

# **Subliminal** Captivity

Why We Tell Ourselves To Give Up

# About The Author

My name is Tom Meitner, and I'm an average schlub.

Don't get me wrong - I'm not your typical average schlub. But I'm not a guy that has special advantages, superpowers, or remarkable talents. I'm not a ruthless businessman, nor am I a brilliantly-gifted intellectual. I'm an average guy, with one big difference.

I'm happy.

I'm happy because I know that I have the power to make changes in my life when I need to. When I'm unhappy with something that is going on in my life, I find the ways to unstick them and kick them out the door.



Long ago, I stopped telling people that I couldn't do things, and I started telling myself that I could. So, before, I was single with no prospects, stuck in college going nowhere, working two dead-end, entry-level jobs, and I had no idea what was going to happen with my life.

But today:

- Happily married
- Running a successful writing business from home
- Clear, yet ever-evolving road map for the future

Like I said, I'm happy. And I want to help you do the same, regardless of where you are at in life. Most people are unhappy today. With the stresses of poor health, a crumbling economy, and the expectations placed before them, more and more people are using weekends as an excuse to medicate themselves with booze, drugs, or even more dangerous: STUFF. We all carry around massive debts and eat garbage because it's "easy" to do and we "don't have time to eat healthy or exercise". The debt is "too much" and we "can't pay it back right now because things are too tight".

Note that this isn't an ebook about quitting your job and living on the beach. It isn't about making millions of dollars or becoming a world traveler. Those goals are fine, and if this can inspire you to reach them,

then do so by all means (and then [email me](#) to tell me about it)! But there are plenty of places to go for that kind of inspiration already. [Chris Guillebeau](#) is a master of travel hacking, and guys like [Sean Ogle](#) have made an art out of adventure. Heck, Colin Wright of [Exile Lifestyle](#) recently had readers vote on where he was going to live next! So there is plenty out there already, if that's what you are looking for.

This is for the girl who thinks her genetics will keep her from ever losing 10 pounds, so why bother? This is for the married couple struggling to get a hold of their finances. This is for the overworked businessman who can't find time to relax and enjoy life a little bit. If the average person suffers with these kinds of problems, there's no chance they will entertain the idea of being a world traveler or living with only 100 items! So let's start small - let's get a hold of your life. You have much more freedom than you might think.

And no, your situation is not unique. People before you and people after you have and will overcome much worse than what you've got. You're not a victim, so knock it off.

This ebook is your own personal slap in the face. It's me begging you to get real already. It's a challenge to be un-average. Plenty of people struggle with stress all over the world, but it's up to us to actually do something about it. We can vote one political party in after the other, but nothing's going to change until we do. Nobody else will do the work for us.

If you're ready to start making some changes, and to truly see what you can and can't do with your life, then read on.

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# Chapter One: From “The Whiny Kid” to a Happy Guy

“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”

- **Maria Robinson**

As I grew into adolescence and went through high school, I had a reputation as a guy who complained a lot. There was always something to complain about: a girl breaking up with me, not having a whole lot of friends, being pretty lousy at sports, and generally untalented. The only thing I had going for me was that I had a decent head on my shoulders – not exactly the type of thing that gets friends or chicks.

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I've been considered smart for a very long time. When I was younger, I was even in discussions to skip a grade (which never happened). So, when I grew older, I was expected to do something with my life. For a while, I thought that meant I would be a doctor. Just like the Huxtables of *The Cosby Show*, the sign of success I thought was being a doctor or a lawyer. Outside of *Boston Legal*, I had no interest in the law (and I doubted that actual courtrooms would be that much fun anyway). So I settled on being in the medical field.

As I went through high school, I talked it over with my mom several times, as she was a receptionist in a clinic. So she knew doctors for a long time. As we talked, she brought up concepts that weren't so appealing to me, like being on call. These started to worry me a little bit - what good is going through expensive and time-consuming medical school if I don't get to call more shots with my job when I actually get it?

So I wanted to go a different route. I wanted to do something that I was already good at and something that I would love. As I went through high school, I discovered a love for writing. I loved literature (if I wasn't forced to

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read it) and I loved creating my own stories. I had a knack for it, so I decided that I would major in English, with a writing focus.

### Why College Sucked (for me)

I went to college at Carroll College in Waukesha, WI – which is now named “Carroll University” for some self-indulgent reason. In fact, the name change is a good example of why I stopped going there after two years. It reminded me of that teacher I had in high school that insisted that everyone call him “Professor”.

The place was full of hypocritical PC-ness where there were signs posted everywhere encouraging diversity, which I felt were too heavy-handed. I started going through the English program and realized that mandatory worship-type services (though they were not called that) and ridiculous program requirements were going to keep getting on my nerves and pull my focus off of what I really wanted to do: write. After all the talk about how

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college prepares you to get a job, I found myself in worthless algebra classes and an astronomy course that set new records for uselessness.

So, after much deliberation, I decided to transfer to the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. I left a lot of friends behind at Carroll, but I felt this would be the better move, professionally. UWM had an English program with a creative writing focus, so I would be able to really dive in to my creativeness. Plus, being an actual university meant, in my mind, that they would have more organized resources to help me figure out what to do with my life.

As many people already know, transferring colleges is rarely a smooth endeavor. As it so happened, all of my credits from the past two years transferred over just fine. The problem was, they only transferred as random credits. They didn't transfer as completed courses. In other words, I had the credits, but I did not have the completed courses on my records. So, in my third year of college, I was stuck taking freshman-level English courses. I was furious, I was bored, and it was mind-numbing. It pushed me back a year, so I was stuck in now a five-year plan, and I still had extra science courses I needed to take. As I said, worthless. The pure boredom caused me to coast through

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the classes and my grades started to tank.

Once I finally got into some writing courses in my fourth year of college (remember, I'm a writing major, and it took me four years to get to actual *writing classes*), I had a wonderful creative writing course that turned me on to all kinds of writing exercises and wonderful ways to look at prose. After class one day, I pulled my teacher aside and asked what I felt was a reasonable and important question: "How can I make a career out of creative writing, besides being an author or a teacher?" I knew I wanted to work in the creative writing field (obviously) and I wanted to make sure that I could put food on the table - bring home the bacon, so to speak. Authors tended to be starving artists, and I had no interest in being a teacher.

My teacher gave me an answer that affected my life dramatically, though not in the way I'm sure she intended: "Don't write for the money; write for the love of writing. If you are motivated by money, you are writing for the wrong reasons." That was it.

My response, in my head: "Yeah, I get that, but I need to make a living, don't I?"

## Finding a Path – On My Own

So there I was, four years into college and I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I was approximately a year away from being expected to enter into the workforce full time, and I had no path for myself, nor did I have any idea how I was going to pay back the eventual \$40,000 in student loans.

I was wandering the aisles of Barnes And Noble (as I often did then, and still do sometimes) and I stumbled on to the “Writing/Publishing” section. This is where I found a book about freelance writing. And another. And another. Somehow, my teacher had failed to recognize that there was a way to write for money. The catch: I would be running my own business.

So I read everything I could on the subject. I wanted to be an expert on freelance writing. Originally, I was trying to be a freelance copywriter - and so in 2007, I hung out my shingle as a copywriter, from my brother’s basement. And I got an odd job here and there.

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In 2008, I was able to generate enough potential work that I quit waiting tables at the fondue restaurant I was working at (nights and weekends for two years!) and I was just biding my time until May, when I would get my worthless diploma and work from home full time. I had a job, and it was no thanks to college. I didn't even go to my graduation ceremony. What was the point? I was so disillusioned with the whole concept of college, I had even thought of dropping out at various points. College was not teaching me anything that I could apply to my life, and it was giving me absolutely no direction in what to do with my life after college.

***Disclaimer: For some, college is a great idea. It just wasn't for me, considering what I was trying to major in. If you plan to be a doctor or a lawyer, I strongly advise that you go to college and learn things. Doctors deal with facts – writers don't, necessarily.***

College was an absolute waste of my time. I hang my diploma in my office as a reminder not to let myself get sucked into the rules of what other people expect me to do. I went from starting college on the Dean's List to being on academic probation at one point. It wasn't because it was hard - it wasn't. I just stopped going because they weren't teaching me anything, except how to suck

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up to professors whose political views I didn't agree with (and didn't feel were appropriate for classroom discussions!). My mother even expressed disappointment in me at one point because I went from a straight-A student for so many years to being a guy that was just trying to figure out how to spend less time in the classroom and still pass, so I could spend more time working on my business. College was just getting in the way of my life.

As I built my freelance business, I stumbled into the blogging world and found a number of great bloggers who began to inspire me to do more with my life. Chris Guillebeau is the head honcho in my hierarchy of bloggers, but there are dozens of them out there, creating not only businesses, but awesome lifestyles as well. They were taking control of their lives and doing crazy-cool things, like traveling the world.

My goal wasn't to travel the world (though I have done a bit of traveling). My goal was to work from home, doing something I love, and raising a family. After a long-time girlfriend broke up with me, I took charge of the situation and realized what I *could* control. So I asked out another girl I was interested in, and she became my wife.

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Today, I work from home full time, bringing in my share of the household bacon, and I spend my evenings with my wife and my weekends with friends and family. I'm happier than I have ever been, and it's because I recognized what I could control and did something with it.

Now, it's your turn.

# Chapter Two: Establish "I Can't" As The Enemy

## can't

1. cannot; is unable to; does not have the ability to  
*I **can't** quite get it to work.*
2. To forbid, not permit  
*You **can't** enter the hall without a ticket.*

[source: [Wiktionary.com](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/can't)]

Today, we are at war. We're not fighting communism. We're not fighting terrorism. This isn't a War on Drugs or a War on Poverty. It's a War on Vocabulary, and our gun sights are set on the word "can't".

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The word “can’t” is a stupid word. We use it for everything. Think of the difference in saying, “I can’t eat mushrooms” and “I can’t fly a helicopter”. Those are two different uses of the word with very different connotations (or meanings) behind them. One is saying that you have a disgust of something, and another is saying that you do not have proper training. Yet the word is the same: “can’t”. Off the top of my head, here are other definitions of “can’t”:

- I’m not legally allowed to.
- I don’t want to.
- I would prefer to do something else.
- I am physically incapable of doing so.
- I would be embarrassed if I did that.
- I am struggling to see the solution.
- It feels like too big of a risk.
- I have other priorities.
- I’m not willing to make that sacrifice.
- I am not very good at it.

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You get the picture. Yet, we all wind up using the same phrase constantly: “I can’t do that.”

The danger in falling into this trap is that, while we know the difference, our subconscious brains do not. If you say out loud that you can’t do something, your brain will stop trying to come up with a way to get it done, even if it is possible to do it. But if you consciously say that you will do something, your brain will subconsciously find a way to get it done. The part of your brain that does this is called the “reticular activating system”.

Let me give you an example. Let’s say you want to start a business on the side. If you glance around a little bit at business ideas and a few seem far-fetched, you might say to yourself or to someone else, “Well, I can’t start a business anyway.” Your brain will immediately dismiss the problem as unsolvable, and you’ll continue to be unhappy. Now, change the wording around: “I haven’t found the right idea yet, but I will find it.” Now, every time you look at or experience something, your brain will be hunting for clues to find the solution

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to the problem. Just saying that you can find the solution allows your brain to work in the background and find it for you.

“Can't” is a curse.

We may not be stirring a pot and singing “Double, Double, Toil, and Trouble”, but when we use the word “can't” inappropriately, we curse ourselves and carry around a burden that we will struggle to get rid of. We place handcuffs on our lives and our lifestyles, forcing us to settle for what's already here when there are better options available.

Society today won't recognize this, however. We all seem to be okay with the excuses. That's when we react with “I don't blame him/her.”

In his book *Decision Points*, former President George W. Bush tells the story of a man who lost his legs in the Iraq War. He told the President from his hospital bed that he was going to be able to run again. The President told him that, if he did, he should come by the White House so that they could go jogging together.

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A couple years later, that man came knocking, and there is a picture in the book of the man, standing on metal legs and feet, in sweats, next to Bush, also in his running gear, as they prepare to go out for a jog together. Think of the different ways that man could have given up:

- He could have told himself that he would never walk again.
- He could have told himself that he would be able to walk, but running would be too much.
- He could have told himself that he could run again, but the President wouldn't take the time to run with him.

Any of those excuses, in the world's view, would have been fine. Nobody would have blamed the guy for just thinking that the President was being polite and encouraging. We would have let him off the hook if he just gave up. But this guy didn't. He had a very specific goal in mind, and he decided not only was he going to run again, but he would do so with the President of the United States. Then he did exactly that. *That's* how you pound the word "can't" into the ground!

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But how easy would it have been to give up? Often, giving up is much easier. I don't doubt that this man had to work incredibly hard to re-learn how to walk, and then how to run. He likely had to spend long hours building up the strength to do it. But he did it - because he knew he could. If he had told himself that he couldn't do it, he would just be another guy in a wheelchair.

### Excuses are our security blankets.

There's something comforting about a security blanket. In the interest of full disclosure, I slept with my blanket every night from birth until my senior year of high school. There was just something about it - it was comforting and it helped me fall asleep. To get rid of it would mean to expose myself to discomfort, and I wasn't willing to do that at the time.

***Another disclaimer: I figured bringing a blanket to a college dorm would be a bad move for a lot of reasons, so my hand was forced and I packed it away. It now resides in a cedar chest in my parents' basement across town.***

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Excuses are like our security blankets: they're comfortable, they're familiar, and they keep us feeling secure. See, telling yourself that you can do something involves taking on a bit of risk. You risk failure, you risk looking stupid, you risk getting frustrated, and you risk making things worse. So hanging on to those excuses is a great way to avoid the risk entirely.

Picture yourself in a lot of debt (yeah, it's a stretch, I'm sure). You have two ways of dealing with this debt. The first way is to be aggressive, sacrifice for a few years, and pay it off. The second is to just pay minimum payments and keep it around, just like you have always had. If you take the first way, you could fail and not succeed in paying it off. You could look dumb if you can't go out with your friends or buy a lot of Christmas presents. You could be really frustrated at having to limit your activities and give up some things you enjoy, and you could make some bad decisions and wind up losing even more money. On the flip side, you could just tell yourself that *Hey, everybody carries debt in life and I'm no different*, so you just deal with the stress of making all these payments every month for the rest of your doggone life.

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See what happened there? The end benefit (being debt-free) was swallowed up by flawed logic. The idea that staying in debt is the better option is silly, but when you are approached with the risk of trying to pay it off, you suddenly find a way to rationalize your way out of it.

You cling to those excuses like a high-school Tom and his blanket at bedtime.

## Security is an illusion.

I'm a writer. I run a writing business from my apartment. This is the second time I've done so. The first time was when I was single, and the only source of income coming into my household was my business. When I would run into somebody that I knew from high school, we'd get to the "So, what are you up to?" conversation that we all wind up having, and I would tell them I was running a writing business out of my apartment. It would almost always garner the same reaction:

"Oh, I could never do that..."

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My gut reaction was always to ask, “Well, why not?”, but I never did, because I knew how the conversation would go, and I knew what they meant. Some people would (and do) actually just tell me the obvious: “I need the security of that steady paycheck.”

Security is a funny thing. It doesn’t exist as any sort of entity. Security isn’t a line on your paycheck, and it’s not listed in your employee benefits. Security is just a feeling. It doesn’t exist in the natural world. You are responsible for defining it.

My brother had a steady job in a medical supply company. One day, his boss called a meeting, packed the entire department into a conference room, and basically told them they were out of jobs by the end of the week. They were outsourcing the entire department overseas.

My cousin-in-law had a steady job at a great company with plenty of growth potential. But the company blamed the economy for bringing sales down, and while they liked the work she was doing, they had to fire her to make their budget.

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Security, eh?

Both of those are real-life examples, and you can see that they have something in common: they weren't fired because they were bad at their jobs. They both were doing well in companies with advancement potential. A different set of circumstances affected their employment. No matter how hard they worked at their jobs, they had no chance of being kept employed.

People tell me all the time that they would worry about not making enough money if they ran their own businesses. But what I tell them is, as an entrepreneur, I know that (provided I'm working on the right things) the harder I work, the more money I get. My income is spread out over 6-7 clients, so if one dries up, I just make sure I'm getting another client or getting more work from a client I already have. I diversify my income. When you have a job, you are placing all of your eggs in one basket, which in any other situation is considered bad.

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My point here isn't that you should necessarily quit your job and become an entrepreneur. The point is that sometimes you have security because it's considered "normal". You have security in your job because everybody else does. Society, by and large, consider that steady paycheck as a secure thing – it's there all the time. But that security is not based on fact and you can't measure it. It's all in your head - just an illusion.

# Chapter Three: From “Can’t” to “Can” - The Steps

“Life can either be accepted or changed. If it is not accepted, it must be changed. If it cannot be changed, it must be accepted.”

- **Unknown**

Let’s say you are standing at the bottom of the Empire State Building in New York City and the elevator is out. You have to take the stairs. If you stand at the bottom and look up, you can’t even see the top. Your goal is to get all the way up there, but it is virtually impossible to envision yourself getting there. What you *can* see, however, is the steps that are in front of you. You focus on them until you see the first floor. Then you zero in on them again until you get to the second floor. Eventually, you will get to the top. You couldn’t see the top when

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standing at the bottom, but you knew that if you focused on the steps you could see, eventually you would get there.

Is that a transparent analogy or what?

Hey, when you have a lofty goal, it is pretty daunting to look at the goal as a whole. That's what most people do, and that's why we never get anywhere. This is where those, "I can't do that..." comments come from.

You might say that you could never start a full-time business from home because you have no funding. Okay, that's fine. But can you save up \$100? Even if it takes a couple months, you could. With that \$100, you could buy a domain that you like and get it hosted for a year, start blogging, and put together a few ebooks that you could sell with [e-junkie](#) and a free [PayPal](#) account. Some bloggers have built big businesses out of that. But you get there by focusing on the \$100 first. See how this works?

Getting from "I can't" to "I can" is a difficult challenge, but if you can focus on

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one step at a time, you will find renewed confidence and drive to get where you want to be.

### Step 1: Answer this simple question.

Why?

Why do you want to do this? The answer to this is not what you don't want to do - the answer is what you want to do. What's the end goal? Nobody can answer this but you. You don't want to start a business because you hate your job. You want to start a business because a business will give you \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_. You don't want to lose weight because you think you're supposed to - you want to lose weight because you want \_\_\_\_\_. The same goes for getting out of debt, learning to fly an airplane, facing your fear of heights, or anything else you want to accomplish.

When you run a race, you don't do it because the coach wants you to get to the finish line, and you don't do it because you want to get away from the starting line. You do it because, in your heart, you want to get to that finish line. You

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need to get to that finish line. Then you get the sense of accomplishment from finishing the race, or you get that medal for placing highly, or whatever. There are clear reasons why you want to finish that race. Make sure that you are clear about this when setting goals!

### Step 2: Break down the obstacles.

Another racing analogy (I was in cross country and track in high school, so forgive me): if you are going to run a hurdle race, before you start the race, you look at the track to see where the hurdles are. You know you can't get to the finish line without jumping over them, and you need to focus on each of them as you approach them. If you lose focus, you catch your foot on one and fall face-first onto the track, and you have to spend part of your high school life with your jaw wired shut (happened to a girl in my class). Then you stop running that race.

When you have a goal to achieve, you need to figure out where those hurdles are. If it's debt, instead of looking at the six-figure debt load you are carrying, look at each individual one. Those are obstacles you can handle and visualize

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beating. Pay them off one at a time. Lose weight one pound at a time. Have a clear game plan to achieve each one. Build your business one customer at a time, etc. You get the idea.

Each hurdle needs to be jumped separately. Some hurdles are higher than others and will require a different kind of jump. So when you are listing out all the obstacles in between where you are now and where you are going to be, have a specific game plan for each one. Some will take longer than others, and that's okay. Feel free to celebrate when you jump another hurdle. This keeps you in the race.

### Step 3: Give yourself time.

How many times have you tried working out, only to wind up in pain and still in the same shape as you were? How long did you try it - a week? Two weeks? A month?

It's hard to define how long a goal will take to achieve. While sometimes you will have clear timelines, other times you may need to just wait it out and keep

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plugging away. This is the hardest pill to swallow when trying to change your life.

Working out more hurts at the beginning. Trying to lose weight unsuccessfully for a few weeks can be frustrating. Working on a business for a few months with little-to-no-income can feel devastating.

My advice? Keep at it. Nothing worthwhile happens overnight. Ever. We look at history books and they sum up everything in a neat and tidy manner, making it feel like everything happened overnight. It didn't.

Recently, I was at a Bible study and we were discussing the apostle Paul. For those not familiar with the Bible, Paul was a guy who hated Christians for years, and was basically a leader in killing as many of them as he could. One day, God dropped by, pushed him off his horse and said, "You need to knock it off." Paul turned into one of the most influential missionaries the world ever saw.

If you read his story in the Bible, it pretty much feels like he got up and started

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preaching. But what I learned in that Bible study a few weeks ago was that Paul went through 20 years of studying and training before he went out to share the Biblical message with the public. Details like these are relegated to a few words in the Bible, and other history books do the same thing.

The biggest developments that happen don't happen overnight. The United States wasn't just built when the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. It took over a hundred years to build it up to a point where it could be successful on its own.

It might not take you a hundred years, but don't be discouraged by the time it does take. Keep at it - any goal worth pursuing is going to take some time.

### Step 4: Just freaking do it.

I added "freaking" so that Nike doesn't hit me with a lawsuit. They've ruined that phrase forever.

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You read a lot of blogs about your goal? Good. You have a clear vision and a game plan? Great. You talk about it with others? Awesome. Are you doing it?

Oh.

There are a lot of excuses used to explain why you're not doing it - you "don't have time yet", you "are waiting for \_\_\_\_\_", etc. The truth is, there is no perfect time to do something.

After my wife and I married, we came to the very stark realization rather quickly that I was miserable at my customer service job. I was making a little bit of money on the side, but not nearly enough to replace my job's income, so on paper, it didn't make sense to quit. But after talking at great length, we came to a consensus: there wasn't going to be a perfect time to quit.

We could wait until we were out of debt, but that would take a few years at least. We could wait until we paid off only a few debts, but then we knew we would keep pushing it off to pay off other debts. We also knew that, in a couple years, we wanted to start having kids, so that would further complicate

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things. In the meantime, I would be miserable just about all of the time. The best option we came up with was to just give it a go and see what happens - take on the risks associated with it and go for broke. I went into work the next day and put in my two weeks' notice.

That was several months ago. Today, bills are getting paid and I am bringing in money to cover what we lost by me quitting that job. If we had waited for the "perfect time" to do it, we never would have pulled the trigger. I would have spent my time making just a little bit of money on the side and never realizing my dream. Our new marriage would be under incredible stresses from not seeing each other (I worked nights and weekends - again), and I would still be waiting for my big break.

There are always reasons not to do something. The perfect time is now. Get going.

# Chapter Four: You Are Not a Puppet

“He who defines duty for himself is his own master.”

- **Dick Cheatham**

I took my crappy customer service job for two reasons:

1. I needed money.
2. It was a “good company”, and I wanted to be a copywriter, so I felt this was a foot in the door to the marketing department.

Every interview I had, I told them I wanted to get into the marketing

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department, and they all told me about how much they like to promote from within. I thought that was great! I could get in to the company, build a solid reputation, and get into the right department!

I had regular one-on-one meetings with my boss. It was clear after about two months that I was a leader in the department. (Note: This isn't me just bragging about how awesome I am. They kept numbers on every employee and posted them, and I was consistently one of the top two employees in the entire department.) I was well-liked and performed beyond the rest of my peers. My boss would ask me about my goals, and every month I would say the same thing: "I want to get into the marketing department." She would tell me that I can't change departments until I worked there a year because it was "company policy". Then, she would ask me about my goals for the department I was in. I would have to make something up, because I had no goals for that department. I didn't want to move up in that department, I wanted to get into marketing. I didn't want a career in customer service.

Every month was the same story. We'd talk about fake goals, etc. I would get some sort of arbitrary "promotion" where my title would change and I'd get

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paid a little more, and my boss would talk about me getting a supervisor position in that department. Again, I would tell her that I wasn't interested, because I wanted to get into the marketing department. After a year of being there, I couldn't even get into an interview, and it was apparent that my boss paid me a whole bunch of lip service about helping me get to that department. I never got even close to any interviews. I couldn't even go over to the department to talk to anybody. I was stuck.

So I quit.

## Other people's goals are not your goals.

Why do you make the decisions that you make? Do you do them because you choose to do them, or do you do them because you are expected to? There's a big difference there. We were created as beings that have a free will; we can make decisions and choices about the actions that we take. We generally do not have instinctive reactions - we think them through rationally.

But our parents set goals for us. Our teachers set goals for us. Our bosses set

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goals for us. Our spouses set goals for us. We get so used to people setting goals for us that we never learn how to do so ourselves. We turn into puppets: we do what we do, but we have no idea why.

### Other people's perspectives can be flawed.

Many times, it's not by design - it's just a flaw of the system that we've created. Parents try to influence their adult children's decisions because that's what they've always done, and most of the time, they are just trying to get you to do what they feel is best for you.

But their perspective is much different. For example, if you tell your parents you want to quit your job, you might be met with a lot of flak from them. Just a few decades ago, the usual process of life went like this:

- Graduate from college.
- Get a job right away.
- Move up in that company.

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- Retire.

But today, jobs are pretty scarce and layoffs are common. This sort of thing just doesn't happen anymore. You might tell your overweight father that you want to lose fifty pounds, and he'll tell you not to bother because you were born with fat and being fat is in your genes. In other words, he failed at it, so he doesn't want you to deal with the disappointment. Your parents may have mishandled their finances, so they resolved themselves to a life of debt, and they don't want you to deal with the stress that they did when they tried to dig themselves out and gave up. So while your parents mean well, they're working off of a different playbook than you are now, both in the way society works now and their own life experiences.

Recognizing this fact helps you deal with the people in your life who may try to discourage you from going after your goals.

# Handle them appropriately.

The first step is recognizing and understanding where they are coming from. Often, it's just a matter of realizing that it didn't work for them, so they assume that it won't work for you. Second, arm yourself with some facts - share some success stories of people who have achieved these goals. This is a great form of defense at work, when the person you are facing might be your boss. Facts can be a great piece of ammunition. Third, detail a game plan. Instead of just telling them that you want to do this, show them *how* you will get it done.

Finally, you may just have to accept that they will disagree with you. If this is a boss, start finding a way to achieve this on your own. So if your goal is to work from home and your boss won't let you, regardless of the masterful plan that you put together, either find a job that will allow it, or build a business on the side that will eventually allow you to work from home. If it's your parents, stop talking about it and change the subject. Tell them that you're sorry that they

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won't agree with you, but encourage them to be supportive. Otherwise, you just won't talk about it around them.

Many times, in the cases of your friends and family specifically, they're not trying to be mean. Sometimes, their snarkiness or bad attitudes towards the topic stems from the fact that they failed at achieving the exact same thing. Respond with kindness. Don't hold bitterness or anger towards them. They don't mean to hold you back - they just don't want you to be disappointed if you fail (or "*when* you fail", in their minds). That's why you persist through failure when you go after your goals, and you can just show them that it can be done.

But when you show them it can be done, also be careful not to do the "I told you so" thing. If they ask, share the results, if you are comfortable with it. Be the bigger man (or woman). Let them make the judgment. Just represent your facts. Don't complain to them when you struggle, and don't brag when you succeed. Again, it's not that they wish you harm, it's just that they couldn't do it themselves - and your bitterness or resentment won't get you any closer to your goal, so just drop it.

# Chapter Five: Tools To Help You Get It Done

“Do not wait; the time will never be 'just right'. Start where you stand, and work with whatever tools you may have at your command, and better tools will be found as you go along.”

- **George Herbert**

My dad is about to turn 60 years old as of this writing. He has been smoking cigarettes since he was 15 years old. For the past 25 years, I've never heard him say that smoking was “okay”. In other words, he knows it's wrong, and he knows that he should stop. But because he has such an ingrained habit of smoking every single day for the past 45 years, he physically can't stop. He needs help. Whenever he tries to stop, he might make it a few weeks, but eventually he falls right back into it again.

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You're stuck in a habit - a habit of doing nothing. A habit of floating by, and letting life happen to you. You've made up your mind to make a change, but you need some help to get you there. Otherwise, when the going gets tough, you're going to fall right back into doing nothing.

Fortunately, at little-to-no cost (and I mean that by "average broke guy" standards, not "This is an investment in your future!" standards), there are plenty of tools available to you that can help you define your direction and keep you on track.

### An Obvious One: The Internet

Pretty lame, hey? The internet has become so common that people rarely view it as a valuable tool, and yet it is a ridiculously useful resource for finding inspiration and connecting with others, as well as finding the information that you might need quickly and easily.

You can use the 'Net to find blogs for inspiration (see below), join [Twitter](#) to follow and connect with people that are in the same boat as you, or hit up

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[Google](#) (or your other favorite search engine) to find information related to what you are looking for.

### ***Beware the dangers of the internet!***

Specifically: Facebook. YouTube. Anyone promising you that you will make money quickly with little effort. Spam. Pop-up ads. Nigerian kings looking for wire transfers.

At best, some of these are giant time-sucks that will pull you off course and have you muttering to yourself, "Where did my night go?" At worst, some of these things will install garbage onto your computer, generally rendering it useless, and/or cost you large sums of money and time. Using the internet for good takes a lot of self-control. You can have fun online, but don't let it overtake your true goal of being on there.

As stated on [this infographic](#), the internet as a whole would take 57,000 years to read in its entirety - if you're reading 24/7. It would be a book 10,000 feet tall. Oh, and that was in 2009 - two full years ago. The internet is growing at a rapid pace, and while there is a TON of junk and garbage and useless crap all over the internet, there is also a strong community of entrepreneurs, health

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nuts, and people focused on improving lives. These are the people you want to learn from.

Imagine just a few decades ago when the printing of a new book was a big deal. The internet is a vast and ever-growing resource - start using it!

## Evernote

Evernote is one of those tools that you don't recognize the value of it until you start using it. In short, it's an online notebook. A better way of describing it is it is an extension of your brain.

I use Evernote every day. Every. Day. No joke. Here are a few ways I use Evernote on a daily basis:

- I scan my business receipts into it and tag them as business receipts, so they are backed up online and sortable in one click.
- I securely store all my passwords in it, with a master password needed to access it.

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- When I come across a quote I like, I can highlight it, click the Evernote button on my web browser, and safely file it in my “Quotes” notebook for whenever I need inspiration or an idea.
- I forward order confirmations to back them up in my Evernote account with one click, so I can keep my email inbox clean and organized.
- I keep a database of blog post ideas.
- Anything I come across regarding the art of writing, I can note and file in my “Writing” notebook.
- If I get a random idea while out and about, or something comes up in conversation that I want to address later, I can text it into my Evernote account for later viewing.
- By that same token, if I can't sleep [because my brain is going crazy](#), I can text or email that subject and my thoughts into Evernote to deal with in the morning.

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- While reading on my Kindle, I can send a direct message from my Twitter account into Evernote, so I can highlight notable text and send those notes to Evernote.
- I can store weekly meal plans so that I know what we're eating every night.
- I keep all my favorite recipes in it, tagged with things like, "ham", "eggs", or "chicken", so that I can quickly search for a meal that I'm in the mood for.
- I keep my bucket list and other goals in a safe spot.
- I store the date when I am due for another oil change.
- I keep the hours of various stores in my Evernote, so that I can quickly see if a place is open.
- I keep the type of printer ink that my printer takes.

Now, why is it important to use a service like Evernote for this type of information? Surely, I could do the same with a bunch of Word documents that are organized into folders on my hard drive! This is true, but the beauty of

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Evernote is its accessibility. With all of that information, I can pull it up on my computer, on my phone (thanks to its Blackberry app - it also has apps for iPhones, Android phones, Windows Mobile phones, etc.), and anywhere with a web browser, and it is all synced together, so it is current from no matter where I access it.

In other words, it truly is an extension of my brain that is nearly accessible anywhere. So I can keep my thoughts organized, as well as my goals, and anything else I can store that will keep me motivated towards my goals.

Oh, and it's free.

## A Blog

"I'm not a writer!" you say.

Yeah, neither are a lot of bloggers. Your goal may not be to start a new Movement, or to build a giant following online, but a blog can be a great source for therapy, as well as public motivation. Have a goal in mind? Set up a blog devoted to it and tell a few people about it. Then post on it a few times a

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week discussing what you are learning about your goal and implementing it in your life.

A stunning example of the therapeutic aspects of a blog is given by Neil Pasricha. Neil was a man whose wife had left him and best friend had ended his own life. He was down. He set a goal for himself to pull out of his funk and start focusing on the great parts of life. He started a blog called, “[1000 Awesome Things](#)”. Now, he is an award-winning blogger with a bestselling book (and another one on the way as of this writing), and he seems to be a very positive, proactive person (you can hear Neil’s full story in his great TED Talk [here](#) - worth the 20 minutes!). That’s what blogging can do.

Neil’s story is special, but what his blog has done for him is not necessarily unique. Just writing a little bit every day can help you find your motivations, inspirations, and keep you accountable for your goals.

Not a techie person? No need. While I prefer [Wordpress](#) for the ultimate in customization, if you just want a quick, easy blog that you can set up without a lot of effort, [Tumblr](#) is the way to go (I run my [personal web site](#) with Tumblr, actually). Just sign up for an account, make a few choices, and you can start blogging. You can even email in your blog posts if you want. It’s dead simple.

### A Whiteboard

This is a little more of a personal preference here. I bought a whiteboard years ago when I first started working from home because I felt that, as a guy with a home office, I SHOULD have a whiteboard. So I would jot down a few things on it, and then leave it. I wrote down projects on it, and then not use it. It just hung on my wall, with little attention paid to it.

I had been using [Remember The Milk](#) for my to do lists, and eventually settled on the simple [Gmail Tasks](#). Both were easy to use and readily accessible. But I still found myself pushing things off and not making myself complete those lists.

When my wife and I moved into our current apartment, I was able to take over the second bedroom and use it as my office. When hanging things on the wall, I put up the whiteboard out of pity for it, if nothing else. As I would sit at my desk, I noticed that I was always facing the whiteboard, and I could see it out of the corner of my eye as I worked. It seemed like a waste to just let it sit there.

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So I started writing a weekly quote on it to keep me motivated, since I would constantly glance at it. That worked, but I wanted to go further. Finally, I put my to do list on there, and my productivity skyrocketed. There is something about having the ability to keep your to do list in front of you at all times, and the physical act of erasing something or rewriting it is a very powerful thing, emotionally and mentally.

I use my whiteboard every day. I am actually considering getting a larger one so that I can do some brainstorming on it as well. Standing in front of that whiteboard is one of the highlights of my day, because I have the power to write down exactly what I'm going to accomplish. If you have any sort of goals that will require steps (and you do, trust me), you may benefit from having a whiteboard.

If you don't like that idea, use one of the other to do list managers I linked to above. Or keep one in Evernote. Or use a notepad and a pen. I don't care. The right tool is whichever one that you use regularly.

# Chapter Six: Find Some Inspiration

“Motivation will almost always beat real talent.”

- **Norman R. Augustine**

Some days, you just need a good old fashioned kick in the pants. So you need to regularly consume information that might motivate you to keep going on your journey. Here are a few places to find this inspiration:

## Books

Yeah, you hate reading. You know why? Because you were forced to read in school, and you hated the subject matter. What do you like? What interests you? Reading is hardly a boring activity - you just think it is based on what you've read. If you are looking to lose weight, reading some books on weight loss plans and philosophies would be awesome. Or if you want to get out of debt, personal finance books are plentiful (and captivating!). Want to build a

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business? My goodness, is there some good stuff out there! Just get a book and start reading it. Give it a chance. Try a few out. Go to the library if you don't want to spend any money. Read stories of people who overcame tremendous obstacles, like [Helen Keller](#), or Franklin Roosevelt. Historical biographies are great ways of seeing how somebody else has kicked butt in life, and shows you that your goal can be achieved, even if you think it's impossible right now.

## Blogs

I love me some blogs.

- They are usually pretty quick to digest.
- I can access them from one central location.
- I can usually communicate readily with the authors via Twitter or their comments sections.
- They are darn interesting.

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Don't know where to start with blogs? Ease in slowly. First, sign up for an account with [Google Reader](#) (or, just go there if you already have a Google Account). Then, click "Add Subscription" and type in some terms related to the subject matter you want to read about. After you add a few blogs, you can click "Browse for stuff" and click "Recommendations", where you will get recommended blogs based on your Googling history and the stuff you are already reading. You'd be surprised how quickly you can find stuff that interests and inspires you! Blogs are updated on a regular basis, so you will always have new content to read every day that will keep you focused on your end goal.

# Conclusion

Truly believing that you can make changes in your life is a tough transition to make. But if you approach it with a stubborn resolve and a clear game plan, you stand a great chance of success. Because this is the conclusion of the ebook, I'm supposed to plug something, so here goes (but I'm *not* asking you for money!):

If you want to keep being inspired and show your support for all of us who are trying to make real changes to our lives, join **The "I Can" Movement** by heading over to [The Practical Nerd](#) and entering your email address in the box on the right side of the screen. You'll get a free 4-day email series called ***Do The Impossible: 4 Steps to Eliminate "I Can't" From Your Vocabulary***, which expands on a few points from this ebook, and you'll get a weekly digest of the posts on The Practical Nerd every Saturday in your inbox. Plus, you'll get

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advance notices and offers as they come up (for example, members of The Movement got free preview copies of this ebook).

The other plug is this: share this ebook with someone you know. Show them that you want them to succeed in whatever changes they need to make in life. Put this up on your own blog, if you have one. Spread the word. I don't care how you do it - as long as you don't sell this thing to anybody. This is a free, uncopyrighted ebook. Get the word out to as many people as possible so that we all can take full charge of our lives.

After all, they're your boundaries. Break them.

Thanks for reading!  
Tom