

# How to Be Committed to Your Goals Even During Hard Times

It's hard to learn how to be committed to your goals, especially during a crisis. Here are 17 tips to help you stay on track.

Learning how to be committed to your goals is as important as setting them. Anyone can set a goal—like losing weight, getting a new job, or beating a world record in hula hooping—but what happens when you reach a plateau? What if you face a family emergency that disrupts your lifestyle? What happens if economic circumstances force you to into a difficult situation?

Remaining committed to your goals can be challenging during these exceptionally difficult times, but with the right strategies, you can stay persistent—and ultimately achieve more.

Staying committed to your goals isn't just about brute forcing your way to the end of the path through willpower. Instead, it's better to focus on smaller, actionable steps to help you remain committed in the face of adversity.

## 1. Find New Commitment Devices

A commitment device is a psychological concept devised by authors Stephen J. Dubner and Steven Levitt<sup>[1]</sup>. Essentially, a commitment device is a mechanism or measurable consequence that encourages you to stay committed to a behavior. It's a way to lock yourself in to a course of action you might be unwilling to do otherwise.

For example, let's say your goal is to lose weight, but you're always reluctant to step on the treadmill. A commitment device could be watching an episode of your favorite TV show while working out; if you're motivated to watch the next episode, you have to exercise.

Get creative, and find a commitment device that ties into the activities that take you closer to your goal.

## 2. Recalculate Your Goal

You may be reading this guide hoping for advice on how to achieve your original goal, even in the face of an oppressive challenge. Unfortunately, this isn't always possible. That said, it is possible to continue making realistic progress.

For example, let's say your goal is to run a marathon this summer, but you've suffered a significant knee injury and your doctor has advised you to rest for a month. Achieving your original goal may no longer be possible, so consider recalculating that goal<sup>[2]</sup>; can you run a half marathon by fall instead?

### **3. Take a Break**

Similarly, you may consider taking a break—as long as you do this with the right attitude. More than 80 percent of people give up on their New Year's resolution by the second week of February<sup>[3]</sup>, and when they do, they feel horrible. They feel like failures, like they weren't strong enough to follow through on their mission.

However, if you're facing significant adversity that may be reduced or absent in the future, there's no shame in temporarily walking away from your main goal. Don't see it as a failure; see it as saving your energy up for a better attempt in the future.

If you can, set a date or time when you'll return to your goal, or pledge to return once circumstances have changed.

### **4. Establish a New Routine**

Goal progress is almost always a byproduct of our routines. It is the daily habits we have, accumulating over time, that result in progress (or lack thereof). If you're facing new, difficult circumstances, you'll need a new routine to overcome it.

For example, can you wake up an hour earlier to squeeze in a study session before work? Can you take a long lunch to spend time honing your skills?

Changing your routine can be tough, but it's worth the effort.

### **5. Build Your Inspiration**

What inspires you to reach this goal? Finding new sources of inspiration and reinvigorating old ones can bring you the new energy and renewed focus you need to power through a tough situation.

For example, do you have professional role models who have achieved this goal in the past? Listen to talks they've given, or post photos of them on a motivational board.

Are there movies, songs, or books that particularly inspire you? Turn to them more frequently.

### **6. Keep Your Goals Visible**

Along with this, it's a good idea to keep your goals visible. Being reminded of your goal on a regular basis can help you remain focused on its completion and discourage you from engaging in counterproductive activities.

As a simple example, you can write your goal down on an index card and place it somewhere you walk past frequently throughout the day.

### **7. Get Social Support**

Social support is strongly linked to goal achievement, in part because other people can help you stay accountable for your goals. If you tell a friend you're quitting smoking, and you light up a cigarette, they'll be there to remind

you of your original vision.

However, social support goes beyond that; depending on what difficult circumstances you face, social support can help you resolve them. For example, a good friend can help you manage a difficult move or get through a traumatic event.

And even if you're not in need of a specific type of help, general social support can improve your mental and physical health<sup>[4]</sup>, improving your ability to achieve any kind of goal.

## **8. Remember Why You Got Started**

Why did you set this goal in the first place? If you're losing motivation or momentum, take a moment to reflect on your original motivations. How were you feeling? What was happening around you?

Reconnecting with your former self can be immeasurably motivating.

## **9. Focus on the Big Picture**

Next, try thinking about your goal in the context of the bigger picture. Your goal is likely a specific subset of a broader family of achievements; for example, your main goal might be to stop drinking alcohol, but reducing your intake down to three drinks per week is still going to result in an improvement in your health.

Achieving a body weight of 160 pounds may be ideal, but any amount of exercise and healthier food choices will be beneficial for you. Specific goals are highly motivating, but in some situations, it's better to have a more generalized outlook.

## **10. Pay Attention to How You're Spending Your Time**

Time management skills play a massive role in the achievement of any goal. No matter what, you'll need to spend time making progress, whether that's by reading, exercising, or putting in genuine work hours. If you're spending that time on unproductive tasks or on things that reduce your focus or energy, it's going to hurt your potential.

The best way to approach this is by measuring how you spend your time. How many hours per day do you spend scrolling through a social media app? How many do you spend on binge watching a guilty pleasure show? How many emails do you get every day?

These are areas of time expenditure that can easily be reduced.

## **11. Eliminate One Bad Habit**

Speaking of reductions, if you're struggling to achieve a goal, try to focus your energy on eliminating just one bad habit. It doesn't have to be related to your main goal; the point is to do something positive for yourself and feel more confident about your abilities.

If you're able to cut out something like biting your nails or stress eating cookies at 2 am, you'll feel incredible—and you can channel that energy into your next goal.

## **12. Cultivate More Energy**

Many people prematurely stop pursuing their goals because they simply don't have the energy. They're exhausted in the face of adversity and can't find the energy to spend on their bigger goals. You can combat this by cultivating more energy however you can.

Eating nutritious meals, exercising, drinking caffeinated beverages (in moderation), talking to loved ones, petting animals, taking power naps, and doing small things that you love can all boost your energy levels in different ways.

## **13. Work in Smaller Time Intervals**

If you're feeling overwhelmed, try to break your goal-related work into smaller, more manageable time intervals. Instead of worrying about whether you can adhere to your month-long workout plan, focus on having one good session at the gym.

Instead of focusing on getting your master's degree, focus on taking one class, or even completing one assignment for that class. Instead of trying to get an entire project done in one day, just do 15 minutes of work on it.

You'll feel a greater sense of achievement, which could build momentum you can use in pursuit of your main goal<sup>[5]</sup>.

## **14. Focus on Small Victories**

Similarly, you can focus on achieving and celebrating small victories. What steps have you taken to get closer to your goal? Consider them, and feel good about them. How have you improved in the past week? What are you grateful for?

Expressing gratitude in any way is proven to make you feel happier<sup>[6]</sup>, so make the time to do it, whether you write about it in a journal or just talk to yourself about it.

## **15. Work on an Adjacent Goal**

If you can't make progress on your core goal, consider working on an adjacent goal. For example, let's say your goal is to write a novel. Can you instead work on an outline, or develop a character sheet? Can you work on a short story that will help you hone your narrative writing skills?

In many cases, these smaller, related goals are more manageable, and can make you feel like you're taking a break from your main focus.

However, at the same time, you'll be developing meaningful skills and making progress in a way that matters.

## 16. Build up Your Positive Self-Talk.

Your subjective feelings of positivity and happiness will affect your ability and willingness to work toward a goal. Fortunately, scientific research has demonstrated that it's possible to increase your happiness<sup>[7]</sup>, even if you can't change your environmental circumstances.

One habit that can crush your motivation and self-esteem is negative self-talk; occasionally, we all practice negative self-talk with internal dialogue like, 'I can't believe I messed this up,' or 'I'm never going to get back on track.'

Remain aware of these messages when they run through your head, and replace them with positive ones, like 'I learned a lot from this, and I'll do better next time,' or 'In a week, this setback won't even matter.'

## 17. Identify and Neutralize the Source of Your Challenge

You're facing especially challenging circumstances, so one of the best things you can do is eliminate the source of that difficulty—which may be easier said than done.

For example, are you finding it hard to work on your academic goals because of your excessive work schedule? Consider taking a reduction in hours or delegating some of your responsibilities. Are you unable to resist temptation because your friends have similar bad habits? Consider establishing some distance, and socializing with a new group of people.

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