

# How to turn your dreams into actions

**Combining psychology, personal development and project management.**

## Getting started

I have created a Google Drive template of every worksheet in this article—complete with digital sticky notes.

All are free to use. Simply click on the links in the image captions and it will take you to the respective template.

Select “use this template” in the top left corner, aaand Bob’s your uncle.

*To quickly duplicate the sticky notes, hold down the “Ctrl” or “Apple” key while you drag and drop one to a new place.*

I recommend focussing on one step every day. There are eight steps, so doing this should take eight days.

Don’t rush it, or you will just get frustrated and abandon this altogether.

*Oh, and one last tip: if you are serious about this, find a friend in the same head-space to go through this with you.*

***“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.”  
— Anais Nin***

## Step 1

## **Identify your personal goals**

According to psychology, there are specific human needs that are hard-wired into each and every one of us.

Each new level is said to only fully reveal itself once the level before it has been adequately fulfilled.

There are 7 “levels” of human needs and they are explained as a hierarchy.

1. Physiological
2. Safety
3. Belongingness and love
4. Self-esteem
5. Cognitive
6. Self-actualisation
7. Transcendence

Personally, I believe that leisure time should also be included—as its own level within in the hierarchy.

List as many goals as you can think of for each block

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<b>Well-being</b> How might I feel more fit, healthy, strong, comfortable, energetic?  1	<b>Security</b> How might I feel more financially stable, physically safe, secure?  2	<b>Connection</b> How might I feel more love, belonging, part of a community?  3	<b>Esteem</b> How might I feel more accomplished, confident, important, valued?  4
<b>Leisure</b> How might I feel more relaxed, amused, entertained, refreshed?  5	<b>Knowledge</b> How might I feel more skilful, informed, capable, knowledgeable?  6	<b>Purpose</b> How might I feel more satisfied, content, happy with life, fulfilled?  7	<b>Service</b> How might I feel more kind, considerate, part of something bigger?  8

[Click here to get the personal goals worksheet](#)

In the worksheet above, I have edited the title of each level to make them easier to understand and identify with.

Ask yourself the “How might I...” question below each heading to help you think of goals to satisfy each level.

Try to list as many goals as possible, but don't beat yourself up if you can't think of any goals for a particular level.

As you begin to tick goals off of your list, more goals will reveal themselves to you—add them as they do.

***“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”***

— ***Tony Robbins***

# Step 2

## Break large goals into smaller actions

Some of your goals are going to either be too “fuzzy” to start working on or too large to complete in one go.

I have found, in both work and personal life, people struggle to break large goals up into manageable chunks.

The trick is to think of your goal as a series of small actions. Each action should be achievable on its own.

Goal breakdown

Break large goals into smaller, easy to accomplish actions

Created by Vaughn Gunnell

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<div><div>Goal</div><div>Pick a goal from your personal goals worksheet. Place your goal here.</div><div>Goal</div></div>					
<div><div>Actions</div><div>What are the smallest actions you need to take to make this goal happen? You don't need to use all the blocks.</div></div>					
Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 4	Action 5	Action 6
Action 7	Action 8	Action 9	Action 10	Action 11	Action 12

[Click here to get the goal breakdown worksheet](#)

For each large goal you have, use the worksheet above. Use as many as you need to break up all your goals.

Place your goal in the top section and list the smallest actions you can take to make your goal happen.

The numbers are just a guideline, you don't need to use all twelve blocks.

If you need more than twelve blocks, ignore the grey dashed lines and add as many actions as you need.



***“If opportunity doesn’t knock, build a door.”***  
**— Milton Berle**

## Step 3

### Group actions by “recurring” and “once-off”

In order to track your progress you'll need to know which actions belong in your calendar versus your task list.

Actions generally fall into one of two categories—“recurring” or “once-off.”

### Action types

Group actions by "recurring" and "once-off"

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<b>Recurring</b> Schedule time for these actions in your calendar	<b>Once-off</b> Add these actions to your kanban board
Group A	Group B

[Click here to get the action types worksheet](#)

Use the worksheet above to label all of your actions (for all of your goals) as either "recurring" or "once-off."

This step won't take as long as the others and ensures that you commit to a method of tracking for each action.

***"The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity."***

***— Amelia Earhart***

## Step 4

**Schedule actions that recur every week**

Looking at the actions you put into “Group A” (recurring), decide which of the actions must happen weekly.

For example, you might want to go to gym three days per week or write ten lines of your thesis every evening.

If one of your goals is to lose [insert number] % body fat, you might want to schedule your new meal times.

### Weekly calendar

Schedule actions that recur every week

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Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
AM	AM	AM	AM	AM	AM	AM
PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM

[Click here to get the weekly calendar worksheet](#)

Using the worksheet above, write each of your actions and the time you plan to complete it on a sticky note.

Place each action in the column of the day you plan to complete it, listed in descending order from AM to PM.

***“Either you run the day, or the day runs you.”  
— Jim Rohn***

## Step 5

### Schedule actions that recur every month

Looking at the actions you put into “Group A” (recurring), decide which of the actions must happen monthly.

For example, you might want to transfer money into an investment account or publish an article once a month.

<b>Monthly calendar</b> Schedule actions that recur every month		1	2	3	4	5
		6	7	8	9	10
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

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[Click here to get the monthly calendar worksheet](#)

Using the worksheet above, write each of the actions on a sticky note and place it on the date you plan to complete it.

This worksheet is best used only for the actions that recur once, twice or three times in a month.



When something starts happening four+ times a month, twice a week or more, then your weekly calendar is best.

***“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”***  
**– Arthur Ashe**

## Step 6

### List once-off actions in order of priority

Take the actions you put into “Group B” (once-off) and decide which are:





1. Not yet started
2. Currently in progress
3. On hold (i.e. delayed)
4. Already complete

Most of your actions should fall into the “not yet started” category, but some might already be further along.

## Kanban board

Visually prioritise actions and manage your progress

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<b>Not started</b> Take your actions from Group B and arrange them in order of priority	<b>In progress</b> Move an action here when you start it	<b>On hold</b> Move an "in progress" action here when you encounter a delay	<b>Complete</b> Move an action here when you complete it
			

[Click here to get the kanban board worksheet](#)

Using the worksheet above, list all of your "once-off" actions in the correct columns in order of priority.

Order of priority is a huge thing here. You want to make sure you are doing the most important things first.

When you start an action, move it from "not started" to "in progress." If it gets delayed, move it into "on hold."

When you start the action again, move it back into "in progress" and when it is finished, move it into "complete."

As the urgency and importance of each of your actions change, rearrange the order of priority accordingly.

Making your progress visual will allow you to spot bad prioritisation habits, bottlenecks and procrastination.

***“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”***  
**– Alan Kay**

## Step 7

### Digitise your calendar and kanban board

Now that you know how you’re going to make your goals happen, you need constant access to all your information.

If you cannot see it, you cannot track progress and you’re bound to forget to do, or double-book, some of your actions.

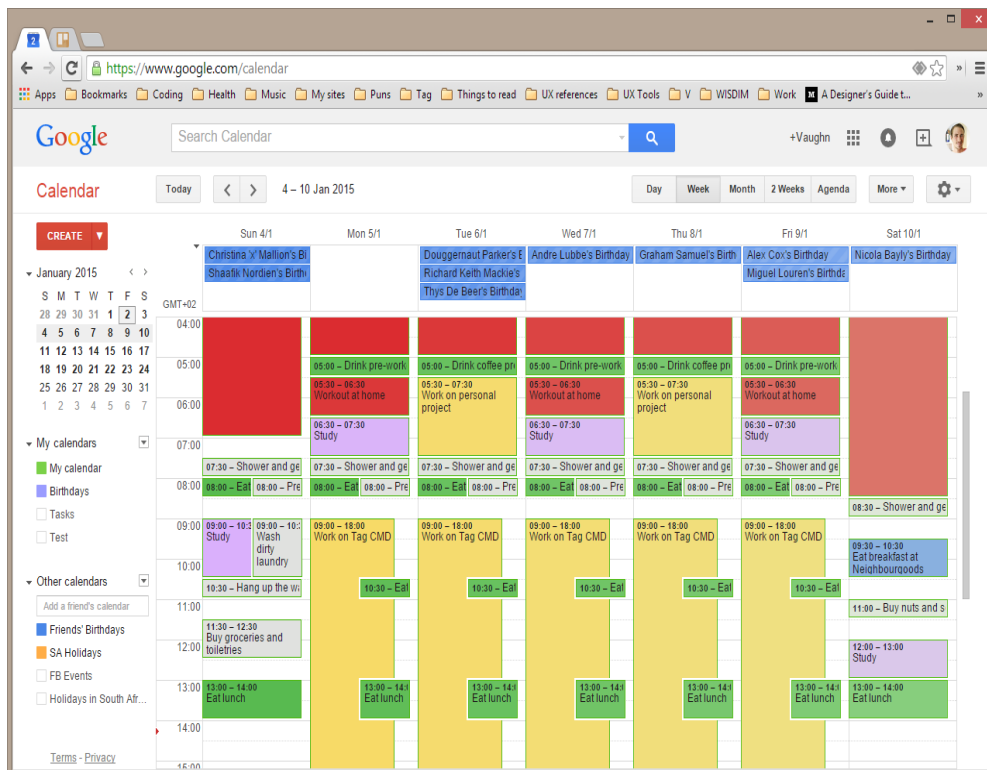
You also want to avoid duplicating work and make action management as quick and effortless as humanly possible.

The answer? Cross-platform applications.

The two apps I could not live without are:

Both apps are free and can be accessed using a web browser or the Android, iOS and Windows 8 downloads.

Once you’re all set up, add your “recurring” actions to [Google Calendar](#) and your “once-off” actions to [Trello](#).

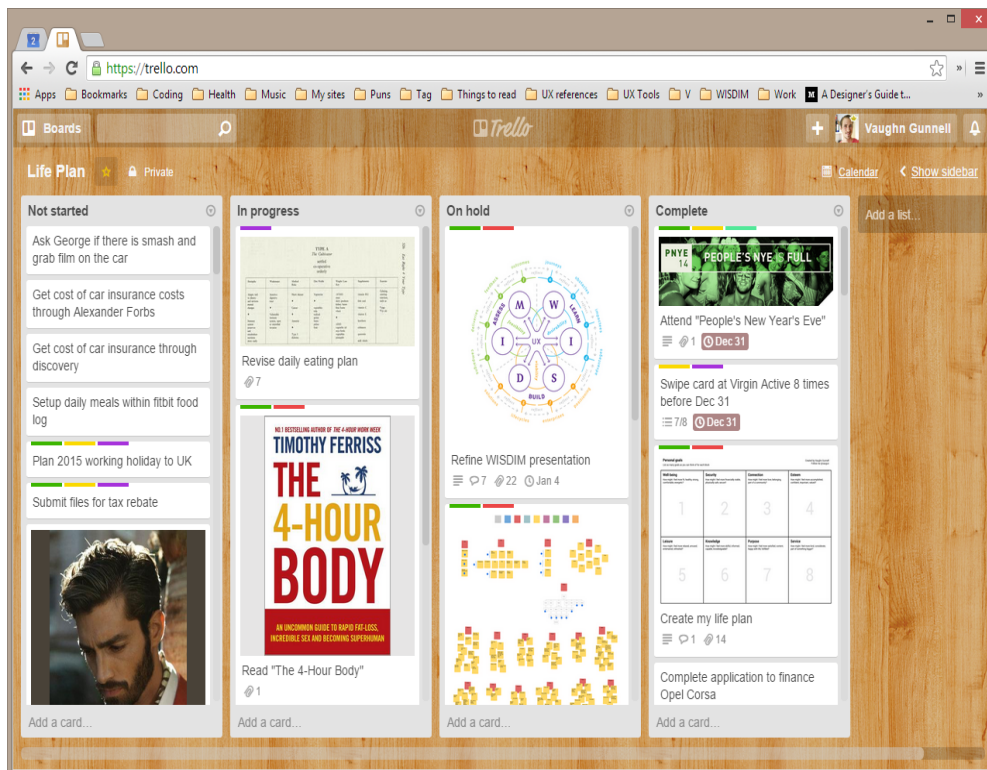


Screenshot of my calendar

*Most of my calendar entries are recurring tasks that form a “template” for my week. I add, edit, re-arrange and delete blocks as needed.*

*Constantly playing “calendar **Tetris**” keeps you in-tune with how much time you have available everyday and avoids over-committing.*

*It’s also much faster to re-arrange or delete entries than to keep adding them.*



Screenshot of my kanban board

*I try to capture every action I need to take, no matter how small. **Trello** adds new items to the bottom of the list by default.*

*Once a week—and when I have time to spare—I skim through my “not started” column and re-prioritise items as needed.*

*It's far easier to delete from your list than to remember what you have forgotten.*

***“The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have.”***

***— Vince Lombardi***

## Step 8

### Set audible / visual reminders

## ***Recurring actions:***

Things begin to get tricky when you're trying to build a new habit into your daily life to override an older, bad habit.

Daily, weekly—even monthly—recurring actions usually determine whether you will achieve a goal in the long run.

The worksheet below is best used for planning a path of least resistance to complete challenging recurring actions.

### **Habit loop**

Plan a "path of least resistance" to complete recurring actions

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<b>Trigger</b> What is that smallest, most convenient and effortless thing you can do to start (i.e. "trigger") the action? E.g. Sit down at your work desk; open a text book and put headphones on; put on your workout clothes.  <b>B</b>	<b>Action</b> Place the action you want to turn into a habit over here ...  <b>C (start here)</b>	
<b>Prompt</b> What audible or visual cue will remind you to do the action? E.g. Calendar notification; alarm on mobile phone; running shoes / gym clothes at your bedside table.  <b>A</b>	<b>Reward</b> What good thing happens when you complete the action? E.g. Achievement; stay on schedule; get the result you want; win a bet; earn a prize; loose weight.  <b>D</b>	<b>Penalty</b> What bad thing happens if you don't complete the action? E.g. Disappointment; no longer on schedule; give money to your friend; loose a bet; gain weight.  <b>E</b>

[Click here to get the habit loop worksheet](#)

Start by placing an action in section "C". Follow the letters in alphabetical order and read the description for each.

Decide upon an effective prompt, trigger, reward and penalty for this action and place them on the worksheet.

This sequence of events is the routine you will use to complete this action.

### ***Once-off actions:***

Thankfully, once-off actions require less effort because they do not need to repeat in order to achieve your goal.

To make once-off actions happen, schedule a time slot in your calendar and set a notification to remind you to do it.

If it is small enough that it does not require its own time slot scheduled in your calendar, just set an audible alarm.

***“The secret of getting ahead is getting started.”***  
***— Mark Twain***

## **Inspiration**

### **Listed by date of publication**

*These are the articles, videos, models and books that have inspired the thinking behind the way I like to get things done.*

Mark E. Koltko-Rivera (2006) [Rediscovering the Later Version of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: Self-Transcendence and Opportunities for Theory, Research, and Unification.](#)

Tony Robbins (2006) [Why we do what we do.](#)

Steve Diller, Nathan Shedroff, and Darrel Rhea (2008) [Making Meaning: How Successful Companies Deliver Meaningful Experiences.](#)

Sebastian Seung (2010) [I am my connectome.](#)

Ash Maurya (2011) [How We Build Features.](#)

Simon Sinek (2011) [Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action.](#)

Richard Barrett (2013) [Seven Levels of Consciousness—Personal, Organisational, Societal.](#)

Jocelyn K. Glei (2013) [Manage Your Day-to-Day: Build Your Routine, Find Your Focus, and Sharpen Your Creative Mind.](#)

Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland (2013) [The Definitive Guide to Scrum: The Rules of the Game.](#)

Nir Eyal (2013) [Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products.](#)

Dan Gilbert (2014) [The psychology of your future self.](#)

Sam Thomas Davies (2014) [Choice Architecture: How to Commit to Behaviour Change When You Lack Willpower.](#)

Carol Dweck (2014) [The power of believing that you can improve.](#)

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