

30 Days to a
BETTER MAN



★ *written by Brett McKay* ★

The Art of
MANLINESS
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30 Days to a **BETTER MAN**

written by Brett McKay

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INTRODUCTION

[30 Days to a Better Man](#) was a month-long series that originally appeared on the Art of Manliness website in June 2009. The goal of this project was simple: to encourage men to be better men in all areas of their lives. I'm sure all of us have made goals to improve ourselves. But often our goals become one of those well-meaning intentions that we plan to do...someday. And if you're like me, some day never comes, and you're stuck in the same place of mediocrity you were before.

Personally, I'm more likely to follow through with a goal if I have a specific plan, instead of just some ethereal intention. I'm also more likely to accomplish a goal if I have a group of people who are encouraging me and keeping me accountable.

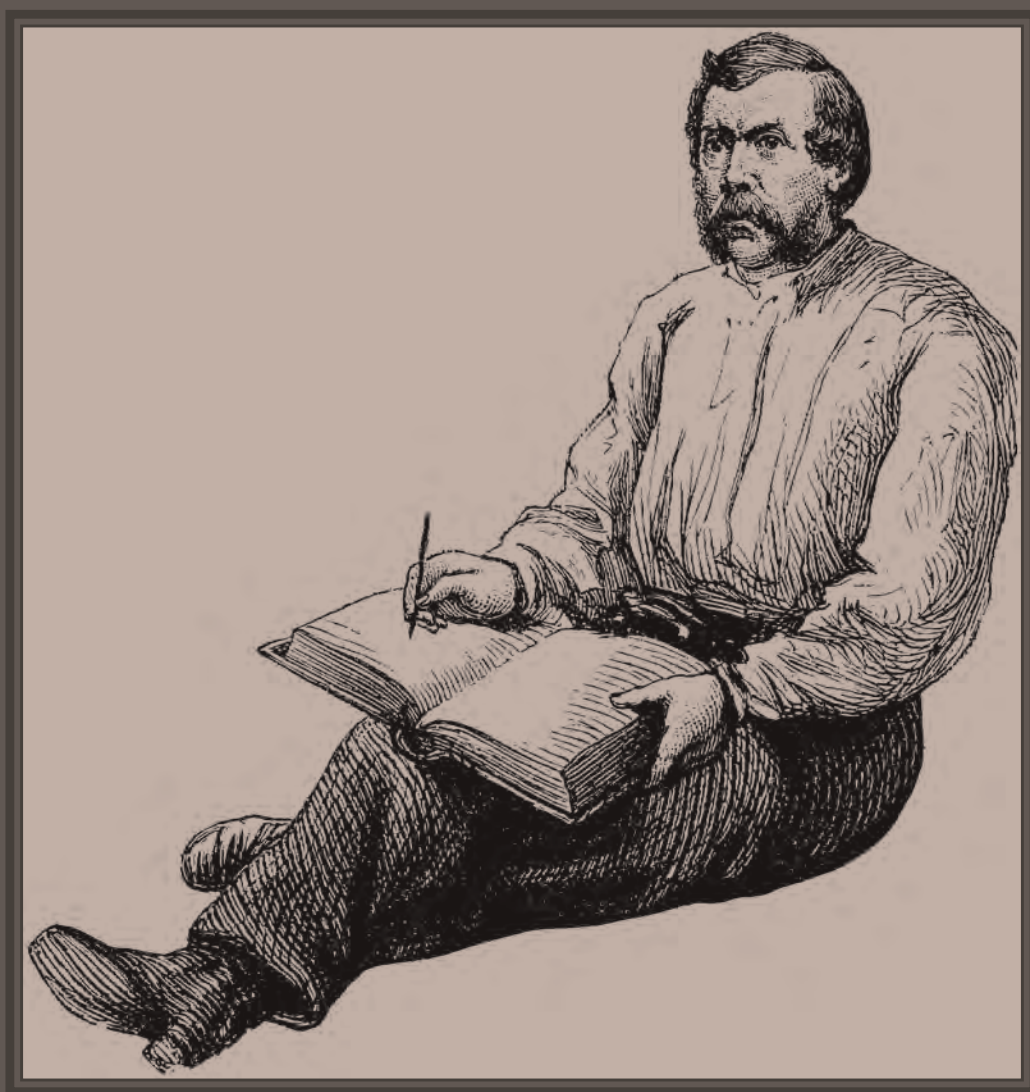
How It Works

Each chapter has a specific task to accomplish that day. The chapter will begin with a theory component in which we briefly explain the benefits of doing the task and how to go about accomplishing it. After that, you go out and do the task. The tasks will cover a variety of areas of a man's life including relationships, health, career and money, and style. Even if you already do the things we assign, it's always good to have a reminder to keep on doing it.

You can tackle as many of these tasks as you want in a single day, but we encourage you to take it one at a time. In my experience, when I've tried to make dramatic changes in my life (even for the better) I end up falling flat on my face. The name of the game here is small steps.

If you're looking for more advice on being a better man, make sure to check out www.artofmanliness.com. Every day we post informative articles that are designed to improve and entertain men.

Let's get started.



DAY 1

Define Your Core Values

When I look at photos of men from my grandfather's and even my dad's generation, I can see a sense of purpose in the eyes of those men. Yet when I look at men today, I often don't sense that kind of steely focus. Instead, I see dudes who are just sort of drifting along whichever way life pulls them.

I've heard a lot of men my age complain of a sense of shiftlessness. They don't have the drive, purpose, and ambition that our forbearers had, and they feel adrift.

And this isn't some sort of cranky old man observation about "kids these days." Several books and articles by sociologists back up these observations.

There are numerous factors why men are just sort of drifting by today. Changes in the economy and societal shifts in regards to gender are definitely two major factors. But, let's be honest. There's not much a man, let alone a man stuck in neutral, can do about these things. So, today we're going to focus on something that we all have the power to control: our core values.

The Importance of Clearly Defining Your Core Values

DEFINING OUR VALUES GIVES US PURPOSE.

When you don't know or you haven't clearly defined your values, you end up drifting along in life. Instead of basing your decisions on an internal compass, you make choices based on circumstances and social pressures. You end up trying to fulfill other people's expectations instead of your own. And

before you know it, life has passed you by and you haven't even started to live. Trying to be someone else and living without core values is exhausting and leaves you feeling empty and shiftless. Conversely, living a life in line with your core values brings purpose, direction, happiness, and wholeness.

DEFINING OUR VALUES PREVENTS US FROM MAKING BAD CHOICES.

Perhaps you have a vague idea about what you value. But if you haven't *clearly* defined your values, you can end up making choices that conflict with them. And when your actions conflict with your values, the result is unhappiness and frustration.

DEFINING OUR VALUES GIVES US CONFIDENCE.

I've noticed that when I take the time to really think and meditate upon what I value as a man and then write those things down, I'm more likely to have the courage and confidence to make choices based on those values. There's something about actually writing down your values that makes you more committed to living them.

DEFINING OUR VALUES MAKES LIFE SIMPLER.

When you're sure of your core values, making decisions becomes *much* simpler. When faced with a choice, you simply ask yourself, "Does this action align with my values?" If it does, you do it. If it doesn't, you don't. Instead of fretting over what's the best thing to do, and standing shilly-shally in times of crisis, you simply let your internal compass guide you.

How to Discover Your Values

Your task for Day 1 of our *30 Days to a Better Man* project is to discover, clearly define, and write down your core values. Before we begin, let's be clear that we're not trying to define goals here. Goals are specific actions, like "becoming financially independent by age 30" or "asking my girlfriend to marry me this June." What we are looking for are values: the ideas that you esteem to be of great worth and that give structure to your life.

1. **Get nice and relaxed.** Go to a quiet room and sit in a big comfy chair (maybe even sit in your closet; something about small spaces helps you think), grab the fishing pole and spend an hour or two casting your line into the fishing hole, or take a walk on a nature trail or around your neighborhood. Just do whatever works for you.
2. **Have the proper tools.** Have a pen and paper handy so you can write down your values as they come to you. I don't recommend using a computer to do this as it's pretty easy to get distracted from the task at hand. Write on something you won't accidentally throw away and that will last for many years to come.
3. **Ask yourself this question: "What's truly important to me as a man?"** Once you're nice and relaxed, simply ask yourself what's truly important to you. Think about those moments in your life when you felt completely whole and fulfilled as a man. Think about the times when you've been the happiest. If nothing comes to you at first, don't worry. Just keep thinking.
4. **Write down whatever comes to you.** When you have a moment of insight about what's important to you, write it down. Don't self-censor yourself. Be completely honest during this process. No one else is going to see this, so don't list the values that you think "should" be on your list. If it comes to you, write it. You'll be able to go back and edit the list in the next step. For now, just do a total brain dump. (Also,

don't worry about prioritizing them yet. We'll do that later. Our goal right now is to just get down whatever comes to you.)

5. **If you have more than five values, eliminate some.** Think hard about what you truly value in life. Put a star by the values you're sure about. Then take the ones that you feel are important, but aren't sure if they're top 5 material, and put them in pairs. Think about two of those values side by side, and ask yourself which of the two is more important. Then eliminate the other. Keep pitting the survivors against each other until you're down to 5. If some of the values you listed are just two words describing the same idea, combine them.
6. **Prioritize.** Once you whittle your list to five core values, prioritize them in order from most important to least important. Ideally, your core values complement each other, but there might be times when two or more conflict. When that happens, which value will trump? If you know this before that choice presents itself, you'll know how to proceed. And even if your values conflict in the future, look for creative ways to combine them. For example, family might be your top priority, but so is volunteering. When you have the choice of spending time with your kids or signing up to help at a charity event, do both by bringing the kiddos along with you.

If you're having trouble getting started, I've provided a list of values that you might consider. The list isn't exhaustive; there are literally hundreds of values you could have.

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| • Adventure | • Education | • Freedom | • Happiness |
| • Balance | • Faith | • Fulfillment | • Health |
| • Confidence | • Family | • Forgiveness | • Hope |
| • Control | • Financial | • Fun | • Honesty |
| • Creativity | • Security | • God | • Humor |
| • Discipline | • Friends | • Growth | • Independence |

- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|
| • Integrity | • Peace of mind | • Security | • Strength |
| • Kindness | • Power | • Self-reliance | • Success |
| • Knowledge | • Progress | • Service | • Truth |
| • Marriage | • Reason | • Spirituality | • Wisdom |

Today's Task: Define Your Core Values

Your task for Day 1 is to discover, clearly define, and write down your core values.

MY 5 CORE VALUES

Write your core values in the space provided below and revisit them now and then to remind yourself what's truly important to you:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



DAY 2

Shine Your Shoes

There's a lot of sage wisdom to be found in the film *The Shawshank Redemption*. But there is one detail the movie got wrong: people do notice your shoes (especially women). And while it's true that people don't spend an awful lot of time staring at your shoes, you'd be surprised at how often you look at your own feet. And when you look down and can practically see your reflection in your shoes, it gives you a sense of satisfaction, a boost in your confidence, and some added pep in your step. Too many men put on a nice pair of dress pants and a freshly pressed shirt, but then ruin the whole get-up with scuffed shoes. A pair of glassy, shined shoes will pull your whole appearance together.

So your task today is to shine your shoes. Get out every pair of dress shoes that you own and get them all into ship-shape condition. You never know when you're going to need to don a pair, and the last thing you want to do is be ready to run at the door to an important meeting and realize that your shoes are in no condition to meet the public. Having a closet full of shined shoes ensures that you are ready for any occasion, at the drop of a hat. Plus, shining your shoes is the kind of quiet, repetitive activity that will calm your mind and soothe your stress.

To get started on today's task, check out our post on [How to Shine Your Shoes Like a Soldier](#). We also have an [illustrated guide](#) and a [video tutorial](#) to help guide you along. You don't need a fancy shoe shining kit to do this. Just a few cans of Kiwi shoe polish and a couple of rags can get the job done. You can find shoe polish at most drug and grocery stores for a couple of bucks a can.

After you're all set up, read these additional shoe shining tips we gleaned from that original post's numerous comments:

1. Rubbing alcohol is a good polish stripper, which should be done every so often, particularly if the boots haven't been shined in a long time (dirt gets embedded into the polish). (From Eric B.)
2. Those little pantyhose-like foot covers they have at shoe stores? Grab a handful of those and stretch one taut and buff with a sawing motion as fast as you can for a few minutes. The friction and pressure combine to make a little heat that really brings the shine out. I never used anything more than an old pair of socks cut up into rags, a can of Kiwi, and some old pantyhose, and I rarely find shinier shoes. (From Charlie)
3. Shine your boots to the usual black glass look, and then put a coat of Blue Lincoln wax on and buff. The blue wax will make your boots glow. (From Ron Waters)
4. I used cotton wool balls for ages until I discovered make-up removal pads (the little flat round ones). You can wrap them around your finger for much better control, they stand less chance of scratching the polish with a fingernail, and they don't leave little bits of cotton behind if you're a little careless. (From Tom)

Today's Task: Shine Your Shoes

Nothing too difficult here. Bust out your shoe shine kit and start brushing!



DAY 3

Find A Mentor

A few years ago we wrote about [the importance of a mentor in a man's life](#). Figuring out what it means to be a man can be tough. And it's arguably tougher for men today, who are often more socially isolated, don't have as many friends, and don't have strong relationships with their fathers and other male relatives. It's therefore more important than ever for every man to seek out mentors to help him navigate the complicated waters of manliness and life.

Mentors have the experience and wisdom to give us sound guidance, direction, and advice. Mentors can also help us expand our point of view on a particular area of our life. Moreover, a mentor can become a good friend and confidant during times when we struggle and falter.

So having a mentor is quite important. The tricky part is, how do you find one? Here's a suggested road map.

How to Find a Mentor

- 1. Determine what sort of mentor you're looking for.** We all have different facets of our lives. Work, school, spirituality, family, etc. Ask yourself what area of your life needs improvement and could benefit from a mentor. And it doesn't have to be a specific area of your life like career or church. Perhaps you're just looking for a mentor to help you be an all around better man. That's fine.
- 2. Draw up a list of three men that you'd like to mentor you.** Think of all the men you know that might be able to help you in the area that you're looking for some mentoring in. Guys that you've always looked

up to or admired and wish you had a better relationship with. If you're looking for a mentor to help you in your career, look around at the men you know at work that have been in the game awhile and know the ropes. If you're a student, you might want to pick a professor that really inspires you academically. If you're looking for a mentor to help you be an overall better man, simply think of the men you know and admire. While we often think of a mentor as being older than us, a mentor can be a guy the same age as you, who just has his life together a bit more or who lives his life in a way you really admire. Also, don't stick with men that are exactly like you. One of the benefits of a mentor is that they can help expand your point of view.

3. **Write down how each mentor could help you grow as a man.** Think of the traits each man has that you wish to learn. Do some research on them. Do they come from a similar background as you? Do they have unique experiences that can broaden your conception and understanding of success in a particular area of your life? Have they had any setbacks similar to yours? What is it exactly about this person that makes you want him to be your mentor? This will come in handy when you finally get around to asking.
4. **Figure out what you expect from the mentor relationship.** Before you ask someone to be your mentor, you need to know what he should expect from the relationship. How often would you like to meet with him? Once a week? Once a month? How do you want the mentoring to take place? A discussion over lunch? Email? A monthly phone call? When you're deciding this, take into account the men you're asking to be your mentor and what will work for them. If you know one man is particularly busy, you wouldn't want to ask that he meet with you once a week.
5. **Ask the first man on your list.** After you've done all your prep work, it's time to ask. Whether you call, email, or write a letter to do the asking will depend on each person. Some older men might be "old

school” and prefer a phone call or letter over email. If they’re younger and a bit tech savvy, email is just fine.

Tell your prospective mentor that you’re looking for a mentor in “x” area of your life and that you think he’d be a good one. Explain why you think he’d be a good mentor by sharing some of the positive traits about him that you wrote down. People love to be praised!

If you get some positive feedback from your prospective mentor about the relationship, go on and start discussing logistics. Explain what you’re hoping to get out of the mentorship and get an idea of what he’d like to get out of it as well. Synchronize schedules and how you two plan to carry out the mentorship. The clearer you are at the beginning, the less likely for awkward moments down the line.

If asking someone so directly to be your mentor makes you feel awkward (or you think it might make them feel uncomfortable) then just ask the man to have lunch or hang out some time. Start dropping by the professor’s office or your co-worker’s cubicle for chats. And the relationship will hopefully develop naturally from there.

6. **Expect rejection.** Don’t get discouraged and don’t take it personally if people say no. People are busy these days, and they just might not have time to be a mentor. If the first man says no, go on to the second.
7. **Say “thank you.”** No matter if you get a no or a yes, be sure to thank the person.

Now, it might not be possible to find a mentor in just one day, but let’s at least get started on it.

Today's Task: Find a Mentor

- Pick an area in your life where you think a mentor can help you and draw up a list of three potential mentors.
- Describe why you think they'd be good.
- By the end of the 24 hours, contact this mentor. Send an email or letter, call them, or drop by their office. You don't actually have to visit with them during this day, but make contact with them in some form.

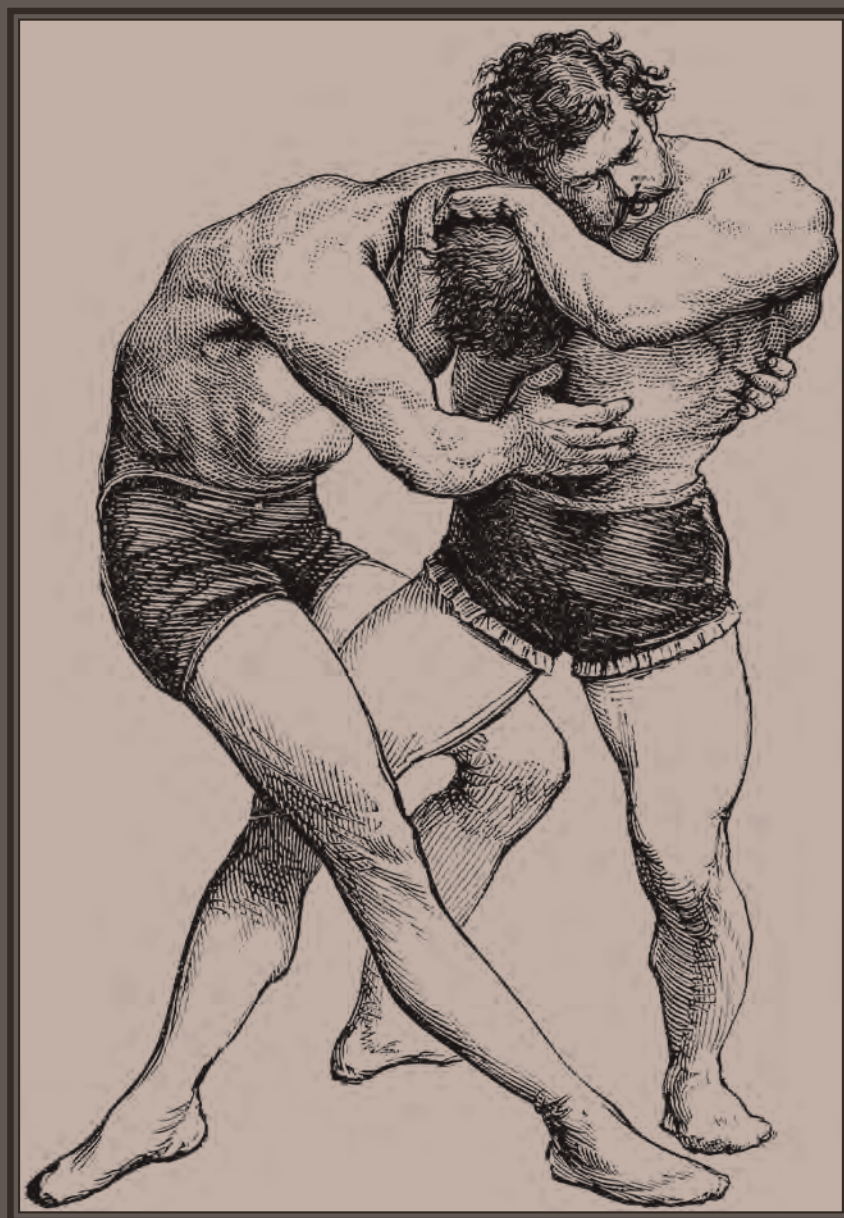
What area in your life do you need a mentor for? _____

Write down your three possible mentors, and why they'd be a good fit.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



DAY 4

Increase Your Testosterone

When it comes to the differences between men and women, some are arguably cultural and some are biological. And the ones that are biological all pretty much have one thing in common: testosterone.

It was testosterone that helped form your penis and scrotum when you were just a fetus, and testosterone that put those first awesome hairs on your chest as a teenager. You may not have thought about testosterone much since your voice cracked while reciting Shakespeare in Mrs. Tonnelson's ninth grade English class. But you should. A lot, actually. Why, you ask? Well, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you feel like your libido has been ebbing away?
- Has erectile dysfunction caused you embarrassment?
- Have you been carrying some extra pounds that won't go away?
- Do you often feel physically and mentally tired?
- Do you feel depressed and unhappy?
- Do you feel shiftless and lack drive?
- Do you wish you felt more like a man?

Testosterone is not the cure for all of life's ills. But it can go a long way in addressing these ailments and contributing to your overall health and well-being.

WHAT IS TESTOSTERONE?

Testosterone is part of the androgen group and is the primary male sex hormone. The majority of your T is produced by your trusty testes. Women

have T too, but men have 40-60 times greater amounts in their bodies. Testosterone is what gives you bigger muscles and organs than women. And it's what gives you a "male brain," which is larger than the female brain (although we should strongly point out that size has nothing to do with intelligence) but which has a decreased connection between the hemispheres. Perhaps most importantly, T is what enables you to rock an awesome beard or mustache. Testosterone maintains your manly characteristics throughout your whole life and regulates several systems in your body.

So T is pretty damn important to a man. It's what makes you feel like a man, man. So if you haven't been feeling too manly lately, or maybe ever, perhaps it's time for you to throw yourself a T party.

THE BENEFITS OF TESTOSTERONE

Testosterone has been scientifically proven to:

- Improve your mental and physical energy
- [Increase your competitive drive](#)
- Increase your muscle size and strength
- Increase your metabolism
- [Help prevent Alzheimer's and dementia](#)
- Increase libido and prevent erectile function

Every man is born with different levels of testosterone, and T secretion naturally falls as a man ages. And overdosing on testosterone (read: steroids) can have negative health effects. But modern environmental, cultural, and dietary changes are **artificially** decreasing men's normal T levels, and at a younger and younger age. According to a [recent study](#):

"Researchers in the US are finding testosterone levels to be substantially lower — by about 15 to 20% — than they were fifteen years ago. Scandinavian studies show similar declines, and in younger men too; a man born in 1970, for example, had about 20 percent less testosterone at 35 than a man of his father's generation at the same age."

SO WHAT'S SAPPING OUR T? HERE'S A FEW OF THE FACTORS AT PLAY:

- **Stress.** Stress increases our level of cortisol and decreases our testosterone.
- **Lack of sleep.** Testosterone rises while you sleep, particularly during the REM phases. Today, men are often skimping on their shut eye, which in turn is sapping their testosterone.
- **Soy intake.** Soy is supposed to be *so* good for you, right? [Wrong! Soy increases your estrogen and decreases your T.](#) It will also lower your sperm count.
- **Eating a low fat diet.** [Low fat diets have been widely debunked](#) these days. But in case you needed yet another reason to put down the Snackwell's, it has also [been proven to decrease your T.](#)

Today's Task: Increase Your Testosterone

So your task for today is to do **three things** from the following list that will help increase your testosterone. Obviously, doing more than 3 is great, and I would encourage you to commit to them for the whole 30 days and beyond. Beyond that, in 2012 we wrote a [comprehensive week-long series](#) about T and [how to increase your T naturally](#). Read up on that as well, and your virility will be on its way up in no time.

1. **Get at least 8 hours of sleep tonight.**
2. **Do not eat anything with soy in it.** You're going to have to read labels. It will blow your mind how many things contain soy these days.
3. [Meditate](#) for at least 10 minutes. This will help you de-stress.

4. **Do resistance training.** Lift some weights and do compound exercises like squats, [deadlifts](#), dips, rows, and [pull-ups](#). They'll boost your T more than bicep curls. You also need to use heavy weights and short sets. If you're looking to maximize your T, I highly recommend the [Strong Lifts 5X5 program](#).
5. **Eat a serving of good fat.** As you fat intake goes up, so do your T levels. Aim to get at least 30% of your calories from fat today and spread your consumption of it throughout the day. Monosaturated fats — the kind found in nuts, fish, olives, olive oil, seeds, and avocados — are particularly beneficial to your testosterone level (and your health). Also, don't be afraid of saturated fat; that whole business about it raising your cholesterol and causing heart disease is a bunch of rubbish.
6. **Eat a serving of animal protein.** Vegetarian diets [have been proven to lower your T](#) levels. So go ahead and have that steak. (This might be the easiest day of the challenge yet!) There's no need to overdo it though; a diet with a carb-to-protein ratio of 2:1 is ideal for testosterone production.
7. **Eat a serving of cruciferous vegetables.** Veggies like broccoli, cauliflower, radishes, turnips, cabbage, and brussel sprouts contain Diindolylmethane, which helps balance your estrogen and testosterone levels and increases the amount of free circulating T in your body.
8. **Have morning sex (if you partner is willing, of course).** Just having an erection increases your testosterone. And you already get a surge of T when you wake up, so this will bump it up even further.

3 THINGS I WILL DO TODAY TO INCREASE MY TESTOSTERONE

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



DAY 5

Cultivate Your Gratitude

The following story ran in a newspaper some years ago:

The District of Columbia police auctioned off about 100 unclaimed bicycles Friday. “One dollar,” said an 11-year-old boy as the bidding opened on the first bike. The bidding, however, went much higher. “One dollar,” the boy repeated hopefully each time another bike came up.

The auctioneer, who had been auctioning stolen or lost bikes for 43 years, noticed that the boy’s hopes seemed to soar higher whenever a racer-type bicycle was put up.

Then there was just one racer left. The bidding went to eight dollars. “Sold to that boy over there for nine dollars!” said the auctioneer. He took eight dollars from his own pocket and asked the boy for his dollar. The youngster turned it over in pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters — took his bike, and started to leave. But he went only a few feet. Carefully parking his new possession, he went back, gratefully threw his arms around the auctioneer’s neck, and cried.

When was the last time you felt gratitude as profoundly as this little boy did?

Aesop said, “Gratitude is the sign of noble souls.” Indeed, gratitude is one of the hallmarks of a life lived well. It is a virtue that profoundly impacts your personal happiness and the quality of your relationships.

SHOWING GRATITUDE TO OTHERS

A lack of gratitude is often at the root of a variety of the ills that plague relationships. When a wife or husband never shows appreciation for their spouse, the embers of their love are soon extinguished. When a boss never thanks his employees for what they do, the employees start to resent both

him and their job. On the flip side, nothing can buoy up our relationships quite like gratitude. A warm word of appreciation can instantly thaw the ice between people.

How often do we thank our wives for taking care of those little errands we forgot to do? How often do we thank our girlfriends for how thoughtful they are? When was the last time we thanked our co-workers for helping us get a project ready or our friend for being there to help us move?

We often assume that people either get thanks from other people or that they just somehow know how grateful we are for what they do. We are usually wrong on both counts. Here's another old story that illustrates this well:

A group of friends in the midst of an after-dinner conversation started talking about what they had to be thankful for. One of the group said, "Well I, for one, am grateful to Mrs. Wendt, an old school teacher who, 30 years ago in a little West Virginia town, went out of her way to introduce me to the works of the poet, Tennyson." "And does this Mrs. Wendt know that she made that contribution to your life?" someone put in. "I'm afraid she doesn't. I have been careless and have never, in all these years, told her either face-to-face or by letter." "Then why don't you write her?"

Now, all this is very poignant to me, because Mrs. Wendt was my teacher and I was the fellow who hadn't written. That very evening, I tried to atone. On the chance that Mrs. Wendt might still be living, I sat down and wrote her what I call a Thanksgiving letter. This is the handwritten note I had in return. It began:

"My Dear Willie-

I am now an old lady in my 80s, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely and seemingly like the last leaf of fall left behind. You will be interested to know, Willie, that I taught school for 50 years and, in all that time, yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered my lonely old heart as nothing has cheered me in many years."

WHAT PREVENTS US FROM SHOWING OUR GRATITUDE MORE FREELY?

Gratitude is inextricably tied up with the virtue of humility. Gratitude shows that we're paying attention to the acts of service people perform for us and that we truly understand how those acts make our life better, easier, and happier. The ungrateful man is callous; he's come to think that all the good things that happen to him and all the service rendered him are an automatic response to his impeachable awesomeness. He deserves all that stuff and more. Thus, he never takes notice of the good things that happen to him. And he's never really happy with what he has. He deserves only the best in life, and concentrates solely on the ways in which this ideal hasn't been met.

The grateful man is a humble man. He has no illusions of his grandeur. He knows that bad things happen to good people. He knows how easily a rally can turn into a slump. He knows how much worse off many others are than he is. He understands the sacrifices others make on his behalf. And he deeply, *deeply* appreciates them.

PERSONAL GRATITUDE

Gratitude is not simply something that we externally share with others. It is an attitude that we live with every day. Some of the unhappiest men I've met in my life have also been the most ungrateful. They could only see the things that were wrong with their life, choosing to concentrate on the things they wished they had and wished had happened but didn't. Their whining corrupted their soul. On the flip side, some of the happiest men I've know are the ones that truly embraced the virtue of gratitude. Some of them were dirt poor, but they were still so grateful for what little they did have. They focused not on the things they lacked, but on all the things they had going for them.

Some people think if they had more stuff or better luck, then they would magically have more gratitude. But the number of your material possessions or relationships will have no effect on your attitude. Once you got

those things, you'd simply start thinking about new things you wanted. Gratitude is an attitude that can be cultivated in whatsoever circumstances you find yourself in. It's not about good things happening to you, it's about finding new layers of wonderfulness in the things that you have right now.

Today's Task: Cultivate Your Gratitude

Today's task has two parts to help you work on both your personal gratitude and also on showing your gratitude to others.

PART 1: CULTIVATE YOUR PERSONAL GRATITUDE

It's time to take stock of all the good things in life that we have to be thankful for. **So task #1 is to make a list of 10 things that you're grateful for.**

When you start, big things will probably come to mind first: health, family, job, kids, etc. But remember gratitude will really work its magic in your life when you start taking notice of the great layers of pleasure present in everyday things. We often walk around like zombies, totally numb to the great beauty and joy we experience each day. So think about really specific things. Not just, "I'm thankful for my wife," but, "I'm thankful that my wife makes me laugh every day." Not just, "I'm thankful for my kids," but, "I'm thankful for how happy it makes me when my kids rush to the door when I come home from work." It doesn't have to be deep stuff. You can be thankful for a delicious meal of beer and pizza or how fresh the house smells when the windows are open. Really take some time to think about the stuff that gives you pleasure and happiness. And don't feel like being grateful for material things is superficial; it's great to take time to reflect on how thankful you are for the Nissan 350Z in your driveway.

10 THINGS I'M GRATEFUL FOR

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

PART 2: SHOW YOUR GRATITUDE TO OTHERS

Too many times we skim on the thank yous because something has happened so often it's become routine or we figure the person already knows how thankful we are for them. But as I said above, they often don't, and even if they do, telling them directly will warm their soul and make their day.

So task #2 is to give three thank yous to three different people today. These have to be specific thank yous. I'm not talking about the waiter bringing your soup and you saying, "Thank you," in return, although you could at the end of the meal say, "I just wanted to tell you how grateful I am for

the extraordinary service you gave tonight.” It’s okay to thank people just for doing their job well. Yeah, they’re just doing their job, but I think we all know plenty of people who can’t even rise to that level, and I’m personally grateful when people have enough integrity to do so.

Thank your significant other for how wonderful she is and mention some specific things about her that you love. Thank your co-worker for bringing donuts. Thank an AoM Community member for their contributions to the community. Thank your teacher for how great he or she is.

It doesn’t have to be present stuff either; give another thank you to your friend who showed you the best time in NYC when you went to visit 2 years ago. Send a thank you to that old professor you had in college who really opened your mind. Call your brother and thank him for helping you get through that rough time you had last fall. Think about people you should have thanked but missed your chance with or the people you really didn’t thank enough.

These thank yous can be done in person, on a post-it note, by letter, by email, by phone, whatever. Just put some thought into it and get going!

THE THREE PEOPLE I THANKED TODAY

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



DAY 6

Update Your Resume

None of us need reminding that the economy is in the tank right now. In this tight job market, every small thing can mean the difference between landing a job and being unemployed. Today we're going to focus on one of those "small" things: our resume. I don't know everyone's story out there, but I'm sure many of you are looking for work. And having an updated, sharp-looking resume is an essential part of [networking like a man](#).

Even if you have a job, it's a good idea to update your resume. Why? Well, first, there's a chance you could lose your job, and you want to be able to start looking for new work immediately instead of having to spend time working on your resume. Second, perhaps a better job opportunity will show up. Many times, such opportunities are time sensitive, meaning the first to get his foot in the door usually gets the job. We all need to be ready for these opportunities when they present themselves by having resumes that are ready to be printed off and placed in someone's hand.

So today's task is to update our resumes. If you don't have a resume, then today's a good day to start one. I'd suggest first reading our articles "[How to Write a Resume](#)" and "[The Importance of a Good Resume](#)".

Before we get to the task, let's take a look at 7 pointers to ensure that we all have killer resumes.

TIPS FOR UPDATING YOUR RESUME

1. **Brainstorm.** First, check to see if there's anything you can add to update your resume. If you look down at your resume and nothing comes to you, pull out an empty sheet of paper and list all the projects you've worked on, all the training you've accomplished, and any

awards you've received since the last time you looked at your resume. If you've done any volunteer work during that time period, add that too.

2. **Eliminate outdated info and “padding.”** Now that we've made a list of new stuff that we can add, take a hard look at your current resume and your new list of items. Are there items on your current resume that are just padding? Perhaps there's some achievement on your new list that is much stronger and impressive than what you currently have. If so, replace the old achievement with the new. Update any new certifications you may have received. And make double sure that all your contact info is up-to-date. You don't want to miss a job opportunity because you gave your old phone number and email in your resume.
3. **Update your format.** If you're like most people, when you first wrote your resume, you probably just used a Word template. But we want our resumes to stand out. It's hard to be unique if you use the same template that every other candidate is using. Instead of using a Word template, take a look at some sample resumes online. Below, we've included a few online resources you can use in your research. Also, it doesn't hurt to ask friends and colleagues in the same field as you if you can see their resumes to get inspiration on how to format yours.

Further reading:

- [LifeClever Template](#) (Word doc — highly recommended)

4. **Replace fluff words with concrete language and specific numbers.** Your resume is no time to be vague. So phrases like “Good people skills” have to go. Instead, replace such vague phrases with action words that give specific numbers. Instead of saying “Good people skills,” say something like, “Managed 45 employees and conducted monthly interviews with each of them.”

Further reading:

- [6 Words That Make Your Resume Suck](#)
- [25 Words That Hurt Your Resume](#)

5. **Triple check for spelling and grammar mistakes.** Your resume is probably the first impression you'll have on a future employer, so you want it to be the absolute best. Having spelling and grammar mistakes isn't the way to leave a stellar first impression. Run through your resume several times and check for any errors or typos. Read it out loud to yourself. Have a friend or a mentor look it over, too.
6. **Give it a face lift.** Finally, you want to polish off your resume so it gleams among the stacks of inanity on an employer's desk. One way you can do this is to make simple changes in the font and spacing. [LifeClever has an amazing tutorial](#) on how to make cosmetic changes to your resume that can really make it shine. It's amazing how such small changes can truly freshen up your resume's appearance and make it easier to read.
7. **Create digital copies.** After you've updated your resume, make digital copies of it so you can access your resume at the drop of a hat. I always keep a copy of my most current resume saved in my Gmail inbox in case I need to print one off while I'm away from my computer or I need to email it to a potential employer. Also, I recommend attaching a USB drive with your updated resume to your key chain. That way if you ever need a resume, you just plug and print.

Today's Task: Update Your Resume

There you go. Seven simple suggestions to help you update your resume. Now, take an hour today and update yours.



DAY 7

Reconnect with an Old Friend

I've recently been reading the book [*Team of Rivals*](#), about the men Abraham Lincoln picked for his cabinet. As I was reading it, I was struck by this passage concerning the friendship between the future Secretary of State, William H. Seward, and his friend David Berdan:

"Together, the young men attended the theater, read poetry, discussed books, and chased after women. Convinced that Berdan would become a celebrated writer, Seward stood in awe of his friend's talent and dedication. All such grand expectations and prospects were crushed when Berdan, still in his twenties was "seized with a bleeding at the lungs" while sojourning in Europe. . . The illness took his life...Seward was devastated, later telling his wife that he had loved Berdan as "never again" could he "love in this world."

Such intimate male attachments as Seward's with Berdan, or, as we shall see, Lincoln's with Joshua Speed and Chase's with Edwin Stanton, were a "common feature of the social landscape" in the nineteenth century America, the historian E. Anthony Rotundo points out. The family-focused and community-centered life led by most men in colonial era was transformed at the dawn of the new century into an individual and career-oriented existence. As the young men of Seward and Lincoln's generation left the familiarity of their small communities and traveled to seek employment in fast-growing, anonymous cities or in distant territories, they often felt unbearably lonely. In the absence of parents and siblings, they turned to one another for support, sharing thoughts and emotions so completely that their intimate friendships developed the qualities of passionate romances."

We have [previously discussed the ardent friendships of the 19th century](#), and the interesting history of male friendship in general. And while much has changed in our world since Lincoln's day, are we not still a society where we head from our hometowns to far flung locations in pursuit of career or

college, and are we not still at times, if we can admit it, “unbearably lonely?” (Be sure to check out our article on [how to make friends when you move to a new city](#).)

Yet unlike the men of the 19th century, the men of today do not seek even closer friendships to enrich their lives and lend them support. Instead, under the excuse of being too busy, we often distance ourselves from other men, trying to be the lone wolf. Or, as [Wayne has pointed out](#), we look to female relationships to cure all of our hunger for intimacy.

OUR CRUMBLING CONNECTIONS

We are isolated more than ever before. According to a study conducted by the American Sociological Review in 2006, over the past two decades, the number of confidantes Americans feel comfortable discussing important matters with has shrunk by a third. 25% of the study’s respondents said they had no one with whom they felt comfortable discussing important matters, more than double the percentage who felt that way 20 years ago. And 20% said they had only one person with which to do so. The greatest drop in confidantes occurred in non-familial relations. Or in other words, our friends.

What a lamentable state of things. Can we get by without any friends? Surely. But can friends enrich our lives and make us happier? Most definitely. There’s something invaluable about knowing that you are not alone in the world. That no matter what, [there’s a guy out there](#) who you absolutely know has your back. A friend that would come to your side if you were beset with a crisis.

So what was the difference between the men of the 19th Century and our day? Did they need friendships more some how? That’s debatable. Were they less busy? Men of today would probably like to think so. Busyness is our favorite excuse for why we can’t make time for the good things in life. But given that the men of the 19th century had no electricity, no modern appliances, no internet, no cars, no packaged meals, no cell phones, and no

fast food, unless they were a slave owner, which the men above were not, then they weren't sitting around all day twiddling their thumbs.

So what was the difference between them and us? They weren't as **dis-tracted** from what's important in life as we are. They didn't labor under the belief that watching *Lost* was an adequate substitution for friendship. And they didn't think that checking a buddy's Facebook update was equivalent to catching up with him.

It's amazing that with the proliferation of time-saving devices these days, we feel busier than ever. Yet, it's all relative. We're *not* busier than ever. And if we feel that way, it's because we aren't prioritizing the right kinds of things in our lives. And that's going to change this month, starting with today's task.

Today's Task: Reconnect With an Old Friend

It's not as if men like Joshua Speed and Abe Lincoln had an edge on this friendship business because they stayed in one place their whole lives. Men back then were just like you; they made close friendships and then often went their separate ways. The difference is that they made the effort to stay in touch. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were apart from each other for 14 years, yet they kept their friendship alive by writing 158 letters to each other.

So your task today is to make like men of old and reconnect with a friend, either by letter, phone, or email. Wild dogs shall be released upon any man who attempts to complete this task via Twitter.

I highly recommend the letter option myself. I personally don't like talking on the phone. Letter writing is an [excellent tradition](#) to begin with your buddy, and unlike an email, it begs an answer and will almost certainly not be ignored.

This is not a task to arrange a hangout with your friend (that will come up later, rest assured); you need only to shoot the breeze and catch up on old times.

3 POSSIBLE FRIENDS TO RECONNECT WITH

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



DAY 8

Start a Journal

My grandpa, Bill Hurst, was a journal writer his entire life. His journal was quite simple. He just kept a small notebook in the pocket of his pearl snap shirts and jotted down a short description of the things he did and the people he did it with. This is something he did pretty much every day for his entire life. He also kept extensive diaries of his time as a forest ranger in the Wasatch Range.

About 12 years ago, my grandpa took all these diaries and daily journal entries and began to write his memoir for his children and grandchildren. The finished product was a 500-page behemoth filled with stories from my grandfather's life. Here's just a few of the interesting things I learned from reading it:

- My grandpa met my grandma by hitting on her while she worked as a telephone operator.
- My grandpa helped pay for college by playing pool.
- He worked as a sheep herder during the summers in high school and college. He gives a very descriptive account on how castrating sheep is performed. He did it [just like this](#).
- He has a scar from when he was hit by a car while racing his horse through the streets of his boyhood town. The horse died.
- As a boy, his family traveled by horse and buggy.

There's more. Lots more. But while the stories are interesting, what I found more interesting was the commentary my grandpa gave on different events in his life. In these moments, he passed on some insights and lessons on what it means to be a man. My grandpa's memoir is a treasure trove of

knowledge and wisdom from a life well lived. By writing his memoir, he guaranteed that his legacy will live on indefinitely.

But his life story would have been but a few pages long had he not kept a journal.

There are a myriad of other benefits to keeping a daily journal besides remembering what you ate five years ago. So today's task is to start the journaling habit.

GREAT MEN KEEP JOURNALS

In studying the lives of great men, I've noticed a common trait: they were all consistent journal writers. Now, I'm not saying that their greatness is directly attributable to their journaling. I'm sure Captain Cook would still have been a badass even if he hadn't kept a diary. But I figure, if great men like these thought it was important to keep a journal, maybe I should, too. Heck, if it weren't for their journals, we probably wouldn't know much about their great lives and deeds.

Here's a short list of great men from history who kept journals:

- Theodore Roosevelt
- Thomas Jefferson
- Charles Darwin
- Benjamin Franklin
- Lewis and Clark
- Andrew Carnegie
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Captain Cook
- Winston Churchill
- Sir Edmund Hilary
- Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton
- Doogie Howser M.D.

I could go on, but I think you get the idea.

WHY KEEP A JOURNAL

- 1. Your children and grandchildren will want to read it.** I know it's hard to believe right now. Your life probably seems quite ordinary and of little interest to anyone else. And every generation believes that life will pretty much continue on like it is now. When your great-grandpa was kicking it in the 1920s, he thought to himself, "Who would want to read about this new fangled radio or how I get my food out of an icebox? Phhht! That's boring stuff!" But it's not boring anymore; to this generation, such a peek at the olden days is fascinating. And so it is with you. When your grandkids are talking to people via hologram, they are going to be absolutely fascinated by your impressions of those ancient things like cell phones. And unfortunately, they're not going to be curious about it until they get into their 20s, realize you're going to die, and start asking you questions.

Trust me, while you think that you'll be able to remember everything just as clearly in the future, you won't. Remember when you were a kid and you thought your experiences would be easily recalled at age 30? Now what do you remember from those days besides that time a dog bit you in the face?

As each year passes, the pixels of our memories burn out and the haze sets in. By age 80, you'll only remember the faintest outlines of the big things that happened to you. But the stuff that's really interesting is often the little, seemingly mundane details of life. What was a man's daily routine like in 2009? Of course, the whippersnappers will ask you about the big stuff too: "Where were you when you found out about the attacks on the World Trade Center?" and "What did you think about the election of Barack Obama?" Your journals will give them the answers they'll be looking for and will bring you closer.

And who knows? Maybe the whole world might be interested in your musings someday. You may not think so now, but how many famous men knew that they would be famous before they actually

burst onto the scene? And how many men were ignored in their lifetime, only to be celebrated after their death?

- 2. It can bring you to your senses.** Have you ever struggled with a choice, thought about it long and hard, made a decision, but then some time later started to regret it? Have you ever gotten into a rut from which you can't seem to find a way out? A journal can aid you in these dilemmas. When you make a decision, you can write down all the reasons you have for coming to that conclusion. Then, after time passes, and you start doubting that choice, you can look back, remind yourself of why you made that decision in the first place, and feel reassured in pressing on. Or, if you're in a depressed funk and don't know how to extract yourself from it, you can look back through your journal to find the times when you were happiest. Old journal entries can help you rediscover the kinds of changes you need to make to get your life back on track. Or you can look back at your journal and how you used to operate 5 years ago and think, "Damn! I never want to be that man again! What was I thinking?" A journal is basically a chance for your past self to lend counsel to your present self.

Finally, simply writing about your feelings and frustrations helps you focus on what's really going on in your life and in your head, so that you can come up with a solution to your problems.

- 3. Journaling grants you immortality.** Think of the billions of people who have and will perish from the earth without leaving a trace of themselves behind. They vanish into the ether, completely forgotten in the annals of history. A journal helps make you immortal. It is a tangible piece of evidence to leave behind that you were here! That you lived and loved! That there was such a person as Jared Matthews who lived in Austin, Texas who thought and breathed and died.
- 4. Journaling improves your health.** Several studies have shown that writing about traumatic or stressful events and your deepest feelings

and emotions [boosts your emotional and physical health and sense of well-being](#).

Especially as men, we often tend to keep things bottled up. Journaling provides an excellent outlet to let go of those things that are bothering or worrying us.

HOW TO JOURNAL

1. **Pick a medium.** If you've never journaled or if you have previously, but fell off the wagon, the first thing you need to decide is what kind of journal you're going to keep. There are basically two different types of journal mediums: analog and digital.

Analog journals, the paper and pen variety, are what we traditionally think of when we think of journals. You can use something as basic as a spiral-bound notebook and a Bic pen or something as fancy as a hand-bound leather journal and a fountain pen. Just do what works for you.

With the advent of computers, many people have gone digital with their journaling. The digital world offers a plethora of options to record your daily happenings and thoughts. Here's a list of possible desktop digital tools in which to keep your journal:

- **Word Processor.** Pretty basic. Just open up Word or [OpenOffice Writer](#) and start clickity clackin' away.
- **TextEditor/Notepad.** Just open up the text editor for your operating system, call the file "journal.txt," and start writing. Date each entry. If you're using Notepad, here's a nifty [little hack to automatically insert the date into your journal entry](#).
- **JDarkroom.** JDarkroom is a free Java-based text editor. What makes it different from other text editors is that it takes up the entire screen for distraction free writing. I've used it before, and it's actually pretty nice. It works on any platform.

- **OneNote.** Microsoft OneNote is a robust note-taking program that can double as a journal. Just create a notebook within OneNote for your journal and start writing. With this program, you can easily drop photos and videos into your journal entries. OneNote is only available for Windows.
- **Evernote.** Evernote is pretty much like Microsoft OneNote except 1) it's free, 2) it works on any platform, and 3) you can save and access entries on the internet easily, thus giving you access to your journal everywhere you go. I don't use Evernote for my journal, but I use it on a daily basis for notes and would definitely recommend it.

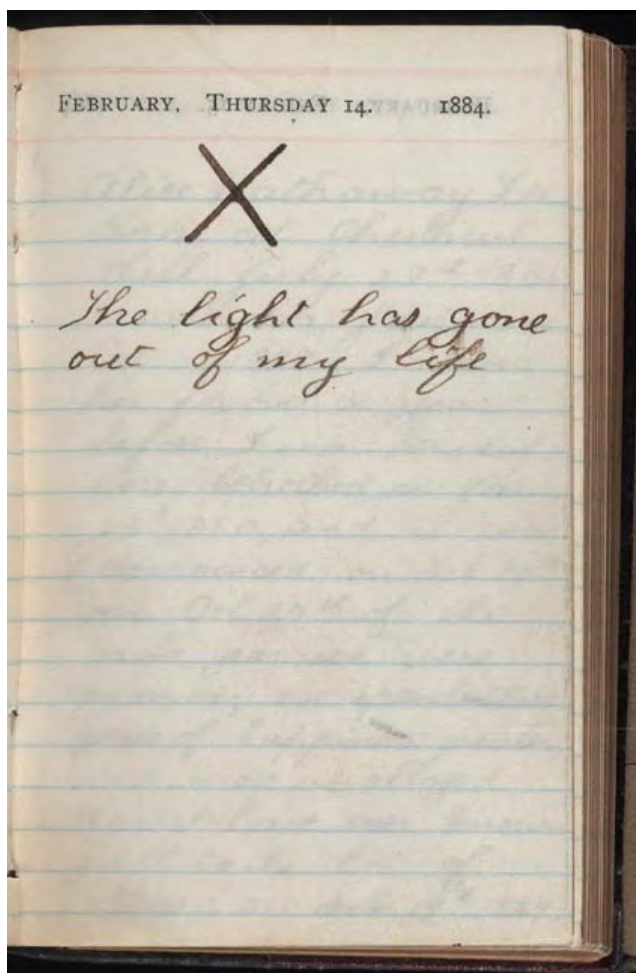
The internet provides several options for you to store your journal in the “cloud” and even share it with other people. A few options:

- **Blogspot.** It's free and it gives you the option of keeping your journal private or sharing it with a few people. In addition to writing text, you can easily include photos in your journal entries.
- **LiveJournal.** Pretty much the same as Blogspot. It's free and you have the option of keeping it private or you can share with others.
- **WordPress.com.** Out of all the blogging platforms, I prefer WordPress (it's what we use for Art of Manliness). You can get a free wordpress.com blog and start a journal with it.
- **Use Gmail as a journal.** This is an interesting idea.

2. Schedule a time. Starting a journal is easy enough. Sticking to it on a daily basis is more difficult. If you want to make it a habit, just pick a time in your day for journal writing and make it a non-negotiable in your life. I like doing it at night right before I go to bed. It's a good way to decompress and review the day's events. But some people prefer writing in the morning or jotting down thoughts throughout the day. Just do what works for you.

Some days you might not have the energy or desire to write in your journal. On those days, just write something. It can be a sentence long. It can simply be, “I’m not in the mood to write.” Just keep your commitment.

One of the most memorable journal entries I’ve come across was written by TR on the day both his wife and mother died. Instead of spending several pages outlining his grief, this is all it said:



WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

This is where a lot of people get hung up on with journaling. They feel like they don't have anything to write about so they end up not writing at all. There are hundreds of books that give you "suggestions" of what to write about in your journal. Usually they're cheesy and inane things like, "If you were a cloud, what shape would you be."

Just write about your day. No need to get fancy with those cute little journal prompts. Some days might be pretty routine, but other days you might be feeling philosophical or have a problem that will require you to write more in-depth entries. Just write what comes naturally to you on that day.

And as we mentioned above, while you might think your life is boring, your great grand kids won't. They'll be just as fascinated about you driving a car that runs on gasoline as you are about your great grandpa driving a horse and buggy. If your life really is boring, perhaps keeping a journal will give you an incentive to take on more adventures so you have something to write about.

If you're still having trouble coming up with what to write about, we've put together a very handy and virile [31-day journaling calendar](#) that gives manly prompts for each day.

Today's Task: Start a Journal

It's time to get started. Pick your medium and begin. If you already have a journal, but haven't written in it in awhile, write an entry today. And if you're one of those few consistent journalers out there, bully for you! Keep up the good work and use today's journal entry to give yourself a pat on the back.



DAY 9

Take a Woman on a Date

A man has many roles in his life — leader, father, brother, friend, and so on. Yet there's one name that fewer and fewer men may be called by: lover. Manliness is often ranked by how many random women a dude can bed. But one of the things that separates man from the beasts is the ability and desire to focus his romantic energies on one woman at a time. Being a lover and romancer is something that makes us human, and not just another mammal on the Discovery Channel.

There is no better tool in the romantic man's arsenal than the date. The date's structure allows a man to show off his ability to woo a lady. Unfortunately, few men have been taking on the challenge of being lovers these days as our dating abilities have become infected with the plague of hanging out.

DATING AND THE SINGLE MAN

We've [previously discussed](#) the way in which “hanging out” has largely supplanted dating these days. Young people hang out in groups of friends and “friends with benefits” and rarely pair off for an official date. There's nothing wrong with hanging out, but it's not a substitute for dating. Dating is the way you find a woman you'd like to have an exclusive relationship with. Exclusive relationships are one-on-one affairs, so there has to come a point where you leave the comfort of the group and start getting to know women on a one-on-one basis.

DATING AND THE COMMITTED MAN

Hanging out isn't just a romance killer for the single set, it also has a nasty habit of snuffing out the sparks of long-term relationships as well. Too many men think that the courting phase of a relationship ends at the altar or once they've landed a lady. But this is patently incorrect, at least if you want to have a happy, fun, and intimate relationship.

Think about it: if you want to feel the same way about your wife that you did when you were dating, then you have to do some of the stuff you did when you *were* dating. The most obvious of which is, of course, actually going on dates. Every couple should make a weekly date night a non-negotiable in their life. And not just the same dinner and a movie date either. It turns out that if you want to get back the butterflies you used to feel for your lady, [you need to make the effort to keep your dates fresh and interesting](#). By injecting some novelty into your relationship, your brain gets flooded with dopamine and norepinephrine, the chemicals that used to make you think about your love obsessively and feel down right giddy about her.

So ditch the whole pizza and Netflix routine and really get out and do something new and different.

Today's Task: Take a Woman a Date

Dating has fallen into such disfavor that we should perhaps give a primer on what a date is. At it's most basic, a date must include the "3 P's" to be official:

1. Paired off
2. Planned ahead
3. Paid for

The “paid for” and “paired off” business isn’t as important for the fellows already in a long-term relationship as it is for the single gents, but for both groups of men, the planning ahead part is crucial. You need to try to cook up something cool for your date.

But keep in mind that a date doesn’t have to be expensive or formal. With a little creativity you can come up with an inexpensive, yet creative date that will really impress your lady. Check out [this post](#) for some great ideas.

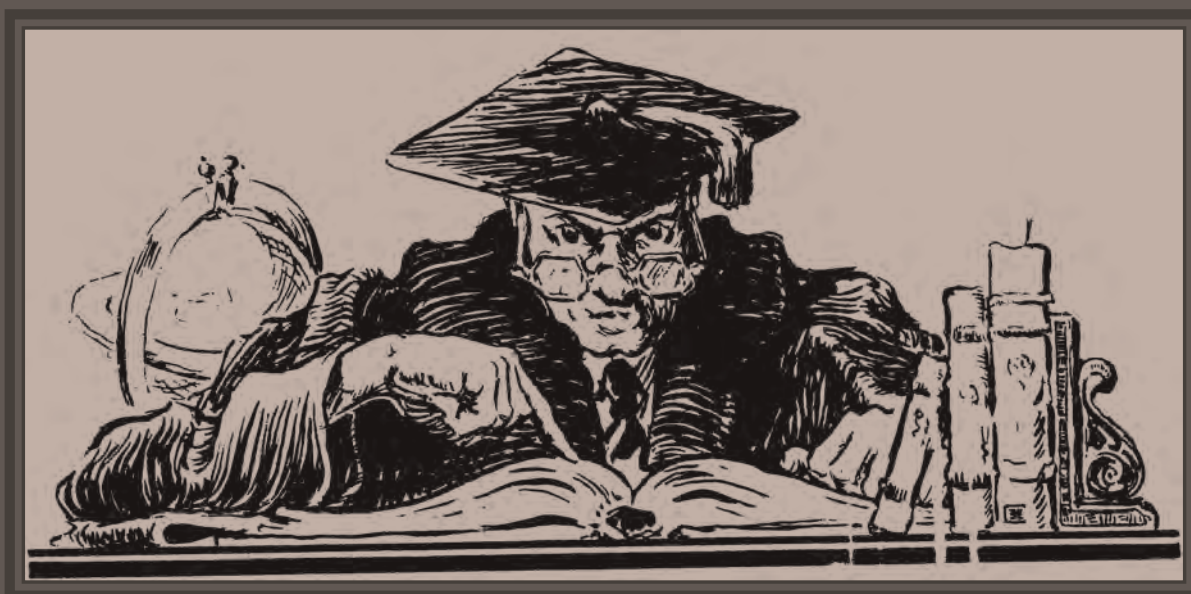
A woman needs to plan ahead too. So you are hereby charged with asking a woman out in the next 24 hours. You then have the rest of the week to plan a killer date.

DATE PLANNER

Who am I taking out? _____

What do I plan on doing with her?

When is the date? _____



DAY 10

Memorize “If”

Before Google and the internet, [people memorized stuff](#). When your grandpa went to school, memorization was the main method of learning, and he had to commit things like the Gettysburg Address and sonnets by William Shakespeare to memory. Decades ago, rote learning went entirely out of fashion amongst educators, in favor of helping students think creatively and problem solve. Yet, the pendulum swung a bit too far, and the baby got chunked out with the bathwater. For in truth, there are many advantages to memorizing information. After all, while it's important to be able to think and apply knowledge, if you don't have any knowledge to apply, knowing how to apply it is pretty useless. This is where memorization comes in.

The ancient Greeks understood this. They began the schooling of their young men by having them memorize the poetry of Homer or the wise words of Solon, the founder of Athenian democracy. The Athenians believed that by memorizing great poetry they were helping their citizens develop a mastery of language that would serve them well in the halls of the Assembly. Moreover, memorization of noble poetry burned the ideals of Athenian society deep into the souls of its citizens.

The West's most famous wordsmith, William Shakespeare, gained his education by memorizing the epic poetry of the classical world. Through this practice, the Bard developed an ear for the sophisticated rhythms and patterns of language, helping him churn out some of civilization's most cherished pieces of literature. Moreover, by memorizing the myths and stories of the ancient world, Shakespeare had a fountain of creative resources to draw upon as he wrote his plays.

Almost the entirety of Abraham Lincoln's education was self-directed. Lacking formal schooling, he consumed books with an insatiable desire, reading snatches of them whenever he could. He also committed to memory numerous passages from his favorite books. It enabled him to learn the musicality present in great writing. It's no coincidence that the mind that produced the Gettysburg Address had at its immediate disposable snippets from the world's finest authors.

These days, people have to Google something if they want to remember the words to a poem or some other famous piece of literature. Heck, we even need Google to remember the capital of Vermont. In an [article in the Atlantic Monthly](#), one writer makes the case that Google is making us dumber. And he's probably right.

So today, we're going reverse the trend of having to depend on the Google crutch by memorizing Rudyard Kipling's poem "If." Let's get started.

WHY MEMORIZE THINGS

There are countless benefits to memorizing great poems and passages. Here are a few for consideration:

- 1. Improved writing.** As you memorize great poetry and other worthy pieces of literature, you'll begin to internalize the rhythm and structure employed by some of the world's greatest writers. Etching these things into your brain allows some of that magic to make its way into your own writing. Benjamin Franklin was a believer. According to his autobiography, Franklin set out to improve his writing by memorizing the works of writers he admired.
- 2. Increased vocabulary.** In the course of memorizing, you'll undoubtedly encounter words you've never seen or don't know the meaning of. By memorizing the word within the context of the poem, it will be easier to recall its meaning and use it later than if you had tried to memorize the word alone.

3. **A more interesting personality.** I've always been impressed by that very rare man who can weave a snippet of a great speech or poem into a conversation. Being able to throw some inspiration from Wordsworth or a bit of wit from Twain into your conversations can definitely distinguish you as a gentleman of letters. The trick is to be discriminating when you start reciting stuff. If you do it too much or at the wrong times, you'll just make yourself look like a pompous ass.
4. **A strengthened backbone.** The most important benefit of memorizing passages from great works is that you'll be storing up a treasure trove of wisdom and knowledge that you can immediately access when you need extra motivation to man up. Feeling a little nervous while you're waiting in the lobby for a job interview? Recite Theodore Roosevelt's "[Man in the Arena](#)" to yourself. Perhaps you've been put in a leadership position and need to get psyched up to lead your group to success. Mull over the words to the "[St. Crispin's Day](#)" speech. There's probably a poem or a great speech that can be used to motivate you for any facet of your life.

TIPS ON MEMORIZING

When I was in law school, I often had to memorize 40 pages of a class outline. So I was always looking for new ways to improve my ability to memorize.

I'm a big fan of the [peg system](#), the [link system](#), and [mindmaps](#). Unfortunately, I found these techniques useless for memorizing 40 page law school outlines filled with abstract legal doctrine. So I came up with my own system, which I call "brute force memorization." It ain't pretty or efficient, but it gets the job done.

THE BRUTE FORCE MEMORIZATION PROCESS

While reading the sentence I want to memorize aloud, I'll type it into my computer. I repeat this process five times with each line of data I want to

memorize. In this way, I get visual stimulation by reading and auditory stimulation from the reading aloud. And writing things down is one of the best ways to remember things. These three things done simultaneously produce a trifecta of memorizing power.

And of course, repetition crams the info into your brain. If I'm having trouble memorizing a particular piece of information, I'll keep repeating the process until I've got it down.

I've been doing this for years and it has always helped me remember those pesky details I've needed to know for school or other things.

Caveat: I don't completely abandon other memorizing techniques while doing this. I often incorporate them in the process when I see they would work. For example, something else I'll do is a technique that was used by those memorization gurus, the ancient Greeks. The Greeks are the originators of mnemonic devices (from "mnemonikos" which is itself derived from Mnemosyne, the name of the Goddess of Memory). Orators faced the daunting task of memorizing long speeches and employed the "method of loci" in order to do so. They would picture a house and place "objects" (words they wanted to remember from the speech or poem) in different rooms in the imaginary house. Then, to remember the speech, they would "walk" through the house picking up each "object" as they went.

Today's Task: *Memorize "If" by Rudyard Kipling*

Exercising your memorization muscles is clearly beneficial, but many men are totally out of practice or have never tried. So today we're going to start working out those muscles, starting with one of the manliest poems ever written – "If" by Rudyard Kipling. It's a poem that every man should have thoroughly lodged in his head, ready to conjure up whenever he's feeling down.

It's not too short, but it's not too long either. I think memorizing it is doable in the next day or two. Go to it!

“If” by Rudyard Kipling

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you
But make allowance for their doubting too,
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:*

*If you can dream—and not make dreams your master,
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: “Hold on!”*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much,
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!*



DAY 11

Give Yourself a Testicular Exam

Today we're going to examine ourselves. And by ourselves, I mean our balls. Why, you may be asking, are we examining our bits and pieces today? Well, testicular cancer is the most common malignancy in young men between the ages of 20 and 34. It's also is the number one cancer killer among men in this same age group. Who knew that the one thing (okay, two things) that makes a man a man, can also be the very things that kill you?

The good news is that if detected early, testicular cancer is almost always curable. But in order to detect cancer, you need to know what to look for and also how to look for it.

DO I NEED REGULAR TESTICULAR SELF-EXAMS?

Most health professionals recommend all men between the ages of 15 and 40 have regular testicular exams performed by a doctor. This is usually done once a year at your yearly physical.

If you have a history of testicular cancer in your family or if you had undescended testicles as a baby, it's recommended that you perform monthly self-exams. Studies have shown that male children with a history of undescended testicles have about 10-40 times higher risk of developing testicular cancer. And here's the kicker: both testes are at higher risk, not just the undescended one. If you don't know if you had an undescended testicle, ask your parents.

The American Cancer Society doesn't recommend that men who have no risk of testicular cancer perform regular monthly self-exams. But even if you aren't at a high risk for testicular cancer, it doesn't hurt to examine

yourself every now and then. It's fast, painless, and will give you peace of mind to know that everything is fine under the hood.

Today's Task: Give Yourself a Testicular Exam

I'm sure that many of you are still trying to complete yesterday's task and are hard at work memorizing "If." So today's task is simple, straightforward, and quick. You're going to give yourself a testicular exam. Here's how to do it:

It's best to perform the exam right after a hot shower when the scrotal muscles are warm and relaxed. You know...when your balls are saggy.

1. Stand in front of a mirror and check for any swelling on the scrotum's skin.
2. Exam each testicle with both hands by rolling the testicle gently but firmly between your thumb and fingers. Don't worry if one testicle feels larger than the other. That's completely normal. **Fast fact: A man's left testicle is usually larger than the right one.** While you're rolling each testicle in your hands, look for **hard lumps** on the surface of it.
3. Don't confuse the epididymis for a lump. The epididymis is the spongy, tube-like structure that collects and carries your sperm to the prostate. You can feel the epididymis on the top and down the back side of each testicle. This isn't the sort of lump you're looking for.
4. If you notice any sort of hard lump on your testicle, don't freak out yet. Just contact your doctor **immediately**. Complete and accurate diagnosis can only be performed by a trained medical physician.

In addition to lumps on the surface of your testes, be on the look out for these signs of other problems:

1. Sudden acute pain during the self-examination could mean you have an infection in the epididymis or it could mean the spermatic chord is twisted up and blocking blood flow to your testicles. If you feel pain during the exam, go see the doctor.
2. You feel a soft collection of thin tubes above or behind your testicles. It's often described as feeling like a "bag of worms." This may indicate a [varicocele](#).



DAY 12

Create Your Bucket List

A few years ago, AoM guest writer Chris Hutcheson wrote a great piece on [writing your bucket list](#). After the article was published, Kate asked me, “What’s on your bucket list, Brett?” To be honest, I had never given much thought to what would be on my bucket list. Consequently, I could only think of two things. At that moment I realized: 1) I’m pretty pathetic if I could only think of two things I wanted to do before I die and 2) creating a bucket list actually takes a lot more thought than I thought it would. And so here it is more than a month later, and I still haven’t completed the task.

I’m sure I’m not the only man out there who hasn’t given much thought to all the exciting and fulfilling things he wants to do before he kicks the bucket. And I’m sure I’m not the only one who found Chris’s post really interesting, and then proceeded to do nothing about it. So today’s task is to turn our good intentions into something concrete by creating a bucket list and taking the first steps towards actually completing one of the items on the list.

WHY HAVE A BUCKET LIST?

As Chris pointed out in his post, when we were kids, we all had dreams of cool and exciting stuff we wanted to do when we grew up. I remember dreaming about going to Japan and learning karate. But something happens when we become adults. We become more cynical and start thinking big adventures aren’t prudent or reasonable. We think we’re too busy to do anything extraordinary. And we’re surrounded by ordinary people who aren’t doing anything special either. So we settle and stick with doing what’s safe.

Of course, no matter how deeply we bury our dreams, regret over their demise will still come bubbling to the surface. I don't know about you, but I don't want to look back on my life wishing I would have done x, y, and z when I had the chance. I am convinced that all men are made for [adventure](#). And when there's no adventure in our lives, a little part of us dies.

If you feel like you've been in a rut or that you've become too boring, creating a bucket list is the first step to adding a little more excitement back into your life. A bucket list can act as a road map to a life of adventure and fulfillment.

CREATING THE BUCKET LIST

Creating a bucket list is pretty easy. It's just a matter of taking the time to actually do it. But if you're like me, it's just one of those things that you never get around to and you keep living your life one dull day at a time. Today we're going to change that.

Today's Task: Create Your Bucket List

Set aside about 30 minutes of your day and think about all the things you've always wanted to do. Then write them down. Writing creates a contract with yourself and makes you more likely to follow through with your dreams. The goal is to come up with at least 10 items for your bucket list. If you're like me, this could take a lot longer than you think.

Don't put down things just because you feel like you're *supposed* to want to do them. If you're not really excited about the idea of skydiving, then don't put it down. People might tell you that everyone should backpack across Europe, but if you're honestly not a person who enjoys travel, then don't add it to your list. Really think about stuff that you yourself have dreamed of doing. The stuff that makes you happy just thinking about it. Think about where you want to be in 10, 20, and 50 years. Think about sit-

ting in a nursing home at age 90 and looking back over your life. What is that old man wishing he had done?

If you're having trouble coming up with items for your list, it might help to create categories such as these:

- Travel
- Relationships
- Career
- Financial
- Entertainment
- Education
- Health

After you come up with the categories, think of something for each that you would like to accomplish. For example:

- Travel: Visit Greece
- Relationships: Propose marriage to my girlfriend on top of a mountain
- Career: Find a job where I can work at home
- Financial: Become a millionaire by age 35
- Entertainment: See Jimmy Eat World in concert
- Education: Take a course in basic carpentry skills
- Health: Lose 20 pounds

PICK ONE ITEM ON YOUR BUCKET LIST AND DO SOMETHING TO SET IT IN MOTION

Now that you've created your bucket list, look it over and pick one goal as the one you next plan to accomplish. Pick the one that you can most reasonably complete this year. Then, come up with a plan on how you're going to accomplish this goal. Think through and make a list of everything you would need to do to make it happen.

THEN PICK ONE TASK FROM THE LIST AND DO IT IN THE NEXT 24 HOURS.

For example, if your goal was to visit Greece this summer, you would make a plan like this:

- Request time off from work
- Buy travel book about Greece
- Get passport
- Figure out a way to make more money to pay for the trip
- Start researching prices of airline tickets

You might choose “buy travel book about Greece” as your first task, and head down to the bookstore to pick one up. The important thing is to do at least one single task that will move you closer to your goal.

Remember, a little bit of adventure is in the reach of every man. It doesn't have to mean spending all your money or giving up your responsibilities. You can live like a happily ordinary guy 362 days a year, but just leave 3 days for doing something extraordinary, something that reminds you that you're alive.

My Bucket List

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Which one do I plan on accomplishing this year? _____

What will I do today to accomplish this goal? _____



DAY 13

Declutter Your Life

“Simplify, simplify.”
—Henry David Thoreau

The simple life is a manly life. Some of history’s manliest men lived lives of true simplicity, free from unneeded clutter. The Spartans basically had one piece of clothing they wore all year, a spear, a shield, and some farm tools. Because of their simple lifestyle, they were able to focus on learning how to be fighting machines.

Despite being relatively wealthy, [Ben Franklin](#) lived a pretty simple life. Consequently, he was able to spend his time inventing stoves, creating public libraries, discovering electricity, and founding a country.

Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were evangelists of simplicity. When Thoreau went to Walden Pond he brought with him just a few things. Because he didn’t have crap distracting him, he was able to focus his energies into writing some awesomely deep thoughts.

The simple life is a manly life because a man defines himself not by his possessions but by his character, virtues, relationships, and experiences. These are the things that he invests his time, energy, and emotions in, because these are the things that no natural disaster, no bomb, no prison can ever take away from him. The less stuff we accumulate, the less energy we have to devote to the maintenance of it, and the more energy we can put into becoming better men.

WHY DECLUTTER

1. **It reduces stress.** I definitely think there's something to the idea that clutter can block the flow of good karma and energy in your life. Whenever I'm in a room filled with crap, I get tense and feel like I'm being buried in stuff. When I clear things out, I feel like a load has been taken off me physically and mentally. I think clearer, I'm more productive, and I have a bit more pep in my step.
2. **It gives you a fresh start.** If you feel as though you've been [stuck in a rut](#) lately or if you've [gone through a tough break-up](#) or recently been [laid off](#), decluttering your space may be just the thing to kick-start your life and move it out of neutral. You can get rid of stuff that reminds you of a part of your life you want to move on from. Holding onto stuff you associate with bad memories and feelings keeps the bad energy in your home. After you clear out your crap, you'll have a clean canvas on which to create a new life.
3. **It saves you time.** I don't know how many hours I've wasted in my life looking for something in the boxes and drawers of junk I've accumulated. When you have a house free of clutter, you can spend less time looking for stuff and more time focusing on more important things like [making your bucket list](#) or [reconnecting with nature](#). After all, "[A place for everything, and everything in its place](#)," is one of the manlier mantras you can organize your life around.
4. **It can save (and make) you some money.** When you have a disorganized mess, important things like bills can get lost in the mix. When that happens, you run the risk of forgetting to pay a bill and being slapped with an overdue fee. You also forget what you have and don't have, and thus end up buying duplicates of things already in your possession. Save yourself money by keeping your place clutter free.

Also, through the process of decluttering, you may run across a few things that you can sell on eBay or Amazon and thus make some cash in the process.

HOW TO DECLUTTER

1. **Set aside a big chunk of time.** How much time you allocate for decluttering will depend on how much crap you've accumulated over the years. Usually when I declutter the house, it takes about four hours of focused work. It may take you longer or shorter. But I would give yourself at least 2 hours this weekend to get started on it.
2. **Get some garbage bags.** You'll either be tossing stuff out, donating it to Goodwill, or selling it. Have one trash bag for each one of these purposes.
3. **Tackle the task one room at a time.** One thing I've noticed when I've done some heavy duty decluttering is that I'll begin in one room, but somehow end up in another. This just makes my job harder because I have to keep track of what's going on in both rooms, and I've made a mess in two rooms instead of one. It's better when I just focus on one room or closet at a time and focus completely on clearing it out until I'm satisfied with the job I've done. So fight the temptation to have several irons in the fire while decluttering. Pick a room in your house and work on it until you're done.

After you've selected a room, work on it section by section. For example, start with your dresser or desk and go through it drawer by drawer. Or start with your closet and look at what's on each hanger. Don't move on to another section until the one you started on is done.

Finally, leave no stone unturned. Go through your underwear drawer and throw out those socks without matches or those boxers with gaping holes in them. Clean out your medicine cabinet and throw away anything that has expired. Go through your desk drawers and chuck

your pens that have run out of ink. Get every last piece of unusable clutter out of your life.

4. Sort through your stuff. As you work through each section, take everything item by item and decide whether you're going to keep it or which bag it goes into: trash, sell, or donate. Here's some advice on how to make that decision:

- **Books.** Go book by book and ask yourself if you're ever going to read it or read it again. Be honest here. Don't keep a book because it makes you feel smart while deep down you know there's no way you're going to read it. Books aren't accessories or decorative pieces. Also, keep in mind that if you get rid of a book and then regret it, you can always check it out from the library or buy it used for \$2 on [Amazon](#) or at a used book store. This is not a life or death decision, so err on the side of uncluttering.

Take the books you don't want and put them for sale on sites like [Amazon](#) or half.com. Or take them to your local used bookstore. If you can't sell them, donate them to the library.

- **Clothes and miscellaneous items.** Go through your clothes and other stuff piece by piece. Ask yourself this question as you hold each item, "Is this something I have used/worn in the past year?"

If you haven't, then get rid of it. We often hold onto stuff because we think we're going to need it "someday." But if you haven't used something in a year, you're probably never going to use it, and it will just end up taking up space in your house. Even if you would end up using it 10 years from now, the cost/benefit analysis of lugging that thing around for the next decade just doesn't make sense.

When you make this decision, be quick. Don't mull over it too much. The more you mull, the more likely you'll hold onto it. Remember, if you hesitate at all, you probably don't need it. You

have to learn to detach feelings and emotions from stuff. Stuff is just stuff, a bunch of atoms and molecules. Unless something is truly irreplaceable, then it's okay to throw it away and keep the memories in your mind and heart.

Put your old clothes, with the exception of your underwear, in the donate bag. As you put stuff in the bag, make a note of what the item is on a piece of paper and give it an approximate value. You can use this to get a receipt from Goodwill and write off the amount you donated on your income taxes.

- **Paper and mail.** If you don't have one now, go out and buy a file box. And then make folders labeled as "Bills," "Instruction Manuals," "Letters," "Receipts," and so on. Then go through your mail and paper piles piece by piece, throwing away what you don't need and filing what you do need.

CHUCK IT OR DONATE IT

When you're done decluttering, take the bags designated for trash to the curb. Drop off the donate bags to Goodwill and make sure to get a receipt from them for your income tax deduction.

PREVENTING CLUTTER FROM RE-ENTERING YOUR LIFE

Once you have successfully decluttered your home, you'll be amazed at how satisfying it feels. The hard part is holding on to that feeling and not letting everything get cluttered up again. So here are a few steps to take to prevent clutter from creeping back into your life:

- Every time you bring home something new, get rid of something. This keeps the balance of clutter in check.
- Every time you go to bed, spend 5 minutes moving from room to room and throwing away junk that's been lying around.

- Each time you get the mail, open it immediately, throwing away what you don't need and filing what you do.

Today's Task: *Declutter Your Place*

Just get started. Maybe you have so much crap that you can only get one room done all day. So be it. Just get started.



DAY 14

Write a Letter to Your Father

The Old Man. Pops. Dad. Daddy. Father. Papa. By whichever named we call him, no matter whether he was a good dad or a horrible one, no man looms larger in a man's life than his father. For better or worse, his influence is inescapable. He is our model for manhood. Thus few things elicit stronger feelings in a man than his father. It's the reason why Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* resonates so deeply with us and the reason we get teary eyed when we watch movies like *Big Fish*.

Every boy wants a perfect father. He wants the man who acts as protector when things go bump in the night, who teaches him how to break in a baseball glove and how to shave, who gives him advice on women, and who becomes a friend and confidant later in life.

Of course, every dad is human and lives up to our dreams of perfection to varying degrees. He may fall so short of the father we hoped for that we ache in disappointment for what might have been. Or he may be so close to the ideal that we still fear that we may never live up to the example he set. Either way, our relationship with our father shaped us as no other, and our feelings about that relationship run deep, whether we can even acknowledge them or not.

The feelings that exist between father and son are rarely expressed. Many of us still think about that one time our father said, "Son, I'm proud of you." And many dads still cherish the time their sons said, "Thank you, Dad."

Most of have never taken the time to really thank our dads for everything they've done for us and shown us or had the courage to acknowledge how much they've hurt us. Yet if we don't understand how we feel about our dads, we can't understand how they shaped us, and we can't understand

ourselves and why we turned out the way we did. So today we're going to write a letter to our first models of manhood: our fathers.

Today's Task: Write Your Father a Letter

Whether or not you had/have a good relationship with your dad, today you're going to write him a letter. Even if he's passed on or you don't know where he is. Sending the letter is optional; writing it is not. The purpose of this exercise is for you to get out and write down your feelings about your dad.

IF YOU HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER

If you have/had a good relationship with your dad, then the purpose of today's letter is to let your old man know how much you appreciate him. Here are some recommendations on how to structure the letter:

- Something awesome Kate did for her dad when he turned 50 was to come up with a list of 50 of her favorite memories of her dad, type it on quality paper, and then frame it. You don't have to make something fancy like that, but you might want to write your dad and tell him you've been thinking about all the good times you've had together and make him a list of your favorite father/son memories. It shows him that all that hard work he put into raising you was not forgotten, and that you still remember that time he stayed up all night assembling your bike after you went to bed on Christmas Eve.
- Another option is to frame the letter by outlining all of the things you feel like your dad taught you. Tell him how you've been reflecting on the kind of man you've become. Tell him the specific ways in which he influenced you, the things that he taught you, and the examples he showed you. Let him know how he helped you become the man you are today.

IF YOU DON'T HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER

A lot of men don't have the kind of relationships with their fathers that they wish they had. Whether you and the old man are estranged, he's passed on, or you just don't get along, your relationship has probably affected your life in many ways. The purpose of today's letter is to help you get out and understand some of the feelings you have about you father.

But it's not designed to be an exercise where you whine about how your life is messed up all because of your old man. Think about and write down examples of where you really needed your father and he wasn't there and the times you really missed him. But at the end of the letter, put a positive spin on things. Tell your dad how you learned how not to be a man from him, and how he made you work harder to turn out differently.

This letter is obviously something you might not want to send. But it's still important to really think about how you feel about your dad instead of letting it fester inside.



DAY 15

Make a Meal

Kate and I have a special place in our hearts for [Uncle Buzz's](#) house, where he often serves up a delicious “breakfast for dinner” meal of homemade waffles, hash browns, and sausage. Everything he’s made me has been singularly delicious. He’s a maestro in the kitchen and yet also a man’s man. I’ve always found this combination really impressive.

In almost all primitive societies, the responsibility of preparing food fell to the women folk of the tribe. And with the arrival of the industrial revolution and the cult of domesticity, the home, and of course, the hearth, became the domain of women. While we’ve made great strides in equality since the days of sending our ladies out to pick berries and roots, the association between cooking and women persists.

This is quite unfortunate. If you’ve ever taken the time to notice, most of the world’s top chefs are men, and cooking has a variety of manly benefits and qualities.

We’ve previously established the [manliness of cooking](#). And we’ve taught you how to [know your way around a kitchen](#). So today we’re just going to do a little review of the reasons a man should be as comfortable in the kitchen as he is in the garage.

- 1. Cooking makes you self-sufficient.** A man strives to be as self-reliant as possible. But if he runs to Micky D’s every time there’s a rumble in his stomach and doesn’t even know how to make scrambled eggs for himself, then he falls short of being able to fully stand on his own two feet. Cooking is a valuable skill that grants us a greater degree of independence.

2. **Cooking saves you money.** The manly man is a frugal man. He's always looking for ways to live within his means. And so he eats in far more than he eats out. He understands how much money can be saved by cooking one's meals at home instead of eating at a restaurant.

The more clueless you are in the kitchen, the stronger the temptation is to go out to eat. If the choice is between a PB&J at home or a steak dinner somewhere else, the latter is always going to win. As you get to the point where your own meals approach restaurant quality, staying home will become more and more desirable.

3. **Cooking keeps you healthy.** It's shocking to flip through a health magazine and see the nutritional information for restaurant meals. When a Quizno's Classic Italian Sub has 1370 calories, PF Chang's Pork Lo Mein has 1820 calories, and Macaroni Grill's Spaghetti and Meatballs has 2430 calories, eating out not only does damage to your wallet, it also does a number on your waistline. Restaurant meals don't just pack in the fat and calories either, they're also loaded with salt; Chili's Buffalo Chicken Fajitas clocks in at 5690 milligrams of sodium (2,300 mg is the recommended *daily* allowance).

Cooking allows you to create healthy meals that can still taste great. And you can feel satisfied in knowing exactly what's going into your meals. And that [some dude at Domino's didn't add boogers to your order](#).

4. **Cooking is creative.** Finding years ago that they had no aptitude for painting or music, many men live lives devoid of creative outlets. Cooking is an incredibly creative process and proficiency in this art is within the reach of every man. You take a bunch of disparate ingredients, experiment with and tweak them, and create a whole far greater than its parts.

Many men want to learn a craft, a skill, something they can do with their hands. They consider woodworking or welding, but never consider cooking. But it can produce the same kind of satisfaction

as other crafts. Cooking doesn't have to be a chore; it doesn't have to be drudgery. It can be something you really enjoy and even develop a passion for.

- 5. Cooking boosts your social skills.** Whether you're single or married, few things can warm the heart of a lady like being able to whip up a tasty meal. Much of what we think of as charm comes from surpassing people's expectations. Because of the historic association of cooking with women, a man who can really cook absolutely endears himself to females. If you're looking for a way to make your wife happy or impress a girl you like, show them that you've got real chops in the kitchen.

Additionally, every man should strive to be a gracious and welcoming host. Uncle Buzz always busts out all the stops in preparing Kate and I delicious dinners and breakfasts. And nothing makes you feel more at home and more welcome than a well-prepared meal. It helps you share a bit of yourself and your home with your guest.

Today's Task: Cook a Meal with Your Own Two Hands

It can be breakfast, lunch, or dinner. If you've never cooked before, don't worry; if you can follow a recipe, you can cook. Remember, we're not talking about adding beef to Hamburger Helper or making a ham sandwich. Make a real meal. If you're a subscriber to the blog, and need ideas for recipes, check out substantial [“Cooking”](#) category. If you don't have time to run to the store, try a site like supercook.com. You enter the foods you have at home, and it will come up with a recipe that uses what you already have.

Below we've provided you with a meal planner to help get you started.

MEAL PLAN

What am I cooking? _____

How many people am I feeding? _____

What ingredients do I need? _____



DAY 16

Create a Budget

With the economy in the tank, it's more important than ever to tighten our belts and get our finances under control. The most effective tool to do this is the lowly budget. I've had an on-again off-again thing with budgets. But when I've used them, my financial situation always improved. Of course, what ends up happening is that I get lazy, stop making time to review my budget, and fall back into just sort of winging it with my finances. While I don't start spending like a high roller, I've noticed that when I'm not following a budget, my financial situation stagnates and doesn't improve. And as men, especially as men taking this 30-Day challenge, we're all about continual improvement. So today we'll be creating a budget. Let's go.

THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A BUDGET

- 1. Puts you in control.** A man is always in control. He's in charge. But when you don't have a budget, your money controls you instead of the other way around. You want to be the man with a plan, not the man floating along with his head in the clouds.
- 2. Reduces stress.** If you don't keep a budget, you're inevitably going to run into a situation where you don't have a clue about how much money you have in your account, and you'll end up incurring some sort of overdraft charge. Not knowing how much money you have at your disposal can create a lot of unneeded stress. You don't know if your check is going to bounce; you don't know if you're going to have enough money for the month's rent; you don't know how you'll pay for an emergency if it arises. By having a budget, you can know

exactly what's going in and out and focus on more important things in your life.

- 3. Increases confidence.** There's something about knowing exactly where your money is going that increases your confidence. I think it has something to do with the feeling of control a budget gives you. Plus, having a budget can help you make decisions faster and more confidently. Instead of hemming and hawing over every single purchase you make, you can just look at your budget, see if you have money available for it, and make your decision.

HOW TO CREATE A BUDGET

- 1. Assess your monthly income.** Gather your pay stubs together and figure out exactly how much you're bringing in each month. If you're self-employed or do work on the side, make a close estimate of how much you earn a month. You need to know how much money you have to work with before you start budgeting it out.
- 2. List your fixed expenses.** Fixed expenses are those that stay about the same each month. There's usually not much you can do to change the amount you pay on fixed expenses. Fixed expenses can include things like rent or mortgage payments, car insurance, car payments, and health insurance.
- 3. Subtract your total fixed expenses from your total monthly income.** The amount that's left over is what you can work with for your variable expenses. If your fixed expenses are more than your total monthly income, you're in trouble. You may need to downgrade to a smaller house or perhaps sell your car and get an old beater so that you have money left over for things like food, gas, and savings.
- 4. Set a spending goal for variable expenses.** Now that you know how much money you have to work with, you can start budgeting for your

variable expenses. Variable expenses are those that fluctuate from month-to-month. You have a degree of control over variable expenses. These are the areas where you can cut back the most and start getting ahead in your finances. Variable expenses include items like groceries, gasoline, eating out, and entertainment. Set a reasonable spending goal for each variable expense.

The two most important variable expenses, and the ones that you should budget for before you budget any others, are a retirement and emergency fund. Let's face it, when it comes to retirement, we can no longer depend on our jobs or the government to fund it. So it's up to us to do it. [Read AoM's guide to retirement accounts.](#)

In addition to saving for retirement, [budget some money each month for an emergency fund](#). This money is to be used only in, well, emergencies, like unexpected unemployment or car repairs. Even if you can only sock away \$25 a month in the beginning, it's better than nothing. Most financial experts agree that you should save enough for three to six months of living expenses. If you're looking for a good place to stash your emergency fund, check out [CapitalOne 360](#). It's an online bank and they have decent interest rates. It's what I use.

In addition to a retirement account and an emergency fund, you may also want to budget for what I call a "freedom account." I put a monthly sum into the account to pay for expenses that come up regularly during the year. This includes a yearly vacation, oil changes, weddings gifts, Christmas presents, dentist and doctor appointments, etc.

- 5. Subtract your total expenses (fixed and variable) from your monthly income.** The goal is for your expenses to be less than your income. If they're not, you'll need to tweak it some so that they are. This may mean cutting back or cutting out things like going out to eat or cable television. If you have any surplus, put it into your emergency fund or towards your retirement.

6. Keep track of spending. After you've created the budget for the month, keep track of every single penny you spend to ensure that you stay within your budget. Keeping track of your spending will also come in handy when you make next month's budget. You'll be able to review how much you spent the previous month and adjust your budget accordingly. One of the best ways I've found to keep track of your expenses is [Mint.com](https://mint.com). You can connect your bank account to Mint, and each week you'll get a report telling you how much you've spent on groceries, gasoline, etc. It can be very helpful and eye-opening to see your expenses broken down into a color pie chart; you may be surprised about what portion of your money is going to things like eating out. And you don't have to worry about security; they use the same security measures as online banking systems, and it's read-only anyway, meaning if someone did get in, they couldn't withdraw or move funds.

One of the best old-school methods of keeping track of your budget is to put the money you budgeted for certain things like groceries into envelopes. You only use the money in the envelope when making purchases for that thing. When the money runs out, you're done spending in that category for the month.

7. Review your budget every month. Each month, go over last month's budget to see how you did. You'll be able to see where you did well and where you can improve. After you review, repeat the whole process and make next month's budget.

TOOLS FOR BUDGETING

Below, we've created a short list of budgeting tools that you can use to help you get started with your budget. What's nice about all of them is that they're free!

Online

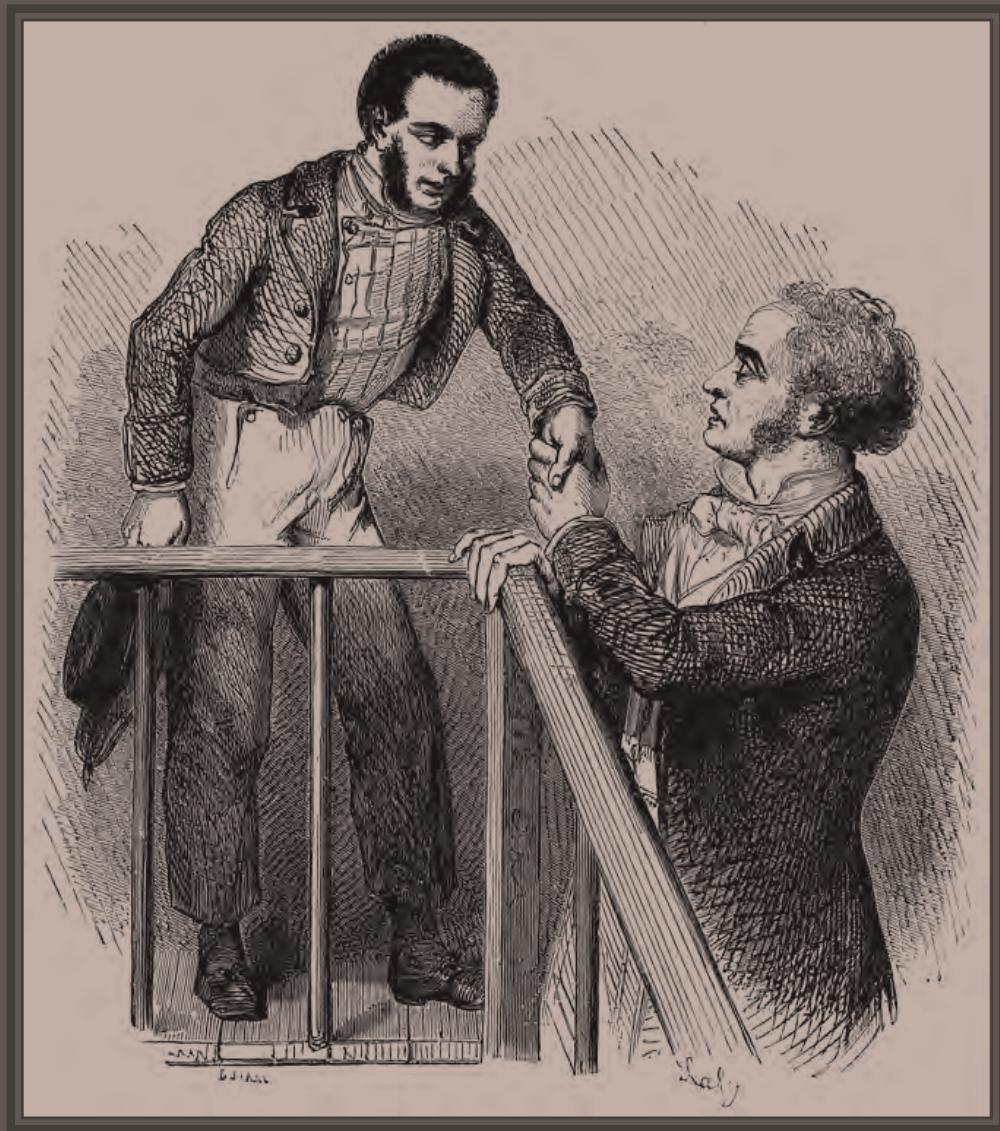
- [Mint](#) (this is what I use – I highly recommend it)
- [Wesabe](#)
- [Geezeo](#)
- [Yoddle](#)
- [Quicken Online](#)

Free Budgeting Spreadsheets

- [Pear Budget](#)
- [Of Zen and Computing Spreadsheet](#)
- [Get Rich Slowly Spreadsheet](#)
- [FinanceProfessor.com Spreadsheet](#)
- [Uncommon Way to Wealth Spreadsheets](#)
- [MS Office templates](#) (MS Office Suite or [Open Office](#))
- [Mr. Peanut's Debt Snowball Spreadsheet](#)
- [Patrick Holt's Spreadsheet](#) (lots of cool calculators)
- [It's Your Money has 22 different spreadsheet](#)

Today's Task: Create a Budget

If you already have a budget, then check it over, look for ways to increase how much you're saving and putting towards retirement, and check out some of the resources above to help you keep track of your expenses.



DAY 17

Talk to 3 Strangers

Ever since many of us were little kids, we were told to never talk to strangers. While this was done out of a concern for our safety, many men have carried this mantra over into adulthood. In the United States, we've even mythologized the idea of the strong, silent man that keeps to himself. The reality, though, is that history's greatest men were some of its most social. They were comfortable with anyone, in any situation, and understood the importance of reaching out to others and expanding their circle of influence.

We are more and more isolated these days. We live in a neighborhood for decades and never get to know our neighbors. We sit in a pew at church for years and still know absolutely nothing about the people sitting in front of us. We don't know the guys at work who are in a different department than we are, even though they're just a few floors up or down.

This lack of social trust is not only bad for our communities, it's bad for ourselves as well. So today we're going to throw off our inner Jeffrey Dahmer and start up a conversation with people we don't know...yet.

WHY TALK TO STRANGERS

- 1. Make new friends.** We've previously discussed the importance of male friendships. Men who have more friends tend to be happier and live longer than men who don't have any good buddies. Many men, myself included, find making new friends to be a difficult task. But there are potential friends all around us if we would just get out of our comfort zone and start talking to some strangers. The dude who comes into the gym at the same time as you every day? Potential workout partner. The guy who has an office down the hall from you?

A golf buddy. All it takes to make a potentially lasting connection is for us to open our mouth.

- 2. Meet a potential mate.** A man's fear of talking to strangers can potentially prevent him from finding the love of his life. If you've been lamenting the fact that you can't find any good women, then you're not looking hard enough. Look around you. The woman in the produce aisle squeezing cantaloupes could be your future wife. That girl sitting next to you in Economics 101 could be your soulmate.

There are women everywhere. You just need to go out there and meet them. No need to use creepy pickup lines, just be friendly and approachable, and you're bound to meet someone with whom you'll feel some sparks. I'm living proof of this benefit of talking to strangers. Because I was able to man up and strike up a conversation with a stranger, I met my wonderful and beautiful wife Kate.

- 3. Expand your business network.** You can't [network like a man](#) if the only people you ever talk to are your mom and your cat, Mr. Peepers. While the prospect of talking to someone you don't know from Adam might seem daunting, getting over this fear can be the difference between staying in a dead-end 9-5 job or landing your dream gig. If you can get in the habit of talking to strangers on a daily basis, you'll be surprised where you might meet someone who can help you advance your career.
- 4. Increase your social skills.** If you wish to go far in life, you need to hone your social skills. This doesn't mean you have to be the man that works the room like an insurance salesman. You'll probably just annoy people if you do that. But let's face it, most success in life, whether it's in business or love, depends on our ability to interact with other people. Just like any other skill, our ability to interact with others improves the more we practice. Talking with strangers on a daily basis, provides you ample opportunity to fine tune and hone your social skills.

5. **Learn new things.** Talking to strangers forces you to interact with people that aren't like you. Consequently, your views on the world will broaden.
6. **Boost your confidence.** There's something about talking with strangers that boosts my confidence. Maybe it's the adrenaline rush of doing something that makes me a bit uncomfortable. I don't know. All I do know is that I usually feel good when I reach out to others and just start talking. If you're looking for a way to increase your manly confidence, start talking to strangers on a daily basis.

HOW TO TALK TO STRANGERS

1. **Let go of your pride.** You might think that the number one barrier to talking to strangers is nervousness, but it's actually pride. We're nervous because we don't want our egos bruised from being rejected, so we don't even attempt to reach out. But here's the deal. That fear is completely unfounded. About 97% of the time when I've struck up a conversation with a stranger, the response is positive. Humans are social animals and are actually quite open to conversation. Even if you do get rejected, big deal. You didn't know the person before and now you still don't know them. Nothing has changed.

Another way pride gets in the way of talking to strangers is that it's common for us to look down on someone as not worth talking to. Admit it, we've all done this at one time or another. But I've found that when I let go of my pride and talk to people that I would have otherwise written off, I'm always surprised by the fascinating stories they have to tell.

2. **Dress for success.** If you find yourself shuffling along in life and staring at your shoes instead of looking at other people, it's probably because you lack self-confidence in your appearance. If you're dressing like a slob, you're not going to want to talk to people because you don't

want anyone to give you a closer inspection. But when you practice good grooming and dress nicely, you'll feel great about yourself. You'll have more self-confidence, and you won't be afraid to look people in the eye.

Also, dressing nicely makes people more comfortable with talking to you. People get nervous when sketchy looking men try to start conversations with them. [Dressing nicely makes you more approachable.](#)

3. **Smile and say “Hi!”** You'd be surprised how a smile and a “hello” can break the ice with people. Instead of keeping your eyes glued to the ground as you're walking, make it a habit to smile and say hi to people as you pass them. You might not start a conversation with that person, but it's a good baby step towards having full-flung conversations with strangers. If you need another reason to get into this habit, smiling and saying hi is probably the only pick-up line that consistently works with women.
4. **Break the ice by finding something you have in common at the moment.** At a wedding? Ask the person how they know the bride and groom. At a school function? Ask about the person's kid and share something about yours. Standing in line at the coffee shop? Ask a person what they suggest ordering. The conversation may only last for a minute, but there's always a chance you're striking up a conversation with a new mentor or girlfriend. [Click here for a comprehensive guide on the art of small talk.](#)
5. **Talk to people at businesses you frequent.** Talking to a business's employees is one of the easiest ways to begin a conversation with someone, because you already sort of have a relationship with them. They make your coffee, bring you your food, or cash your checks. Instead of keeping your communications strictly business, show some genuine interest in these folks and ask them questions like, “How's business today?” or, “How's your day today?” or, “How long have you

been working here?” Introduce yourself and ask them their name. There you go — you’ve just made a new connection with someone you interact with on a regular basis.

People at work generally welcome a friendly chat (the exception being if they’re really busy and there are other people waiting; don’t hold up the line or keep a waitress from her tables). Their day is monotonous and half the time they have to help some nimrod who’s talking on his cell phone and treating them like an automated robot. A friendly conversation can be a bright spot in their day. As an added benefit, if you chat with them regularly, you may end up getting better service. It’s only human nature. People tend to treat people they know and like better than people they don’t know.

6. **Ask questions.** Probably the easiest way to get people to start yammering is to ask questions about them. Most people love to talk about themselves. But be careful how you employ this. It’s probably not a good idea to ask a woman you just met where she lives and what time she comes home. You’ll just freak her out.
7. **Be authentic.** When talking with strangers, be your best self. There’s no need to come up with some canned lines that you say to people you don’t know. When you’re comfortable with yourself, people recognize that and will instantly become comfortable with you.

Today's Task: Talk to 3 Strangers

And people online don't count.

THE 3 STRANGERS I TALKED TO TODAY

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



DAY 18

Find Your N.U.Ts

Editor's Note: This section written by Wayne Levine. This exercise fits nicely into the project, as it builds on our first task, which was to find our core values. Your N.U.Ts are the specific and concrete terms that spring from those general core values. For example, if one of your core values is fitness, then something like, "I will workout 6 times a week no matter what," might be one of your N.U.Ts. Let Wayne explain more.

One of the most important challenges facing every good man who wants to be better is to know exactly what he's committed to. Without a clear understanding of what is acceptable and what is not, a man is untethered, and likely to find himself down a path of compromise, resentment, and despair. So, what's a better man to do? Find his N.U.Ts and maintain a firm grasp.

N.U.Ts are your **Non-negotiable, Unalterable Terms**. N.U.Ts are the things you're committed to, the things that matter more than anything else: your kids, your career, your primary relationships, yourself, your purpose, your spiritual practice, your hobbies, your integrity, your morals, and your psychological well-being.

N.U.Ts are the boundaries that define you as man, those things which, if repeatedly compromised, will gradually – but assuredly – turn you into a pissed-off, resentful man who will likely blame others for your unhappiness.

Your N.U.Ts are uniquely yours. They reflect who you are as a man and the man you want to be. Compromise your N.U.Ts, and you'll compromise yourself. Compromise yourself too often, and you'll become an extremely unhappy man, husband, and father.

SAMPLE N.U.Ts

Here's a short list of Non-negotiable, Unalterable Terms provided by the men of our [BetterMen Community](#). These will give you an idea of the N.U.Ts that men, like you, have developed for themselves in their efforts to be the men they've always wanted to be.

- I am faithful to my wife.
- I say what I want.
- Compassion for my family trumps my need to be right.
- I replace doubt with acts of faith.
- I am a risk taker.
- I devote at least three hours a week to my writing.
- I live in accordance with my religious faith.
- I do what I believe is in the best interest of my kids, even if they disagree.
- My commitment to my children comes before everything else.
- I do not ask for permission.
- Fear does not keep me from taking risks.
- I do not indulge my addictions.
- I am a man of my word—period!
- I take my problems to men, not to women.
- I do not show anger to my elderly mother.
- I do not tolerate my wife's attempts to belittle me.
- When name-calling begins, the discussion is over.
- I spend time with other men.
- I have my own private office/space some place in my house.
- I exercise regularly.
- I do whatever it takes to keep my family in our home.
- I ask for help when I'm not being the man I want to be.
- I speak my mind in spite of my fear of confrontation.
- I honor my daily spiritual practice.
- I welcome feedback.
- I only apologize when it's appropriate, not simply to please others.

- I do not hide out at work just to avoid issues at home.
- I decide how I interact with my boys.
- I choose which of my friendships to maintain.
- I do not sell out who I am to placate others.
- I share my men's work with the men in my life.
- I do as I see fit.

This list is here simply to inspire you. Maybe some of these N.U.Ts resonate with you. If so, use them and make them your own.

Can you imagine the transformation in your life and relationships if you were this clear about your terms? Can you see how much easier it would be for you make decisions? Do you understand how you owning your N.U.Ts makes it so much easier for those around you to rely upon you and respect you?

FINDING YOUR N.U.Ts

Understanding the importance of finding and never compromising your N.U.Ts—your Non-negotiable, Unalterable Terms—is the most important thing you, as a man, will do. Once you find your N.U.Ts, never forget them and never compromise them.

Some men find their N.U.Ts over time, while others sit down and make a list. Either way, here are some of the questions you'll want to ask yourself:

- What's most important to me in life?
- Are there activities I used to do for fun that I no longer do? Is someone interfering and am I resentful because of it?
- Are there valuable friendships with men I've let slip away?
- Where am I currently having problems (unhappy, frustrated, sad, angry, resentful) in my life, and did compromising myself—and what's important to me—contribute to my feelings and/or the situation?
- What dreams have I abandoned?
- If I'm going to be the man I want to be, what will I have to do differently?

Today's Task: Find Your N.U.Ts

Carve out a good chunk of time. Have privacy. No distractions. Breathe for a couple of minutes like this: count to seven in, hold for seven, count to seven out. Do it a few times. Feel yourself relaxing and connecting to this important moment.

Take the list of N.U.Ts offered above and identify candidates that suit you.

Then methodically answer the six questions above. Don't rush it. This is your life. If you're going to short-change this process, how committed are you, really, to becoming a better man? Take your time. Compile your first draft of N.U.Ts.

This may be today's task, but for many men, it's a lifetime commitment. The more work we put into defining our N.U.Ts, the happier and more successful we'll be. And as we mature, we change. As we change, so must some of our N.U.Ts. This list you create today will be something you'll want to revisit periodically.

For this first go, expect to come back to it a few times over the course of the next month. Let your N.U.Ts sink in. Run them by a man or group of men you respect. Get challenged. See what you're made of. See how committed you truly are to these new N.U.Ts.

Then, live them and keep asking for help.

Editor's Note: For more about figuring out your N.U.Ts check out Wayne's book, aptly titled, [Hold On to Your N.U.Ts](#). Wayne's not making me say this. I've read the book and it's great. And I'm recommending it to you.

MY 5 N.U.Ts

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



DAY 19

Schedule a Physical

Men are reluctant to pay a visit to the man in the white coat. Studies have shown that more than half of the men in the United States have not been to see a doctor in the past year. And 55% of men admit that they are reluctant to visit the doctor. When we do go, we usually wait until we're missing an arm or have a javelin stuck through our head.

There are a few reasons why men don't visit the doctor on a regular basis. One reason that I hear quite frequently from my male friends is that going to the doctor is just too inconvenient. I understand this sentiment. You go for what should be a 30-minute check-up, only to wait in the lobby for an hour, and then you spend another 20 minutes sitting bare-bottomed on some butcher paper in the exam room.

Another reason men avoid the doctor is that we've been socialized since childhood to believe that being a man means sucking it up when you have an illness or injury. Going to the doctor for some men means admitting that you're weak and defected, and, thus, unmanly.

I think one of the biggest reasons men don't go to the doctor for regular check-ups is that we view the doctor as someone we only visit when something's wrong with us. We don't see going to the doctor as a way to prevent health problems before they start.

Finally, some of us are nervous about going to the doctor because we're afraid they'll find something wrong with us. But of course, that reason doesn't make an ounce of sense. Because while being diagnosed with something isn't very fun, it's a barrel of monkeys compared to dying.

So today, we're going to get over our reluctance to visit the man in the white coat and schedule a physical for ourselves.

4 REASONS TO GET REGULAR PHYSICALS

1. **Prevent health problems.** This is the most important reason. In the modern world, it seems medicine is geared towards *treating* health problems and not *preventing* them. While it's true that doctors spend most their time treating people who are already ill, more and more doctors are focusing on preventing their patients' health problems before they start. A regular physical exam is one tool to accomplish this goal.

By getting a regular exam, you can nip your health problems in the bud. If your doctor spots a funky mole, it can be removed before you have problems with skin cancer. If he notices that your blood pressure is too high, he can suggest a diet and fitness plan to help reduce it before you have a heart attack.

Also, when you get your physical, your doctor will ask you about your family's health history. If your family has a history of certain diseases or health problems, your doctor can give you guidance on how you can reduce your risk of suffering those ailments.

2. **Save money.** While we sometimes avoid the doctor because we don't want to pay for an appointment, if a doctor can nip a problem in the bud before it gets serious, you'll save *a lot* of money on medical bills down the road.
3. **Establish baselines.** If you haven't been to the doctor in a while, getting a physical will establish baselines for things like your weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Having these baselines will help your doctor gauge your health's subsequent progression or regression.
4. **Develop a relationship with your doctor.** Because men don't see the doctor regularly, we often don't have a doctor with whom we've developed a trusting relationship. But having a doctor that you can trust can ensure that you get the best care possible. First, we're more likely to open up to doctors that we have a good relationship with, which

means the doctor will get the information he needs to make a correct diagnosis when things are wrong. Second, having a regular doctor means you'll have someone who knows your health history well enough that they don't have to re-invent the wheel every time they see you. Finally, when you have a doctor you feel comfortable with, you'll be less hesitant to go see him when something about your health goes south.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU GET A PHYSICAL

- **If you're in your 20s** – every five years.
- **If you're in your 30s** – every three years.
- **If you're in your 40s** – every two years.
- **50 and above** – every year.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU GET A PHYSICAL

A lot of men have never had a physical and might be nervous about what to expect. Will they stick their finger up my butt? (Only if you're older than 50). Will they touch my balls? (If you're under 40, then yes. Your balls will not only be touched, they will also be hefted). To take some of the edge off of going to get your physical, here's a broad roadmap of what to expect.

1. **Paperwork.** While you're waiting in the lobby to see the doctor, you'll probably be given a bunch of forms that ask about you and your family's health history. The questionnaire will ask if you use tobacco, consume alcohol, exercise regularly, or have had any health problems recently. It will also ask if anyone in your family suffered from cancer, diabetes, alcoholism, etc. Answer these questions truthfully and to the best of your ability. It will assist the doctor in giving you advice on staying as healthy as you can be. If you're visiting this particular doctor for the first time, they usually ask that you arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment in order to fill out this paperwork.

2. **Weight, height, blood pressure, and temperature.** When you first walk in, a nurse will probably weigh you, measure your height, and take your blood pressure and temperature readings. They'll probably take your pulse too just to check you're alive and not a zombie.
3. **Getting naked.** Depending on the doctor, you'll then probably be asked to strip down and put on those goofy aprons that leave your butt hanging out for the world to see. This gives the doc easy access to examine all of your man parts.
4. **Skin exam.** The doctor will come in and start checking out your skin. He'll be looking for weird moles, paleness, yellowish tinges, rashes, and dryness.
5. **Your ugly mug.** Your doctor will check your face for things like puffy eyes and swollen glands near your throat, which could indicate a thyroid problem.
6. **Open your mouth and say "ahhhh...."** Your mouth can reveal a lot about your overall health. If your lips are cracking and all red, it may mean you have a vitamin B deficiency. He'll also take a look at your gums and teeth to see what sort of shape they're in. Finally, he'll look to the back of your throat to see if there's any swelling. If you smoke, he might be looking for signs of throat cancer.
7. **Your eyes and ears.** The doc will switch off the lights and bust out some tools called an ophthalmoscope and an otoscope. They're lighted instruments used to examine your eyes and ears respectively. Your doctor will be looking for inflammation in your ears or maybe a perforation of the ear drum. You also might be subjected to a sound test to check your hearing. In addition to checking your eyes with the ophthalmoscope, you'll probably be given a vision test that will involve reading an eye chart.

8. **Listening to your ticker.** The doctor will use his stethoscope to listen to your heart and look for any abnormal sounds that might indicate an enlarged heart or a defect with your heart valves. He'll also listen to your lungs and check for any wheezing, crackling, or gurgling sounds.
9. **Pushing your gut.** You'll be asked to lie down so the doctor can press down on different parts of your abdomen. He'll ask you if you feel any tenderness as he presses down in different areas. He's looking for any possible fluid accumulation or abnormal masses. The doctor is also looking to see if your spleen and liver are in the right place.
10. **You got nerve, man.** The doctor will check your nervous system by basically having you do the sobriety test that police officers use. He'll ask that you walk in a straight line, close your eyes, touch your nose with both fingers, etc. You'll also test your reflexes with that little reflex hammer. While you're up, the doctor might also have you bend down and touch your toes to 1) check your flexibility and 2) check your spine.
11. **Checking the boys.** If you're under the age of 40, your doctor will give you a testicular exam. He'll also probably ask you to turn your head and cough while he holds onto your balls to check to see if you have a hernia.
12. **Let go of your decency....** if you're over 40, the doctor will likely check your prostate for signs of prostate cancer. The doctor will place his fingers inside your rectum and check your prostate for tumors. While he's up there, the doc will also check for signs of rectum cancer.
13. **Checking your bodily fluids.** When you're done in the examining room, you'll put your clothes back on, and be sent to the lab where they'll take all sorts of liquid from your body. Blood will be taken to test your cholesterol, your blood cell count, and your glucose level. A man's urine can tell a lot about his health, so you'll also be asked to pee in a cup.

14. Other tests. Some doctors perform chest x-rays and ultrasounds at physicals, but many don't. The x-ray is to help doctors get a better look at your lungs and the ultrasound lets them analyze your internal organs more closely.

Today's Task: Schedule a Physical

The manly man is a healthy man. Call your doctor and schedule an appointment for a full physical.

My physical is scheduled for: _____



DAY 20

Perform Service

When we think about moments that epitomize manliness, we often think of the captain going down with the ship, the men who allow the women and children to go first, [the soldier](#) who throws himself on a grenade to shield his brothers from the blow, [the old man](#) who attempts to save a drowning child and perishes himself in the waves. The common denominator in such scenarios is this: sacrifice. Sacrifice is arguably the manliest of virtues. It is the ability to give up our desires, sometimes even our lives, to aid and benefit someone else.

While most of us will never be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice, there is one sacrifice every man is both capable of making and should be making: the sacrifice of his time and resources in service to others.

Even men who don't consider themselves materialistic can be absolutely greedy with their time. But while holding tightly to our time and resources seems, in the moment, to protect our happiness, in the long run, this selfishness cankers our souls. The more tightly we hold to things, the less we enjoy them. Selfishness makes us needlessly bitter and contemptible, never feeling like we have enough, always worried that someone is going to take away our stuff. In not sharing of our time, talents, and resources, we end up feeling empty, not full. Service should thus be a part of every man's life, lest he along with [Ebenezer Scrooge](#) should despair, "Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! Such was I!"

OUR OBLIGATION TO SERVE

Everybody knows that life isn't fair. Some of us have a lot and some of us have a little. We can throw up our hands at this disparity, or we can do as much as we can to add balance to the universe. If you are lucky enough to have more talents and resources than someone else, then show your gratitude for these things by putting some back in the pot. Where much is given much is required.

Part of the warrior's code that every soldier lives by is the maxim, "I will never leave a fallen comrade." Thus, in the heat of battle, when someone cries out, "Man down!" the troops mobilize to get their fallen comrade to safety. A medic or another soldier will brave the hail of bullets to save their comrade.

There are a lot of men down these days. They're wounded on the battlefield of life, not with bullets but with poverty, illiteracy, and hopelessness. As part of the brotherhood of man, we have an obligation not to leave our comrades behind. As the saying goes, "The public service we render is the rent we pay for our place on earth."

THE BENEFITS OF SERVICE

Of course the greatest benefit of service is the help that those in need receive from you. Service can transform lives, communities, and nations. But giving service is one of the greatest paradoxes of life. For although it seems as if we sacrifice in giving away our time and resources, we actually get a whole host of benefits in return. In giving, we get. It's a mystery, but it's absolutely true. Serving can transform your life in the following ways:

- 1. Makes you happy.** One of the first words a child learns is "mine." And we often navigate life with this simple philosophy: "What's in it for me?" But as mentioned above, such selfishness does not bring us contentment or peace. It's giving, not getting, that brings us real happiness. I'll admit that when I'm asked to do a service project or when I'm waking up at 7 in the morning on a Saturday to go help

somebody, I don't always feel very happy. Often, I grumble about it. But every single time I've manned up and gone and done the service, I've felt happy and satisfied afterward. Every single time. Service just makes you feel good about yourself and about life.

2. **Puts your problems in perspective.** We often think that our problems are huge. And they feel huge because we have nothing to compare them to except our own life experiences. But when we serve those less fortunate than us, we come to see how good we have it. Our problems start to seem relatively small. And our gratitude for all the good things we have in life increases exponentially.
3. **Breaks down prejudice.** It's easy to paint people we've never had any contact with broad strokes, to think we have them all figured out. Immigrants, poor people, criminals, and so on – we think we know their story. We often formulate our opinions on such people without ever having talked to a single one of them. But when we work one-on-one with people different than us, we come to really love them and know them, and our compassion and empathy grows. We don't see them as stereotypes, but as flesh and blood people, people whose problems are often far more complicated than we could have previously imagined.
4. **Helps you find yourself.** A lot of people talk, and agonize over, “finding themselves.” They want to find their authentic selves, who they really are. To this end, many traipse through Europe or go to grad school. There's nothing wrong with such pursuits, but there's no better way to get to the core of who you are than serving others. It will peel back the layers of your artifice and reveal what you're really made of and what you really value. I can't explain in words why it has this effect, but it does. I think it's like the saying, “The watched pot never boils.” The more time you spend thinking about who you are, the more elusive the answer gets. As soon as you turn your focus to others, your true self is revealed.

HOW TO FIND SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

One of the reasons many of us don't serve more is not because we don't have the desire, but simply because we don't know how to get involved. We don't know where to jump in. Here are some suggestions on finding a place to volunteer:

1. Volunteer with a Preexisting Organization

There are lots of established organizations out there that are always looking for volunteers. All you have to do is sign up. You might want to check out these:

- [Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America](#)
- [The Red Cross](#)
- [Habitat for Humanity](#)
- [Boys Scouts of America](#)
- [Meals on Wheels](#)

2. Check a Website

There are several websites out there that simplify the process of finding a service opportunity. You simply enter your location to view a list of positions that organizations need filled by a volunteer.

- [Volunteer Match](#)
- [Serve Net](#)
- [Serve.gov](#)

3. Call an Organization

If you already know an area where you'd like to serve, than call up an organization and asks about volunteer opportunities. For example, if you'd like to work in education, call up a school. If you want to help the sick, call a hospital. Other possibilities include prisons, churches, retirement homes, and charitable organizations. Or you might try to

combine an old passion with your desire to serve by signing up to be a volunteer firefighter.

4. Join a Fraternal Organization

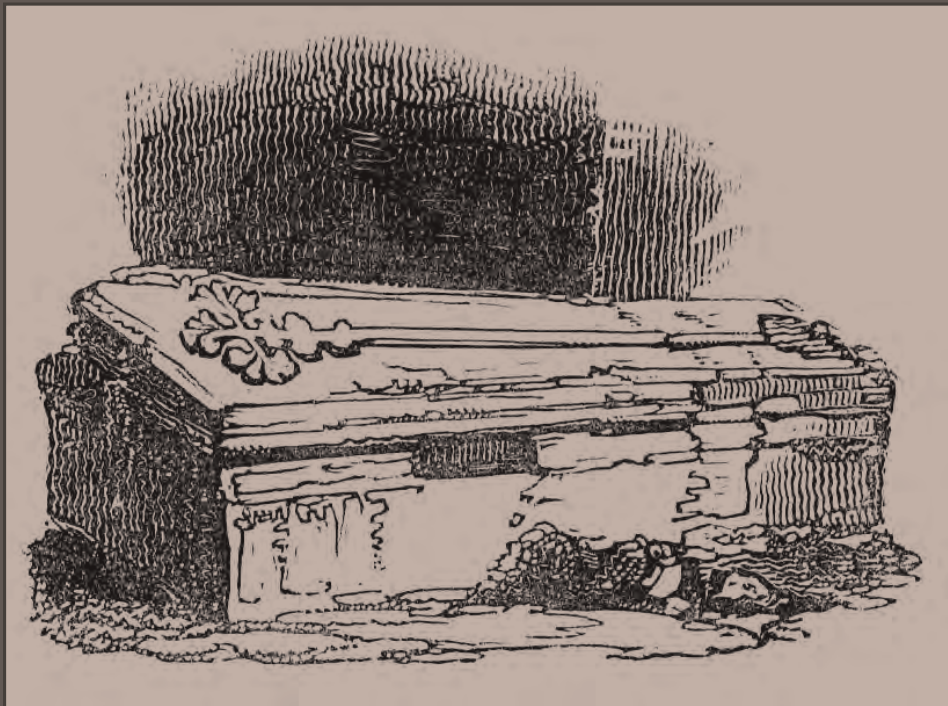
While we often think of fraternal organizations like the Masons and Shriners in conjunction with their ceremonies and rituals, or as those guys who ride around on three-wheelers in parades, one of the main functions of lodges today is to perform community service. Joining an organization like the Masons will provide you with great service opportunities so you don't have to go hunting them down.

5. Start Your Own Project

All that's needed to start a service project is to identify a need in your community and then fill it. For example, Buzz started a project in his town of Montpelier, Vermont to bring firewood to the needy. Energy costs are sky-high these days, and many people in places like Vermont can't afford to heat their home electrically in the winter. They therefore use a wood burning stove to keep warm, but groups like the elderly and the sick aren't able to go gather the wood they need. Buzz chops down trees (legally), splits the wood, and then delivers it to those who need it. Any man can do something similar. And it doesn't have to be on a big scale either. If there's a little old lady down the street, why not ask if you can mow her lawn or run some errands for her?

Today's Task: Commit to Service

You obviously don't have to do the service in the next 24 hours. Your task is simply to find a project or opportunity you'd like to volunteer for and sign up if you can.



DAY 21

Write Your Own Eulogy

It's something all of us have imagined at one time or another. What would it be like to die and attend our own funeral? Who would be there? How many people would come? Will the woman who spurned our love be devastated and finally realize how great we were? Will someone you thought you were close with be surprisingly composed?

And of course the thing we wonder about most is this: What will people say about me? What will people remember about my life and how I treated them? How will I be eulogized?

Today we're going to take these imagined musings one step farther. We're going to write our own eulogies. It may at first blush sound a little morbid, but [we all must confront our mortality from time to time](#). Our society does a bang up job of hiding death from our view and many of us live in a state of denial about the fact that we'll one day be pushing up daisies. But we all will. Acknowledging this fact can help us concentrate on living each day with purpose. Even if we live until we're 90, that day will arrive faster than we can imagine. Life is short: carpe diem!

HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN EULOGY

Of course you can't come up with your own eulogy without knowing how to write one in general. Many of us probably don't have much or any experience in eulogy writing. So let's go over some basic guidelines.

There are several different formats a eulogy can take, and were we writing a real eulogy, you would want to take some time to come up with memories and humorous stories to weave into your speech. But for our purposes today, we're going to keep our DIY eulogies simple and straightforward.

The easiest kind of eulogy to write is a “chronological eulogy.” Basically you start from the beginning of the person’s life, and give a run down of where they lived, their education, marriage, family, kids, career, accomplishments, and so on. Here’s how to get started:

STEP 1: WRITE AN OUTLINE.

Sit down and imagine that you lived until you were 90 and then passed away. Now picture what you did during your 9 decades of life. Where you lived, who you loved, how you acted. This is your life as you hope to have lived it. Jot down some “memories” of yourself in answer to the following questions.

- Where did you live? Did you stay in the town you were born in? Did you live in a far-flung land? Did you move every few years? Where did you retire?
- What were your hobbies? What did you enjoy doing in your 20s and 30s? What did you enjoy doing with your family? What kept you busy in retirement?
- What kind of relationships did you have? Did you get married? How many kids did you have? How many friends did you have? Many? A few really good ones?
- Where did you go to school? What did you study?
- What did you do for work? Did you stay with one company or job your whole life or did you change careers many times?
- Did you win any awards or accomplish any noteworthy feats?
- What was most memorable about you? Your zany sense of humor? Your delicious cooking? Your insatiable love for adventure? Your passion for the outdoors? Your unshakable faith?
- What was it about you that people admired most? Your unwavering loyalty to your friends? Your honesty? Your work ethic? Your love for your family? Your patience? Your leadership?

- What will people miss most about you? The creative homemade gifts you gave every Christmas? What a good listener you were? The handwritten letters you sent to friends? The way you could turn every mishap into something to laugh about?

STEP 2: TURN YOUR OUTLINE INTO A EULOGY.

Now you're going to take all of the ideas you just jotted down and coalesce them into a finished project. Here's an easy format to follow:

1. Birth and childhood. Keep this section pretty brief.
2. College and career. Where you went to school, what you majored in, what jobs you had. Include any awards you won or accomplishments you made.
3. Family and relationships.
4. Your hobbies and interests.
5. The qualities and characteristics that set you apart and made you memorable.
6. What people will miss about you.

Your eulogy doesn't have to be an endless tome. Just hit the high points of your life, the really important stuff. Here's a sample eulogy that I made up:

"Carl Johnson was a true New Yorker. He was born in the city in 1978 and he never truly left. Although he traveled the world extensively, and lived at times in other places, he always came home to the Big Apple. He said the city was truly in his blood, and there was never any doubt about where he would retire. Carl grew up in the Bronx and showed his propensity for adventure early on when he snuck out of the house and rode the subway all over the city at the tender age of 8. Carl's parents were terrified; Carl was delighted.

Carl went to school at NYU and studied journalism. He wanted to be another Bob Woodward or Carl Bernstein. He worked for several smaller papers, always burning the midnight oil, always hot on the trail of the next big story. He landed his dream job when he was hired by the *New York Times* to

work in their Washington bureau. He loved politics. He loved getting to the bottom of the wheeling and dealing that went on behind the scenes. Most of all, he loved to uncover corruption. He was an idealist who believed that one man could help change the government by exposing the dark things to the light. It was his work in this capacity that won him the Pulitzer Prize for his story on the bribery going on in the Department of Natural Resources.

While Carl loved his work, he loved his family more. He married Cindy, the love of his life in 2001. They were as close and in love as any couple I've ever met, two veritable peas in a pod. In reference to Cindy, he said to me several times, "I'm the luckiest guy in the world." Together he and Cindy had two beautiful children, Robert and Elizabeth. He adored those kids. No matter how busy things got at work, Carl was always there at his children's activities. Of all his life's great accomplishments, Carl was most proud of the splendid people his children turned out to be.

Although he settled down, Carl never gave up his adventurous spirit. The places he traveled are too numerous to list. He wanted to see every corner of the world and pretty well succeeded in doing so. He camped in Alaska, rode an elephant in Egypt, and canoed the Amazon. He had a long bucket list of things he wanted to accomplish, and he did all of them before he finally did kick the bucket.

I can unequivocally say that Carl was the best man I knew. He combined a *carpe diem* attitude with faithfulness to his family and an untarnished professionalism at work. Everything Carl did, he did with integrity. 20 years after I had loaned him 50 bucks, he came across an IOU for it, written on a post-it note and stuffed in a shoebox. I had long since forgotten about the loan, but Carl came to my house that very day to repay me. He was also loyal, almost to a fault. Whatever jam someone was in, no matter how busy Carl was, he would drop everything to come help them. He would give anyone the shirt off his back. Yet while his principles were rigid, he was no stiff. He was the only person to ever make soda come out of my nose. He could find humor in absolutely every situation.

I will miss so many things about Carl. I'll miss his mighty bear hugs. He was not a man ashamed of hugging. I'll miss the blueberry pancakes he made me whenever I came to visit. I'll miss his unflagging optimism. There was no such thing as a bad day for Carl, just challenges that had to be faced and overcome. I'll miss the great book recommendations he gave me; he always

seemed to know just what I would love. I'll miss the site of him roaring up on his motorcycle, smiling his ever-boyish grin. Most of all I'll miss how full of life he was. Whenever I was with him, I somehow felt more alive. Now that's he's gone, I can't feel that firsthand anymore, and yet his legacy continues to spur me to seize the day."

Today's Task: Write Your Eulogy

Confront your mortality and really give some thought about how you want to be remembered. You don't have to follow the guidelines or example given here. Be as creative as you want.



DAY 22

Improve Your Posture

They are the battle cries of moms and elementary school teachers all over the world: “Sit up straight!” and “Stop slouching!” Despite what our third-grade minds may have thought, sitting up straight wasn’t a stress position used to break unruly children. Believe it or not, our parents and teachers had a reason for issuing these demands. They intuitively knew of the health and psychological benefits people with proper posture enjoyed, and they were just trying to instill the habit into our young, impressionable minds. To their disappointment, we probably ignored them and went on with our slouching ways.

But today we’re going to redeem ourselves. Today we’re going to improve our posture.

THE BENEFITS OF GOOD POSTURE

There are several ways that good posture can improve both mind and body. Below we list a few of them:

- 1. Improves organ function.** When we’re slouched forward, our rib cage is actually pushing down on our internal organs. All this mushing can cause digestive problems. By having good posture, we keep things nice and open for our intestines to do their work.
- 2. Reduces tension and pain in neck, shoulders, and back.** If you suffer from chronic pain in your upper body, it may be caused by your poor posture. When you first start practicing good posture, you may feel as though you had less pain and tension when you slouched around all day. But keep at it. You’re retraining your body to have the posture

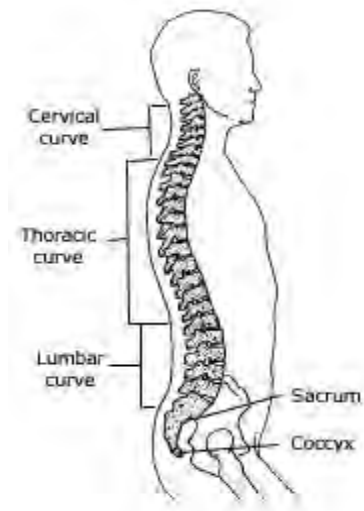
nature intended. After a week of strengthening muscles you probably haven't worked in a while, your chronic pain should begin to dissipate.

3. **Increases concentration and mental performance.** A study done by Colorado College showed that male students with the best sitting posture scored significantly higher on tests than students who slouched. Tomi-Ann Roberts Ph.D, lead study author, stated that “an upright posture makes people feel dominant and successful, which in turn improves their ability to relax and focus on problems.” Interestingly, the study showed that only **male students** benefited academically from improved posture. Good posture didn't seem to have an affect on women.
4. **Prevents humped shoulders.** We often only associate the shoulder hump with little old ladies and Quasimodo. But men can develop a “dowager's hump,” too. The hump develops through a combination of bad posture and osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is common in older women, but men can also see a significant loss of bone mass as they age. You can help stave off the hump by focusing on maintaining good posture throughout your life (and taking a calcium supplement when you get older).
5. **Increases height.** Studies have shown that [taller men earn more money](#) and [attract more women](#) than their shorter counterparts. That's not to say if you're shorter, you can't make lots of money and be a lady killer. I mean, look at Tom Cruise. But these studies suggest height is one of the evolutionary factors that we take into account when we size people up. But before you go out and buy some lifts, consider the fact that many men are walking around one inch shorter than they actually are due to poor posture. While sitting up straight won't turn you into LeBron James, it will at least maximize your God-given height.

Moreover, maintaining good posture while you're young can help mitigate the height shrinkage that occurs in many elderly people, allowing you to see over the wheel of your Cadillac well into old age.

6. **Prevents “beer belly.”** Have you ever seen those old men who have super skinny legs and arms, but then a small (or sometimes huge) beer belly? Well, there are two factors at play here. First, as we age, our metabolism slows down, and as men, we store more fat in our bellies. This factor can be mitigated by proper diet and exercise. The other factor is, you guessed it, posture. As mentioned above, bad posture causes your rib cage to push down on your organs. Your organs are surprisingly malleable and will consequently protrude out and push against our abdominal wall. By standing and sitting up straight, we can help mitigate our beer bellies. You can truly take some inches off your waist just by practicing good posture. Beats doing sit-ups. Just kidding. But seriously. I hate sit-ups.
7. **Increased confidence.** Remember that Colorado College study we mentioned above? It also said that improved posture increases confidence in men. So next time you’re about to go into a job interview or are about to talk to a woman for the first time, stand up a little straighter to increase your manly swagger.

WHAT IS GOOD POSTURE?



Contrary to your third grade teacher, good posture does not require you to look like a stiff piece of board. Good posture involves having a relaxed appearance and a “neutral spine.” A neutral spine retains three natural curves: a small hollow at the base of the neck, a small roundness at the middle back, and a small hollow in the lower back. Many people over-compensate for bad posture by standing too straight, thus eliminating the natural curves of the spine.

When our posture is correct, the ears, shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles should align in one straight line. To give you a mental image of what good posture looks like, imagine hanging a plumb line from your earlobe. If your posture is correct, the line would hang straight to the middle of the anklebone.

If you’re not a mental imagery kind of guy, perform this “wall test.” Stand with head, shoulders, and back against the wall and your heels about 5-6 inches forward. Draw in the lower abdominal muscles, decreasing the arch in your lower back. Push away from the wall and try to maintain this upright, vertical alignment. That’s good posture.

POSTURE WHILE STANDING



Stand tall at your office

1. Feet should be shoulder-width apart, thigh muscles elongated without locking the knees back. Maintain most of your weight on the balls of your feet and not on your heels. When you put your weight on your heels, you create misalignment with your body. A quick test to see if your weight is properly distributed is to have someone gently push on your sternum. If you lose balance easily, then your weight is on your heels. Now try putting more of your weight on the balls of your feet and have someone push you again. You're probably more stable this time because your body is better aligned.
2. Maintain a small hollow in your lower back, but avoid the tendency for too much arching or leaning back, especially with prolonged standing. The "tail" should remain slightly tucked down.
3. Lift your chest. Your shoulder blades should move down and back. This will create a good distance from your hip bone to your rib cage.
4. Make your chin level. The highest point of your body should be the top back region of your head. Relax your jaw and neck muscles.
5. Perform the wall test if needed to ensure your posture is good.

POSTURE WHILE SITTING AT A DESK



Sit at attention

1. Feet should be resting on the floor with knees and hips bent 90 degrees. While it may seem more comfortable to cross our feet, this actually screws up our body's alignment and causes unneeded stress on joints and muscles.
2. Maintain an arch in the lower back. If you are unsure how much arch is "good," go from a slouched position up to the extreme end of erect posture. Now back off 10-15%. This is the neutral position for your lower back.
3. Lift your chest. Picture a string tied to the 2nd or 3rd top button on a shirt pulling straight up to the ceiling.
4. Make your chin level. If it helps, picture a book on your head. The highest point of your body should be the top back region of your head.
5. Avoid slouching or leaning forward, especially when tired from sitting in the office chair for long periods.
6. Take frequent breaks. At first, trying to sit up straight in a chair can be tiring. After years of slouching, your body has probably created a new "bad" posture for itself, and it's going to take some work to get it back to the way it should be. Take it slow from the beginning. Sit

straight for 20 minutes and get up and take a break. Walk around, reach your hands towards the sky, and stretch. Sit down again and get back to work. Take another break 20 minutes later.

Today's Task: Keep Your Posture in Check

Maintaining good posture is definitely not easy. We can't be thinking about it all the time. We may start off the day sitting upright, but a little while later, we're lost in our work and slouching down. Here's an easy way to remind yourself to work on your posture:

1. Tie one end of a string to the top button on your shirt.
2. Tie the other end of the string to your belt buckle, so that the string is taut when you're sitting upright.
3. Whenever the string goes slack, you know you're slouching. Sit up and restore your good posture.



DAY 23

Learn a Manual Skill

I read an interesting [article](#) in the *New York Times* where the editors asked eight artists to draw a portrait of their fathers and name one thing that their dad can/could do, but they can't. The answers were interesting and made me think of the things that my dad can do that I can't. Like clean a gun. And skin a deer. While it's not universally true, among people my age, it seems our dads are a lot handier than we are. Sometimes I imagine what would happen if there was a terrorist attack or natural disaster that wiped out our electricity and disrupted society. How many of us would be standing on our lawns, scratching our heads, absolutely clueless about what to do next?

Learning hands-on skills is about more than survival, however. Men are made to be productive, to create things with our hands, to enjoy the manly satisfaction of taking things apart, seeing how they work, and putting them back together. Manual skills have stopped being passed down from father to son. And in our digital age, much of what we do for both work and pleasure is often conducted in an intangible realm with intangible results.

You might think that the need for craftsmanship has become irrelevant in our high-tech times. But while working with your hands may no longer be necessary for your livelihood, it doesn't mean it's not necessary for you soul. The need for craftsmanship springs eternal. To put into words why this is, I turn to Mathew B. Crawford, whose book, [Shop Class as Soulcraft](#), makes the argument for craftsmanship far better than my humble writing skills ever could. This excerpt comes by way of [The New Atlantis](#):

Anyone in the market for a good used machine tool should talk to Noel Dempsey, a dealer in Richmond, Virginia. Noel's bustling warehouse is full of metal lathes, milling machines, and table saws, and it turns out that most of it is from schools. eBay is awash in such equipment, also from schools.

It appears shop class is becoming a thing of the past, as educators prepare students to become “knowledge workers.”

At the same time, an engineering culture has developed in recent years in which the object is to “hide the works,” rendering the artifacts we use unintelligible to direct inspection. Lift the hood on some cars now (especially German ones), and the engine appears a bit like the shimmering, featureless obelisk that so enthralled the cavemen in the opening scene of the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Essentially, there is another hood under the hood. This creeping concealedness takes various forms. The fasteners holding small appliances together now often require esoteric screwdrivers not commonly available, apparently to prevent the curious or the angry from interrogating the innards. By way of contrast, older readers will recall that until recent decades, Sears catalogues included blown-up parts diagrams and conceptual schematics for all appliances and many other mechanical goods. It was simply taken for granted that such information would be demanded by the consumer.

A decline in tool use would seem to betoken a shift in our mode of inhabiting the world: more passive and more dependent. And indeed, there are fewer occasions for the kind of spiritedness that is called forth when we take things in hand for ourselves, whether to fix them or to make them. What ordinary people once made, they buy; and what they once fixed for themselves, they replace entirely or hire an expert to repair, whose expert fix often involves installing a pre-made replacement part.

So perhaps the time is ripe for reconsideration of an ideal that has fallen out of favor: manual competence, and the stance it entails toward the built, material world. Neither as workers nor as consumers are we much called upon to exercise such competence, most of us anyway, and merely to recommend its cultivation is to risk the scorn of those who take themselves to be the most hard-headed: the hard-headed economist will point out the opportunity costs of making what can be bought, and the hard-headed educator will say that it is irresponsible to educate the young for the trades, which are somehow identified as the jobs of the past. But we might pause to consider just how hard-headed these presumptions are, and whether they don't, on the contrary, issue from a peculiar sort of idealism, one that insistently steers young people toward the most ghostly kinds of work...

The Psychic Appeal of Manual Work

I began working as an electrician's helper at age fourteen, and started a small electrical contracting business after college, in Santa Barbara. In those years I never ceased to take pleasure in the moment, at the end of a job, when I would flip the switch. "And there was light." It was an experience of agency and competence. The effects of my work were visible for all to see, so my competence was real for others as well; it had a social currency. The well-founded pride of the tradesman is far from the gratuitous "self-esteem" that educators would impart to students, as though by magic...

...craftsmanship might be defined simply as the desire to do something well, for its own sake. If the primary satisfaction is intrinsic and private in this way, there is nonetheless a sort of self-disclosing that takes place. As Alexandre Kojève writes:

The man who works recognizes his own product in the World that has actually been transformed by his work: he recognizes himself in it, he sees in it his own human reality, in it he discovers and reveals to others the objective reality of his humanity, of the originally abstract and purely subjective idea he has of himself.

The satisfactions of manifesting oneself concretely in the world through manual competence have been known to make a man quiet and easy. They seem to relieve him of the felt need to offer chattering *interpretations* of himself to vindicate his worth. He can simply point: the building stands, the car now runs, the lights are on. Boasting is what a boy does, who has no real effect in the world. But craftsmanship must reckon with the infallible judgment of reality, where one's failures or shortcomings cannot be interpreted away.

Hobbyists will tell you that making one's own furniture is hard to justify economically. And yet they persist. Shared memories attach to the material souvenirs of our lives, and producing them is a kind of communion, with others and with the future. Finding myself at loose ends one summer in Berkeley, I built a mahogany coffee table on which I spared no expense

of effort. At that time I had no immediate prospect of becoming a father, yet I imagined a child who would form indelible impressions of this table and know that it was his father's work. I imagined the table fading into the background of a future life, the defects in its execution as well as inevitable stains and scars becoming a surface textured enough that memory and sentiment might cling to it, in unnoticed accretions. More fundamentally, the durable objects of use produced by men "give rise to the familiarity of the world, its customs and habits of intercourse between men and things as well as between men and men," as Hannah Arendt says. "The reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors. Because craftsmanship refers to objective standards that do not issue from the self and its desires, it poses a challenge to the ethic of consumerism, as the sociologist Richard Sennett has recently argued. The craftsman is proud of what he has made, and cherishes it, while the consumer discards things that are perfectly serviceable in his restless pursuit of the new. The craftsman is then more possessive, more tied to what is present, the dead incarnation of past labor; the consumer is more free, more imaginative, and so more valourous according to those who would sell us things. Being able to think materially about material goods, hence critically, gives one some independence from the manipulations of marketing, which typically divert attention from *what a thing is* to a back-story intimated through associations, the point of which is to exaggerate minor differences between brands. Knowing the production narrative, or at least being able to plausibly imagine it, renders the social narrative of the advertisement less potent. The tradesman has an impoverished fantasy life compared to the ideal consumer; he is more utilitarian and less given to soaring hopes. But he is also more autonomous...."

While Crawford's convictions led him to quit his job working for a DC think tank to become a motorcycle mechanic, quitting your white-collar

job may not be possible or even desirable. It's okay to like your white-collar job. You can still obtain the manly satisfaction of working with your hands by learning skills in your off time. The stereotype of men 50 years ago was the image of the guy endlessly tinkering in the garage. While that image has been fading, let's start today to bring it back.

Today's Task: Learn a Manual Skill

Have you ever watched some guy [fix your toilet](#) or [change your oil](#), and wished as he gave you the bill that you were a little handier? Well today's the first day of the rest of your handy life. Today, you are going to pick a manual skill you've always wanted to learn, and take the first steps towards mastering it. Here are some skills you may wish to consider learning:

- How to tune your bike
- How to change your car's oil
- How to fell a tree
- How to make a bookshelf
- How to install of a ceiling fan
- [How to do electrical wiring](#)
- How to fix a leaky faucet
- [How to make furniture](#)
- How to build a tree house
- How to build a deck
- How to lay tile
- How to replace your car's brakes
- How to use a soldering iron
- [How to split wood](#)
- [How to build a campfire](#)
- [How to clean a gun](#)
- How to garden and landscape

You should ideally pick a skill that you can get some real hands-on practice with right away. So for ideas about what to learn, take a look around the house at what's broken.

Obviously, you can't learn these skills in a single day. **This task simply requires that you take a least one step towards learning a new manual skill.** These steps may include, but are not limited to:

- Checking out from the library or buying a book about the skill.
- Watching an online video or reading an online source about how to do the skill.
- Having a friend or family member who knows how to do the skill walk you through it or give you advice.
- Signing up for a course on how to do the skill at a local technical college.
- If you're in the New England area, you might want to check out a place called [Yestermorrow](#) in Vermont. It's a design/build school that holds week and weekend long courses on everything from basic carpentry and masonry to building a skin-on-frame canoe.



DAY 24

Play!

When you think fondly about your boyhood days, you probably think about the time you spent playing. While we now associate playing with toys, your best memories probably don't involve plastic crap at all. You likely think about catching fireflies, building dirt ramps for your bike, playing capture the flag, having dirt clod fights, playing wall ball, and hunting for sparrows with your BB gun.

As we got older, those endless summer nights of play came to an end as we were expected to take on more responsibility and act more "grown up." We accepted new rules about how to behave and what to prioritize. We stopped playing and started working.

Here at the Art of Manliness we're about the business of helping men man up and quit being perpetual boys. But becoming an adult man shouldn't mean that you completely extinguish your boyish spirit and vitality. Indeed, an irrepressible boyishness is essential to a life of fun, humor, and happiness. While becoming a man means putting away some childish things, playtime shouldn't be one of them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Most grown-ups view play as a kind of dress-rehearsal for adulthood, believing that once we become adults, the need for play evaporates. But little of children's play relates to actual adult experiences; most of us don't grow up to become Spiderman or a swashbuckling pirate. Children play simply for play's sake, for the pleasure they get from it. And it turns out that adults need to play for the very same reason. [We shouldn't grow out of play](#); even our biology rejects the idea.

Humans are in fact the most neotenous species on the planet. Neoteny refers to the retention of immature qualities into adulthood. We're not talking about pooping in our pants here; rather, humans retain the ability to imagine and play, and this gives us an evolutionary advantage in how flexible and adaptable we are. Humans are uniquely designed [to play throughout our entire lifetimes](#).

So we are not supposed to suppress the boy within us completely!

While there hasn't been much research on adults and play (it's hard to get grants for studies on the subject), scientists who work in the field believe that many of the numerous and scientifically proven benefits that children get from play apply to adults as well. Play boosts our optimism and immune system, increases our happiness, and gives us a sense of belonging and community. According to Dr. Stuart Brown, the head of the [National Institute for Play](#) (yes, it's a real institute), while we think the opposite of play is work, it's actually depression.

Play is also essential to having healthy relationships with others. To quote the NIFP:

"Play refreshes a long-term adult-adult relationship; some of the hallmarks of its refreshing, oxygenating action are: humor, the enjoyment of novelty, the capacity to share a lighthearted sense of the world's ironies, the enjoyment of mutual storytelling, the capacity to openly divulge imagination and fantasies ... These playful communications and interactions, when nourished, produce a climate for easy connection and deepening, more rewarding relationship – true intimacy.

Take play out of the mix, and like the oxygen deprived cyanotic, the relationship becomes a survival endurance contest. Without play skills, the repertoire to deal with inevitable stresses is narrowed. Even if loyalty, responsibility, duty, and steadfastness remain, without playfulness there will be insufficient vitality left over to keep the relationship buoyant and satisfying."

WHAT IS PLAY?

On the surface, the question of what constitutes play is a simple one. But as adults we lose our sense and feel for play, so it may be beneficial to explain the nature of play a bit.

Play is an activity that is done for its own purpose, exclusively for the pleasure of the experience. According to Dr. Brown, if an activity's "purpose is more important than the act of doing it, it's probably not play." Or to put it another way, "Most essential, the activity should not have an obvious function in the context in which it is observed—meaning that it has, essentially, no clear goal."

While we most often think of play in terms of things like tag and four-square, there are actually 7 different types of play:

- 1. Attunement.** Attunement occurs when individuals mutually create, match, and share their affective states. The best example of this is when a mother or father gazes at their baby, and the baby gazes back. The baby smiles, and the parent coos and smiles back. The right brains of both parent and child are attuned. Another example of this is being a spectator at a sporting event; the fans are attuned to one another and are united by a sense of common emotion.
- 2. Body Play and Movement.** This is the kind of play we probably most often think of when we think of play, not only as children but as adults. Whenever we jump on or over stuff, play football, dance, run, and so on, we receive the pure pleasure of feeling our bodies move and work. Dr. Brown defines Body Play as "the spontaneous desire to get ourselves out of gravity."
- 3. Object Play.** Object plays occurs when you're having fun doing something, with, well, an object. Like a boy playing with action figures or pretending that a stick is a sword. Or a man tinkering with an engine or playing catch or golf (perhaps those latter two are especially pleasurable because they combine object play *and* body play).

4. **Social Play.** Social play encompasses a wide variety of forms, from roughhousing with other guys, to flirting with the opposite sex. Dr. Brown argues that “the basis of human trust is established through play signals.” If you’ve ever bonded with a friend by wrestling, or felt a sense of belonging after playing a game of ultimate frisbee, you understand how this works.
5. **Imaginative and Pretend Play.** This is the kind of play that comes easiest to kids and hardest to adults. We lose a lot of our capacity for imagination as we age. But if you’ve ever gone paintballing, dressed up for an adult Halloween party, or wholly let go of your adult cynicism at Disneyworld, you know that we still have some capacity for it.
6. **Storytelling/Narrative Play.** Storytelling is not something we ordinarily think of as play. But as the Institute for Play argues, “It is in [our] capacity to produce a sense of timelessness, pleasure and the altered state of vicarious involvement that identifies narrative and storytelling with states of play.”
7. **Transformative/Integrative and Creative Play.** Sometimes we can use our play to create new things and foster ideas. You can brainstorm crazy ideas for an invention, jam out on your guitar as you think of new songs to write, or make a funny video of your cat to post on YouTube.

Today's Task: *Play!*

While play may seem like a silly frivolity, it’s actually an essential part of our health and well-being. Manning up doesn’t mean turning into a robotic stiff. You should also maintain some of your boyish spirit. You need to make room in your life for things that you don’t *have* to do, but that you simply do because it gives you pleasure. **So today you have to spend at least 30 minutes in pure play.**

There's definitely an aspect of play with video games, but for the sake of stretching yourself today, pick something a little more creative and open-ended. Play a pick-up game of basketball with your friends, a board game with your wife, or a game of catch with your kid. Jam on your guitar or dust off your skateboard. Take a hike or ride your bike.

Do something that society says you're too old for, but you know deep down absolutely still gives you joy. Make a slingshot; play with fireworks; build and fly a paper airplane; play table football; skip a stone; fly a kite.

Keep in mind that some of the best play involves novelty, curiosity, and most of all, exploration, whether of the limits of your body, new physical locations, or the corners of your mind.

Remember, the purpose of play can't be more important than the pleasure you get from it. So you can go for a run, but you can't bring a watch or try to set a new PR. And you can tinker in the garage, but not because you need to check changing your car's oil off your to-do list. It must be something that you're doing simply for the fun of it.

For ideas about what to do for play, Dr. Brown recommends thinking back to your fondest childhood memory of play and linking that memory back to your present life. For example, if you used to love tag and kickball then go play a pick-up game of some sport. And if you used to love being read to at night, then read to your kid. If your favorite thing to do as a kid was climb trees, go scramble over some rocks. If you used to endlessly tinker with an erector set, work on a craft.

But of course don't overthink this task too much; it's play after all! Just think about something that sounds fun and do it.

Finally, while today's task it to set aside time for play, you should ideally strive to make play an integrated part of your everyday life.

Now go play!



DAY 25

Start a Debt Repayment Plan

Since I've graduated law school, I've been taking a look at the debt Kate and I have accumulated during our time in school. And it isn't pretty. I hate debt. I hate the feeling of owing another person money. I hate thinking, "Oh good, I have 'X' amount in savings!" and then realizing that when I take into account how much debt I have, I actually have nothing to my name.

Some debt is necessary for getting ahead in life and building a future. But there are few things more emasculating than excessive debt. A man should strive to be as self-reliant as possible. To be able to stand on his own two feet. To be able to plan for the future without being hobbled by the past. To be free from the shackles of dependencies. To live without another man looking over his shoulder.

Debt robs you of these things. The interest from your debt is your captor, shadowing you wherever you go:

"Interest [on debt] never sleeps nor sickens nor dies; it never goes to the hospital; it works on Sundays and holidays; it never takes a vacation; it never visits nor travels; it takes no pleasure; it is never laid off work nor discharged from employment; it never works on reduced hours. ... Once in debt, interest is your companion every minute of the day and night; you cannot shun it or slip away from it; you cannot dismiss it; it yields neither to entreaties, demands, or orders; and **whenever you get in its way or cross its course or fail to meet its demands, it crushes you.**"

—J. Reuben Clark Jr.

Over the past 10 years, people have had a pretty lackadaisical attitude about their finances, thinking that the economy would keep pace with their debt. The recession burst this bubble of fantasy. The average American fam-

ily is carrying \$8,000 to \$10,000 in credit card debt, and that doesn't even include the amount they owe on new cars!

People have awoken from their orgy of spending with a nasty, debt-filled hangover. Even if you're not hurting too bad from debt that you've taken on, paying down your debt is definitely the manly thing to do. Being debt-free grants you an unmatched feeling of independence and self-respect.

There are several ways to go about attacking your debt. Below we provide two suggestions. But the first thing you need to do is figure out how much can afford each month to pay down your debt. So let's start there.

Note: Many financial experts recommend you [start an emergency fund](#) before you start paying down debt. The choice is yours.

COME UP WITH YOUR MONTHLY DEBT NUT

If you haven't been paying anything towards your debt or if you haven't been paying very much because you feel as though there isn't any wiggle room in your monthly income, then the first thing you need to do is figure out exactly how much you can pay towards your debt each month by completing a monthly budget.

Go back to your budget that you created a few days ago. How much do you have set aside for paying down debt? Could you set aside more? You might be thinking to yourself, "There's no money left to go towards paying down my debt! I've reached my limit." But I've found if we look hard enough and are willing to sacrifice, we can always find more money that can go towards paying down our debt. For example, you could get rid of cable, share one car with your spouse, or take your lunch to work instead of eating out. Do enough of these little things and you'll quickly have a nice wad of cash that can go towards paying down your debt.

OPTION #1: PAY OFF THE DEBT WITH THE HIGHEST INTEREST RATE FIRST

Paying off your debt with the highest interest rate first makes *the most economic sense*. By tackling the loans that are costing you the most in interest,

you can save yourself money in the long run, and you might be able to pay off your debt faster. Follow these steps to begin reducing your debt this way:

Grab a piece of paper and list all your debts in order from highest interest rate to lowest interest rate. Usually your highest interest rates will be on credit cards and car loans, and your lower interest rates will be on student loans.

Focus on paying down the debt with the highest interest rate. Take the debt nut that you just calculated out and direct as much of it as you can towards paying down the debt with the highest interest rate.

Continue making minimum payments on the rest of your debt. You can't pay one creditor at the expense of others or else you'll wind up in deep doo doo.

Once the debt with the highest interest rate is paid off, start putting the money you were paying on it towards the debt with the next highest interest rate. When that debt is paid off, start going after the next highest interest rate, and so on until it's all paid off.

OPTION #2: DAVE RAMSEY'S DEBT SNOWBALL PLAN

One debt repayment plan that's popular with folks is [Dave Ramsey's](#) "Snowball Plan." Here's how it works:

- 1. List your debts in order from lowest balance to highest balance.**
Don't take into account the interest rate. We're just focusing on the balance of the debt.
- 2. Allocate as much of your monthly budget as you can to paying off the debt with the lowest balance.**
- 3. Once the debt with lowest balance is paid off, you add the dollars that had been going to that debt to what you've been paying against the next lowest debt.** Each time you pay off a debt, the amount you can apply to remaining debts is a little bigger. Thus, the name "Debt Snowball Plan."

The benefit of the debt snowball plan is *psychological*. By having success paying off small debts first, you'll receive instant positive feedback that can encourage you to continue paying down your debt. The drawback to the snowball method is that you'll end up paying more in interest than you would if you went after the debt with the highest interest rate first. However, if the idea of paying off a \$10,000 credit card bill seems too daunting, go after the low hanging fruit by paying off the \$2,000 bill first. It will hopefully get you started down the path of reducing your debt.

Today's Task: Start Paying Down Your Debt

We're not going to pay off our debt overnight, but we can at least get started. Today's task is to sit down and establish a debt reduction plan.

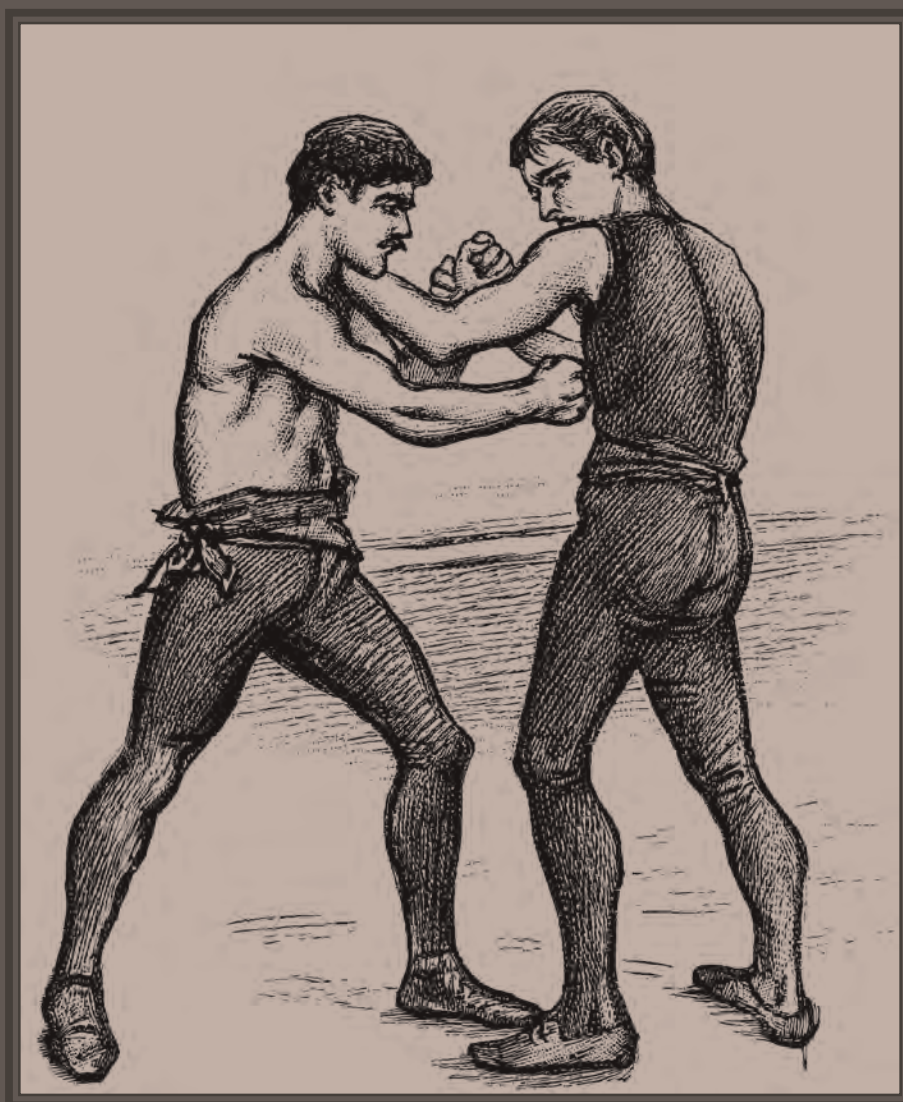
DEBT REPAYMENT PLAN

Either list your debts from highest interest rate to lowest rate or least debt amount to highest depending on which debt repayment plan you want to do.

Creditor / Amount / Interest Rate

_____	/	_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____	/	_____
_____	/	_____	/	_____

How much extra can I afford each month to pay down my debt?



DAY 26

Take the Marine Corps Fitness Test

During the 30 Days to a Better Man project, we've been doing a lot exercises for our mind and character, but it's equally important to exercise our bodies. A man's health is his most important asset. If you suffer from chronic health problems, it can take a toll on your job, on your bank account, on your family, and on your psyche. And being out of shape and unhealthy saps one's manly confidence and spirit. Unfortunately, for the past few decades, the fitness level of men, particularly American men, has been going down hill. With cars replacing walking as the primary mode of transportation and desk jobs replacing manual labor, men have become more and more sedentary.

There may have been a time when you were in pretty good shape. Maybe it was in high school or college. But since then, you've gotten a job, a mortgage, a wife, and 2.5 kids. But in your mind's eye, you still think you're the guy who could bench press 300 lbs and run the 40 yard dash in 4.5 seconds. You might be a bit softer, but overall you feel good. But the mind can play tricks on you. Slowly through the years the body adjusts itself to a less active lifestyle. The change happens so gradually, that you don't even notice it. That is until you try to lift a big bag of dirt for your garden or play a pick-up game of basketball. And all of a sudden you're hit with the realization that you're not the strapping lad you once were.

While humbling moments like the ones mentioned above can give you somewhat of an idea of your fitness level, an actual fitness test can do a better job because numbers don't lie. So today we're going to give ourselves a gut check by taking a physical fitness test. And not just any physical fitness test. We're taking the [U.S. Marine Corps Fitness Test](#).

HOW TO PERFORM THE MARINE CORPS FITNESS TEST

The Marine Corps Fitness test consists of three exercises: pull-ups, crunches, and a 3-mile run. The events are “designed to test the strength and stamina of the upper body, midsection, and lower body, as well as the efficiency of the cardiovascular system.”

All the exercises are to be performed in “one single session, not to exceed two hours.” Since it’s just you who’s doing the test and not an entire squadron of Marines, it should take you about an hour.

1. **Pull-ups.** Find yourself a pull-up bar. If you don’t have one, just go to a park and use the monkey bars. They’re perfect for pull-ups. I also highly recommend investing in the [Iron Gym Pull-Up Bar](#). It’s one of the best and most useful things I’ve ever bought. And you’ll be able to use it at home once the fitness test is done to keep improving your strength.

To begin the test, grab the bar, both palms facing either forward or towards you. I would do it palms facing towards you. It’s easier that way.

The correct starting position begins with your arms fully extended beneath the bar and your feet off the ground.

One rep consists of raising the body with the arms until the chin is above the bar and then lowering your body until your arms are fully extended. The object of this test is to measure your performance from a dead hang position. Thus, whipping, leg kicking, or leg kipping are not allowed and pull-ups using these assistance methods do not count.

You don’t have a time limit to perform your pull-ups, but as soon as you let go, the test is over.

2. **Abdominal Crunches.** The ab crunch test has a two-minute limit. Perform as many crunches as you can in two minutes.

Cross your arms across your chest or rib cage with no gap existing between the arms and chest/rib cage. Both arms must remain in constant contact with the chest/rib cage throughout the exercise. A single

repetition consists of raising your upper body from the starting position until both forearms or elbows simultaneously touch the thighs, and then returning to the starting position with the shoulder blades touching the ground. Your butt must remain in constant contact with the ground.

You can have a buddy hold your legs or feet, at or below the knees. If you don't have a buddy, place your feet under a couch or some other sturdy object.

- 3. 3-Mile Run.** Mark out a 3-mile course. One way of doing this is to reset your car's trip odometer and drive a flat course in your neighborhood to mark out the 3 miles. Another idea is to go to a high school or college track. It's flat, clear of any obstacles, and it's measured out for you. Four times around the track is one mile. So for three miles, you'll have to run around it twelve times.

Time yourself with a stopwatch to see how fast you can run three miles. Run as fast as you can.

MARINE CORPS PHYSICAL FITNESS TEST SCORING

Each Marine is given a numeric score based on his performance in each event. Based on the total points of the three events, a Marine will be assigned to a physical fitness test class – first class being the highest and third class being the lowest. In order to get the highest possible score on the test you'd have to perform 20 pull-ups, do 100 crunches in 2 minutes, and run 3 miles in 18 minutes. Below are a series of charts that shows how scoring and class are determined:

Points	Pull-Ups	Crunches	3-Mile Run
100	20	100	18:00
99		99	18:10
98		98	18:20
97		97	18:30
96		96	18:40

30 Days to a **BETTER MAN**

95	19	95	18:50
94		94	19:00
93		93	19:10
92		92	19:20
91		91	19:30
90	18	90	19:40
89		89	19:50
88		88	20:00
87		87	20:10
86		86	20:20
85	17	85	20:30
84		84	20:40
83		83	20:50
82		82	21:00
81		81	21:10
80	16	80	21:20
79		79	21:30
78		78	21:40
77		77	21:50
76		76	22:00
75	15	75	22:10
74		74	22:20
73		73	22:30
72		72	22:40
71		71	22:50
70	14	70	23:00
69		69	23:10
68		68	23:20
67		67	23:30
66		66	23:40
65	13	65	23:50
64		64	24:00
63		63	24:10
62		62	24:20
61		61	24:30
60	12	60	24:40

59		59	24:50
58		58	25:00
57		57	25:10
56		56	25:20
55	11	55	25:30
54		54	25:40
53		53	25:50
52		52	26:00
51		51	26:10
50	10	50	26:20
49		49	26:30
48		48	26:40
47		47	26: 50
46		46	27:00
45	9	45	27:10
44		44	27:20
43		43	27:30
42		42	27:40
41		41	27:50
40	8	40	28:00
39		x	28:10
38		x	28:20
37		x	28:30
36		x	28:40
35	7	x	28:50
34		x	29:00
33		x	29:10
32		x	29:20
31		x	29:30
30	6	x	29:40
29		x	29:50
28		x	30:00
27		x	30:10
26		x	30:20
25	5	x	30:30
24		x	30:40

23		x	30:50
22		x	31:00
21		x	31:10
20	4	x	31:20
19		x	31:30
18		x	31:40
17		x	31:50
16		x	32:00
15	3	x	32:10
14	x	x	32:20
13	x	x	32:30
12	x	x	32:40
11	x	x	32:50
10	x	x	33:00
9	x	x	x
8	x	x	x
7	x	x	x
6	x	x	x
5	x	x	x
4	x	x	x
3	x	x	x
2	x	x	x
<1	x	x	x

Class	Age 17-26	Age 27-39	Age 40-45	Age 46+
1st	225	200	175	150
2nd	175	150	125	100
3rd	135	110	88	65

MINIMUM FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

The Department of the Navy has established minimum fitness requirements for all Marines depending on their age to ensure that they're ready for combat. Most of us probably won't see action in Afghanistan, but if you

can meet the fitness requirements for these tests, you'll know that you have the physical condition to take on most of life's challenges. The minimum requirements below would give a soldier enough points to meet a class three standard.

Age	Pull-Ups	Crunches	3-Mile Run
17-26	3	50	28:00
27-39	3	45	29:00
40-45	3	45	30:00
>46+	3	40	33:00

After you establish your base, start working on improving through regular exercise. Take the test again in a month to see how much you've improved. Try making it a goal to score a perfect 300 on the test.

Today's Task: *Take the Marine Corps Fitness Test*

Take an hour after work today and do the Marine Corps Fitness Test. No matter what kind of shape you're in, it will help you know how fit you are, give you a benchmark to base future progression and regression on, and grant you either some motivation to improve or a sense of satisfaction that you're ready for action.

MY MARINE CORPS FITNESS TEST RESULTS

- Pull-ups: _____
- Crunches: _____
- 3 Mile Run Time: _____
- Total Score: _____
- Fitness Class: _____



DAY 27

Start a Book

1 in 4 American adults did not read a single book last year. Those who did read books were usually women and older folk. This doesn't bode well for younger men. It's not that younger men aren't reading. They're probably reading plenty on blogs or on their phone. But reading snippets from blogs and websites is a completely different experience than reading a good old fashioned book. With a book you can get completely immersed in a story and suck out the marrow of good ideas. With the internet, you tend to just get blips of information at a time. It's never enough to gain the kind of immersive experience and broad picture that a whole book gives you.

Today, we're going to turn the page (so to speak) on the dearth of men not reading books. But before we begin, let's just quickly review some of the benefits of reading.

THE BENEFITS OF READING

Of course, the greatest benefit of reading is simply the pleasure that it gives you. Reading is an unmatched pastime for relaxing and wiling away some time. Besides being thoroughly enjoyable, though, it has even more benefits:

- 1. Improves your writing.** The ability to write well is a skill that will set you apart from your peers. Of course, if you want to become a skilled writer, [you must practice writing](#). But in addition to writing, reading the words of great authors can also help you improve. As you read, you'll begin to notice patterns and sentence formations that work well. If you're constantly reading quality writing, it's hard for some of it not to rub off on your own writing.

2. **Provides fodder for conversation.** Some of the best conversations begin with the simple question, “Read any good books lately?” You don’t want your answer to be, “Uhhhhh, no. But dude, have you checked out [Keyboard Cat?](#)” By reading good books, you build yourself a storehouse of conversation topics that are engaging and interesting.
3. **Improves concentration and focus.** With the internet and its millions of mindless distractions, concentrating and focusing on a single task has become more and more difficult. If you feel like you’ve become particularly distraction prone, reading a book could be just the prescription you need. Unlike blog posts and magazine articles that can be read in a matter of minutes, reading a book requires extended periods of concentration and focus. You’re not surfing around, feeding your brain an endless supply of new stimulation. It’s just you and the text. If you set aside time to read a book every day, you’ll start to notice a strengthening of your attention span.
4. **Increases creativity.** A creative person doesn’t just create new ideas out of thin air. He takes already existing ideas and cross-pollinates them to create something entirely new. By exposing yourself to different ideas in the pages of books, you create a breeding ground in your mind for new ideas to grow.
5. **Makes you a better man.** Do you want to be a better man? Then read the biographies of great men. The lives of great men contain numerous lessons that are just as applicable to us today. I feel I’ve gotten more out of reading a biography of a hero of mine than I have with any so-called self-improvement book. With a biography, you can see concrete principles of manliness in action instead of just reading abstract advice. If you’re looking for a biography that will really inspire, I suggest [The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt](#). (Big surprise, huh?)
6. **Broadens your perspective.** No matter how far and wide you travel and how many interesting people you meet, you can never have the

breadth of experiences contained within the world's great books. Through reading, you can experience what's it's like to grow up fatherless, sail along with barbarous pirates, fly a plane in World War II, and climb Mt. Everest, all without leaving your armchair. Books help you gain greater insight and empathy than could be mined from your personal life alone.

Today's Task: Start a Book

Start a book. Any book. Pick one of your favorite novels from high school or college. Choose a book that you've been forever meaning to read and have been continually putting off. Pick a book from the [Essential Men's Library](#), or our list of [great fictional adventure books](#), and go to the library to check it out. Once you've selected your book, we're going harness our inner third grader and D.E.A.R. it up. You know, **Drop Everything And Read**. Read for *at least* 30 minutes today. Your brain and soul will thank you later. Before you do that, be sure to read our article on "[How to Read a Book](#)." Think you knew? Think again!

BOOK I HAVE DECIDED TO READ:

Title: _____

Author: _____



DAY 28

Write a Love Letter

We previously discussed the idea that every man should strive to be a romantic lover, and how the date is one of a man's best tools for wooing a lady. A man's other major tool in the romance department is the love letter. As long as love (and writing utensils) has existed, so has the love letter. It has been the go-to way for millions of men throughout history to confess or reiterate their feelings of love for another.

Plenty of women, of course, have and will continue to write love letters. But as the sex that has historically been the "pursuer" in the relationship and often has trouble vocally expressing their feelings, writing love letters has traditionally been the purview of men.

It's not always easy to express our feelings to our significant others. We'd rather show our love through actions. We feel that our love for someone is manifestly obvious, because after all, don't we vacuum the house, and mow the lawn, and make them their favorite pancakes every Sunday morning? Our actions show that we're faithful and true, and to us it feels like this should be enough.

But it's not quite that way for a woman. Women definitely appreciate our acts of love, but their brains are also quite a bit more language oriented than ours. They want to hear the words behind the actions. They want to know exactly what's in our hearts.

But it's hard to not only find the right words to express how we feel about someone, but to also make it flow and sound real purty. It's especially difficult when you're sitting down with someone and trying to remember exactly what you wanted to say. Enter the love letter.

Writing a fantastically romantic love letter can be a challenge, but that's what you signed up for with this 30 Days project. So let's get started.

WHY WRITE A LOVE LETTER

Love letters were definitely more popular in the past when soldiers were off fighting the Big One and men left on trips that took them away from their love for months or even years at a time. With the rise of modern means of communication, love letters, and letters generally, have fallen into disfavor.

But as we talked about in our [letter writing post](#), letters have special properties that no modern form of communication can duplicate. It's something tangible that we touch and hold and then pass to another to touch and hold. And they are preserved and cherished in a way that text messages or email never will be.

The love letters you give your wife or girlfriend are testaments in the history of your love. They constitute a record of your relationship that she'll hold onto for the rest of her life (unless of course you break her heart and then the letters will give her the satisfaction of having something to burn or line the bird cage with).

Your love doesn't have to be far away for you to write a letter to her. A love letter is appropriate even when you're sleeping alongside your special someone every night. It's a chance to express your feelings in a more ardent way than you do on a day-to-day basis.

A woman cannot hear too many times that's she beautiful and that you love her. They'll never get sick of it. They want to know that you still feel the same way as you did when you first met, heck, the same way you felt last Monday. When the cheating politicians of the world dominate the news, a lady can be forgiven for wanting regular reassurance that you're not about to go traipsing off to Argentina to cavort with your Latin lover.

HOW TO WRITE A LOVE LETTER

If you're particularly in touch with your feelings and a great writer, then love letters may come easily to you. In that case, just sit down with pen and paper and let it rip. If you're someone who has problems formulating a romantic love letter, we offer the following tips to guide the process.

1. **Start off by stating the purpose of your letter.** You want your love to know right away that this is a love letter and not a note to give her the brush off or to voice some kind of displeasure with the relationship. Begin with something like, “I was thinking today about how very much I love you, and how I really don’t tell you that enough. So I wanted to sit down and let you know how totally in love with you I really am.”
2. **Recall a romantic memory.** What’s special about couplehood is that the two of you have a shared history, a history that is unique to you and your love. Thus the best way to start a love letter is to refer to a shared memory; this conjures up feelings of your history together and scores you points for remembering details of your past. For example, begin by saying, “I still remember clearly the moment when you walked into Rob’s party, wearing that stunning red dress. You were smiling ear to ear and absolutely lit up the room. I knew immediately that I had to meet you. I went to the bathroom to try to summon up my courage and think of what to say. But it was no use; I was totally tongue tied when I approached you. I was smitten from the very start.”
3. **Now transition to a section about the things you love about her.** Move from your memory to the present with a line like, “And here we are more than a decade later, and you still leave me weak in the knees.”
4. **Tell her all the things you love about her.** Before you write this section, make a list on a separate sheet of paper of all the things that you love about your significant other. Think about her physical characteristics, her personality, her character, and all the wonderful things she does for you. Then, turn the things you listed into sentences. “I truly think you are the most beautiful women in the world. I love the feeling of your legs intertwined with mine and the smell of your hair and skin. Your smile lifts my spirits on even my worst days. I love your laugh and your ability to find humor in every situation. I’m so grateful

for everything you do for me, from your delicious dinners to your magnificent backrubs.”

5. **Tell her how your life has changed since meeting her.** “You truly complete me. These last few years have been the happiest of my life. I can’t tell you how lucky I feel to always have my best friend by my side.”
6. **Reaffirm your love and commitment.** “I will always love you, no matter what happens, through thick and thin. I will be absolutely true and faithful to you forever.”
7. **End with a line that sums up your love.** “I can’t wait to grow old with you.” “My love for you will never end.” “You are my best friend and soul mate and I will love you until the end of our lives.”

It’s okay to err on the side of cheesiness. The most important rule is to be completely authentic. Write only those things that you truly feel. This will prevent the letter from seeming over the top or incongruous with your personality and relationship.

If you need some inspiration before you start writing, read this letter written in 1861 by Sullivan Ballou to his wife Sarah, a week before the Battle of Bull Run:

July the 14th, 1861

Washington D.C.

My very dear Sarah:

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days – perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.

Our movement may be one of a few days duration and full of pleasure—and it may be one of severe conflict and death to me. Not my will,

but thine O God, be done. If it is necessary that I should fall on the battlefield for my country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt.

But, my dear wife, when I know that with my own joys I lay down nearly all of yours, and replace them in this life with cares and sorrows—when, after having eaten for long years the bitter fruit of orphanage myself, I must offer it as their only sustenance to my dear little children—is it weak or dishonorable, while the banner of my purpose floats calmly and proudly in the breeze, that my unbounded love for you, my darling wife and children, should struggle in fierce, though useless, contest with my love of country?

I cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when two thousand men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death—and I, suspicious that Death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country, and thee.

I have sought most closely and diligently, and often in my breast, for a wrong motive in thus hazarding the happiness of those I loved and I could not find one. A pure love of my country and of the principles have often advocated before the people and “the name of honor that I love more than I fear death” have called upon me, and I have obeyed.

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me to you with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my

love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield.

The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when God willing, we might still have lived and loved together and seen our sons grow up to honorable manhood around us. I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me—perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar—that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name.

Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness, and struggle with all the misfortune of this world, to shield you and my children from harm. But I cannot. I must watch you from the spirit land and hover near you, while you buffet the storms with your precious little freight, and wait with sad patience till we meet to part no more.

But, O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the garish day and in the darkest night—amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours—always, always; and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by.

Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again.

As for my little boys, they will grow as I have done, and never know a father's love and care. Little Willie is too young to remember me long,

and my blue-eyed Edgar will keep my frolics with him among the dimmest memories of his childhood. Sarah, I have unlimited confidence in your maternal care and your development of their characters. Tell my two mothers his and hers I call God's blessing upon them. O Sarah, I wait for you there! Come to me, and lead thither my children.

Sullivan

Today's Task: Write a Love Letter

Hopefully, you are now fully inspired to write your lady a romantic love letter. One need not wait until they are nigh unto death to make their feelings known. Each day could be your last; tell her how you feel right now.

And if you are single, write a love poem to hone your romantic writing skills.



DAY 29

Conquer a Fear

Fear can be a good thing. It's a biological instinct that prevents us from doing stupid things that might kill us. For example, fear kicks in with good reason when we see a slithering snake or look over the edge of a cliff.

Unfortunately, fear is not always rational and not always healthy. Thus, our heart races when we're getting on a plane but not when we're driving, even though we have a far greater chance of dying while behind the wheel. And while fear works to prevent us from physical pain, it can also hold us back from the chance at both the pain of a crushed ego and the exhilaration of victory and success.

THE MANLINESS OF OVERCOMING YOUR FEARS

1. **Fear is irrational.** No one can ever be fully rational in their choices and behavior. But every man should strive to live with reason and ration as his guide. Fear is a primal instinct, not a function of higher brain faculties. When we logically think through our fears, we often find that they have no real rational basis.
2. **Fear is cowardly.** We often try to frame our fears in ways that soothe our egos. We say that we're being prudent or cautious. We say that we haven't tried simply because it's not important to us. We say that we're just a little nervous. But if you want to start overcoming your fears, it's helpful to call a spade a spade. Don't say, "I'm not doing this because I'm nervous," say, "I'm not doing this because I'm a coward." This is not meant to be harsh; I actually find it quite helpful to frame

my internal debate this way. Because who wants to be a coward? A man seeks to be brave and [courageous](#).

3. **Fear robs you of your integrity.** Integrity means behaving in a way wholly congruous with your beliefs and values. But when we want to do something and we believe it's the right thing to do, but we fail to do it because of fear, we violate our core values. Living true to your principles will always involve a healthy measure of overcoming your fears.
4. **Fear pushes you from the driver's seat.** A man is a captain of his own destiny. He makes the choices and chooses the roads that lead him to his goals. A man ruled by fear abdicates his captainship to his fear. He gives his fear the steering wheel. Who is the master of your life, you or your fears?
5. **Fear leaves regrets.** A man does not dwell on the past. He learns from it, but never lets it hinder him. Yet if you allow fear to keep you from seizing opportunities that come your way, you will inevitably look back, kick yourself, and wonder why the heck you let fear have its way with you.
6. **Fear slows our personal growth.** A man should always be striving to improve himself, to be a little better than he was the day before. But there is no growth without risk.

HOW TO OVERCOME OUR FEARS

"Many of our fears are tissue-paper-thin, and a single courageous step would carry us clear through them."

—Brendan Francis

We need not live our lives captive to our fears and insecurities. You can, through your will, become the master of your fears.

1. **Change your perspective on fear.** Is the pain you experience while working out a negative thing? Or is it just the feeling of your body getting stronger? Fear is only a negative thing if you believe that it is. You can choose to think about it simply as the “pain” your body experiences as your character develops and expands. There is very little growth where there is no pain and work.

Instead of seeing the tackling of our fears as nerve-racking, see it as an adventure. An adventure is anything that takes you out of your comfort zone and into unexplored territory. It can be as grand as an African safari or as basic as talking to a stranger. Conquering a fear, big or small, can be downright thrilling. Every man should try to scare himself a little every day.

2. **Change your perspective on risk.** The root of our fear is our fear of trying something and crashing and burning. What if I get rejected? What if I fail? These are short-term risk assessments. Yes, there is a chance that you will fall on your face. And if you don't take the risk, you're guaranteed not to face failure.

But in making such a calculation, you are leaving out the long-term risk, a risk that's far riskier than any short-term blow to your ego. The long-term risk is this: that of never amounting to anything. The risk of living a completely mediocre life. The risk of looking back in 10, 20, or 30 years and feeling your stomach turn with regret.

When I was a kid and was afraid to do something, whether it was slide down the water slide backwards or ride a huge roller coaster, I would ask myself this question: “Which choice are you going to regret more? Doing this thing and being scared for a few minutes or not doing it and missing out on the experience and always wondering what it would have been like?” Even my ten-year-old brain knew the answer.

Remember, when you skip an opportunity because you're afraid, you'll never get that moment back. Never.

Finally, we often fear failure and rejection because it hurts to think that we're not as suave or talented as we had supposed. This is a blow to the ego. But when we don't act on our fears, we send a message to ourselves that we are in fact cowardly, and this subconsciously wears away our sense of self and will stick with us far after the sting of any failed enterprise has passed.

Maybe it's time you updated your criteria for risk assessment.

- 3. Act courageous.** Teddy Roosevelt overcame his fears by acting as if he were not afraid. Do the same:

"There were all kinds of things of which I was afraid of at first, ranging from grizzly bears to "mean" horses and gun-fighters; but by acting as if I was not afraid I gradually ceased to be afraid."

- 4. Think about the great men of history.** Our own personal fears and challenges can seem overwhelming and insurmountable. But with the proper perspective, they can seem rightfully manageable. The next time you feel paralyzed by a fear, think of the courageous men of the past. Think of Edmund Hillary ascending Mt. Everest, the Freedom Riders meeting a crowd of angry Klansmen, the astronauts sitting in Apollo 13. You'll soon think, "Dammit! And here I am unable to make this flippin' phone call!"

- 5. Kill the fear with logic.** As we mentioned above, fear is not a rational thing. The solution is thus to kill it with logic. The best way to do this is to ask yourself this question: "If I do this, what is the worst that can happen?"

What's the worst that could happen if you asked someone out and they said no? You didn't have a date then, you don't have a date now. Nothing has changed.

What's the worst that could happen if you apply for a job and don't get it? You didn't have the job before, you don't have the job now. Nothing has changed.

What's the worst that can happen if I give a speech at the conference and bomb? No one will ever tell you, and you'll never know you were bad.

And so on and so on. With almost any scenario the worst that could happen might be temporarily unpleasant, but is infinitely manageable.

- 6. Memorize this quote.** We've already talked about the power of having memorized quotes at your ready disposal. One of the best passages to memorize and recite to yourself when you're afraid is this one from Theodore Roosevelt:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

- 7. There's no need to feel the fear, just do it.** A lot of self-help gurus recommend that you fully feel the fear and go ahead and tackle it anyway. I disagree. Giving the fear wholesale residency in your body is just going to make you get all tense and freaked out. What I find works is acknowledging the fear, but then immediately going for it, even before your brain has time to dwell on what you're about to do. Just put your brain on cruise control. Check out a little bit and start down a path you can't return from. Dial that number. Walk into that office. Once you're in the mix, you're forced to carry on, and you'll find that you do indeed have the strength to pull it off.

[The men of Easy Company](#) signed up to be paratroopers with only the faintest idea of what jumping out of an airplane entailed. As they

donned their packs and climbed into the hull of the plane on their first training flight, some of the men were feeling the fear big time. Others chose not to think about it. When the green light went off, they lined up, stepped to the door and jumped.

Just do it.

Today's Task: Conquer a Fear

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. Security does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than exposure.”

—Helen Keller

Pick a fear you've had for some time. Something you need to do, something you want to do, but you've been continually putting off. We think we stay safe by playing it small, but our unconquered fears sit like a weight on our shoulders. They're there when you wake up and when you go to bed. They keep whispering in your ear that today is the day to go for it, and you keep ignoring the call. The weight of your unconquered fears builds slowly, almost imperceptibly, but it grows each and every day, slowing down your progress and cluttering your mind.

Ask that girl out that you've liked for a very long time. Tell your best friend how you really feel about her. [Break-up](#) with your girlfriend that you stopped having feelings for months ago. Ask for that raise you deserve. Confess your mistake to your friend or boss. Ask your brother for forgiveness.

Perhaps there are some 30 Days tasks that you haven't done yet because you've been afraid to. **Today is the day that the excuses and procrastination absolutely must end.** [Talk to 3 strangers.](#) [Write your dad a letter.](#) [Take a woman on a date.](#) Just do it.

THE FEAR I PLAN TO CONQUER

HOW I PLAN TO DO IT



DAY 30

Get a Straight Razor Shave

At last! We've finally made it to the last day of the 30 Days to a Better Man Challenge. It's been a tough 30 days. Hopefully, the tasks we came up with helped you stretch, grow, and become a better man. Today's final task will both complete this process and reward your efforts during the past month. Today's challenge is to get an old fashioned straight razor shave from a barber.

WHY GET A STRAIGHT RAZOR SHAVE

1. **It's relaxing.** The straight razor shave is the facial for manly men. The experience is definitely a treat. There's nothing like a hot towel on your face or the manly fragrance of shaving cream to sap the stress right out of your body. The few times I've gotten a straight razor shave, I've fallen asleep because it's so darn relaxing.
2. **It's manly.** When you get a straight razor shave, you can almost feel the testosterone increasing in your body. It feels cool to be taking part in a ritual that thousands of men from history experienced. Plus, in a world where women are pretty much doing everything men are, a straight razor shave is one of the few activities that is still completely and exclusively male.
3. **It's dangerous.** At least it feels that way. There's nothing like letting another man hold a razor sharp piece of metal to your neck to remind you that you're alive.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A STRAIGHT RAZOR SHAVE

1. **Cost.** The barbershops that I've been to charge \$20 for a straight razor shave. Some places will be more and some places may be less. But \$20 seems to be the going rate.
2. **The process.** The two places I've gotten a straight razor shave had a pretty similar process. Here's how it typically goes. You'll sit in a cool barber chair, and the barber will tilt it back. He'll start off putting a nice hot towel around your face to soften up your whiskers. After the first hot towel, some barbers rub cleanser on your face to open up the pores and to make sure your face is nice and clean for a good shave. After that, another hot towel.

Next, they might put some conditioner on your whiskers to soften them up, followed by another hot towel.

Now it's on to the shaving cream. Most barbers have their own secret recipe for shaving cream that has been passed down for generations. The shaving cream will come from a heated dispenser. It feels really nice on your face.

They'll then take the razor to your face. Because of health codes, most barbers use disposable straight edge razors as opposed to traditional straight razors. Some men would argue that you'll notice the difference. Honestly, I haven't.

After a first pass with the razor, you'll get another hot towel. Shaving cream is reapplied, and another pass is made.

When the barber is done removing your beard, he'll give you a cold damp towel to close your pores and then splash on some manly aftershave.

Bada bing! You just got a straight razor shave. You'll walk out of the barbershop feeling rejuvenated, relaxed, and uber-manly.

Today's Task: Get a Straight Razor Shave

Today's task is to get a straight razor shave. Not all barbers do them. So you'll have to call around to find one that does.

For our bearded brethren, have a professional trim and clean your beard up. I hear some barbers have some nice shampoos designed specifically for beards that smell particularly manly.

After this task, you could even [try the straight razor shelf yourself!](#)



CONCLUSION

Congratulations!

You've completed the Art of Manliness 30 Days to a Better Man challenge.

Use the momentum you've created to continue your journey to becoming a better man.

For more advice and tips on how you can become a better man, check out www.artofmanliness.com.

