one change would have the biggest impact on your life? Is it to eat more consciously? Maybe you need to prioritize your to do list. Do you need to exercise daily? Should you start each day with a plan?

You can also find this article published on [One step at a time](#), and on the tag pages [Life balance](#).