

10BrilliantThings™

FREE GUIDE · PERSONAL GROWTH SERIES

Set Goals That Actually Stick

Move beyond good intentions — build the structure, accountability, and momentum that make goals real.

By Coach Andre Fredericks · 10BrilliantThings.com

Introduction

You have set goals before. You have written them down, felt the excitement of a fresh start, and committed — with genuine intention — to following through. And then, somewhere between the intention and the outcome, things quietly fell apart.

You are not alone. Research from the University of Delaware confirms that approximately 90% of people abandon their goals within the first few weeks of setting them. Not because they lack ambition. Not because the goals were wrong. But because the structure supporting those goals was never properly built.

The problem is rarely willpower. It is architecture. Goals that actually stick are not simply more motivating than goals that don't — they are more deliberately designed. They are rooted in values, structured for success, supported by accountability, and connected to an identity that makes following through feel natural rather than forced.

This guide gives you that architecture. Across ten practical chapters, you will learn how the psychology of goal-setting actually works, how to design goals that align with who you are and what you genuinely want, and how to build the habits, environment, and accountability systems that turn intentions into outcomes.

"People who set goals and regularly self-monitor are almost two and a half times more likely to attain their goals." — Brendon Burchard, High Performance Habits (2017)

The tools in this guide are immediately applicable. The change begins with the next decision you make. Let's build the structure.

Chapter 1 UNDERSTAND WHY MOST GOALS FAIL

Before building better goals, it is worth understanding precisely why most goals collapse. The insight is not discouraging — it is liberating, because it shifts the problem from personal inadequacy to structural design.

University of Delaware researchers identify three primary failure modes: lack of genuine commitment (goals set out of social pressure rather than personal conviction), motivational mismatch (the gap between initial excitement and sustained effort), and insufficient planning for the smaller steps required to achieve larger aims.

Behavioural scientist Wendy Wood's research on habits and goals adds another dimension: goals require conscious effort, while habits operate automatically. When the novelty of a new goal fades and conscious motivation drops, there is nothing left to carry the behaviour forward — unless it has been embedded in a habit or supported by structure.

Understanding this is the first act of intelligent goal-setting. You are not fighting a character flaw. You are designing around predictable psychological patterns.

- **Failure mode 1:** Goals set without genuine personal conviction collapse the moment motivation drops.
- **Failure mode 2:** Goals without clear sub-steps overwhelm and paralyse rather than energise.
- **Failure mode 3:** Goals unsupported by habits or environment rely entirely on willpower — which is finite.

◆ **Reflection:** Think of a goal you have abandoned in the past. Which failure mode was most responsible? What would you design differently today?

Chapter 2 GROUND YOUR GOALS IN VALUES

A goal without a values foundation is a target without a reason. You may hit it — but you will not know why it mattered. Worse, you may achieve it and feel nothing, or abandon it halfway without understanding your own disengagement.

Research on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation consistently shows that goals aligned with personal values generate stronger commitment, greater persistence under pressure, and more authentic satisfaction on completion. Extrinsic goals — those driven by approval, status, or social expectation — produce motivation that is highly conditional and surprisingly fragile.

Grounding your goals in values does not make them softer. It makes them stickier. When a goal connects to something you genuinely care about, the inevitable difficult moments — the days when motivation is low, the setbacks, the slow periods — carry meaning that sustains you through them.

- **Ask yourself:** 'Why does this goal matter to me — not to my employer, family, or culture, but to me?'
- **Test the connection:** Can you trace a direct line from this goal to one of your core values?
- **If the line is weak:** The goal may be borrowed from someone else's expectations. Revise it or release it.

Goals that reflect your genuine values are not just more motivating — they are more resilient. They survive the inevitable friction that stops externally-motivated goals in their tracks.

◆ **Reflection:** For your most important current goal, write down the core value it expresses. If you cannot identify one clearly, what does that tell you?

Chapter 3 DESIGN GOALS WITH PRECISION

Vague goals produce vague results. 'I want to get healthier', 'I want to grow my career', 'I want to be more productive' — these are aspirations, not goals. They have no edge. They cannot be measured, planned for, or celebrated.

Edwin Locke and Gary Latham's foundational goal-setting theory — one of the most extensively replicated findings in all of applied psychology — establishes that specific and challenging goals consistently produce higher performance than vague or easy ones. Specificity matters because it transforms a wish into a target your brain can actually direct its resources toward.

The SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) remains one of the most reliable tools for goal precision — not because it is the only framework, but because it forces you to answer the questions that vague goals leave open. Relevance is particularly critical: a goal that is specific but disconnected from your values will still underperform.

- **Specific:** What exactly will you achieve? The more precisely defined, the more actionable.
- **Measurable:** How will you know when you have succeeded? Define the evidence in advance.
- **Achievable:** Is this genuinely within reach with effort and the right resources?
- **Relevant:** Does this goal connect to your values, purpose, and broader direction?
- **Time-bound:** By when? A goal without a deadline is a wish with good intentions.

◆ **Reflection:** Take one of your current goals and rewrite it through the SMART lens. What changes when you apply each criterion honestly?

Chapter 4 BREAK GOALS INTO MEANINGFUL SUB-STEPS

One of the most reliable predictors of goal failure is treating a large goal as a single destination rather than a sequence of smaller achievements. Research published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* found that breaking a large goal into sub-goals made participants 7–8% more likely to sustain their commitment over several months — a significant effect from a simple structural change.

The psychological mechanism is straightforward. Large goals feel abstract and distant. Sub-goals feel concrete and achievable. Each completed sub-goal produces a small dopamine reward that reinforces motivation for the next step. The brain, in effect, is rewarded not just at the finish line but throughout the journey.

Professor Philip Gable of the University of Delaware notes that when goals feel too large, people experience emotional distress at setbacks — because every failure seems to threaten the entire goal rather than just one step. Sub-goals create recovery points: a missed step is a minor course correction, not a collapse.

- **The 90-day breakdown:** What must be true in 90 days for you to be on track toward your annual goal?
- **The weekly action:** What is the single most important action you can take this week toward that 90-day target?
- **The daily commitment:** What is the smallest daily action that, repeated consistently, compounds into your sub-goal?

◆ **Reflection:** Take your most important goal and break it into three 90-day milestones. What does the first milestone look like in concrete, measurable terms?

Chapter 5 CONNECT GOALS TO IDENTITY

Perhaps the most powerful insight from recent goal-setting research is this: goals that are framed as expressions of identity are significantly more durable than goals framed as outcomes to achieve.

Research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* in 2024 found that framing habits and goals in terms of identity — 'I am someone who exercises daily' rather than 'I want to exercise more' — produces stronger commitment and longer-lasting behaviour change. James Clear popularised this insight in *Atomic Habits*, but the underlying research predates his work by decades.

The logic is elegant. Outcomes are external — they can be missed without fundamentally threatening who you are. Identity is internal — acting against it creates cognitive dissonance that your brain is highly motivated to resolve. When your goal becomes part of who you are, breaking it feels like a betrayal of self rather than simply a missed target.

This is also why the 10BrilliantThings™ framework places Responsibility — ownership of your outcomes — at the foundation of the Personal Development Model. Responsibility is ultimately an identity claim: 'I am someone who owns my results.'

- **Outcome goal:** 'I want to read 12 books this year.' (External, easy to abandon)
- **Identity goal:** 'I am a reader. I read daily.' (Internal, self-reinforcing)
- **The reframe:** For every important goal, ask: 'What kind of person achieves this — and am I becoming that person?'

◆ **Reflection:** Rewrite one of your current goals as an identity statement. How does it feel different? What behaviour does the identity version make more natural?

Chapter 6 USE IMPLEMENTATION INTENTIONS

One of the most evidence-backed tools in goal achievement research is also one of the simplest: the implementation intention, or 'if-then' planning.

Psychologist Peter Gollwitzer's research, replicated across more than 200 studies, found that people who used implementation intentions — explicitly planning when, where, and how they

would act toward their goal — were three times more likely to follow through than those who simply stated their intention. The formula is direct: 'If [situation], then I will [behaviour].'

Implementation intentions work by linking a goal-directed behaviour to a specific cue, making the response more automatic and less dependent on in-the-moment decision-making. Rather than relying on willpower to remember and motivate the right action, the cue triggers it. This is particularly powerful for goals that require consistent repetition.

- **Example:** 'When I finish my morning coffee, I will spend 20 minutes on my most important project task.'
- **Example:** 'If I feel the urge to scroll my phone at night, I will read one chapter of my book instead.'
- **Example:** 'Every Sunday evening, I will review my goals and write my three priorities for the coming week.'

The difference between a goal that gets done and one that doesn't is often not motivation — it is a specific plan for when and where the action will happen.

◆ **Reflection:** Write one implementation intention for your most important goal. Be as specific as possible about the trigger, the action, and the location.

Chapter 7 DESIGN YOUR ENVIRONMENT FOR SUCCESS

Most people try to achieve their goals through willpower alone — relying on internal resolve to overcome external friction. But research by behavioural scientist Wendy Wood demonstrates that habits and goal-consistent behaviours are far more sustainable when the environment is designed to make them easy and make competing behaviours harder.

Your environment sends constant cues that either support or undermine your goals. The books on your desk, the food in your kitchen, the apps on your phone, the people around you — all of these are stimuli that trigger behavioural responses, largely outside your conscious awareness. Designing your environment is designing your behaviour.

Dr. Kristin Neff's research also highlights the importance of social environment: surrounding yourself with people who support your goals — or who are pursuing similar ones — dramatically increases your likelihood of sustained effort. Humans are profoundly social creatures, and our behaviour is constantly shaped by the norms of the groups we belong to.

- **Remove friction:** Make goal-consistent behaviours as easy as possible. Reduce the number of steps required.
- **Add friction:** Make goal-undermining behaviours harder. Put distance between yourself and your triggers.
- **Design your social environment:** Spend time with people who model or support the goals you are building toward.
- **Visual cues:** Place reminders of your goals where you will see them at decision points throughout the day.

◆ **Reflection:** Identify one environmental change — physical, digital, or social — that would make your most important goal easier to pursue consistently.

Chapter 8 TRACK PROGRESS AND CELEBRATE MOMENTUM

Tracking is not bureaucracy. It is a psychological tool. Research confirms that self-monitoring — regularly checking in on progress toward a goal — significantly increases the likelihood of behaviour change and goal completion. A 2025 study found that individuals using simple binary tracking (done / not done) maintained new habits 27% longer than those relying on more complex measurement systems.

Dr. Gail Matthews' research found that individuals who wrote down their goals and tracked their progress were 33–42% more likely to achieve them than those who only held goals in their minds. The act of externalising a goal — putting it on paper, into a tracker, or onto a visible board — engages a different part of the brain's commitment circuitry.

Momentum is also built by celebrating sub-goal completion, not just final outcomes. Small wins signal progress to the brain's reward system, reinforcing the neural pathways associated with goal-consistent behaviour and making the next action easier to take. The goal of tracking is not to judge yourself — it is to fuel forward motion.

- **Daily tracking:** A simple yes/no habit tracker is more effective than a complex rating system during goal formation.
- **Weekly review:** Each week, review what you completed, what you missed, and what you will adjust.
- **Celebrate milestones:** Acknowledge every completed sub-goal. Progress deserves recognition — it builds the next step.

◆ **Reflection:** How are you currently tracking your most important goal? If you are not, what is the simplest tracking system you could implement today?

Chapter 9 BUILD ACCOUNTABILITY INTO THE SYSTEM

Accountability is not a sign of weakness. It is a structural amplifier of commitment. A 2025 meta-analysis of 42 studies found that individuals with structured accountability systems were 2.8 times more likely to maintain new habits than those working in isolation.

The mechanism is social: human beings are inherently sensitive to how they are perceived by others they respect. When we commit to a goal publicly or to a specific person, the psychological cost of abandoning it increases significantly. This is not manipulation — it is the intelligent use of a deeply human motivation.

Accountability works best when it is structured, specific, and reciprocal. A vague commitment to 'keep each other posted' is less effective than a weekly 15-minute check-in with a specific peer, coach, or mentor — where you report on your commitments from the previous week and set your commitments for the next.

Within the 10BrilliantThings™ framework, Collaboration — one of the three pillars of the Team Model — is not just about working with others. It is about structuring your growth in relationship, so that shared accountability becomes a multiplier for individual effort.

- **Accountability partner:** Identify one person who can hold you to your weekly commitments with honesty and care.
- **Public commitment:** Share a meaningful goal with a trusted group or community — the social stakes help.
- **Coaching relationship:** A skilled coach provides structured accountability, honest feedback, and forward momentum.

◆ **Reflection:** Who in your life could serve as an accountability partner for your most important goal? What would a structured check-in arrangement look like?

Chapter 10 RECOVER FROM SETBACKS WITHOUT LOSING GROUND

Setbacks are not exceptions in goal pursuit. They are features. Every goal of any significance will encounter disruption, missed days, unexpected obstacles, and moments of doubt. The question is not whether setbacks will happen — it is what you do when they do.

University of Delaware researchers emphasise the importance of self-compassion in this process. Dr. Kristin Neff's research confirms that self-compassion — treating yourself with the same kindness you would offer a trusted friend — leads to greater resilience and faster recovery from setbacks than self-criticism. Guilt and shame, paradoxically, make it harder to re-engage with a goal, not easier.

The 'never miss twice' principle, popularised by James Clear, offers a practical framework: missing one day is a mistake; missing two days is the start of a new habit. The focus shifts from perfection to consistency over time. A single lapse does not define your trajectory — your response to it does.

In the 10BrilliantThings™ Motivation Ladder, setbacks often push people back toward Survival mode thinking — reactive, shame-driven, focused on the gap between where they are and where they intended to be. Recovery is the deliberate act of returning to Proactive mode: acknowledging what happened, adjusting the approach, and choosing forward motion.

- **After a setback:** Acknowledge it without judgment. Ask: 'What can I learn, and what will I do differently?'
- **The 24-hour rule:** Give yourself a full day to process a setback — then recommit with a specific next action.
- **Adjust, don't abandon:** Most goals don't need to be given up — they need to be recalibrated based on new information.

You are not behind. You are not failing. You are learning the structure that works for you — and that knowledge compounds into something the original enthusiasm never could.

◆ **Reflection:** Reflect on a recent setback in goal pursuit. What would a self-compassionate response have looked like? What will you do differently next time?

Conclusion

Goals that actually stick are not the product of superior willpower or exceptional talent. They are the product of deliberate design — a system built from values, precision, identity, habits, environment, accountability, and the wisdom to recover when things go wrong.

The ten chapters in this guide are not a checklist to complete once and set aside. They are principles to return to each time you set a meaningful goal — a framework that becomes more powerful the more consistently you apply it.

Begin with one goal. Apply the structure. Track your progress. Find your accountability. Recover from the inevitable setbacks with self-compassion and renewed focus. And watch what becomes possible when intention is finally matched with architecture.

"You're not stuck. You're simply under-structured." — Coach Andre Fredericks

The structure is in your hands. The next goal you set does not have to be another intention that fades. It can be the beginning of a pattern that defines who you are becoming.

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