



21 DAYS TO A MORE

disciplined

LIFE

C R Y S T A L P A I N E

MONEY SAVING MOM®

21 DAYS TO A MORE *disciplined* LIFE

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction: Getting Back on the Wagon</i>	5
Day 1: Discipline Is a Choice	7
Day 2: Discipline Is a Process	10
Day 3: Start With Small Things	13
Day 4: Focus on One Habit at a Time	15
Day 5: Anticipate Obstacles	17
Day 6: Be Realistic	20
Day 7: Resist Negative Thought Patterns	22
Day 8: Put Your Goals On Paper	25
Day 9: Break Your Goals Into Bite-Sized Pieces	28
Day 10: Discipline Needs Cheerleaders	31
Day 11: How to Find an Accountability Partner	33
Day 12: Discipline Demands Focus	35
Day 13: Read Motivating Books	37
Day 14: Set Yourself Up for Success	39
Day 15: Say “Yes” to the Best	41
Day 16: Do the Hardest Things First	43
Day 17: Stop Comparing Yourself to Others	45
Day 18: Embrace Your Own Uniqueness	47
Day 19: Get It Done Early	49
Day 20: Do It Now	52
Day 21: Discipline Begets Discipline	54
<i>Conclusion: Taking the Next Step</i>	56
<i>About the Author</i>	58
Mega Project Master To-Do List (printable)	59
Good Habits/Bad Habits (printable)	60
Motivational Book List	61

Introduction: Getting Back on the Wagon

Recently I fell off the wagon and I was struggling to get back up again. My productivity was going down while the distractions in my life were rising; I wasn't exercising enough, or taking care of the business in an efficient manner. And my lack of self-discipline was catching up with me.

I started mulling over ways to break the bad habits I'd developed, and stop the downward spiral. That's when the idea came to me to spend 21 days focusing on intentionally developing more discipline in my life. Discipline would definitely fix all of these problems that were holding me back!

After thinking about it for a few weeks, I finally pitched the idea to my husband. His response? "I think it's a great idea. Can I join you?"

So we sat down the following weekend and discussed what areas he and I were particularly struggling with and what specific actions would generate immediate and effective change. We wanted the biggest impact possible, but without pushing ourselves past our limits and burning out. We each ended up with a game plan for the next 21 days.

Public accountability works wonders for me, so I decided to blog my 3-week journey to more self-discipline. I wrote all of the posts primarily for me, hoping that maybe my struggles, victories, and A-ha! moments could help some of my readers as well.

The response from my readers was phenomenal. Of all the thousands of posts I've written during my years of blogging, the series on discipline seemed to garner the most response, excitement, and emails. Apparently, I wasn't alone in my discipline struggles!

Discipline is a daily struggle for so many people, and there are so many areas in which our discipline lapses rear their ugly head. You may find that you're disciplined in one area, but fall woefully short in another. For example, you may have no problem exercising for one hour, 6 days per week, but your house is a mess. Or, you may have a perfectly organized house, but you can't get control of your grocery budget.

Most people manage to exercise some form of discipline in a few areas of life, but still lack control over the areas that are boring, mundane, or tough...like getting those bathrooms clean, or getting up at the crack of dawn.

After many requests, I've edited and rewritten the blog series as an e-book in hopes that it might be a blessing, inspiration, and challenge to many of you. If you only have one or two areas of your life where you want to build better habits, then reading once through the book will probably be enough. If you have many different areas to tackle, consider going through the book day by day, several times in a row. If you use the book this way, you can really cement the principles into your life, and forge new discipline habits that will take your productivity to a whole new level.

Here's to more discipline in all of our lives!

Day 1: Discipline Is a Choice

Most of us crave more discipline in our lives even if we don't know it or admit it. Why? Well, we need order and peace so that our creativity can take off. We want to be better managers of our time and life. We want to follow through with our good intentions.

Despite my desire for more and better discipline, I've found that I usually try to force myself into a more disciplined life through the wrong ways. I check out a book on living an organized life from the library and think it will make all the difference. I download a printable household organization planner and hope it will magically whip my house into shape.

When the book on organized living or the printable household planner doesn't automatically give me the discipline I was hoping for, I've sometimes found myself wistfully thinking that if my house or life or responsibilities were different, then I could achieve a disciplined life.

Do you see what the problem is here?

Instead of addressing the root issue – my own, personal lack of self-discipline – I convince myself that a fancy new system or a change in circumstances will fix the problem.

But here's the reality: A bad system is not the problem. My circumstances are not the problem.

I am the problem.

Oh sure, every time I start to get a good routine going, life throws a curveball. There are job losses, babies born, illnesses, moves, and never-ending projects that must be completed or that I want to complete. But ultimately, whether or not I live a disciplined life depends solely upon me and the choices I make on a daily basis.

Believe me, those are tough words to swallow. My life isn't disciplined, and it's my fault. And I could wallow in frustration over my shortcomings and failures. But instead, I want to let that frustration motivate me. I am the problem, but I am also the solution.

I don't need to spend hundreds of dollars on organizational products. I don't need to buy 20 books on living a disciplined life. I don't need to somehow trade my life in for someone else's.

Instead, I need to commit to change myself from the inside out, one step at a time, one day at a time, for 21 days straight. If I can methodically go through the next 21 days and focus on creating one or two new habits in discipline, I can start changing my life.

Practical Application

- To jumpstart your own 21 Days to a More Disciplined Life Challenge, choose one small project that has been nagging you for the last few weeks or month. Pick something like cleaning out one messy cabinet, tackling the ironing pile, answering that email, filing that stack of paperwork, or sewing on that missing button.
- Go start and complete it in the next 24 hours. You will discover that it didn't end up taking you nearly as long as you thought it would, and you'll feel so relieved to have it done. Completing this one task will get your discipline snowball rolling and give you momentum to stick with the rest of the tasks over the next 21 days.

Mega Project Assignment Step 1

In addition, today your assignment is to choose one Mega Project that you have been putting off, simply because you don't know where to start. We all have these projects lurking around. Make a list of possible project ideas and then choose one to focus on for the next 21 days. Once you've picked your Mega Project, figure out how you can divide it into 21 small parts.

For example, if you choose to work on a sewing project that seems overwhelming, then Step 1 is to cut out the pattern. Step 2 may be pinning the pattern to your fabric, and Step 3 could be cutting out the fabric pieces. Next, take a look at all of the steps on your pattern, and divide them equally between the remaining 18 days. At the end of your 21 days, you should have a completed project. You just have to commit to the small amount of time each day you'll need to complete the daily steps.

So you have three pieces of homework for Day 1:

- ✓ Complete one tiny project (think minutes instead of hours).
- ✓ Choose a Mega Project and construct a game plan to take on your Mega Project.
- ✓ Complete the first day's step on the Mega Project.

Congratulate yourself on a job well done – and let today's small accomplishments keep reminding you that you can do this!

Day 2: Discipline Is a Process

Yesterday was all about recognizing that a disciplined life is dependent solely upon you and your daily choices. You are not only the problem; you are also the solution. You have to recognize and embrace the fact that you alone are responsible for how you choose to organize your life. No one is born disciplined, after all; most people don't even have a natural inclination toward discipline. Instead, a disciplined life slowly flowers through careful cultivation.

So how do we change from the inside out? How do we undo decades of careless habits? The first step is to realize that developing discipline will be a process. You can't just decide to go from zero discipline to 100 percent disciplined overnight... even though that would be nice.

If you want your new habits to take permanent residence in your life, then the change will have to be gradual. Making small changes over time cements new habits in a way that quick, drastic changes cannot.

In fact, drastic changes are hardly ever sustainable. When was the last time that you made a 180-degree change in your life? Did you manage to stick with it long term?

Suppose you're a person who usually subsists on fast food, candy bars, and carbonated beverages. After feeling sluggish for some time, you decide that it's time to draw a line in the sand and make some radical changes. Starting tomorrow, you're going to only eat an organic vegetarian diet -- no meat, no sugar, no processed foods, and only water to drink. While it would be fantastic if you could give up junk food just like that, overnight drastic changes to your diet are probably not going to stick for the long haul. In fact, in most cases, they are doomed from the get-go.

However, if you decided that you were done feeling so sluggish and you made a game plan to slowly change your eating habits over the course of one or two months, you'd be much more likely to stick with that plan. Sneaking in more vegetables into a regular meal is a lot easier than becoming an overnight vegetarian.

I wish there was a magic pill that would suddenly give you the resolve and fortitude to change and control your life. But of course, there isn't. Instead, you have to focus on changing one thing, and then you actually have to follow through.

This one change can be as simple as resolving to put your purse away in a designated spot when you come home (instead of dropping it wherever it lands when you stumble into your front door). This change seems hardly noticeable at first. But what if you change your purse's resting place the first week, then you always put your shoes back in your closet the second week? What if you get your laundry put away as soon as it is folded the third week, and the fourth week focus on immediately sorting your mail? Well, by the end of four weeks, you'll make a lot of headway in conquering a perpetually messy house.

Sure, we all want to overhaul our whole lives in a matter of hours or days. But I promise that setting small, simple, and achievable goals – and sticking with them for the long haul – will produce more real change than any 24-hour spree. Best of all, you won't end up exhausted and burnt out.

Practical Application

Choose one simple thing that you can change today. Follow through with your change for the next week. Remember, keep it simple and just stick with one thing for now (like where you put your purse) – even if you have a hundred things screaming for change.

If you're looking for suggestions, try one of these small changes that comes with a big pay-off:

- Always doing dinner dishes before bed.
- Making your bed every morning as soon as you get up.
- Putting away the laundry as soon as it's folded.
- Sweeping the floor after each meal.

Just choose one, not all of them!

If you're employed or own a business, here are some ideas of simple changes you can work on developing as habits:

- If you open an email, immediately answer or take care of it before moving onto something else.
- File all papers at the end of the day before going home or stopping for the day.
- Tidy up your desk before turning out the light.

Again, choose just one, not all of them at once.

Mega Project Assignment Step 2

Remember your Mega Project from yesterday? The one that you broke down into 21 steps? Today, it's time for Step 2. Stop what you are doing right now and take care of Step 2. If you divided the work up properly, this task should only take you 10-15 minutes.

While you are at it, go ahead and take a look at Step 3 of the Mega Project. Make sure you have all of the materials available for tomorrow.

Day 3: Start With Small Things

I love how **FlyLady encourages her readers to start changing their lives by shining their kitchen sink**. This simple task seems so small that it's hardly worth the effort. In practice, though, it makes all the difference. I've experienced the difference firsthand.

Not too long ago, we started making the effort to go to bed every night with a spotless kitchen. It's a small change, but I'm amazed at how much more peaceful my mornings feel when I don't wake up to a sink overflowing with dirty dishes. It makes my whole day seem brighter to walk out of my bedroom and into a sparkling kitchen in the early morning!

A clean sink is a great example of a **life hack**—a simple tweak in your routine that boosts your productivity. Life hacks are all about psychology and brightening your outlook.

When I walk into the kitchen early in the morning and see that it is sparkling, does that really make my day easier? No, but it sure feels like it! It gives me the feeling that I am on top of my homemaking tasks, and gives me the mental freedom to plug away at my business for an hour or two before my children get up.

On the other hand, if I walk into the kitchen and see dishes piled high and spaghetti sauce smears on my table, my heart just sinks. I feel overwhelmed and behind. My life then feels out of control.

Is my whole life really out of control? No, just the kitchen, but the mess worms its way into my heart. That's why cleaning the kitchen at night is so important for me. I know that my morning will be more productive if the kitchen sparkles.

Whipping the kitchen into shape every night doesn't take much effort. In fact, if my husband and I work together, the kitchen is clean in 10 minutes. But this simple discipline of not going to bed unless the kitchen is clean changes the whole dynamic of the following day.

Remember, moving in the right direction – even at a microscopic rate – is always faster than standing still. Tiny changes can add up to major differences over a long period of time.

These differences are not only physical, but psychological as well. Think of your small changes as working with your brain to change your outlook and achieve your goals.

Practical Application

- Choose one small bad habit you want to reverse, or one good habit you can aim to implement in your life for the next 18 days. Try using the **Habit-Forming Chart** or, if you're ambitious, there's a **3-habit 100 days chart here**. Or, to sweeten the deal, **track your progress online through DailyFeats** and earn free gift cards!
- Think about your daily routine. Do you see anything you're currently doing or not doing that's dragging you down? Do you leave your dinner dishes for the morning? Consider your work area: do you leave big, messy piles on your desk? Are you constantly leaving huge, clean laundry mountains around the house, instead of folding the clothes and putting them away?
- Choose one chore that you are going to life hack for a mental boost. Start today completing this task and enjoy the productivity boost tomorrow.

Mega Project Assignment Step 3

After you complete Mega Project Step 3 today, you should start to feel some momentum building. You may even be tempted to work some extra time on this project. If you have the time available in your schedule, go ahead and work forward.

But do not, I repeat, do not, fall into the trap of borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. If you don't have free time available to work on your project or have to stretch yourself thin, then wait until tomorrow's allotted time. This is where your discipline comes into play.

There's one other problem you have to guard against: burn out. Don't fall into the trap of working on the project for 2 or 3 hours and feeling totally spent at the end. The results aren't pleasant. The project is still unfinished, but you no longer have the desire to finish it.

Practice working on your larger projects for moderate amounts of time, and stopping before you're past your limit and frustrated.

Day 4: Focus on One Habit at a Time

Was it hard to choose just one habit to focus on yesterday? I know the feeling! At any given time, we are capable of spotting a hundred and one areas that need attention and improvement. In fact, when I dwell on all the bad habits I want to reverse or the good habits I want to implement, I get overwhelmed pretty quickly.

Over the summer, I attended [a workshop at our local homeschool conference by Susan Christman](#). She encouraged moms to making habit-training a priority in their children's lives. (If you are unfamiliar with the term "habit-training," check out this free ebook, check out [this free ebook](#) for more helpful information.)

Susan emphasized not only how important habits are to develop in our own lives and the lives of our children, but how important it is to focus on one new habit at a time. I left the conference with this nugget of wisdom forever lodged in my brain.

The one-thing-at-a-time process was the answer to my lifelong quest for more discipline. You see, for as long as I can remember, every few months, I'd realize that my life was in serious need of more order and discipline. I'd have a flurry of resolve, which led to creating this huge list of new habits I was going to begin implementing immediately.

I'd do really well at my new resolutions for about two days. And then I'd crash from exhaustion at all the balls I was juggling. Or something unexpected would come up and catapult me off course. When this happened, I'd throw up my hands in defeat, feeling like a failure. It just didn't work.

Instead of trying to implement two dozen habits at once, pace yourself. Just focus on one habit at a time. Yes, it takes longer to actually see big changes, but those changes will be long-lasting. And that's what we all really want, right? It's better to focus on and master only three habits each year that actually stick, than to repeatedly try to develop 30 different habits all at the same time and end up overwhelmed, frustrated, and back to where you started.

Practical Application

- Sometime in the next 24 hours, find 15 minutes to sit down and make a list of all the good habits you want to develop in your own life and the bad habits you want to reverse. This is not an exercise to overwhelm you; it's an exercise to get it down on paper and out of your system so it's not sitting in your brain nagging at you.
- Once you've made an exhaustive list, prioritize the top three habits. Figure out what would make the most difference if you were to implement them tomorrow.
- Take a deep breath, set your paper aside in a safe place, and plug away on the habit you've already chosen. Make this habit one of your main focuses for the next 17 days.

When you feel like **the current habit you're working on** has truly become a habit, then you can then pull out your exhaustive list and prioritize the next habit. Remember to take it slowly – even if you're tempted to accelerate on to the next habit. I want your new habits to actually stick -- not just be a short-term thing that only lasts for a few weeks.

Mega Project Assignment Step 4

Complete Step 4 of your Mega Project. If you were able to skip ahead yesterday when you spent extra time on the project, go ahead and mark off the extra steps you completed.

Are you starting to feel like this designated time you spend on this project is becoming a new habit? Are you starting to see your project take shape?

Day 5: Anticipate Obstacles

Like we talked about on Day 1, discipline is a choice. But you can't just say, "I'm going to be more disciplined," and then sit back and expect to see your life change.

No, discipline will take work, effort, and much perseverance. You'll have days when you don't want to follow through with your commitment. There will be many temptations that steer you off course, but don't throw up your hands in defeat!

Prepare yourself now for the inevitable obstacles, because they insist on popping up. If you have a contingency plan, you won't be derailed. But if you leave things to chance, you'll get hopelessly lost.

I love how Michael Hyatt talks about [the importance of preparing for obstacles before you encounter them](#) in his [recent post on discipline](#). He says:

"As soon as you start swimming against the current, you will start feeling resistance. It's as if the universe conspires to keep you from succeeding. That's why you have to anticipate these obstacles and build strategies to overcome them."

Instead of being caught off guard, prepare for obstacles and hurdles ahead of time. For instance:

- ✓ If you're trying to lose five pounds this month, plan what you're going to eat before you go to the holiday party so that your hard work doesn't go out the window.
- ✓ If you're trying to go to bed earlier every night, set the alarm or phone with a reminder. This way you'll leave the evening gathering early in order to get home and go to bed.
- ✓ If you're making an effort to get to places on time, plan to leave 30 minutes earlier than you need to, so that an unexpected phone call or diaper blowout doesn't deter you from being on time.

If you are derailed by an obstacle, does that mean that all of your progress is for naught? Does it mean that you should just give up?

Let's say you've stayed on your diet for 7 days straight, but then you succumb to temptation and eat two pieces of chocolate cake. So, what do you do about it since you already downed the cake.

Well, you have two choices. You could have a third piece of chocolate cake, two scoops of vanilla ice cream, and a tall 16 oz. glass of whole milk. Or, you could drink a big glass of water, go take a thirty-minute walk, and refuse to eat anything else that day that is not on your diet?

Oh yes, it would be so easy to say, "I've already gone off my diet for the day, I might as well indulge the rest of the day since I've already blown it." If you do that, though, what could have been a fairly small indiscretion, not costing you much progress, will turn into a cataclysmic food apocalypse that is going to take at least 4 days to undo.

If you fall down, don't stay there! Get back up as quickly as possible, brush yourself off, and keep moving toward your goal.

The more you train yourself that defeat isn't an option, the sooner you'll stop being afraid of adversity. Why? Because you'll know that struggles and difficulties can ultimately propel you forward, instead of setting you back.

Practical Application

- Read Michael Hyatt's article on **"5 Steps to Developing Discipline."**
- Consider the obstacles that lie in your path as you seek to implement your chosen habit over the next 18 days. Create strategies to help you prepare for them.
- Write down one obstacle that may pop up, and two solutions that will leave you on top.

Mega Project Assignment Step 5

Complete the next step in your Mega Project, then take a few minutes and write down what strategies you will employ when you hit a roadblock with your project. What will you do if you run out of supplies? What about if you are forced to miss a day?

Go ahead and draft a back-up plan for your Mega Project. If you have a strategy in place, you are much less likely to succumb to the temptation to skip a day. Even if you absolutely have to skip a day, you'll know what to do to get back on track.

Day 6: Be Realistic

I'm constantly tempted to set goals that are far-fetched and beyond my reach.

For instance, I've been working on getting up earlier recently. If I wanted to pretend I was superwoman, I'd set a goal to get up by 4:30 a.m. every single day.

But I know that it's impossible for me to go to bed before 9:30 p.m. on the weekends, thanks to the usual activities we have going on. So I intentionally decided that I have to set a 'getting up early' goal that matches the amount of sleep I can get. Instead of planning to get up at 4:30 a.m. every day, I decided to set a goal to get up by 5 a.m. Monday through Thursday only. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday I aimed to be up by 7 a.m.

Sure, I'd like to get up by 4:30 a.m. every single morning. But I know good and well I just can't realistically commit to that and follow through with it. That kind of goal would require me to get less than six hours of sleep a night multiple times a week. I can function on less than six hours of sleep once every few weeks, but realistically, I need to get seven to eight hours of sleep on a regular basis to feel energetic and to function effectively.

Do yourself a favor when setting goals: be realistic and thoughtful about them. Even if they don't seem quite so amazing, it's better to set the bar lower and actually meet your goals than to set the bar too high and keep falling flat on your face.

So how do you figure out which goals are appropriate to begin with?

Ask yourself the following questions:

Is this goal Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Rewarding, and Time-specific?(SMART)

Could I accomplish this goal in a short amount of time? (day, week, or month -- if your goal will take longer than a month, consider making it smaller)

Will accomplishing this small goal move me closer to a larger, big-picture goal?

When you are first starting out, it is so important that you keep your goals small and achievable. Burnout and disenchantment will stop your progress in its tracks, so let's just avoid that.

The satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment that you receive once a goal is completed carries you onward. It propels you forward with renewed energy and determination for the next goal. Start taking tiny steps in the right direction and, pretty soon, you'll look back and realize you've made a lot more progress than you realized!

Practical Application

- Step back and consider whether you're being realistic about your current discipline goals. Do you need to tweak anything to set you up for better success?
- Take a good hard look at your larger goals. Do you see any that you can go ahead and break down into several small goals? If so, tweak these now. You can thank me later.

Mega Project Assignment Step 6

Day 6! You're on a roll! If you've completed each day of the Mega Project assignment, you're gaining some serious momentum. Complete step 6, and then evaluate if any of your mega project steps should be broken up into smaller steps.

Here's a tip for analyzing whether or not your steps are too big: ask yourself if you are dreading any particular steps. If you find yourself groaning inwardly, well, chances are that step is too big.

Break it down further, even if it takes you a few extra days to complete your Mega Project. Your goal is finishing well, not dropping out because you sprinted too hard too fast. Be realistic about your pace and you'll reap the fruit from your slow and steady efforts.

Day 7: Resist Negative Thought Patterns

We've all heard the phrase, "Can't never could do anything." But sometimes, even though we know this, we still allow negative thought patterns to creep in. We tell ourselves things like this:

"I shouldn't even bother trying. I'm sure I'll just fail like I always do." Or, "I'm no good at this discipline stuff." Or even, "I can't be disciplined. It's just not who I am."

It's time to banish the words "I can't" from your vocabulary. Stop dwelling on the fact that you'll probably fail at this challenge since you never seem to follow through with anything. Instead, keep a positive attitude and continuously motivate yourself to keep moving forward, keep working, and keep at it.

Oh, and while you are scrubbing "I can't" from your vocabulary, go ahead and remove the phrase "I'll try." Don't try, do it! Do you hear the difference? Say these two phrases out loud, and then tell me which one you are more likely to succeed with.

"I'll TRY to exercise six days this week."

"I WILL exercise six days this week."

Which phrase do you believe?

Consider this. If you were hiring a babysitter and between your two top picks one told you, "I'll TRY to keep your children safe while you're out with your husband."

The other potential babysitter said, "I WILL keep your children safe while you're out with your husband."

Which babysitter would you hire? I think the difference in attitudes here is pretty obvious!

"Try" may not seem like a negative thought word, but it really is! When you use the word "try," you are telling yourself that you don't really believe in your ability to get the job done. In your mind, you've already failed, and you're accounting for your failure with your word choice.

Replace “try” with “will”—and just do it! Or, do your very best. You’ll end up much further along than if you started out feeling like you couldn’t make it before you’d even attempted to.

Need help moving from “try” to “will”? You can give yourself a boost by surrounding yourself with people who inspire and motivate you, rather than people who will discourage you or point out how far you have to go. Having positive influences around you makes an amazing difference.

Pay attention to the speech of your motivating friends. What phrases do they use when they’re talking about their goals? Do they say “try” or do they say “do”? What other words are they using? What are they saying that gets you pumped up?

If you don’t know anyone who motivates you like this, well, it’s time to make some more friends! Surrounding yourself with people who are successful and disciplined will have a positive effect on your own efforts to live a more disciplined life.

True, making friends takes time, so what can you do in the meantime? Start your work time every morning by watching a simple, two-minute video on YouTube called, **“Just Do It.”**

This old video from the ‘80s is done by Art Williams, the founder of A.L. Williams and Associates, now known as Primerica.

Even though the video is a few decades old, the message still rings true today. Watch this clip every day, and sometimes more than once a day if you need an additional kick to get going.

Go watch **“Just Do It.”** Yes, now.

No doubt, you’ll hit some bumps in the road. And you may stumble and struggle along. However, remind yourself that falling down is not failing... unless you don’t get back up. Keep going, even when it feels like it’s an uphill battle that’s going nowhere. Your persistence will pay off.

Practical Application

- What negative thought patterns do you need to squelch? When they arise, how will you replace them with positive, inspirational thoughts?
- Go watch **“Just Do It.”** Have you already watched it? Great! You get bonus points – now go watch it again.

Mega Project Assignment Step 7

Complete Step 7 of your Mega Project today. Pay careful attention to the thoughts in your head as you work. Try to catch yourself any time you think a negative thought. Replace “I don’t think I can do this” with “I am going to figure this out” and “Look how far I’ve come.”

Day 8: Put Your Goals On Paper

To intentionally cultivate discipline in your life, you have to have goals. Not just dreams, not just lofty ambitions, but specific, realistic, achievable goals. If you don't know where you're aiming and lack purpose, you're liable to end up anywhere... and it'll probably be the wrong side of the tracks.

I love how Dave Ramsey encourages people to **put their financial goals “on paper, on purpose.”** When you write down your goals instead of letting them float around in your brain, they have more weight. Plus, if you write down your goals, you are able to track your progress and be encouraged at the momentum you're gaining in the right direction.

Tracking your progress offers additional encouragement, especially if you are a more visual person. Each time you cross a mini goal off of your master goal list, you'll see that you are one step closer to your goal.

If you want to do some in-depth tracking, here are some very helpful **goal-setting worksheets available from Project Management Skills** and from **Cigna Behavioral Health**. However, please don't be overwhelmed by these more in-depth worksheets.

While some people like to map out all of the nitty-gritty details of a goal, a simple sticky note taped to your mirror or refrigerator may work just as well for you. Your objective is not filling out a fancy paper, but actually following through with your goals.

On the other hand, writing goals down but never acting on them is the equivalent of daydreaming for busy people: it gets you absolutely nowhere. If you are going to take the time to analyze your goals and write them down, make me proud, and actually accomplish those goals! I know you can do it!

When you write your goals down, be sure and don't then tuck them away inside of some rarely-opened notebook. Post them in a conspicuous location and review them often. You'll be amazed at how much of a difference this small step will make in propelling you toward success in achieving those goals!

The more you see it, the more you'll believe it. Seeing your goal written in ink, on paper will have a powerful effect on your mind. Each time your brain sees those words and

processes them, you're cementing a critical idea in your brain: Your goals are your coming reality.

Take this exercise one step further. Instead of writing, "I will lose 10 pounds," write, "I HAVE lost 10 pounds." This small language tweak will have unbelievable results in the way your brain processes and leads you to the action steps necessary to make words a reality.

A friend of mine told me about how she recently wrote out 10 goals and then took it one step further. Instead of writing, "I will lose 10 pounds," she wrote, "I have lost 10 pounds."

She went through and wrote all of her 10 goals out as if they were already accomplished. She said, "This small language tweak has had unbelievable results in the way my brain processes and leads me to the action steps necessary to make words a reality."

This seems to be working well for her as she recently told me that she's already accomplished seven of her 10 goals – and she had set the bar high for each one!

Practical Application

- Write down your current goal and tape your paper up in a conspicuous location that you will see often. Review it throughout the day and let the words motivate you to keep on pressing forward in the right direction.
- Don't just tape up your goal in one location; choose several. The more often you see your goal and read it, the more brainpower will be directed towards accomplishing that goal.

Mega Project Assignment Step 8

You already have your mega project broken up into 21 small sections, but have you been having trouble with the motivation to complete each step each day? How can you use today's discipline technique to give you the push you need to work on your Mega Project daily?

Make a sticky note that says "I have finished my Mega Project segment for the day." Place this sticky note with your other goal notes, and read it often throughout the day.

Day 9: Break Your Goals Into Bite-Sized Pieces

Once you've chosen and written down your current goal, you have to develop a plan of baby steps to accomplish your goal.

Think of your Mega Project that I had you break up into baby steps on Day 1. Many times, baby steps are just the ticket to painless goal achievement

Let's look at an example. If you want to lose five pounds in six weeks, your six-week plan of baby steps would look something like this:

Week 1: Track your calorie intake through [SparkPeople](#). Exercise for 2 hours total throughout the week.

Week 2: Find an accountability partner. Continue to track calorie intake, adjust if needed. Exercise for 2.5 hours total throughout the week.

Week 3: Check in with your accountability partner. Continue to track calorie intake and adjust if needed. Exercise for 3 hours total throughout the week. Drink more water.

Week 4: Check in with your accountability partner. Continue to track calorie intake and adjust if needed. Exercise for 3 hours total throughout the week. Drink at least 8-10 glasses of water daily. Cut out fast food, sugar, or soda pop.

Week 5: Maintain all habits from the previous four weeks; reevaluate anything that isn't working, and make the necessary changes.

Week 6: Reward yourself for losing five pounds and developing some good habits that will hopefully stick around for a long time.

Now, I'm not saying that the above plan is guaranteed to make you lose five pounds in six weeks (I'm no doctor or dietitian!), but it gives you an idea of how to take a bigger goal and break it down into smaller pieces. Instead of being overwhelmed by looking at the big picture, think what small steps you can slowly take to get where you want to go. Map them out and then follow them!

Let's look at another example of breaking up a large goal. Say you want to clean out your garage. Goal number one could be filling up three large garbage bags with junk

you either throw away or donate. Goal number two can be organizing three shelves, and so on. Tackle your goals in small bite-sized pieces and let your success breed more success.

If you never let yourself experience small wins, you'll be much less likely to experience the big wins. So don't let yourself become burnt out or defeated with big, overwhelming goals. The small wins quickly add up to significant, measurable accomplishments, and before you know it, you reach your big goal.

Practical Application

- Choose one of your larger goals and break it down into bite-sized pieces and create a plan of action for the next few weeks or months.
- Set up a weekly appointment with yourself to review and reevaluate your goals and how things are going.

Don't forget to change things up if your progress stagnates. If you are not seeing results for a few weeks in a row, it's time to change your game plan a bit. Otherwise, you may just be wasting time.

If you are struggling and feeling overwhelmed with the goals you've set for yourself, step back and reevaluate. Remember, your goals have to be realistic, because discouragement is one of the biggest goal-killers out there.

Do you need to give yourself more time? Do you need to tweak your goal to be a little more realistic? Do you need to call a friend? You can do it, just not all at once!

Mega Project Assignment Step 9

How is your Mega Project coming along? Are you pleased with your progress? Are you staying on target? Are you getting ahead, or have you fallen behind? Are you building the momentum you'll need to finish strong? Are you excited about everything you've accomplished so far?

Think about how far you've come in nine short days! You've accomplished this entire project through baby steps, little by little, inch by inch. Just keep inching towards your final goal of a completed Mega Project and you'll be there in just 12 more days. I'm cheering you on.

Day 10: Discipline Needs Cheerleaders

Not too long ago, my friend Angie texted me with a question. As we were texting back and forth, she asked, "Did you run this morning?"

Angie and I have both been trying to get up early and run in the mornings -- she in her neighborhood or at the gym and me on the treadmill in our basement. We both know we feel better and accomplish more when we do it, but it's not always easy (but no one ever said that the things that would be good for us would be easy!).

That morning when she texted me, I hadn't run yet, as I was hard at work on a business project. Her text was just the motivation I needed to drag myself up and out of the comfortable chair I was sitting in and go run a mile. Yes, it was just a mile, but it was something. And I felt a lot more energetic the rest of the morning.

You can't do this discipline thing alone. Well, you can, but I guarantee you it will be a lot harder to keep at it if you don't have anyone encouraging you along the way. When you have someone willing to check in with you, you gain a major advantage.

So, who can you recruit to keep you on track? You need to pick someone who can be tough if needed. Your spouse is the first logical choice, but only if he or she will give you tough love when you are tempted to slack off.

If your spouse is too much of a softie, it's best to look elsewhere for your cheerleader/drill sergeant. What about a friend or neighbor who loves you dearly and knows how to be the bad guy? Get them on board. You should even give them a copy of your baby steps, so that they know exactly what you should be doing and when.

I've found that when someone else is counting on me, I am much more likely to perform. For instance, whenever I run alone, I tend to go easier on myself and stop earlier than I planned. If my side starts hurting or I have a long to-do list, I use that as an excuse for a short run. However, when I run with someone else, I'm always motivated to push a little harder, go a little faster, and not give up when I feel winded and tired.

It's the same thing as you pursue your goals: when you feel like you're going it alone, it's harder to keep on when the going gets rough. But when you have others around you who are encouraging you, checking up on you, or texting you to make sure you're

following through with your morning run (thanks, Angie!), you're much more likely to actually stick with your goals.

Practical Application

- Do you have cheerleaders in your life who are helping push you closer to your goals? If not, think about people you might ask about becoming your accountability partner. We'll talk more about how to accomplish that in Day 11.
- Are you a member of an online forum, or do you have a blog where you have regular readers? This is an excellent way to get cheerleaders. You won't just have one; you'll have multiple people checking in with you everyday.

Mega Project Assignment Step 10

Go ahead and complete step 10 in your Mega Project, then write down the names of three different people who might be willing to keep you accountable.

The best person for this job would be someone who has already accomplished what you are shooting for. So if you are trying to lose 20 pounds, find a friend who has lost a lot of weight successfully. If you're trying to run your first 5K, look for an accomplished long-distance runner (maybe even a marathoner!).

If you find an accountability partner who is an expert in the field, then not only will you receive accountability, you'll also glean new wisdom.

Day 11: How to Find an Accountability Partner

My husband is my early morning wake-up accountability partner. When I recently presented the idea of committing to 5 a.m. wake-ups every Monday through Thursday, he not only liked the idea, but he enthusiastically offered to jump in and join me in early rising.

While neither of us have been super enthusiastic when the alarm goes off, it's been much easier to stick with our commitment because we're both on board. It's not as easy to roll over and go back to sleep when you know you'll have to explain your laziness to someone else!

As I talked about in Day 10, accountability is crucial in helping you find motivation to stay on track and stay disciplined. But some of you are saying, "I wish I had an accountability partner, but I don't even know where to find one."

Well, it might not be as hard as you think. Start with your local friends and family. See if anyone would like to join you in keeping each other accountable to one specific goal on a regular basis.

If you can't find anyone locally, go digital. Ask friends on Facebook, Twitter, your blog, or other online groups you're a part of. Search and see if there's already an online support group of some sort (such as the [Good Morning Girls](#) or [Hello Mornings Challenge](#), if you're working on getting up early).

One caution about joining an online support group: make sure that the group is not too big. Otherwise, it will be too easy for you to slip in and slip out unnoticed. If the group is large, see if there's one person within the group who is also searching for an accountability partner. There is just something special about one-to-one accountability.

Consider this scenario: you want to start getting up at 5 a.m. to work on your business before the rest of the family is up. You've tried so many times, but you always fail. Why? Because when you sleep in, the only person you are letting down is yourself. So this time, you find a friend at church who is also trying to get up early.

The two of you decide that once you are up – with a full cup of coffee in hand – you will text each other at the beginning of the work session, to let the other know that you

are out of bed. When the work session is finished, you will text one more time, letting the other person know exactly what was accomplished during your session.

This second part is crucial to accomplishing your goal. What if you got up at 5 a.m., only to sit and fritter your time away on Facebook and reading blogs? You may enjoy your time spent quietly socializing in the early morning hours, but your time might have been better spent sleeping. By staying accountable not only for getting up early, but also for getting a lot of work done, you're now way ahead of the game, and so is your friend.

Don't just think about what you are getting by having an accountability partner, also consider what you are giving back. You are helping your friend achieve her goals too.

Start digging and asking around and you're almost certain to find someone – or even a group of someones – who are interested in developing some habits in their own life and who would welcome the accountability.

Practical Application

- Find an accountability partner either locally or online and create a specific plan for how you will hold each other accountable for your goals. Will you email, call, text, or talk in person? How often will you check up on each other? How specific will your accountability get?

Mega Project Assignment Step 11

So now you are just past the halfway point for your Mega Project. Are you starting to lose interest? Sometimes when I get to this point, I just don't want to look at the project any longer. Now is the time to bring your accountability partner on board for this project too. Your partner will give you that little push to keep going and bring your Mega Project to life.

Day 12: Discipline Demands Focus

You want to be disciplined? You have to get focused. You'll never hit the bull's-eye if you're aiming at multiple targets.

Here are two keys for maintaining focus:

1. Remove Distractions

If you are struggling to follow through with your goal, step back and hunt for major distractions:

Are you on Facebook or reading blogs instead of cleaning up your kitchen at night like you committed to? Set up [Leechblock](#) on your computer for the hour after dinner so you can't get on the computer.

Are you giving in to the temptation to eat two brownies every night, even though you're trying to lose five pounds? Get rid of the brownies and don't make anymore! Seriously, it's better to throw them in the trash if they keep you from sticking with your goals.

2. Focus In on the Task at Hand

When you are working on one of your goals, work on nothing else. Don't have ten different windows open on your browser, three different sales orders in progress, or two different blog posts going. Focus on one task at a time. Multi-tasking is the death of focus.

If you are trying to clean out your garage, don't talk on the phone, run inside to start dinner, take pictures of junk to list on eBay, and clean out your van while you're at it. You must learn to only work on one thing at a time. When you learn to focus you will find yourself quickly finishing up tasks and then moving onto the next without distractions, and without trying to remember what you were supposed to be working on.

This is a great time to start using your timer to train yourself to focus 100%. Start very small. Set your timer for five minutes and then throw yourself wholeheartedly into that task until you hear the timer beep.

Now step back and look at what you accomplished, and be sufficiently amazed. Next time, set the timer for 10 minutes. Slowly work your way up to a 100% focused hour of work. When you have built up your skills enough to remain focused for a full hour, you will have entered an elite level of productivity.

Practical Application

- Consider what's distracting you from staying focused on your goal. How can you remove these distractions? Can your accountability partner help you to remove these distractions? Ask her to keep you accountable not only in sticking with your task, but also in staying laser focused on that task.
- If you didn't do so earlier in this series, take the time to break your goal down into small, bite-sized pieces. If applicable, set a specific timeframe for accomplishing each of these small pieces. Share your goal outline with your accountability partner, so they know exactly what progress you should be making. The more specific you are with your partner, the more encouragement you'll receive, and the closer you'll move towards your goal.

Mega Project Assignment Step 12

Take a few minutes today, after you have completed step 12 of your Mega Project, to visualize in your mind what your completed project will look like. If your project is a cleaned-out garage, build a picture of that in your brain. What does it look like and how does it make you feel? Focus on the feelings that come with a job well done.

Day 13: Read Motivating Books

I've been profoundly impacted and inspired by all kinds of books over the last 30 years of my life. I know that many of us have very full schedules, but I strongly encourage you to take time to read – even if it's just a few minutes every day.

You'll be inspired, stretch your mind, and sharpen your thinking. Good books will challenge you to improve as an individual.

Reading right before bed is a great way to unwind and help your brain slow down. Actually, many people find that they rest better if the television is turned off about half an hour before going to bed. So, if you usually watch some television in the evening, try swapping out the last 30 minutes of your usual TV time for reading a good book. You might find that you sleep better and you're guaranteed to sharpen your mind a bit more with a good book than you would if you were watching mindless television!

If you struggle to find time to read, audiobooks are also a great option. You can listen to them while you're driving, while you're washing dishes, while you're cleaning the bathroom, or while you're running on the treadmill.

Here are three of my favorite books on the subject of discipline:

Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time—

This book is jam-packed with practical ideas for prioritizing your time and life so that you make the most of your days. One of my biggest takeaways from the book was the challenge to start the day out by doing the things you like least first, so they're out of the way sooner. Then you can enjoy your day more and be more productive and fulfilled.

168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think—We all have exactly the same amount of time: 24 hours in each day, 168 hours in each week. We all get to choose how we're going to use those hours: wisely or frivolously. Laura Vanderkam's book is based upon the premise that, if we were to step back and look at our week as a whole, we have more time than we realize. And we are probably squandering more time than we think.

This book gives real-life, practical examples for becoming a better manager of your time. It profiles a number of different individuals in different situations and shows how they are using their time well or specific ways they could improve their time usage. This

book is not about stuffing our lives full with longer to-do lists and more responsibilities, but about focusing on a life well lived. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and would recommend it if you want to better steward your time, or find more fulfillment in how you spend your 168 hours.

Today Matters: 12 Daily Practices to Achieve Tomorrow's Success—If you want to make the most of your days, this book will give you practical, step-by-step help and inspiration. The author makes a case for why today is your key to success and outlines 12 decisions and disciplines you should implement in your life. Master these skills and you're almost guaranteed greater fulfillment and success in life.

And when you are looking for a good book, don't forget about biographies! Reading about other people who have accomplished great things in their lifetime is a great way to inspire yourself to reach for more.

Practical Application

- Choose one book or audiobook related to self-discipline and read it over the next month. Set weekly page number goals, or time goals to help you stay on track. If you haven't been reading at all, then I would recommend starting with 15 minutes a day and working your way up to 30 minutes. I find that reading a chapter (or even just a few pages) of a book first thing in the morning works best for me -- especially since I usually fall asleep within a few minutes if I try reading at night!

Mega Project Assignment Step 13

Try to match the first book you choose with your Mega Project. If your mega project involves sewing, read a book about taking shortcuts in sewing. If you are cleaning out your garage, read a book about organization. If you are trying to lose 30 pounds, read a book about sneaking fitness into your daily routine, or the biography of a person who has lost a lot of weight in a healthy way.

Day 14: Set Yourself Up for Success

It's easy to make excuses for a lack of discipline, but excuses don't get you anywhere. Instead, choose to invest the time you usually would devote to formulating an excuse to considering what you can do to set yourself up for success in achieving your goals.

For instance, if you're trying to get up early but you find that you always fall back to sleep or hit the snooze button, don't just give up and make the excuse that "I'm not a morning person." Maybe you're not, but until you've put forth significant effort into getting up early on a regular basis, you can't make that statement.

If your goal is getting up early, recognize that achieving your goal really starts the night before. Begin winding down at least an hour before you plan to go to bed. Make a point to go to bed an hour or two earlier than you usually do. Buy an alarm without a snooze, set multiple alarms, or have a friend call you at 6 a.m. every morning. Make yourself get right out of bed and jump in the shower to wake yourself up. Or, put your shoes on and go out for a morning run. Even if you're dog-tired, you'll probably feel wide-awake by the time you get home!

If you're trying to set up the habit of exercising first thing in the morning, how could you set yourself up for success? How about sleeping in your workout clothes, instead of pajamas? Place your socks and gym shoes right beside your bed. Have a water bottle filled up and in the refrigerator. Have your workout DVD set out on the coffee table. And of course, ask your friend or spouse to keep you accountable.

Look at one more example. If you're trying to lose weight, but you always fall for temptation in the late afternoon, then it is time to set yourself up for success. What food are you craving in the afternoon? Salty or sweet? If you are craving salty foods, then slice up a cucumber the night before and buy some hummus at the store. Measure out a portion that will keep you within your calorie range and place it in a small bowl. Now you have a healthy, savory snack that's much better than chips and dip. If you're craving sweet treats, then buy some low sugar protein powder and freeze a banana and berries. Blend yourself a frosty smoothie in the afternoon, and you'll stay away from chocolate (if you're desperate, buy chocolate protein powder).

Do you see how this process works? If you do as much of the prep work as possible that leads up to the actual dreaded event, you'll feel foolish for wimping out just because

you don't feel like it. Take away all of the excuses, and you'll just have to do it. Then you'll be glad that you did.

Practical Application

- What things are hindering your success and keeping you from following your goals? Can you identify certain times of day when you're more likely to fail? How can you rearrange your schedule to optimize your motivation during those times? What steps can you take to set yourself up for better success? This is an excellent time to use your accountability partner.

Mega Project Assignment Step 14

Have you figured out the best time of day to work on your Mega Project? If not, you're going to work on that today! Think about your day, and think about the different times that you've worked on your project. Was there a particular period of the day when the work on your project seemed to flow better? You may find the best times to work on something like this will be first thing in the morning, during afternoon naptime if you have children, or after the children have gone to bed in the evening.

For me, saving anything important for after the children have gone to bed hardly ever works out well. It's the very end of my day, I'm tired and worn out, and my brain is no longer operating at its peak. If I want uninterrupted time for an important project, then the early morning works best.

As a general rule of thumb, the longer in the day that you wait, the less likely you are to complete your task. You can use the excuse that you're tired, sick, hungry, thirsty, annoyed, ran out of time, too much laundry, juggling cranky kids, dealing with PMS, and on and on.

Choose the time of day when you're most likely to succeed. Purpose to complete your Mega project assignment for the next three days during that window of opportunity, and see whether or not you're more consistent.

Day 15: Say "Yes" to the Best

I hate letting people down. I don't want to admit I can't add another thing to my plate. In short, I don't like saying, "No, not today."

But in the last few years, I've finally come to realize an important truth: **superwoman is a myth**. If I want to live a productive, efficient, happy, peaceful, and disciplined life, **I must learn to say "no."** And I must say it often.

If you want to stick with your goals, you're going to have to **get good at saying "no."** It's hard to do, especially if you're an overachiever like me. But you'll only end up frustrated, exhausted, and depleted if you try to do it all.

Because that's the simple reality: I can't do it all. When I say "yes" to one thing, I must say "no" to something else. When I choose to make getting up early a priority, I have to say "no" to habitually staying up late. I also have to say "no" to most activities and events that would keep me up late.

Slowly but surely, I'm learning to think before committing to anything: what are the consequences of saying "yes"? Will saying "yes" to this late-night commitment throw me off course and keep me from getting up before 5 a.m.? Will saying "yes" to this big commitment mean that my home and family suffers?

Count the cost of each commitment before you make the final decision. Don't just blindly say "yes" when someone tries to convince you that you must do X, Y, or Z. Don't give in to peer pressure or make decisions based how people might view you if you say "no." Nobody else knows your needs and the needs of your family like you do.

You can't say yes to everything. It's up to you to pick and choose wisely and say "yes" to only what's best. If you have leftover time and energy, go ahead. You can say "yes" to some good things, too. But start with the best stuff first.

Practical Application

- Evaluate all the activities and commitments on your plate right now. Choose one that really doesn't matter or isn't helping you move closer to your long-term goals and get rid of it. If it's something that involves other people, make sure you don't just walk out on them without tying up all the loose ends first.
- Make a habit of saying "no" more often than you say "yes." The peace and order you'll begin to experience in your life will be well worth the initial difficulty of getting the word "no" off your tongue.
- Create guidelines for yourself and share them with your accountability partner. Make up a list of guidelines that will help you decide whether an opportunity is worth considering. Some good guidelines include total time commitment, time of day, how many total commitments you'd have in one month, and whether you'll have to handle the task yourself. Also consider if you have helpers, how you'll get childcare, and how this opportunity will help your future. Ask your partner to help you decide if you should say "yes" or "no" to an opportunity, based on your guidelines.

Mega Project Assignment Step 15

Don't forget to finish Step 15 today.

Keeping a Mega Project going in the background is a great way to ensure that you're always moving forward with your goals. But sometimes, you may have to say "no" to your own project. If you are in the midst of a particularly trying time, consider saying "no" to your Mega Project.

Have you just had a baby, a death in the family, or a move? Are you feeling run-down and overwhelmed? These are all excellent reasons to take a step back from productivity, and instead, use the time for something you enjoy. Work on some knitting or other handiwork, read a good book that will help you relax, take a daily bubble bath.

Part of developing discipline in your life includes learning how to take care of yourself. Your Mega Project will be waiting when you're ready!

Day 16: Do the Hardest Things First

I tend to procrastinate on the things I least enjoy. For me, that's usually **laundry**. It's silly, I know, but I'll put off folding the pile of clean laundry until I am down to my very last outfit (it's probably a good thing **I only have a few outfits**, otherwise I can't imagine how behind I'd get on laundry!). An unfolded laundry pile is guaranteed to hang over my head and burden me, but I often don't do anything about it until I absolutely have to.

Mark Twain wisely said, "If you eat a frog first thing in the morning, that will probably be the worst thing you do all day." Brian Tracy wrote an entire book based upon this witticism called, ***Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time***.

Here's the premise: if you start the day and do the things you like least first, you'll get them out of the way. Then you can enjoy the rest of your day more and be more productive and fulfilled. Plus, when you get the most dreaded things out of the way right off the bat, it gives you so much momentum for the rest of the day!

I've been attempting to apply this idea to my laundry pile. Instead of letting it sit and grow to an overwhelming size, I'm trying start a load of laundry first thing in the morning, switch it to the dryer before breakfast, and then fold and put it away mid-morning. Admittedly, I haven't been successful at doing it this way every day. But on the days I have done this, I've been amazed at how well the system works.

And honestly, when I just do one load a day, I'm able to stay on top of the laundry. It never gets out of hand, and it really takes no more than 15 minutes a day to keep up with. Why has it taken me almost nine years of running my own home to figure out this simple principle?

Save the Best for Last

Once you've accomplished your most dreaded tasks for the day, reward yourself with some of the tasks you enjoy doing. This will give you something to look forward to when you're in the midst of doing your hard tasks and will probably give you motivation to accomplish them more quickly.

You can take the reward a step further and allow yourself with a few minutes of craft time (if that's relaxing for you!), or you could read for a bit, or make a healthy snack or

drink. Give yourself something each day that makes the unpleasant work worth it! If you can be disciplined about it, set your timer and give yourself ten minutes to browse Pinterest or go have a few minutes of fun on Facebook. Just remember, you can easily get sucked in and off track. If you struggle in this area, stay away from the computer until your allotted time.

Practical Application

- Read this great article: **“Start Your Day By Eating a Frog”** for some great step-by-step help in prioritizing your day.
- Determine what you tend to procrastinate on and develop a plan of action for making it a first priority. Remember, sometimes procrastination is a sign that you need to break the task up into smaller steps.

Mega Project Assignment Step 16

Is there a part of your Mega Project that you have been flat-out ignoring because it is hard or unpleasant? Well, today is the day to just do it. Take care of the worst step in your Mega Project right now and then enjoy the freedom of having it out of the way.

If you don't have a step that you have been avoiding, consider yourself blessed, and just proceed through your regularly scheduled Step 16 task.

Day 17: Stop Comparing Yourself to Others

I've shared my goal of getting up earlier a lot in this ebook. Now, some of you may feel badly or guilty because you don't get up as early as me. Stop.

Let me just set your mind at ease: please don't feel guilty if you get up later than me. There's no reason for you to feel that way. While I think getting up early can be a fantastic way to get your day off to a great start (and I certainly don't want to encourage you to sleep in out of laziness), I want you to remember that you need to do what is best for you in whatever life season you're in.

I don't have a baby, I'm not pregnant, and I only have three children who all sleep soundly through the night (most nights, at least!). I can also go to bed early and I have a husband who is supportive and joining me in my early-to-bed, early-to-rise challenge.

I can think of many seasons in my life when getting up early wouldn't have been wise or healthy. Maybe you're in one of those seasons. Or maybe you just weren't created to rise early and you're more productive, efficient, and creative at night (unlike me!).

What works for me won't necessarily work for you. Don't feel the need to get up early just because I do, or because it's really making a difference in my life.

Consider your family's needs. Consider your own strengths and weaknesses. And then choose goals that work for your family – even if they're the exact opposite of what works well for someone else.

We can apply this advice to almost every area of our lives, especially as women. My hair will never look that good, why do I have wrinkles and she doesn't, I want to decorate my living room just like her, my kids will never behave like that, and on and on and on.

Do you see how much energy you're potentially wasting on pining after other people's lives? It's time to stop comparing and instead channel that energy and frustration into effecting change in your life. Do you want your living room to look different? Then change it. Are you unhappy with your hair? Try some new hairstyle ideas you find on Pinterest or save up and go get your hair done at the salon. Accept that you will never have her figure, but that doesn't give you an excuse to be lazy and out of shape.

Change the areas that you can change, focus on the areas that will have the largest impact on your life, and let go of the other areas!

Instead of being the person who is always wishing for something different than what you have, go out and be the person who is inspiring. Develop your own style, develop your own habits, develop strong discipline, and be the person that others look up to.

Practical Application

- Evaluate your goals and make sure they are based upon what is best for your family – not your inner need to do something just because someone else is doing it or told you to do it. Do what works for you!
- Sit down with pen and paper and write down every area in which you compared yourself to another person in the last week. Circle three different areas that are important to you and that you want to change for yourself, not for someone else.
- Brainstorm ways that you can change these three areas, but don't do a carbon copy of someone else's plan. Your own originality is important; don't ever trade that in.

Mega Project Assignment Step 17

Day 17! Do you realize that your Mega Project is almost finished? How exciting for you! You're so close to the finish line now, so don't give up! Think about how good you're going to feel when you're finally finished with this project! All of the sacrifices that you've made for the past 17 days will be worth it when you finish strong.

Day 18: Embrace Your Own Uniqueness

You can spend all of your life trying to measure up to someone else. You can fritter away hours of time wishing you had her hair or her figure or her energy or her gifts.

But you are not her, you are you.

You have unique gifts, talents, and abilities. You can improve upon what God has given you and you can wisely steward what He has given you. But you cannot change who He has created you to be.

So instead of living your life wishing you were someone else, embrace your own uniqueness. Don't feel guilty if you can't get up when she gets up, or decorate your home like she decorates hers, or fit into the size of jeans she does, or juggle all the activities and responsibilities she does.

Your life and goals are going to look different from others – and that is completely okay.

It's tempting to look at people we admire and consider our differences from them to be shortcomings. But don't for one minute think that just because you don't "measure up" to some other woman that you're inferior. You are an amazingly unique woman, created in the image of God with your own unique looks, talents, body, home, struggles, triumphs, laughs, and sorrows.

You don't really want to be some other woman, because you wouldn't just get the good – you'd get the ugly as well. And if you were a copy of another woman, the world would not have the pleasure of experiencing your uniqueness.

Stop focusing on mirroring another person's life and start focusing on developing your own strengths. If you start focusing on fully developing your own personal strengths (mental as well as physical) you'll be a force to reckon with in your own right!

To help you recognize your gifts, I really recommend purchasing and reading ***Now, Discover Your Strengths***, written by **Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton**. If you purchase the book brand-new, you also get a special code for a special, high-tech quiz that will identify your strengths.

Once you know your strengths, you can then work on developing them to their full potential. Be uniquely you! As has well been said, “You were born an original, don’t die a copy!”

Practical Application

- Ask yourself: “Am I doing the best I can with the energy, gifts, talents, and resources I have in the season of life I am in?” If so, then press on without guilt – even if your life and goals look completely different than someone else’s you know!
- Read **Now, Discover Your Strengths** and take the quiz to determine your strengths. Then make a list of ways that you will begin developing those strengths.

Mega Project Assignment Step 18

How can you use your strengths when you are working on your next Mega Project? Is leadership one of your strengths? Then enlist your kids to help you and use your skills to teach and train them in a new skill.

Day 19: Get It Done Early

I read a post on [Simple Mom](#) awhile back that rocked my world. It was by one of my favorite people, Mandi Ehman, and it was on “[The Secret of Success for a Work-At-Home Mom](#)”. Here’s a snippet:

“So what’s the key to success? Simply put: Get it done early. This principle applies to your home and family life as well as your business. Whenever possible, get it – whatever it may be – done early and eliminate the stress and frustration of being pulled in a million directions.

“Avoid the guilt of shushing your teething baby because of looming deadlines or groaning in frustration when the school nurse calls, or saying no – yet again – to a fun activity with your kids.”

Ever since reading this post, I’ve been consciously thinking about how implementing this principle would revolutionize my life – and cut down on a lot of stress! You see, I’ve always been a late person. I was born 17 days late and it seems I’ve been late ever since. Whether it’s getting to an appointment or getting an article done, I’m almost always running behind – usually just under the wire or late. Sometimes, really, really late.

In my lifetime, I’ve made a lot of excuses for my tardiness. But honestly? Almost all of them boil down to [procrastination](#), improper prioritization, and a lack of preplanning. Why complete a task now, when I can wait 30 more minutes and do it in a mad rush?

Instead of planning to leave 30 minutes before I need to be out the door, I wait until 30 minutes before I need to leave to take my shower, get everyone dressed, gather up all the things we need for the outing, and get everyone out the door.

Instead of looking at my calendar two or three weeks in advance, planning out articles I need to write, and writing them a week or two in advance, I often wait until the day they are due to even begin outlining them.

Knowing the problem is good, but that doesn’t fix anything. I actually have to make changes if I want to experience any benefits. So I’ve been resolving to not just recognize the problem but actually come up with a solution. At the very least, I have been working diligently in that direction!

I've been looking at my calendar days -- or even weeks! -- in advance, seeing what projects are coming up, breaking those projects down into bite-sized pieces, and then assigning those bite-sized pieces to specific days on my calendar. I've also been planning for the next day the night before: getting my purse and anything together to head out the door in the morning if we have an outing to go to or errands to run. And I've been planning to get places 30 minutes early, adopting the attitude that if I'm ready before I need to leave, I can always tackle a small project before heading out the door (Truth be told, I have yet to be ready much more than 5 minutes before I need to leave, but at least adopting this ready early versus late mentality is actually allowing me to consistently get places on time -- or even a few minutes early!)

Don't overwhelm yourself by trying to be on time for every event in the near future. Just focus on the next event. Decide what you need to do in order to be early for your next event, or your next work related project. And then do it. And then, do it with the next event.

One by one, you will begin to change your habits, and learn what it takes to be a person who finishes early, who shows up on time, and who can always be counted on to do what she says she is going to do.

This disciplinary habit is not just about your own personal habits; this goes much further and deeper. When you're a woman who can be counted on (before that commitment is made, remember, say "no" if you need to), you are building a reputation of integrity.

Practical Application

- Read Mandi's fantastic article, "[The Secret of Success for a Work-At-Home Mom](#)". Even if you're not a work-at-home mom or not even a mom, you'll find some great encouragement in it.
- Choose one area that you especially struggle with being behind in or running late for. Write down a simple plan for how you are going to stop procrastinating, start planning ahead, and get it done early. Come back and share your plan with us so we can be inspired!

Mega Project Assignment Step 19

Speaking of finishing early, how's the project coming? Are you on track to finish up by day 21? If you spend some extra time working on your project today, do you think you could go ahead and get it wrapped up today or tomorrow? Don't overwhelm yourself, or steal time away from another essential activity. But, if you have the available time, go ahead and work a bit longer today and see what you can accomplish.

Day 20: Do It Now

I recently read David Allen's book, **Getting Things Done**. In this book, he strongly encourages readers to immediately do any project that can be done in less than two minutes.

Instead of repeatedly thinking about that appointment you need to make, just pick up the phone and make the appointment. Rather than leaving an email in your inbox and looking at it multiple times, just answer it as soon as you see it.

Instead of procrastinating on little jobs or writing them down on your to-do list, just do the job and get it done. Or, for the people who really like to cross things off the to-do list (myself included), write it down, quickly go do it, and then come back and cross it off!

As I've applied this principle in my own life, I've been amazed! So much of the time, the little projects that I've put off for five days took me less than a minute to complete. And it felt so good to get it crossed off my list... finally!

As I mentioned earlier, laundry is an area I've long struggled with. Instead of spending all day feeling discouraged that I haven't gotten to the laundry yet, I've been working on setting the timer and getting it done now.

The same goes for so many other things. Rather than thinking, "I should call so-and-so," or, "I need to order such-and-such," just do it then.

Most of the time, it only takes a few minutes (or less!) and suddenly the task is no longer nagging you. You've freed up brain space and energy. Best of all, it's done!

Each time you clear brain space by getting a trivial task completed and off the list, you're making room for heavy-duty thought processes. Think about all of the problems you could solve, or all the ways you could let your creativity flow if you didn't have a dozen nibbling tasks torturing your brain.

Clear it all out, and do it as quickly as possible. You will be so happy that you did. This should be a daily process, not a once-a-week brain dump. Each morning when you get up, make a quick list of your tiny tasks, and then finish them as quickly as possible. At the end of the day, this checklist should be all crossed off.

Practical Application

- Set your timer for five minutes and write down as many two-minute tasks as possible. You should have at least 10. Now, set your timer for 20 minutes, and then go do all of them. Enjoy the satisfaction of crossing a whopping 10 items off of your list. You just accomplished more than most people accomplish all week. You are a discipline superstar! Now do it again tomorrow.

Mega Project Assignment Step 20

Take a look at the steps you have left to finish on your Mega Project. Are there any steps that you can do really quickly?

This may be a good technique for you to employ at the beginning of your next Mega Project. When you sit down to write out your step-by-step plan, quickly scan your list and knock out all of the 2-minute tasks. Just set your timer for 20 minutes and take care of the “quickies.”

Obviously, this technique won't work if you're chipping away at an incremental project, like sewing a dress. But if you are working on a more abstract project like cleaning out the shed, this technique will pay off big-time.

Day 21: Discipline Begets Discipline

Are you feeling overwhelmed as we near the end of this 21 Days to a More Disciplined Life Challenge? We've spent three weeks on one habit and you still have a mile long list of dozens upon dozens of other habits you want to incorporate into your life. On the surface, it can seem discouraging.

But don't lose heart! Just because you feel so far behind or so far from where you want to be, you can't ignore your progress. Look at how far you've come.

When I first started my own 21-Day journey, I set a goal to wake up early every day for 21 days. At the end of three weeks, I didn't have a perfect track record and there were one or two days I did sleep in a little past my goal wake-up time. But at the end of the 21 days, I was happy to realize that getting up early was becoming a true habit, not just a good idea or something I did for a few days in a row and then fell off the bandwagon again.

It wasn't easy. There were days when I really, really, really wanted to go back to sleep. But I made myself get up. There were many times when I came up with a long list of excuses rationalizing why it was okay for me to sleep in. But I made myself get up. And I not only did I start a habit, that habit spun off lots of little habits that benefit me and my family.

- ✓ Because I'm getting up earlier, I'm having more lengthy and meaningful time reading God's Word every morning.
- ✓ Because I'm getting up earlier, I'm finding time to exercise almost every single day.
- ✓ Because I'm getting up earlier, I'm jumpstarting my day and this has enabled me to get a lot more done and be more efficient.
- ✓ Because I'm getting up earlier, I'm getting a lot of stuff done before the children wake up. So by the time they wake up, I can give them my undivided attention and stay focused on mothering.
- ✓ Because I'm getting up earlier, I'm going to bed earlier. This has allowed me to get more consistent and restful sleep at night.

That's the beauty of intentionally working on developing discipline: discipline begets discipline. When I am disciplined in one area, that resolve spills over into other areas. Like I experienced with an earlier wake-up time, intentionally making one consistent habit change can slowly lead to amazing transformation in many areas of your life.

You've probably seen this in action in your own life before now. Have you noticed how, on the days when you put on your make-up, take the time to style your hair, wear earrings and pretty clothing, maybe even dab on some perfume, you get so much more done during the day? This is a sure-fire tactic for me. If I know that I have a full day, getting dressed for success is usually the key to the day.

Success builds on success. When you have a successful look, then you will act successful. You just expect it of yourself.

So stick with developing your one habit, don't give up, and keep with it even when you don't feel like it. One day soon, you may wake up and realize you've changed your whole life... beginning with one simple habit!

Practical Application

- Make a list of all the improvements and progress you've seen over the last 21 days. Don't dwell on the areas that still need some major work. Instead, be encouraged by the progress you've made.

Mega Project Assignment Step 21

You should complete your final day of your Mega Project today. How do you feel? Do you realize how awesome you are for taking a seemingly insurmountable goal and breaking it up into baby-steps, and then systematically conquering each step?

Conclusion: Taking the Next Step

Congratulations!

You made it to the end of the 21 Days to a More Disciplined Life Challenge!

While the days have flown by, hopefully your journey towards more self-discipline is just beginning.

You should see positive changes not only in the one habit you have been working on for the past 21 days, but in other areas of your life, as well. You're building a strong foundation with your new habits and this discipline will spill over into most other areas of your life.

If you feel like your first habit is strong, then it's time to choose another to tackle. I would encourage you to go through the 21 days again with the new habit. Re-read each chapter, tackle any of the projects you didn't get to, and keep challenging yourself.

Do this several times with several new habits over the next few months. If you're diligent, your new discipline habits will be firmly cemented into your mind, and you'll start to apply the principles without much thought in just about every area of your life.

Don't forget to celebrate your success over the last three weeks. You've worked hard and followed through on a big whopper of a project that had you shaking in your boots. Now it's done and off the table. That is an amazing accomplishment.

I hope your effort continues to pay off for months and years to come, and I also hope that you will continue to tackle one Mega Project every month or two. Think back on the time you spent daily on your project. How much time did you spend each day? Fifteen to 30 minutes is the maximum time commitment required. Find a way to continue to fit this into your new schedule.

Remember, you are not just nurturing discipline in your life so that you alone may benefit. Think about how your husband and children and/or friends and co-workers benefit as well. A woman who is purposeful in her activities, and who does not get sucked into time traps throughout the day, is more effective in all she does.

Press onward and upward! And please, let me know about any major discipline breakthroughs, or success stories that you have. I love to hear about positive changes in my readers' lives. They inspire me to continue moving forward as well.

Now, onward... together!

Mega Project Master To-Do List

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Day 6

Day 7

Day 8

Day 9

Day 10

Day 11

Day 12

Day 13

Day 14

Day 15

Day 16

Day 17

Day 18

Day 19

Day 20

Day 21

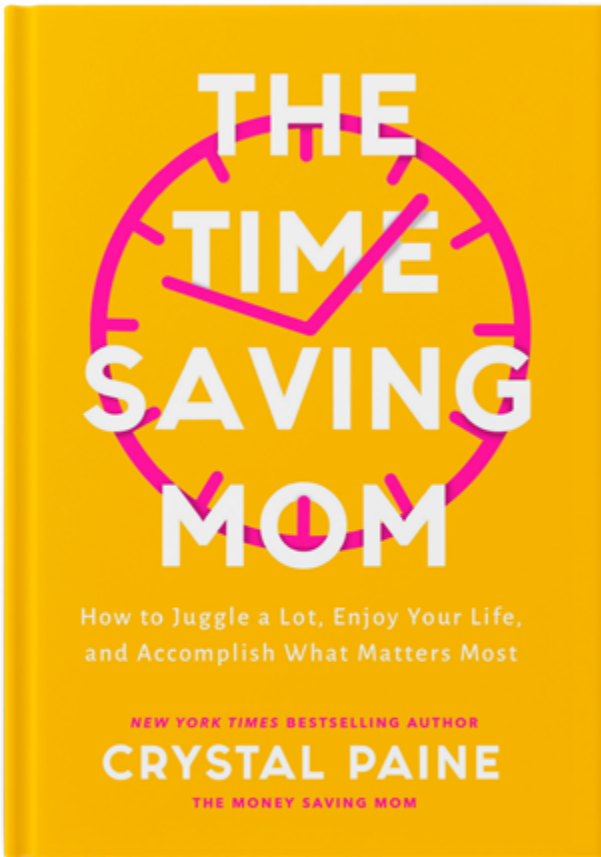
Motivational *Book* List

Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time, by Brian Tracy

168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think, by Laura Vanderkam

Today Matters: 12 Daily Practices to Guarantee Tomorrow's Success, by John C. Maxwell

Now, Discover Your Strengths, by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton



Time is short. Here's how to invest it in what matters most.

As a busy mom, pulled in many directions, you've felt it: There's too much to do, and not enough time to do it.

It seems like the only solution is to hustle harder. But there's a far better way to manage your time so that you can simplify and enjoy your life. Crystal Paine--mom of six, bestselling author, and entrepreneur--delivers a real-world, no-nonsense guide to keeping you sane and doing the things you love most.

In *The Time-Saving Mom*, Crystal takes you inside her days to help you:

- Adopt an easy-to-implement four-step system to organize and simplify your life
- Create morning and evening routines that set you up for success
- Learn time-saving hacks to help you find time for pursuing your personal passions, friendships, exercise, and better sleep
- Carve out sacred time for God and your family

You don't have to be a productivity queen to maximize your time. Instead, you can be a time-saving mom, investing in what matters most.

[GET YOUR COPY](#)



hey there!

EVER WISHED YOU HAD MORE TIME IN YOUR DAY?

I get it! I'm Crystal Paine, founder of MoneySavingMom.com, wife, mom of 6, special needs advocate, foster mom, author, and podcaster. Over the years, I've often wished I had more than 24 hours in my day to do all the things I want to do. But since there's no magic genie handing out extra hours, I've discovered some secrets for streamlining my life, investing my days in what matters most, and still finding time for rest and friendships.

How do I do it? Well, I'd love to share my best strategies with you in a quick email each week. You don't have to live life feeling so stressed and frazzled all the time!

let me show you how!

Oh and don't worry, the email I send will be super short... because I'm all about getting to the point to help you get more of what matters done!

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