

LEAD

## How to Kick Old Habits and Improve Discipline

96% of people fail to achieve their stated goals. Want to become one of the 4% who do?



By [Entrepreneurs' Organization](#) [@EntrepreneurOrg](#)



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Andy Bailey, an [Entrepreneurs' Organization \(EO\)](#) member in Nashville, is an author, CEO and head coach of business coaching firm [Petra Coach](#), who serves in an advisory role on the Gazelles Council, leaders of the Scale Up movement. We asked Andy why self-discipline is such an important element of business execution and success. Here's what he shared:

When I was building NationLink Wireless, I attended the [Birthing Of Giants](#) entrepreneurship program—based on [Verne Harnish's](#) book *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits*—at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I vividly remember this comment from an instructor:

**"Eighty-five percent of you will leave here and do nothing. Fifteen percent of you will do something, and of that small group, only four percent of you will do everything."**

That's what I call the "execution breakdown," because 96 percent of people fail to complete their goals and stick to their priorities. Pretty scary number, huh?

For many companies, the difference between success and failure often can be traced to the level of self-discipline among key players. Leaders who practice self-control and [a commitment to get the job done](#) move a company forward, while those who don't risk the business's well-being.

Fortunately, self-discipline is a personality trait that can be learned. That's one reason that fellow entrepreneur and author [Gregg Thompson](#) believes that great leaders in business or life aren't born—they're made. They are simply more [committed to becoming better each day](#) and contributing to the growth and development of their colleagues and organization. Will Smith said it well in his [inspirational video](#), "At the center of bringing any dream into fruition is self-discipline."

Here are four ways to change old habits and improve your discipline:

### **1. Get out of your comfort zone.**

The first step in changing habits is making that initial leap out of the nest into the process of improvement. Even if you start small and work your way up—the recommended strategy—it'll take a bit of discomfort and willpower to get going.

It's not easy, so that's why you need a trusted advisor to help you, whether that's a business coach, personal trainer or significant other. Get someone who not only will provide support and guidance, but also push you and hold you accountable. With their guidance, you can start making a plan for success.

### **2. Set priorities and identify potential roadblocks.**

There's an old saying in business: "Plan your work and work your plan." The key to effective planning is identifying priorities and tasks that are required to achieve [company goals](#). You want goals to be S.M.A.R.T.—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely.

Businesses get into trouble when they attempt to do too much instead of narrowing their focus to what's really important to thrive. I recommend setting three to five priorities to avoid spreading anyone too thin—and make sure the priorities support the company's monthly, quarterly, one-year, five-year and 10-year goals. That goes for individual priorities as well.

Also, identify potential obstacles that may prevent you from completing tasks. They can be anything from small, daily interruptions to serious issues that need addressing. For the little things that are in your control, set aside time to close your office door and focus on the task at hand; [90-minute blocks](#) work best in my experience. For more substantial roadblocks, think about approaching the task differently to avoid triggering bad habits. For example, if you habitually procrastinate on large, looming projects because you don't know where to start, break it down into manageable steps. There will always be complications and hiccups, but advance planning minimizes their impact on your productivity.

### **3. Measure progress toward your goals.**

Successful execution is the direct result of completing many small activities over a period of time. Every time you complete one of those tasks, check it off a list, so you can see what's done and what's left to do. My clients use a web-based software application that tracks tasks and measures individual and group successes for the whole company to see. It's a great reminder of what needs to be done to keep the company moving in the right direction.

### **4. Just do it.**

Yes, that's Nike's slogan, and it should be ingrained in the psyche of every entrepreneur. One of the quickest ways businesses lose momentum and trust is

by not following through on commitments. Don't promise unless you are sure you can deliver.

Set hard deadlines: The urgency to meet deadlines is a great motivator, which is why tasks with time constraints can be the most effective. If the time constraint isn't enough to keep you moving, share the timeline with your advisor and your team, so they'll [hold you accountable](#) as well.

As the "breakdown" above shows, entrepreneurs all too often will make a plan but lack the discipline to see it through. It's the self-discipline to execute on daily priorities and tasks that separates successful companies from failed ones. Don't let "old habits die hard"—fight to change them. And win!

PUBLISHED ON: FEB 19, 2019

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