

KEEP THE FIRE BURNING

7 PILLARS TO FINISH WHAT YOU START

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WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This book is written for people who are always getting inspired, or motivated, to do things; but never follow through.

It's about tackling the “*grinding*” phase of adopting new habits – the phase where inspiration is gone and the danger of losing the new habit is extremely high.

I want to help you find out how to “grind” – how to make your habit stick.

The intention here isn't to give you a formula to replicate. Tools and formulas go out of date.

Instead, I want to share the knowledge to create something that works for you... after all, something is always more powerful if it comes from *within*.

INTRODUCTION

Does this sound familiar?

You get really excited about a change you're about to make in your life. You either read something inspiring, watched something amazing or someone close to you spoke to you in a way that got you excited.

Armed with this initial inspiration, you immediately get to work on setting yourself up for success. You gather all the knowledge, materials and support you'll need to make it work. You even start telling other people about the big change happening in your life... and you can't wait for them to see the results.

The first week of your big change rolls around and things are moving along great. Everything is perfect, you've been posting status updates on social media sites and you're excited to begin week two.

Second week - same thing.

By week three, you're convinced you have this in the bag. Nothing can stop you from meeting your newly inspired goal. You feel the excitement in your bones because it's *going* to happen.

Then a small snag hits; you get busy with work, the good intentions you had over your holidays fall to the wayside, or you may get sick and are bed ridden for a week. Whatever the case, it's a minor setback, but nothing you can't handle. You've been going strong this long, there's no way you can stop the goal now. I mean, you're even beginning to enjoy the results of your actions!

At the end of the second month, you realize you've kind of abandoned your inspired change and feel guilty... but don't worry, it's not too late to start up and get back on track. After all, you convinced yourself you could do it, and it was working. It's just your circumstances right now that aren't ideal.

You'll try again later. There's still time.

A year later, the cycle repeats.

...Repeat ad nauseum.

IF IT SOUNDS FAMILIAR...

I know the cycle well because I've been there many times.

As a student, I promised myself every year that I wasn't going to procrastinate. That *this* was the year I was going to stay focused. Come exam time, year after year, I was cramming the night before to "absorb" as much knowledge as possible. During essay rush, I could build a fort out of the energy drinks decorating my kitchen table as I prepped for many all-nighters.

My parents had me in sports until my late teenage years. I was pretty kick-ass at martial arts (couldn't resist the pun) and I did well in competitive swimming. But when I gave up competition, I got out of shape pretty fast. I tried running, yoga, Tae-Bo, Insanity, walking and gym memberships to get back to a healthy lifestyle. Surprisingly, Insanity was the longest-lasting of all of those (five weeks).

Since I was eleven years old, I wanted to be a writer. Not only did I love reading; but also as an assignment for my grade six teacher, I wrote a poem about the environment. Writers spend their lives chasing something called "the muse." At eleven, I had touched it. I can't explain it any way other than it felt like I reached out to the muse and allowed it to pencil the words on paper for me. My teacher got the poem published. I was hooked.

I loved writing stories. Here was the problem - I was a terrible writer and had horrible work habits. That one incident in grade six convinced me I needed to write; but I was unwilling to do the one thing all writers must do: write. I told myself for FIFTEEN years that I was going to sit down and write. While my skill improved... my motivation did not.

There were many personal changes and projects I wanted to accomplish. I got very good at getting excited and inspired; but horrible at following through.

THE BIG BREAKTHROUGH

One day, I got sick of not committing. Something *snapped* and major changes began to happen. I suddenly became *really good* at following through: achieving laser-like focus and accomplishing the small tidbits of inspiration that had previously gone to the wayside in my brain.

People were always asking me how I did it. Those close to me saw the transition and were dumbfounded.

I'd like to say it was a result of finding some super-secret formula that instantly gave me the results I wanted. Similar to the muse I met in grade six... but more magical.

Instead, it all came down to this one simple concept: **Many small steps taken over a long period of time.**

Sound boring?

When you keep the fire burning, it's not.

WHAT TO EXPECT

This guide isn't about teaching you a system that can instantly be implemented in some sort of "plug and play" fashion. Every person is unique... and true motivation only comes from within.

Also, there's no "one proper way" to make things happen. I can think of three marathon runners who all had different starts to their running life: one went to receive running lessons and worked her way through their training classes; the second did a home program and followed through; the third just went out to the streets and kept trying to run until he could.

The important point isn't *how* to get started; but *what* keeps you going until the end.

... If there's such a thing as "the end." Once the fire gets lit I guarantee you won't want to extinguish it.

My goal is to give you *pillars* you can set up to create the circumstances in your own life to keep your *own* fire going.

I'll try not to be long-winded about it either.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED

These seven pillars come as a result of the many mistakes I've made over the years in trying to establish new habits in my life.

I experienced failure after failure until the day I woke up and realized I achieved many of the things I set out to do years ago. It's finally taken me until today – through retrospect – to realize what the common threads were among the habits that stuck.

...And that's the learning I've distilled into this guide.

As I said, this isn't some formula to replicate and plug into your own life. I intentionally kept this guide slightly vague so you can use what you want from here and make it your own. Consider it a guide you can use to help you with your personal problem areas.

You may decide you only need one of the pillars, or you may decide you need all seven. Whatever the case, implement it and see what happens. If it's not working, try a different approach.

Remember, there is no secret.

It isn't necessary to tackle the pillars in order. Use whatever you need for the moment and slowly add others. You might also notice some of the pillars overlap: for instance, pillar 3 and 4.

You can also do this on your own or with support, or with a group. Surrounding yourself with a group of people might result in all of you using the same method. That's not a bad thing because you'll be able to help each other out.

I can't tell you whether this is going to be easy or hard. Some things in life come easy to people and they have no problem staying committed. Other times, it comes with great difficulty; but people will still stay the course because they know the rewards are worth it.

I've never had a problem with writer's block. I've had issues with my technical skills, procrastination, distractions and laziness - but never writer's block. I consider myself fortunate I can sit down and have the words flow out from the ether. For me, writing is both easy and hard. It's easy for me to come up with ideas and write about them; but difficult to find the discipline to actually sit down and do it.

That's what I really want to convey here. It's easy to get excited about something... but difficult to commit to it.

Developing a passion for your work doesn't fall out of the sky and hit you one day. It's a slow, careful progression of many small steps and solid pillars put in place to keep you on course. The changes happen so gradually, you won't even notice until somebody points it out to you (and that's really gratifying when someone else points out that you've accomplished it!).

You need to constantly find ways to push yourself, get excited and move forward. That's what this guide will help you do.

If all else fails, start again.



PILLAR 1

THERE IS NO SECRET

Repeat after me, "there is no secret."

There is no one perfect way to accomplish exactly what you want in the minimal amount of time you're looking to make it happen.

Forget surfing the landing pages of product sites, promising you the world on a silver platter. You know which ones I'm talking about - people who claim to have a method that will solve all of your problems.

Don't get me wrong: some of them may have something good to offer. I can assure you; however, they're not the first person to think of it. They just know how to package it nicely.

You may even walk away disappointed when you subscribe to some "magic weight loss" only to discover the advice is the same you've been reading everywhere else: eat healthy and exercise. I mean, here you were looking for the "secret food" and "special exercises" to turn you into a powerhouse, and all you've walked away with is the same advice everyone has been telling you.

There may be some methods to help you on your path... but nothing out there will solve your problems for you.

You still need to execute the plan.

You (and only you) are going to have to put in the work.

Stop looking for secrets, because there are few left in the world.

A person is camping in a desert at sunset. A tent is set up in the background, and a car is parked to the right. A campfire is burning in the foreground. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and purple.

PILLAR 2

SELF MOTIVATION

This pillar is crucial.

Have you ever seen the movie *Inception*?

The movie revolves around a team of people who have been hired to plant an idea in someone's head, while convincing him it was his idea from the beginning.

This is difficult... because when someone gives you an idea, it may get stuck in your head, but you know it wasn't *your* original idea.

To have success in your life, on your own terms, the idea has to be **yours**.

When you hear the story of a self-published author who just sold 50,000 books, you may get inspired to self-publish your own work. Or, when you talk to a friend who took up running and is now doing marathons and espousing on the joy of running, you may get an itch to start running too.

However, in both cases, you're riding on someone else's high. It won't be as satisfying as accomplishing a goal you come up with yourself... and trust me, you won't be nearly as successful.

You have to make the decision about *what you want* in life... and ensure it's your own.

I remember trying to quit smoking. The first few times were because people kept telling me I should quit, and I agreed with them. I failed on those attempts.

Then I told myself I wanted it to happen. It needed to happen, and I would work hard to make sure it would come to fruition. That's when a friend of mine made me a bet: if I could go one year without touching a cigarette, he would personally satisfy my random 2am Big Mac cravings. If not, I would have to drive down to the US and buy him a carton of Marlboro's.

7 years later, I still haven't touched one.

By making a bet, my friend suddenly put my ego on the line. Now, it wasn't about the theoretical reasons why I should stop... It was personal. I didn't want to lose.

Whatever it is you're about to embark on, make sure it's on your terms.

Do what interests you, not what sounds good or what other people have accomplished.

A person is sitting in a campsite at dusk. There is a tent, a campfire, and a white SUV in the background. The sky is dark with some clouds.

PILLAR 3

PICK A PATH

This is where things start to get tricky.

If you were to inherit \$10,000,000, how would you invest it?

You can go ahead and do a search right now to see what the experts say.

It's fine... go ahead. I'll wait patiently here while you do it.

Depending on how much time you took, you may have found some overlapping material. I'm certain you found a ton of people's opinions on *what they would do*; but I doubt you found a consensus.

Remember Pillar 1 and the idea there isn't a magical solution?

Before you start, you should do some research on what you're trying to achieve. The best type of research is to speak with people who have accomplished what you want, and get their advice.

Sometimes personal mentoring isn't an option, and that's okay. Thanks to the Internet, many people have taken to the blogosphere to post about their experiences and to offer their advice.

The big trap is to spend all your time researching different paths to take: getting so overwhelmed with what's out there and the variety of different paths that you wind up picking none and doing nothing.

This is known as analysis paralysis.

Even worse is when you're *already* taking a path and decide to change what you're doing because you think someone else is doing it more “properly.”

I know it's tempting to be doing something that works, read about a "better" method and want to switch over to "give it a try."

Don't do it.

You will end up blaming the *method* for not getting to your destination. Instead, the problem is you haven't *committed* to a path.

The only time you should ever consider switching up what you're doing is when you're doing something that works and you want to upgrade.

Take, for instance, learning how to cook.

When you first start in the kitchen, it's foolish to think buying an \$800 knife set, along with \$2000 worth of appliances, will make you a great chef. You start your cooking experience by buying the basics of what you need and slowly, over time, upgrading to accommodate your growing needs. You also start with easy recipes and work your way up to the complicated dishes.

Pick a path and walk down it.

Keep in mind no matter what kind of shoes you have on your feet; it's going to be a long journey.

But gosh, is it ever going to be worth it!



PILLAR 4

SURROUND YOURSELF

If you could only implement one pillar, this one is it.

When I first started performing magic, my only companions were the books I picked up at the public library. I didn't know any magicians in my area... and as a result, my magic didn't go far.

At 19, I decided to hit the road and do some missionary work. I was fortunate to meet four other magicians in the organization, including one who mentored me. He began teaching me the sleights, the routines and the nuances that I had been craving to learn since I first watched a David Copperfield special. Being on the road with another magician also allowed me to practice, get critiqued and share ideas.

After moving to a bigger city, the first people I connected with were other magicians. We formed a tight circle of both magic and friendship. My magic skills skyrocketed. As a result of constantly hanging out with other magicians, I now have routines that are uniquely mine (or should I say

'ours'). I have constant opportunities for bookings and a love for magic that keeps me inspired.

You'll never stay inspired if you don't have other people to feed your fire.

It's necessary to have other people who can relate to you, who understand what you're talking about and who share their own progress with you. More importantly, when you surround yourself with other people who share your passion, you will be held accountable.

With other people to support you and encourage you, the excuses you normally use for bowing out of your commitments will seem irrelevant... and dare I say won't be accepted by the group.

Being able to constantly feed off each other is a tremendous motivator to staying the course.

Does it mean everything will always be sunshine and roses? Of course not.

You're still going to be facing some inner battles. You will still have to fight inner demons. It's still going to be a grind to get to where you want to go.

The difference is, you won't be fighting the demons inside alone.

A Note on Online Communities

While online communities can be great, they may not always be a practical solution. Having been a part of many (some of which were paid) and having started a few, I've discovered a few things:

1. You can't force a community. People will join, get excited for a few weeks, and then stop.
2. It's difficult to keep up with everybody in that community. Cliques will form and you'll find yourself making connections to a few people.

3. People act differently online than they do in real life. It's indisputable. Online communities can be useful; but in many ways they can't replace the power of a personal community of like-minded people.

I did have a really good experience with one online community and as a direct result, moved cities for schooling. I also became good real-life friends with some of the members from it.

What you want to look for in a community is how long it's been running and how active it is *currently*. If it's been running a while and people are still posting up a storm, sharing information and giving more than they take, go for it. Basically, if you get value from it, go for it.

Otherwise, you may not find what you're looking for.



PILLAR 5

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

I want to take a second to talk about goals.

Goals are often the pillar of the self-help community and the positive thinking, motivational speakers. The advice typically boils down to this:

Have goals.

Write them down.

Achieve success.

This is followed by examples of people who have written down goals and managed to achieve tremendous amount of *financial* success in their lives. Almost always, you'll hear about the Harvard/Yale study where the 3% of students who wrote down their goals managed greater financial success than the other 97% combined.

Sounds great, except it's not true.

There is no such study.

Don't let that depress you. I find it more depressing to hear of this "study," try it... and have nothing happen at all. The depression then turns into a

downward spiral of oblivion because you start to think you did something wrong or the universe conspired against you.

This isn't to say we shouldn't have goals, or that we shouldn't write them down. It's still possible to achieve what you want: we just need to reframe what we mean by "goals."

Think of a mall map. There's usually an asterisk or some kind of graphic to signify where you are. Once you get an idea of where you are right now and where you want to go, it's just a matter of following those directions.

David Allen talks about this in *Getting Things Done* as "taking the next actionable step." You should always be **framing your direction on the next actionable step** in the process. Actionable steps are tangible, real... and not some theoretical idea you hope to "get at some day."

If your goal is to become a runner, and you've laid out a plan to make it happen, your focus should shift from "I want to be a runner," to "On this day, at this time, I will go for a run." Or perhaps take it a step back and say, "I need to buy a pair of running shoes." Or heck, start with "I need to learn to tie my shoes."

If the next actionable step requires you to wait (e.g. you pitched an agent with your writing, applied to grad school, planted a tomato seed and watered it), use the down time to get yourself prepared for the next step. Or look at future steps and see if you can start working ahead on any of them. Don't let your momentum stall: keep giving the fire fuel.

When I pitch someone with my magic show and they tell me they need to get approval (as is common with many businesses who are spending money at events), I've started preparing my correspondence for both a yes and a no.

Keep your focus on the next actionable step.

The background image shows a person sitting in a tent in a desert-like environment at dusk. A campfire is burning in the foreground, and a white van is parked to the right. The sky is dark with some clouds.

PILLAR 6

SMALL STEPS

It's time to make another movie reference.

The movie *Contact* is based on the Carl Sagan book where humanity gets contacted by aliens. The first baby step the aliens ask of the humans is to construct a transportation device that will whisk someone across the galaxy.

No one but the traveler gets to see the experience, and humanity will need to wait before taking another step for further contact. It's a pretty giant step for humanity, but in the grand scheme of being contacted by aliens, it's only the first.

What does this have to do with anything?

The temptation when starting something new is to jump from Zero to Master in the shortest span of time possible; or with the least effort possible. This is a horrible mentality.

All big changes happen with many small steps over a long period of time.

My wife got me to eat healthy by gradually increasing the portion size of vegetables and decreasing the amount of junk food in our house. It was so subtle and small, I didn't even notice until nine months later when I realized I lost weight and was feeling healthy.

David Copperfield, one of magic's greatest illusionists, will spend two years developing a magic routine before putting it in his show. He starts with the initial prototype, and then makes tweaks until it fits his style. After, he'll randomly put it in a show to see how it plays with an audience. Based on the audience reaction, he'll go back to tweaking elements until it's ready to go prime time.

I remember speaking with one author who is now about to release his fourth published book. He told me, "People are always looking for shortcuts, but there are none. None that I know of, anyway."

The benefit of taking small steps is the increased chance of what I call "*stickiness*." **Whatever it is you're trying to accomplish will have a better chance of *sticking* if you take it slow and consistent.**

How slow and how small?

Slow and small enough that it becomes a habit.

For those wanting to get into writing, it could be as simple as writing a few sentences a day. My suggestion is to go online and write a review of a product or place every morning. Doing so accomplishes a few things:

1. It gets you practicing your writing in public
2. You're talking about something you know about
3. What you write will be helpful to other people

Eventually, you can veer off into writing something else once you establish the habit of daily writing.

If you want to start working out, keep making small steps with your training. It could be as simple as, "I want to be able to do 50 push-ups." Every day, do a few push-ups and push yourself just a little bit further until you can hit 50.

You want to push yourself just enough that you'll need to work for it, but not so hard that it's impossible for you right now. Anything less and you'll become stagnant.

The fact I have six writing projects on the go didn't come from waking up one day and to find them delivered on my doorstep. They are the end result of years of practicing and connecting with other people.

Success at achieving goals doesn't fall in your lap... the fire won't light itself.

You need to plan for the long term.



PILLAR 7

KEEP IT EXCITING

While I can't promise that working towards your goal will be exciting every day (it won't), people should be able to *feel* your excitement when they talk with you.

During my Masters program, I would often sit down with one of the retiring professors. We enjoyed each other's company and I was one of the very few graduate students to get along with him.

One day, he looked at me and asked, "Are you going to continue in Academia?"

I told him, "Honestly, I don't think my heart is into it."

He smiled at me. "Good, I know. I could tell you don't like this garbage. So why aren't you a magician?"

I looked at him funny. "Excuse me?"

"Every time you ever mention magic, or your career in magic, you light up and get really excited. You should stick with the magic!"

I was stunned.

I was at a point where I was thinking of quitting magic. It was becoming tiring between work, school and my relationship to keep up. In that moment, he made me realize I loved magic more than I believed.

No, I don't wake up every day shouting: "I LOVE MAGIC! I LOVE WRITING!" But, I still get excited about what I can do with it. I still get excited about ideas running around in my head.

There are days when both my passions feel like a real grind... and this is coming from someone with years of experience as an automotive assembly line worker. There are times when I ask myself whether I should just stop already.

However, I can never give myself a good enough excuse to quit, and nobody around me will ever let me stop (ahem, Pillar 4).

Likewise, there should be some excitement in the things *you* do.

Get the excitement level up again by reading about other people in your chosen field, watching documentaries or videos, talking to others, or simply reminding yourself *why you got into this in the first place*.

If the original idea doesn't excite you, there's a strong possibility it's not going to last. Or, it might last, but will feel like a complete grind every day you do it. And you don't want that!

If you've followed through on setting up the pillars here, there shouldn't be a problem in getting your excitement continuously renewed.

Part of the excitement also comes from your motivation.

Whatever your motivation may be, make sure it's strong enough to sustain you during the dry times.

Keep it exciting, even if what you're doing feels mundane.

RUNNING INTO OBSTACLES

What happens when you take a break?

It could be anything from going on a vacation, a busy time at work, visiting family, or a plethora of other interruptions to your routine. In your head, you imagine ways you can make it work while you're away from the usual routine.

Unfortunately, reality doesn't always play out what we have in our head.

It never works exactly the way we want, or in any way we want for that matter, and when we return to our routine, we find it's been disrupted. We tell ourselves we'll get back to it soon. We did such a great job of doing it before we left, it'll be easy to get back in the swing of things.

A few days turns into a few weeks. Months later, you shrug your shoulders and blame the interruption.

I found two ways to approach this problem.

1. If you're going on vacation, or visiting people, and you have the ability to keep your goal up (eating well on vacation, for example) make sure to call ahead and let people know what you're up to and what resources you'll need. Give a heads up and turn the people you're visiting into your allies in encouraging you to keep pushing through the grind.
2. If you're stepping away from goal for a vacation, don't just take a break from what you're working on. Take a break from *everything*. If you completely shut your body down and let it know it's in complete rest mode, you can do a full reset when you return... and be more successful at starting up again. This is the more difficult of the two options, but it does have its benefits.

If you're doing something for your health (eating better, running, quitting smoking, etc.), go with option 1. If you're on the brink of designing a space ship that flies faster than the speed of light, or some other project related activities, take option 2.

Whatever the case, always anticipate the times that are going to be troublesome. Even if you don't plan on going away, you can guarantee there will be interruptions at home. Something unexpected will always crop up and you have to be prepared to roll with what happens. Mentally prepare for this and come up with a contingency plan.

You can't always anticipate interruptions to your routine, but you can shake off the element of surprise so the interruption doesn't put the fire out.

It's idealistic to convince yourself to not start anything new until "the time is right." That *never* happens - ever. Even retirement isn't necessarily the best time to start something new. You can't anticipate what your life is going to be like at that point... unless you setup your retirement to be dedicated to something. If that were the case, you wouldn't be reading this anyway. You're already doing it.

You're not doing yourself any favours by waiting for the perfect time. Start NOW!

When I started doing magic shows, I didn't have a car, knew only a few routines and was performing in all sorts of situations. I could tell you some of the horror stories from shows; but that's not the scope of this guide.

After performing for a few years, I learned how to setup and cope with any situation. I knew what to anticipate at each event, what to demand from people who booked me and what routines played well with different audiences. I also learned new magic routines based on what works for me in my shows and what can be adapted to my style.

Through performing shows, I was able to setup the ideal conditions wherever I went.

If I waited until I had the "perfect show" and the "perfect audience" in an "ideal theatre," I would still be sitting in my living room playing with magic routines and imagining what it would be like to perform in front of a crowd.

I'm not suggesting you go out looking for the worst possible conditions and worst possible timing for things to happen. Rather, just *go for it and learn how to work around any situation.*

As the quote goes:

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now."

CONCLUSION

That's it!

Well, easier said than done, but that's the point - *it's about doing*.

It's easy to get inspired and feel fired up, but incredibly difficult to *sustain* the fire. You need to strike a balance between drive and discipline. When your drive and inspiration fail, discipline needs to take over. When your discipline starts to feel like a grind, you need to find the drive again.

You must be constantly alternating between the two.

We already know what needs to get done to achieve our results. There are no (or very few) secrets left. There's bad research and shady marketing, but no secrets. What you need to know is already out there and easily accessible.

You just need to keep asking yourself the question, "**What do I need to keep doing in order to get the results I want?**"

My hope is these pillars will provide some guidance on how to go about accomplishing that very task.

There is no follow-up document, book to buy or course to opt-in. Anything further, in my opinion, would be nothing but filler material you can easily find elsewhere. I want to give you the foundation so you can create something that works with you.

Please, keep doing what works, stay the course and find encouragement wherever you can.

If you want, drop me a line at vito@vitomichienzi.com and let me know what you're up to. I'll do my best to provide extra encouragement.

Here's to your on-going success!