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**How to Achieve Your Goals (This Simple Trick Makes Progress Easy)**

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In the last 6 months, I’ve experimented with a simple strategy that has improved my work and my health.

Using this one basic idea, I have made consistent progress on my goals every single week without incredible doses of willpower or remarkable motivation.

Today, I want to share how I use this strategy and how you can apply it to your own life to improve your health and your work.

**The Problem with How We Usually Set Goals**

If you’re anything like the typical human, then you have dreams and goals in your life. In fact, there are probably many things — large and small — that you would like to accomplish.

That’s great, but there is one common mistake we often make when it comes to setting goals. (I know I’ve committed this error many times myself.)

The problem is this: we set a deadline, but not a schedule.

We focus on the end goal that we want to achieve and the deadline we want to do it by. We say things like, “I want to lose 20 pounds by the summer” or “I want to add 50 pounds to my bench press in the next 12 weeks.”

The problem with this is that if we don’t magically hit the arbitrary timeline that we set in the beginning, then we feel like a failure … even if we are better off than we were at the start. The end result, sadly, is that we often give up if we don’t reach our goal by the initial deadline.

I’ve mentioned this idea multiple times before. For example, in making [the mistake of putting performance goals before your identity](http://jamesclear.com/identity-based-habits) or in [choosing life–changing transformations over daily lifestyle choices](http://jamesclear.com/why-is-it-so-hard-to-form-good-habits).

Here’s the good news: there’s a better way and it’s simple.

**The Power of Setting a Schedule, Not a Deadline**

In my experience, a better way to approach your goals is to set a schedule to operate by rather than a deadline to perform by.

Instead of giving yourself a deadline to accomplish a particular goal by (and then feeling like a failure if you don’t achieve it), you should choose a goal that is important to you and then set a schedule to work towards it consistently.

That might not sound like a big shift, but it is.

**How to Achieve Your Goals: The Idea in Practice**

Most of the time, I try to be a practitioner of my ideas and not just someone who shares their opinion, so allow me to explain this strategy by using two real examples from my own life.

**Example 1: Writing**

As you know, I publish a new article every Monday and Thursday. Since [my first article](http://jamesclear.com/successful-people-start-before-they-feel-ready)on November 12, 2012, I’ve never missed a scheduled date. Sometimes the article is shorter than expected, sometimes it’s not as compelling as I had hoped, and sometimes it’s not as useful as it could be … but it gets out to the world and into your inbox.

The results of this simple schedule have been amazing. Our little community has grown, seemingly without effort. We now have over 1,100 people (welcome friends!) who are committed to living a healthy life and who are [actively supporting one another](http://jamesclear.com/you-are-not-alone). Onwards to 5,000 strong!

Related: If you’re a new reader, you can find out what it’s all about and [join us for free here](http://jamesclear.com/pillars).

Imagine if I had set a deadline for myself instead, like “get 1,000 subscribers in 12 weeks.” There’s no way I would have written every Monday and Thursday and if I didn’t reach my goal, then I would have felt like a failure.

Instead, we are slowly building one of the most incredible communities online. (By the way, thank you for all of the emails, tweets, and messages on [fat loss](http://jamesclear.com/the-beginners-guide-to-intermittent-fasting), [lifting weights](http://jamesclear.com/why-lift-weights),[living longer](http://jamesclear.com/116-years-old-lessons-oldest-living-person), and [forming better habits](http://jamesclear.com/identity-based-habits). Keep them coming! I’m always happy to get your questions and I’ll do my best to help however I can.)

**Example 2: Exercise**

Back in August, I decided that I wanted to do 100 pushups in a row with strict form. When I tried it the first time, I only got 36.

In the past, I might have set a deadline for myself: “Do 100 pushups by December 31st.”

Instead, I decided to set a schedule for my workouts. I started doing pushup workouts every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. So far, the only workouts I’ve missed were on long travel days from [this trip in Istanbul](http://jamesclear.com/photo-essay-istanbul-turkey) and [this trip in San Francisco](http://jamesclear.com/magic-of-committing).

I have no total pushup goal for any single workout. The goal is simply to do the workout. Just like I have no goal for any single article that I write. The goal is to publish the article.

The result, of course, is that after doing 77 pushup workouts I’ve made a lot of progress. If you’re interested, you can [see every workout here](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0ApTNYzC_iYrtdGk5dGhydVJ4Zkt4cjY2MXg3T1VEOVE#gid=0).

**Focus on the Practice, Not the Performance**

Do you see how the two examples above are different than most goals we set for ourselves?

In both cases (writing and exercise), I made consistent progress towards my goals not by setting a deadline for my performance, but by sticking to a schedule.

Productive and successful people practice the things that are important to them on a consistent basis. The best weightlifters are in the gym at the same time every week. The best writers are sitting down at the keyboard every day. And this same principle applies to the best leaders, parents, managers, musicians, and doctors.

The strange thing is that for top performers, it’s not about the performance, it’s about the continual practice.

The focus is on doing the action, not on achieving X goal by a certain date.

The schedule is your friend. You can’t predict when you’ll have a stroke of genius and write a moving story, paint a beautiful portrait, or make an incredible picture, but the schedule can make sure that you’re working when that stroke of genius happens.

You can’t predict when your body feels like setting a new personal record, but the schedule can make sure that you’re in the gym whether you feel like it or not.

It’s about practicing the craft, not performing at a certain level. (We’re talking about practice. Not a game, not a game. [Practice](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGDBR2L5kzI).)

If you want to be the type of person who accomplishes things on a consistent basis, then give yourself a schedule to follow, not a deadline to race towards.

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* **About James Clear**

I write about the science of human behavior and how to build better habits. Thousands of people have attended my online seminars on [Habits](http://jamesclear.com/seminars/habits),[Willpower](http://jamesclear.com/seminars/willpower), and [Procrastination](http://jamesclear.com/seminars/procrastination). I share a public reading list of the [best books to read](http://jamesclear.com/best-books) across a wide range of disciplines.