ABRAHAM AUDU

UN
FINISHED

Why You Abandon Meaningful
Projects and What to Do
About It

UNFINISHED!

Why You Abandon Meaningful Projects and What to do About It

What People Are Saying About This Book

Abraham Audu attempts to solve an age long problem with this new book. He intelligently dissects why we abandon projects and what we can do to fight procrastination through strategic self-evaluation and planning. This is a book everyone with dreams of creating a legacy should read.

Olusola Amusan
CEO, Coven Works

<div align="center">* * * * *</div>

Abraham has written an all-important book that should be read and applied by people today. Procrastination, inertia, inaction, etc. are some of the viruses we battle with day-by-day and like a doctor, the author systematically diagnoses the ailment and also provides the needed remedy.

I love the personal experiences he brings on board on several occasions and his emphasis on self-awareness as a foundation. In his words, 'the book is a journey to and of self-awareness'. This book is practical, easy to read and apply and very insightful. I recommend it to everyone out there who's got unfinished businesses, afraid of starting and/or finishing. You will succeed!

Niyi Soyinka
Bestselling Author, *How To Earn A Fee From What You Do For Free!*

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Unfinished is a book that unmasks that hidden true story of struggle you and I face. The struggle for productivity: the fight between our desires and our actions, the fight to conquer procrastination and lethargy. Abraham excellently uses scientific facts and personal stories to first narrate that struggle, and then goes on to give practical insights on how to win the war. Reading the book feels like someone has been watching you silently! The best part is that he helps us move from UNFINISHED to accomplished!

Michael Audu
Founder, High Performers' Network

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

Unfinished is such a treasure chest with invaluable truths and principles. It is a must-read for anyone out there who is faced with the plague of never finishing a task, accomplishing an assignment or smashing a goal. As a master mariner, he succeeded in charting a course for those who would love to learn how to begin and eventually finish whatever they had set out to do with a step-by-step approach.

Isaac E. David
President, Oil-press Network

✶ ✶ ✶ ✶ ✶

Mr. Abraham Audu: "Myself, like a lot of us have undoubtedly made resolutions to finish a thing we have started, again and again. Abraham Audu takes us through the Process of Loss of motivation, Self-Awareness and Clarity; "Why did I start, and why Must I finish?" This book is a must read for everyone who ever struggles in managing action-to-result activities. It is an

insightful, easy-to-apply and very relatable book that will guide anyone willing to move farther in life''

Sarah Sambo,
Program Officer, Core Working Group on Human Capital Development

✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳

As we grow older, our paths are strewn with abandon projects. Projects that would have changed the trajectory of our lives. *Unfinished* is a book where every word is relatable. This book shares personal stories to help us see we aren't alone in the struggle. It also provides well researched and well-thought-out solutions to the problem of 'not finishing'. There's so much to gain from this book, young or old. It was excellently written for everyone. It's phenomenal! A great read for great minds!

Jaachi Edwin,
Songwriter & Architect in training.

DEDICATION

To the misfits, the underdogs and the go-getters scattered all over the world, working to be better across all levels—peace with self, work, relationships and *purpose*; whatever that means to you.

To the ones who have to juggle life-altering decisions more often than the regular guy next door.

To those seeking answers.

It is my hope that this book answers one of your many questions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First off, I would like to say a big thank you to my brain for realising I had a huge problem which needed solving, and for sticking around through the course of writing this book—which served as the solving process.

I will now proceed to appreciate the people who took out time to help bring this book to life.

Stephen Angbulu was extremely resourceful in the early stages and—throughout—the writing process, honestly. He was the unofficial book consultant for this project. I'm being careful with words here because if I acknowledge him as the book consultant, he will send me an invoice! [ha-ha!]. Yes, he is an actual book project consultant. If you ever see him anywhere at a conference or a café, give him a big hug—and money—on my behalf.

A conversation with Michael Audu inspired the research on the I-AM-KING theory which serves as the closing argument for this book and the anchor for finishing what you start.

To Grace Christos, Peter Bassey, Dupe Sarah, Jephtha Idahosa, Michael Audu, Uyai Okonnah, Emmanual Alafiyatayo, Jakes Hinjari, Jimmy Idoko, Afolabi Adesina, Fii Stephen, Ele Ameh, Isaac David, Sarah Sambo, Emmanual Ahmadu, Seun Omonijo and so many others who helped either to enlist the

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Introduction

The idea for this book first hit me when I got frustrated over my struggle to finish what I start. I'm a starter. I always start new brilliant ideas. I paddle past the first 20% and then dump the whole idea shortly afterwards. Then I start a new run with another of my many ideas—well, not so many honestly.

At the end of 2019, I welcomed another brilliant idea. I felt I could write a book about my experience and show my fellow *unfinishers* a highway to getting things done.

I hopped on google in search of reasons people never finish what they start and stumbled on this book by Jane B. Burka and Lenora M. Yuen aptly titled *Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It Now.* Being a pro at what I do, I lived up to the title of the book and read it later. Don't blame me. I felt pressured to conclude the literature review for my industrial training project, which I'd been struggling with for months.

Weeks earlier, I'd read Carl Newport's *Digital Minimalism* and decided to cut back on social media. In the days that followed, I deleted

Instagram and Facebook apps and after resuming school in January 2020, I limited my WhatsApp time to one hour daily.

9 days to the submission deadline of my project, I had typed little to nothing on my literature review. The pressure was out of this world! Regret clouded my mind. I felt the pain of wasted time. I thought of how things would've been different if only I started earlier. Being me, I opted to solve my regret problem not by settling down to work on my project but to focus on my mental health instead. Interesting, right?

I decided to read the book on procrastination which I'd procrastinated about. The goal? To procrastinate further on my project. 15 pages into the book, I felt judged, exposed and attacked. I got angry and anxious at the same time.

I picked up my phone and rang a course mate. We got talking and I discovered to my dismay that she had sent copies of her concluded project to her supervisor for review. She was done and I hadn't started anything.

The pressure quadrupled! I felt like the worst human on earth. It was a Saturday evening. By Sunday evening, I was done with the literature review!

If you are anything close to a master procrastinator, you probably have your proprietary version of this sort. Those moments when you feel like the

world is coming down on you and there is nothing you can do about it because you've passed up the opportunity for the deadline not to scare you.

The alternative is, you probably feel like you are not living up to your full potential. You know there is so much locked up within you but you feel somewhat powerless in making those beautiful ideas in your head come to reality.

Sometimes you dare to bring them to life but you lose the drive to commit. It feels like there's an invisible force that sways your passion from one idea and magically lands it on another, only to repeat the cycle.

I wrote this book to help you understand the possible dynamics that could be responsible for the deadly cycle of an *unfinisher.* I will show you what happens each time you start something new and cannot find it within your humanity to finish it. It can be a painful experience especially when you are staring at a deadline. Sometimes, you feel lost and you cannot go back in time to make up your mind to get it done. Guilt has blinded you from seeing that you still have a chance to make things right.

Sometimes, it is difficult to see this pain until it's too late. You self-sabotage because you feel everything is out of your reach. But in reality, all the impossibilities you thought existed were only machinations of your mind.

Machinations to keep you in victim mode or at least have something to point to and say "this is the reason I could not achieve my highest potentials." Hello blamers!

Sometimes you don't feel good enough. You ask "what if I put in all my effort and it's not worth as much as I thought?" So, you hide under the auspice of "I didn't have what it takes to give my best."

By shrinking from full commitment, you will never know what your best looks like. Perhaps you are scared that your best will not be enough. The cool reality is, sometimes, you perform so well when you finish. Then you realise you're a demigod. Other times you realise you need to be humbler in your approach to life.

If any of these scenarios describe you, then this book is for you. I explore the feelings I struggled with. Feelings I surmounted, thanks to help from beautiful minds like the authors of *Procrastination*, deep thinkers like Cal Newport, Jordan B. Peterson, Malcolm Gladwell and a host of academic intellectuals, some of whom I will reference later in this book.

This book is a journey to and of self-awareness. The goal is to help you understand these dynamics as they happen to you. And to know what

to do with those strange feelings that emerge when you commit to making meaningful progress in your life and work. Finishing is a confidence booster!

I want you to come out of this book feeling confident in your ability to start and finish what you set your heart to do. When I started writing this book, I battled the demons of an *unfinisher* and overcame. I finished! As the author of a book titled *Unfinished*, I must say that I'm super proud that a master *unfinisher* finished writing a book. I want you to know how it feels to finish too.

Abraham Audu,
November 2020

PART I

The Start

This part explores the emotions you experience before, during and after an unfinished project that can or cannot be remedied. We will explore narratives along the areas of the usual feelings you must confront as a person who often finds it difficult to finish what you start. Some of these feelings have lasted for so long that you now define yourself by them. They influence how you see projects and tasks that require more dedication than one or two sittings.

I imagine that for a master *unfinisher*, you relish—the idea of—tasks that take months or years to accomplish. But you now know how disappointing it is to never see the end of what could have been a masterpiece because you could not apply yourself to see it through.

This process of *unfinishing* does not happen by magic. If you're a master *unfinisher*, then you are familiar with the sensations that herald the decline of the will to commit to what would've been a superb idea. Worse, you feel pseudo-helpless and that is understandable. You can only fight an enemy you can identify.

In the chapters that follow, we will discuss selected feelings and patterns I have identified in my years of *unfinishing* which, when studied, will help you identify the mix of factors that impede your ability to finish what you start.

You will understand why the situation always seems to spiral out of control right in front of you. You will also know what to do when things go out of hand—or out of mind—and why your frantic, regret-driven decisions to turn over a new leaf never holds water.

As we explore these dynamics, you will develop increased levels of self-awareness that can help you know when you are getting engulfed in the *unfinishing* cycle and stop yourself from giving in to your tendencies.

More importantly, you will learn to develop structures to make you less vulnerable to this cycle. You become a spy of yourself. You start to watch over yourself in a self-conscious manner. This way, you will capitalise on the "weak points of your weaknesses" to become a consistent finisher.

Chapter 1
Am I the Worst Human on Earth?

You're all alone. The noise is dead. It's just you and whatever is left of the decisions you have made over the last few weeks. In that moment, the little things you never accomplished—that could have changed your life for good—lay forlorn. The opportunity that would have made you return to pick them up has now passed.

You cannot boast of giving your best when the opportunity came. For some reason, you laid in your own rut and refused to rise to your responsibility. In that moment of despondence, you sigh, "Am I the worst human on earth?"

The truth is, you're not. The question should be, "am I the best version of myself? Away with the comparison and the social components of your bad feeling, is this the person you want to be? Is this the version of you you want to wake up to everyday for the next 40 years? Will you be pleased with you?

The decisions you make must come from a sense of the value you want for yourself. Hate from others can be remedied or ignored. Self-hate? Not so easily. You become the virus. To make conscious decision for change,

you must come to terms with the fact that your current *unfinisher* self is not who you want to be. You must base this decision on deep-seated values. Any other standard outside your personal values may lead you astray.

If you base your decision to change on external factors, what happens when you change environment? What follows when you've ticked all the items on society's bucket list? Your decisions must come from who you are and the pursuit to become on the outside who you are on the inside.

From September to November of 2019, I ran into a dense web of confusion. I grew scared about what path to take in life. Frozen in time, I was scared to move in any direction because I was not sure if that will mean moving farther away from who I am. I have always had a knack for exploration. A desire to know what would happen if I did this or did that.

That desire to explore comes with a curse too. It can be disappointing for the explorer if he finds nothing close to what he's searching for; especially if he has made heavy sacrifices to go on the search. I realised that I love working on personal projects that showcased intellectual ability. But then I was getting pulled back by the feeling that I'm neglecting my social life.

The more I heeded to this thought, the more I saw reasons to believe that, perhaps, my social life was not the only thing on hold. My financial stability

and spiritual pursuits were also on hold; seemingly. I began to question the meaning of life. My life.

Amidst this confusion, I stumbled upon the 16personalities test from the works of Carl Jung and some other psychologists. It turned out I was a *logician*. At that point, everything made sense to me. I realised I was not a defective human being after all. I was in fact different and it changed the entire game for me.

From then on, I began to make decisions based on the things that got me going; tinkering with ideas, making thought train connections and understanding why things are the way they are. I understood that I was prone to dumping old ideas and pursuing new ones because the idea of an unexplored idea was something my mind could not resist.

Suddenly, I felt empowered because my reason for *unfinishing* was no longer a mystery. As I understand it, it was only a side effect of my primal mental conditioning. I also knew that I would not amount to much if I did not harness my flaws in a more strategic way. So, I explored new ideas within ideas. Like, what would happen after I figure out this layer? What's in the next layer of this idea?

This way, I could dive deep into one idea because most ideas and concepts go deeper and become more complex as the layers stack up; fuel for my brain.

I know that logicians—myself included—are in the minority in our world today. This is not to toot my horn in any way (ha ha!). Trust me, if the world had my kind only, God may have to pound the reset button. We all need each other to make the world go round.

So why is my story important? It's because we are all made to value different parts of what makes this giant machine called society work. And you will keep feeling lost if you do not find what makes you tick. The things that make you tick are not specific activities but specific rewards that your brain considers to be the centre of meaning. To understand this, you must embark on a pilgrimage to find the things that matter most to you.

After trying your hands on a few activities and causes you feel drawn to, take the 16personalities test online to nudge you closer to your centre. After this point, you can then list out what matters the most to you. This speculative list will help you build your life around what really matters to you.

Drawing these limits is not some defeatist, mediocre way of lowering the bar because you cannot measure up. It is not about avoiding relationships

with other people because you are terrible at relating with people. It does not mean leaving social media because you can't keep up with the Jones'. It's about going to the centre of your person and searching out the things that bring true value to your life and devoting yourself to those things until you find your flow.

So, if winning the social game is what matters to you, then stop beating yourself up because you can't figure out how our solar system works. However, if the success of your social life depends on figuring out the solar system, you will make the effort to figure it out. Why? You have realised that your social life is connected to the core of your being.

This is not a defeatist mentality that makes you give up on what you cannot grasp. Rather, it is a self-centring method. It helps you zero in on what matters to you. It will help you push through even when things are challenging. What's the essence of life if there are no challenges to overcome? What are we living for if we cannot slay giants and come out blood stained from—public or private—battles that infuses us with enough power to define our path?

Such discovery can feel empowering at first but that's all it is, a *feeling*. Now that I have indulged you in a pep talk on devoting to the things you start, let us now see what brought you to the point of asking "am I the worst

person on Earth?'' This is crucial because as I said earlier, you can only fight an enemy you identify.

Always Out of Control

For the classic *unfinisher*, executing the most important tasks is always a mirage. If you are a conscientious planner like me, you probably have the time slots, you have the schedule and there are no visible obstacles before you. But you never meet deadlines. Heck, you often start on the eve of the deadline. But is everything really in place?

As I type this, I have 3 major academic assignments I planned to complete in the 10 days. So far, there's only 4 days left and I have managed to complete one; with the second task in the pipeline. Since I'm writing a book on finishing what you start, I should have a hang of it, right? Well, that's not what this is about.

The true reason why you always spiral out of control is what I'd like to call *hyper-idealism*. *Hyper-idealism* can be broken down into the 3 components that every task or project depends on— time, the activities involved and most importantly, you.

You see, time is an objective quantity. But when you are desperate to meet a deadline, you start to view time subjectively. This makes you believe

you can maximise every second by magic. If you have any experience with time, you know that it is impossible to fully maximise time because as humans, we are inefficient by design. That's why we built machines. Sadly, machines took after us. They are not 100% efficient! Somehow, this common knowledge eludes us when we need all the time we can get.

You imagine a scenario where your brain was the CPU of a computer. You imagine that you can double down on any task and finish in 12 hours. But you are a human being and all sorts of lapses will come up that you cannot—or sometimes choose not to—pre-empt.

Your inability to correctly judge how much time you need to accomplish a task/project invariably makes you plan out many tasks for too little time. Sounds familiar? This concept is better explained in the book *Procrastination* which I mentioned in the introduction.

Next, we talk about the task. How long do you suppose it will take to download 17 PDFs, read and summarise them to build an introduction to your academic research paper? My guess is probably one day, right? But then as you begin, you will suddenly realise that it requires poring through those documents to sieve what matters to your work. You will have to allow your brain absorb that information and organise it in a way that makes enough sense to form the introduction to your work.

While you are still at this, day one is gone and you haven't typed a word on your introduction. Then there's the part where you sit down to type out your thoughts from all the insights gained from previous studies.

This is only one example. Yours could be a business plan, a song you want to record, a painting you want to put on canvas or a surprise dinner for your significant other. The moment you jump right in, the task expands and suddenly, you need to channel an unplanned level of effort to sort out the nuances that never existed one week ago.

The most important element of all is you—your physical and mental state. Most times, you will not feel equal to the mental task of achieving your goals. Sometimes, this is mere procrastination. Other times it is for real. You could be experiencing burnout from the efforts you've sunk into other areas of your life. You may be exhausted from a bumpy week or an impromptu trip you had to make.

All you need is a refreshing weekend so you can function properly on Monday. You know you deserve to rest. But this is the weekend you have planned as the *crash-it* window for that pending project. In that moment, you realise you are only human. That project might remain unfinished in perpetuity—if your life does not depend on it.

Being out of control is not so much about your failure to plan or set up formidable structures to execute tasks. It is about the fundamental flaws in the information with which your plans and structures are built. It is a foundational problem from your construct of time, tasks and your physical and mental abilities.

The Great Resolution

Picture this! You are the greatest hero to walk the earth. You stand before a million people to declare what would be humanity's greatest speech. The world is in chaos but your words pulse through the crowd and suddenly the light shines on the faces of a million people. In that moment, you realise the power of a determined and inspired mind. Except that those smiles are not real. That's not what happens after you fail to hit your targets once again.

Here's a more accurate rendition: the million people are a million emotions, dark emotions. You sit there giving yourself a gracious speech on how your life will henceforth be the ideal standard for the world to follow. Your emotions turn bright and you suddenly feel you can conquer the world.

For clarity, *The Great Resolution* is a decision, a vague decision you make after you flunk another deadline. It is a declaration of your intent to take your work and your life seriously and let nothing fall through the cracks again.

The only downside to this, however, is that it never addresses the wound. It's like covering up a wound filled with pieces of broken glass. When any pressure is applied to that spot it will hurt a thousand times more. Maintain that for long enough and you're looking at a major infection in progress. Yuck!

In this chapter, I'm intentionally restraining myself from dishing any sort of advice because we are exploring the emotions that come with *unfinishing* so we can recognise it when it happens. Call it self-awareness 101.

Now, let's return to my academic tasks. When I first told that story, I spoke as one who is still in the shackles of *unfinishing*. What I did not mention is, that is one of the few times I did what I'd purposed to do during a school break. 3 out of 5 tasks is not bad, is it? On a micro-level, I finished 3 tasks. For someone who would have done nothing at all, it felt like progress.

On the flip side, I only aced the smaller tasks. The 800-pound gorillas—the academic papers—sat on my list taking up precious space. With a fixed mindset, I lost. With a growth mindset, I've made some progress.

Why bring this story up again? When you fail to meet up with your most important tasks or projects, you need to take stock of what happened and detach yourself from the wave of emotions that accompany failure. In

that moment you are neck-deep in the feelings that prompt questions such as "Am I the Worst Person on Earth?" What you should be doing is to evaluate what happened, what didn't happen and then figure out what's left to be done.

The great resolution—promises made from regret—only put you under pressure to magically become who you don't know how to be. The great resolution is an assumption that there's nothing wrong with you and all you need to do is simply put your head down and get the job done at once. This thinking has 2 flaws. First, there is something wrong you are not addressing. Second, you cannot do it all at once.

In my experience, it is always worthwhile to reflect on the emotions you are feeling because, as a person, you are a system. You may see your life in independent *aspects* when in fact, you are a single unit manifesting as many things. You want to ensure that there is harmony in all these *aspects* of your life—not perfection or the absence of problems. There must be a clear path. When your life is aligned on all fronts, it becomes easy to stay on course with what you want to achieve.

Trying to focus on a specific task when some other part of your life is under attack—like London was to the German bomber planes in WWII—is ludicrous. Imagine trying to sleep when there's a fire in your kitchen. Surely,

your sleep is independent of a fire but why take the chance? I don't mean to say that when you cannot get things done, it means that some *aspects* of your life are out of order. Yours could be because of a myriad of reasons. You must search deep.

The second problem with great resolutions is that they amplify your biased view of time. How on earth can an Architecture student finish a skyscraper design in 2 hours when he's spent the past 3 weeks of the assignment doing nothing? Can you see the problem?

The great resolution skews your judgement of your abilities. The great resolution is an emotional manifesto of words. At its root, it is only a wish soaked in regret. It is a state we fall into when we are desperately trying to fix our wrong of wasting so much time on trivialities.

Think about it, what was the deepest feeling you experienced the last time you decided to double down on a task you've procrastinated on for so long? It's most likely a regret for lost time. In your mind, the best remedy to lost time is an elixir that can compress time?

The great resolution is the best way to articulate your wish to magically restore lost time. If you are a veteran at procrastination, you must have noticed that this magical strategy is ineffective. There must be a better way to get around this curve. And there is!

Why It Never Ends

Guilt sets in when you realise you could have been more proactive with your time. It hurts when you flunk another deadline and fail to deliver at the proposed date. But emotions are transient. They come and go like the wind.

3 days later, you will accept that life has its ups and downs. You will accept the lie that there was nothing you could have done to prevent it anyway. But in that statement lies the problem. You have now defined *unfinishing* as a problem that comes naturally with life. You refuse to own up to your failure to get the task done in the first place. Of course, you did something but that was no match for the level of commitment required to get the job done.

You settle into your new reality and you do so unconsciously. You no longer recognise the problem as a problem. Poor habits that have lingered for long will start to feel like a member of the family. Over time, you no longer feel the pain of disappointing yourself and others. You're numb. You cannot see that not finishing the things you deeply care about is an enormous problem that undermines your purpose.

Therefore, you cannot recognize the enemy because it has been sitting right in front of you for ages. You become so familiar with your problem that you see no need for a solution. It is true that abandoning important tasks and projects along the way impacts you and others negatively. But now you can't care less. The mere fact that not finishing a personal project makes you feel bad should be enough reason to get your acts together. But you have mastered suppressing the feeling. This suppression is a coping mechanism.

Since you can no longer appreciate the gravity of the problem, it becomes difficult to imagine what your life would be like when you follow through with important tasks or projects. It's like asking a broke guy what he would do with $20 million.

At first it seems easy. But when you discuss with him and try to draft a logical list, you will soon realise how long it takes him to articulate he will do with the money. Worse, he may come up with a consumer-driven list that cannot exhaust the entire amount.

The alternative is to splurge! Buy a luxurious house and a Ferrari, or something close. Either way, he has no deep-seated desire to first grow and attain that status. When the value of a thing has not been recognized, the pursuit of that thing may never translate into results. The mind will not commit to seeking out opportunities it does not prioritise.

The same applies to psychological desires. When you cannot appreciate the benefit of something, you cannot muster the drive to fight for it. You reading this, pause right now and reflect on any moment when you pictured what your life would be like if you were a more disciplined person; a person who finish what they start. Do not do it from regret. Just think!

If you have no picture or mental map of where you want to be, you will have no desire to go for it. Having no map for what happens after an event or outcome is similar to death. You'll have to put up with too many uncertainties. Subconsciously, you will remain trapped in the domain you can handle.

At least, not finishing will keep you chasing your tail. That is something you know how to do well. But what lies on the other side of this wall where nothing gets completed? You don't know. It's too risky to try. So you keep *unfinishing*.

You may not have a verbal version of this conversation with yourself but trust me, what happens in your head is not so different. There is security and certainty in the known. Thus, you continue to self-sabotage to keep being within the rungs of what you know, can define and can navigate.

The most dreadful of the reasons why *unfinishing* becomes an unending cycle is embodiment. I see it, I feel it, I am it! At this point, you are basically done trying to change and you probably won't start. This is defeat before defeat. The will to embark on personal projects is bleak. And at this point, even obligatory activities of life start to go *unfinished.* This type runs deep.

Case I: It may be a spin-off of a deeper hurt such as depression or devastation from events beyond your control; such as the death of a loved one. In this case, *unfinishing* is only an effect of deep emotions. With proper attention and recovery, things can brighten up and you will make meaning out of your life again.

Case II: You are surrounded by a myriad of unfinished personal goals that keep screaming your name. So you are at a loss of what to do. Such a long backlog of attempts and failures create a deep feeling of inadequacy. You start to define yourself by your problems.

Bear in mind that being labelled by a thing is much different from self-labelling yourself. At this point, anything you start is bound to go halfway because deep inside, it's only another opportunity to prove to yourself how much of an *unfinisher* you are.

Chapter 2

Now I Know Why, What's Next?

After reading the first chapter you may be asking "what's next?" Well, we shall keep exploring causal factors to identify the enemy. In the previous chapter, we discussed neural patterns of *unfinishing*. In this chapter we will discuss the underlying psychological constructs that sponsor those patterns. Think of it as peeling deeper through the onion to see what's in the middle.

This chapter does not contain another onion layer with an air gap in the middle. It won't tell you your problem without solving it. For now, it is our primary concern to explore the root cause of the problem so we can administer the right cure.

It may seem like a luxurious use of time to keep exploring root causes but the works of Charles Duhigg in *The Power of Habit* clarifies that the human condition is such that, for every manifestation of human behaviour, all that we see is not all that there is. Every action is sponsored by a network of psychological circuits and pathways that makes it even more difficult to provide lasting solutions to our behavioural lapses.

It would not be a surprise if most of the behavioural causes we explored in the previous chapter were already familiar to you. And if you're reading this book to come up with a lasting solution—to *unfinishing*—then there is a chance you have already tried coming up with solutions that you could not finish implementing. How ironic?

This information tells us something. It justifies our exploration of reasons why we helplessly act out behaviours that keep us from finishing what we start. Here's an example. Suppose you have a headache; it may be easy to identify the cause but not so easy to explain the physiological changes that happen in your body to cause the headache. Unless of course you're a medical student. The obvious solution is to take medication—a painkiller most preferably.

You do not need knowledge of the internal dynamics of a headache to cure it but the pharmacists who prepared it does. Curing a headache is simple. How about curing yourself of habits that ensure you never finish what you start? There are no tablets for that. We must become mini pharmacists of this behaviour to help change it for good.

The last statement of the last paragraph is what this chapter is about. We will explore the psychological factors that work together to make you an *unfinisher*. Believe me when I say you can only fight the enemy you identify.

That said, we will explore 3 ideas.

1. Inconsequential abstracts
2. Pre-defined identities
3. Self-awareness

These 3 concepts shape the way we see and manage our interaction with the world. Understanding these concepts—and how they function in our lives—is key to an understanding of the dynamics of *unfinishing*. You will then see why some people are pathological procrastinators who never get things done. You probably know someone in this category. Well, if that person— who I suspect is you—is desperate to find solutions, this chapter will come to the rescue.

The Inconsequential Abstract

The inconsequential abstract is an aggregation of several concepts connected to each other. The depth and fragility of the concepts we will discuss in this section is beyond poetic storytelling. As such, the next few pages will discuss a mix of scientific works spiced with fictional anecdotes to help you understand these concepts better.

The first concept we will explore is what experts call *hyperbolic discounting*. But before I explain this concept, it is important I tell you where it comes from. It stems from another concept called *future discounting*.

Future discounting explains the tendency for a person to accept instant gratification when faced with the option of lower reward *now* and a higher reward sometime in the future. A classic example of this is to choose whether to receive $100 now or $150 in a week's time. The majority always goes for the instant reward.

Hyperbolic discounting transfers this concept to activities. In this case, the bigger—more cognitively demanding—task whose reward will come much later is side-stepped for smaller, more instantaneous tasks. This is often an escapist activity such as binging a show on Netflix instead of working on a meaningful project.

Other times, it comes as *deceptive productivity* like sinking your precious time—that could have been invested in an important ongoing task—into exploring a new idea. The excitement of discovering new concepts can be momentarily satisfying. This act in itself is not a terrible idea. In fact, it is one of the ways we grow. But you can subconsciously do this in a way that becomes insidious to your higher objectives.

The true meaning of *hyperbolic discounting* is not exactly what I have demonstrated. Rather, I have adapted that construct to describe how we often channel useful time and mental resources into fleeting endeavours.

It was Albert O. Hirschman who popularised the concept of *the hiding hand*. The theory explains the interplay between our ignorance of future obstacles before undertaking a task and the rational choice to undertake the task as ingredients for creative success.

Essentially, Hirschman argues that because you have started, you decide it is too late to stop and then come up with creative ways to overcome the now-visible challenges. This is often the narrative we hear in inspirational stories. Stories that go, "*we knew there would be challenges, but we followed out gut because we knew we had it in us to win.*" These promote *zeal* as the most important factor for project success.

In 2015, Bent Flyvberg and Cass Sunstein did a closer study on the theory of *the hiding hand*. Their study showed that there are two hands that play in the background; the *Benevolent hand* and the *Malevolent hand*.

The *benevolent hand* is the unseen force that makes things eventually work out in your favour while the *malevolent hand* is the unseen force that wreaks your plans. Their study shows that the *benevolent hand* only acts 22%

of the time. This is bad news if serendipity is your only strategy for success. The *malevolent hand*—which works to creatively obstruct projects—wins 78% of the time. So, 8 out of 10 of your projects are destined to fail if your only strategy for success is *the hiding hand*.

The *malevolent hand* is the progenitor of what Daniel Khaneman and Amos Tversky call *The Planning Fallacy*. First described in 1979, *the planning fallacy* is a phenomenon that describes how optimism bias affects our estimation of how much time and resources is required to complete a future task.

Fundamentally, the *planning fallacy* makes you a bad estimator. We tend to underestimate how much time we need to complete a task. One way the *planning fallacy* manifests is in projects with a necessarily wide time-spread for completion. These projects often have several sub-tasks that come together to make up the whole.

In this case, the *planning fallacy* plays out as *the segmentation effect*— the tendency for the total estimated time for completing a task to be ridiculously smaller than the sum total of time needed for the individual sub-tasks.

Put all these concepts together in a sequential order and you have the *inconsequential abstract*. The *inconsequential abstract* is a phenomenon in which people take actions in the present, detaching and abating their significance in time. Only to make skewed and irrational decisions later to remedy the effects of their past actions.

Put simply, it explains making decisions without properly weighing the consequence. Then you make an even worse decision or set of decisions much later to remedy the repercussions of your improper judgement from the past. The caveat is that these cover-up decisions are only a rechannelling of consequences.

Since we have been discussing the time dimension, here's how the *inconsequential abstraction* of time works. You channel your time into other activities, hoping things will work out fine even when you avoid the big task. But then you encounter a rude shock! Now the true nature of the work becomes clear. You suddenly realise that it will take significantly more time to complete what you thought would be a walk in the park. It becomes clear that you cannot meet your deadline. You realise how you have wasted your time—or in worse cases, your life—on what never mattered.

The application of *the inconsequential abstract* to time is true. At its core, it is *procrastination*. Procrastination can ruin a goal, a life. Especially if

there is a deadline you must honour. With little time left, you can no longer give it your best. *Unfinishing,* however, is more about completely losing motivation to continue with a plan you believe can change your life. So how does the *inconsequential abstract* play out when time is no object?

Where time is not the primary determinant of accomplishing a goal, the value becomes the next target. The amount of fulfilment and joy that you will derive from achieving that goal—though imaginable—is reduced, so distractions come easy.

Therefore, the drive is there but not enough to overcome resistance. You fail to acknowledge the resource demand of the task. This is because we weigh rewards to determine what task is worth our time and effort. Every time you attempt to work in the direction of your goal there is confusion about the what level of—mental or physical—effort is required to complete the task.

Alternatively, because you did not expend enough effort in the direction of the goal, you never meet up with the benchmarks you set for yourself. This leaves you feeling inadequate.

This cyclic feeling of inadequacy or drain after every session of the task discourages you from continuing altogether. In your estimation, the

reward—which is now skewed in its true value—seems too small for the level of strain you must endure.

In essence, the pain factor is perceived to outweigh the benefits of the project. So, you start to distance yourself until you realise it's been 3 weeks or months since you last touched your personal project.

Alas, you come to the conclusion that, maybe the goal is not worth it after all. This verdict is fuelled primarily by an escapist desire to absolve yourself of the blame for not following through.

The catastrophe in all these is that, deep down, you know what you just did. You just killed a vision. But in the moment, that guilt is masked by the temporary freedom from responsibility to yourself and your future. However, this oblivion doesn't last. It fades and soon gives way to reality.

Your personal project would have brought you closer to your dreams. What you start to feel is the pain of regret. This pain is further amplified when you see someone do the same thing and succeeds on a massive scale. "It would have been me!" you scream.

In this description of *the inconsequential abstract*, not giving enough effort at the start of the project is the action whose significance is abated. The total cancellation of the goal is the skewed and irrational decision. The

multiplied pain and regret that follows is the grave consequence of quitting; the quitting which was supposed to remedy the feeling of inadequacy that comes with unattained benchmarks after each failed attempt.

We can see *the inconsequential abstract* in many areas of human endeavour. From meaningful work, friendships, financial decisions, intimate relationships to anywhere requiring conscious effort to bring value.

Pre-defined Identity

I would like to start this with a story. As of this writing, I am a student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. This info is for context.

In January 2019, I wanted to post ads for my energy business on the campus electronic billboards. I went to the school's IT department in charge of the billboards. On arrival, the security guard denied me entry into the building because a conference was going on and students weren't allowed in.

At first, it almost sounded reasonable to me but at the same time, I clarified that I was not there for student affairs. In fact, I was there as a client, not a student. I turned back at first. But after realising my right as a client—not a student—to access to the building for business purposes, I went back and demanded that I be allowed in.

The security guard did not oblige initially. But I would not let someone with 2 seconds' worth of knowledge about me decide my fate. I kept standing there and engaging him until someone else came around, got the picture and not only let me in but escorted me to the office I needed to go.

This story probably sounds like one of these boilerplate motivational stories. But it is not one of those. I told the story to show that, the world does not know how you see yourself and who you think you really are. It is your responsibility to project that image. The security guard gauged my appearance and approximated my hierarchy in the academic strata so he could give me a corresponding treatment.

At that point, it became my responsibility to project how I wanted to be perceived. Going by the story, I don't think the security guard may ever recognise what I was trying to project. It took someone else to get my message and treat me appropriately.

Identity is such a complex map to navigate. I will do my best to break it down and show how much effect it has on whether or not we get to finish what we start. We will explore *Self-Concept*. Self-concept is a multi-layered issue. But it is this deep exploration that will lead to an accurate—or at least functional—understanding of the components that inform how we see ourselves.

Self-Concept

Self-Concept is a collection of beliefs about one's self and it is the basis for defining who we are. Popularised by Carl Rodgers and Abraham Maslow, it is a collection of sub-self-concepts from different areas of your life called *self-schemas*.

Essentially, your self-concept is a collection of all your self-schemas. An example of *self-schema* would be "I'm an excellent student." This could an image of yourself from an academic standpoint. Also, this information does not tell us if you are an excellent relationship partner, son, course mate, citizen, etc. Thus, an aggregation of the descriptions of yourself from all your sub-personas is what makes up your *self-concept. Self-schemas* are built by the interaction of 3 key factors; self-knowledge, self-esteem and social self.

Self-knowledge talks about the things you know you are capable of doing. It talks about what you currently possess in a particular *aspect* of your life—an ability, skill, belief, value system, etc.

Self-esteem will be a touchy part because it is so commonly used that no one talks about its definition. *Self-esteem* is how we place ourselves hierarchically in society as a result of the process of self-estimation. *Self-estimation* is founded in *social comparison*, a field of psychology. Self-

estimation can be in 2 directions; *downward social comparison* and *upward social comparison*.

Downward social comparison involves comparing yourself with other people you believe to be below you in whatever area of life you are considering. This generally makes you feel superior. Per contra, upward social comparison involves comparing yourself with those you perceive to be above you. This tends to make you feel inferior. From a mix of these comparisons in a particular area your life, you estimate, accept and live out your hierarchical standing.

The social self, when investigated, can be seen as esteem from the external world. It is founded on 2 concepts. *The looking glass self* and *self-labelling.* Conceptualized in 1902 by Charles Cooley, *the looking glass self* is a notion that, part of how we see ourselves is derived from our perception of how others see us. Thus, if you keep getting feedback that your culinary skills are legendary, at some point you will start to accept that feedback.

The second concept is *self-labelling.* Here, you have accepted labels from others and so it now defines how you see yourself. It is basically the end result of prolonged exposure to a label received through the *looking glass self.* At this point, it is no longer "I'm probably a good cook." It becomes "I am a super good cook".

To form a *self-schema* in any area of your life, you must keep asking yourself 3 questions:

1. What value, skill or belief do I possess and to what extent?
2. How do I perceive my value, skill or belief compared to others in this same area?
3. How do others perceive my value, skill or belief compared to others?

Your answers to these 3 questions will give you an idea of your *self-schema* in any area of your life. Rinse and repeat this process across all areas of your life and you have a picture of how you arrived at your current *self-concept*. It may be useful to only evaluate the core areas that have a strong effect on your ability to function.

Self-Discrepancy Theory

Now that we've successfully explored the building blocks of *self-concept*, let's discuss the *Self-Discrepancy Theory*. Proposed by E. Tory Higgins (in 1987), it argues that there are 3 self-*concepts* in existence. They include the ought self, the ideal self and the actual self. These concurrently exist in the mental model of people. Much of this theory is explained in *Social Psychology* by Thomas Heinzen and Wind Goodfriend.

The *ought self* is a self-concept developed by virtue of who you are supposed to be by obligation or duty—to your friends, family, religious circle, etc. By mere observation, you can see that the self-schemas of the *ought self* are linked to the *social self.* Over time, imposed opinions and labels become self-labels that define who you ought to be. Hence the *ought self* is a higher self, by obligation.

The *ideal self* is a version of yourself that you want to become. It's founded on self-knowledge. This is when you know your areas of strength or potential strength. Aggregate this concept across several *schemas* and you have your ideal self.

You've been dubbed a painter all your life and everything around you now suggest that art is who you should be. Consciously or not, you accept that you're supposed to be an artist. But then, on deep introspection, you feel drawn to politics and civil leadership. In this situation, you realise that most of the things you feel you ought to be were transferred to you by society. You did not discover them.

The *ought self* is the default identity you are obligated to strive to attain. The *ideal self* is discovered through self-exploration.

The *actual self* is who you are right now as you are reading this. If you are like most people, you are not exactly who you ought to be or who you want to be. This difference between who you currently are and these reference points is what experts call *self-discrepancy*.

The duplicity of reference points created by the existence of the *ideal self* and the *ought self* is the foundation of identity crisis. Most times, your decisions are offshoots of daily living but others are decisions which take you towards one *self* and drag you away from the other *self*.

Going back to the painter/politician dilemma, you probably get to a point where both identities can no longer coexist in the same mind. Now you have to choose. You begin to ask questions like "Who am I really?" and "Where do I really want to see myself at the end of this?"

Pre-defined identity is a phenomenon describing a state in which your *actual self* is a direct consequence of the devoted pursuit of your *ought self*. And since the constructs of the *ought self* were set by external entities, the *actual self* is also, by extension, a *self* given in advance.

Pre-defined identity is not another type of *self*, it is rather a concept describing a type of *actual self* which is developed when the focus of the individual is on attaining the *ought self*.

The *ideal self* is founded on self-knowledge. It is an identity we discover by exploring our abilities as we go through life. This says something; if you have not explored your abilities by trying things—to know what you can and cannot do—you will not be able to draw up an accurate picture of your *ideal self.* As a word of caution, this is where I have reservations about the mainstream notion that you can be whoever you want to be.

Different people are successful at different things because different people are good at different things. If you are innately built for deep analytical thought patterns, there is a region of life endeavours where you will excel and others where you will utterly fail. Same goes for other areas such as a strong sense for art, literature, easy of understanding people, swiftness with numbers, etc.

When you explore your various *schemas* and then discover areas you can develop value, skill or ability, the aggregation of these become your *ideal self.* An *actual self* founded upon the pursuit of this *ideal self* is, in my opinion, the most stable form of being.

How does all these relate to *unfinishing*? Well, everything you start is supposed to take you to a destination. When you have two simultaneous destinations, it becomes difficult to navigate. And so, a goal set in a moment where you were in touch with your *ideal self* will have trouble surviving when

you are predominantly—99% of the time—operating within the constructs of your *ought self.*

On that cool evening or morning when you were in touch with your ideal self, you decided to journey into your ideal by writing your goals but every other day—in your *ought self*—there's a background voice asking "What the heck is this goal doing in my life?" And this voice comes out as "Really? What then will happen when I'm done with this?" This happens because your *ought self* does not know what to do with that information. It's not on the map!

Going back to the story I shared earlier, we can say the security guard was trying to sell to me who I ought to be, a student. Therefore, he could not accept my proposition of my ideal self, a client. This is because my actual self—regular-looking student—did not match my ideal self.

Thus, the security guard's mental model assumed that my higher-level self (ought self) should be a student, while the other man's mental model was open and allowed him decode and accept what I proposed as my higher-level self (ideal self)—a client of the school's IT department.

Therefore, if you set a personal goal on the path to your *ideal self* while you are still acting out the pursuit for your *ought self,* it becomes difficult

to navigate the identity crisis that follow. This internal struggle manifests itself as a myriad of external road blocks to the goal. It could manifest as a deep feeling that you are wasting your time or some level of guilt when you are working on that goal. It could also be your inability to *find time* to finish up the tasks that make up the goal.

The objectives of these roadblocks are an attempt by your *pre-defined identity* to stop you from getting *distracted*. This is so because from the lenses of your *pre-defined identity*, anything that does not take you to who you *ought* to be is a distraction.

We have now come to the part where you ask yourself, "Is my pre-defined identity in the way of my goals, making me an *unfinisher*? Well, if you feel there isn't much wrong with you but your personal goals keep falling by the wayside, maybe your *pre-defined identity* is getting in your way.

Self: Knowledge and Acceptance

When you lack substantial knowledge about the extent of your abilities, you will suffer from a deep uncertainty. This uncertainty based of double feelings about who you can become makes it difficult to commit to one thing and see it to the finish. Why? Your mind always goes, "what if there is something out

there that's potentially much easier for me to achieve? This confusion is why we must explore self-knowledge and self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance is an idea that, broadly, deals with accepting who you are. It involves accepting the good and the bad without judging yourself for your inadequacies. This is an amazing way to live because it shed off all the self-hate and self-judgement that comes with being in an awful position.

However, if you take this approach without first exploring and discovering *what is* and *what is not*—as regards your abilities in the most crucial areas of your life—it will only lead to defeatism.

For example, let's say you have never taken exercising seriously, then you go for a run. After your first day, you feel so sore that you conclude exercising is not for you. You then accept your fate. You don't realise that starting something new or revisiting something you've long abandoned will take its toll on you.

Therefore, the journey of self-knowledge involves making an—actual or mental—list of the things you believe you have a shot at and then taking them on one by one. For example, one of your core beliefs is that "God is a myth."

You then budget the next 3 months to prove your belief. At the end of 3 months, your conclusion will tell if you can build a life on that belief system or not. This is because you now have an experience of the variables in the dynamics of existence.

Another example. You believe that although you are currently a reserved person, deep down, you are the life of the party. So you deliberately expose yourself to situations that demand you being out there interacting with people. Afterwards, you can then compare between your reserved and your unreserved self to see which version brings out the best in you.

The pursuit of *self-knowledge* is all about asking "What's the alternative?" You must seek the alternative of any area of life in which you want to determine what best works for you. This makes it easy to eliminate the future tendency to doubt your decisions in that area of your life.

This process might not eliminate uncertainty once and for all. It can't. What it will do is to enable you to build stability in making and sticking with decisions because you can appreciate and project what life would be on the alternative route(s) based on your prior knowledge of the alternatives.

As a caveat though, bear in mind that when exploring the wild, you can and will come across wild animals. Some cute. Others are horrendous.

God help you that you don't encounter those that will try to eat you. Thus, in your exploratory journey, it is wise to understand the dangers that come with exploration.

Take the exploration of either being a student or dropping out of school for instance. If you are a student reading this, you've probably considered this in our now weird world. In this kind of exploration, the alternative is to drop out and then discover the realities that exist in the world of school dropouts. Not funny, I must say.

A better approach would be to go on a mental journey after gathering knowledge-based evidence from people who have trodden both paths. You must ensure that the facts of your reality appreciably match those of your case studies before they made their decisions. This will help you view their decision with proper context and perspective. At the end of your fact-finding, you then put yourself in the centre of both (or more) realities and picture yourself acting out life with those realities. This way you can see which version you can survive.

Therefore, the journey of self-knowledge is a process of real-life experimentation and mental experimentation of alternatives. This way, you can determine your abilities in the areas (of life) you are exploring. This process will help you develop knowledge-based *self-schemas* based on the

knowledge gathered, and then build up your knowledge-based *actual self*. By observing life's realities, you will discover your areas of weaknesses; areas where you have little or no power to change.

At this point, you possess a clear—and evolving—image of yourself. This image is based on what you have seen for yourself, not what society told you. You will realise what you can and cannot do. Then you can proceed on your journey of *self-acceptance*. At this point, you know what you can bring to the table of life and what areas of life pursuits will yield potential benefits in the future.

When there is no journey of *self-knowledge* and then *self-acceptance*, the *ideal self* cannot be generated with enough certainty. This is so because who you *want to be* is in comparison to *who you are currently*. And it is this exploration that helps you generate an image of *who you are currently*. The absence of certainty of the *ideal self* results in crises between the *ought self* and an *unknown self*—i.e. an *ideal self* shrouded in uncertainty.

In this situation, you are aware that your *ought self* is not who you want to be but at the same time, you don't know who you want to be. This can be disempowering. Chasing societally accepted goals—such as acquiring a degree—might work. Even these can falter. But doing something by yourself, for yourself, would be impossible because it is like journeying into the

darkness. Everything lies there or nothing lies there. Better to stick with what you know—whatever you are obligated to do.

Also, some things may not be closely tied to events in the future. They're simply achievement trophies as souvenirs for the fun of it. But you cannot fathom their utility because the future itself can't be predicted with 100% accuracy.

What this means is, without *self-knowledge* through exploration, it will be difficult to follow through with the biggest or the most trivial personal goals because they lead into darkness (big goals) at worst, or add flavour and features (small goals) to a landscape that is too ambiguous.

PART II: No Need to Finish

In this part of the book, we are going to explore certain doubts and questions that crop up when executing your tasks or goals. We will discuss ways to flip past these obstacles. The working image of the behavioural patterns and psychological constructs of *unfinishing* which we developed in part one has created context for what we will be considering in the next pages.

It will be much easier to address these obstacles because we are not aware of what we're up against. We can now fight *unfinishing* because we can identify it.

Beyond the bitter chaos of *unfinishing*, we need to know what it means to finish, right? So far, we have only focused on *unfinishing* and we have magnified it. We did so for good reasons because when something is magnified, its parts become visible.

We enlarged the notion of *unfinishing* so we can identify and classify its parts. Now we will pay attention to what it means to finish because that's what gives direction to our fight. The vision of where we ought to be—when we finish—becomes the yardstick for our progress. *Finishing* and its meaning becomes the north star of our pursuit. So it's important that we explore what it means to finish and that we shall do that in this second part.

Also, we will explore what comes after *finishing* as a solution to the darkness that lies beyond. We will see this in more detail in chapter 3. We will discuss the possible trajectories we can take when the target—to finish the task—has been achieved. I.e. if it is a task with a definitive end or if it's a new habit we can internalise.

This part of the book is a journey into utilising your new-found understanding to achieve all that once seemed impossible to you. They probably still feel impossible because so far, all we have done is explore what sponsors those behaviours that make you an *unfinisher*.

You may have drawn some inference about what you must do to finish everything you start. If you can do that already, then I'm happy for you. Either way, I think it will be a great idea to discuss the constructs you can explore to truly finish everything you start.

The ensuing chapters contain highly intuitive and actionable ideas you can apply today. They will enable you to create systems that enable you to finish anything you start.

I must also mention that these ideas are not set in stone. They are only starting points from which you can create unique solutions for yourself.

You will do this by using the proposed solutions as references to help you explore what works for you.

I'm not a fan of *toolkit solutions* to life. *Toolkit solutions* are gotten from solutions built off of someone else's experience and adopting them 100%. The danger is that you do not know the nuances under which they developed those solutions. Believe it or not, these nuances change everything!

I'm stating this caveat because, in the ensuing chapters, I will be outlining solutions to the problems we have explored and a few others we will explore. All of which are based on my experiences and some scientific backing. I will only mention solutions I have explored because the aim is to demonstrate the possibility of transitioning into from an *unfinisher* into a *finisher*. When you add these solutions up, it will be easy to develop a comprehensive list for yourself.

That said, please approach this part of the book with an open mind. As much as you can, apply these principles as you encounter them so you can easily draw meaning from them. While you do that, never forget your unique situation and make the right adjustments.

Let's move!

Chapter 3

Must I Finish?

In this chapter, we will talk about the doubts that you might face en route to accomplishing your goal. This is the tricky part. Tricky because now you have begun. You have the drive, the nitro and the *ginger*. But then the challenges start to pop up. Suddenly, the heroic responses you once played in your head do not seem appealing anymore.

You get to that point where you ask, "*Is this goal worth all the pain?*" Asking this question can be disappointing. Despite having full—or at least sufficient—knowledge about why you never finish what you start, you cannot circumvent it. In that dark moment sits you; asking questions.

Well, in case you were wondering, the answer is yes! Your goal is worth all the pain. That you journeyed through the thought process of coming up with the goal and seeing some good in it means that deep down, it is important and should be finished. We will talk about the lies you tell yourself and the boundaries you must draw to ensure you do not fall into your own trap.

The next subject may not be a new train of thought, as there have been several works of literature about it. Nonetheless, we will talk about the nature of goals. We will explore how the growth process is not as impressive as the fantasies we conjured when the idea first struck.

We often underestimate the time and energy we require to implement our ideas. If you are a dramatic person, you will hear some super cool background tunes playing while you embark on this journey. But they all fade away when challenges appear.

The last thing that I will address in this chapter is the fact that every goal has to be approached from a realistic viewpoint. We must factor in the truism that good things take time. We must be conscious of the *malevolent hand* that works in the background to thwart our plans. If you haven't been a goal slayer, if this is your first attempt at going *hard* on a personal goal, then you must be prepared for the external challenges.

You must prepare for the internal battles especially when you start to make significant progress. At this point, you are stepping into an unknown world. A world where you must finish the things you start. This is a novel experience.

With this new experience will come new challenges. Challenges such as the fear of success and the fear of the unknown. These fears may spark idea-doubt, self-doubt and self-sabotage. So far as I know, this trio do not mix well with goals. And to escape it all, you may ask again, "*Must I finish?*"

Well, if you have made it to this chapter, then you are in luck. As I promised in the beginning, every problem we discuss henceforth will come with a recommended solution based on my experience. But always remember to tailor it to your experience. When a solution becomes yours, it can bring you freedom. It will help you achieve your goals rather than make the pursuit of the nuances of the solution the goal.

Trying to fit into a solution means you measure your level of conformity to the *solution* rather than the level of results towards the *goal* the solution is supposed to be helping you accomplish. Tricky but true. Adapt the solution to gain results, do not chase the solution.

Let us answer the question of why you should finish and how to address your doubts.

The Lies, The Lines

"It does not matter if I finish or not," says the nihilistic person. That first sentence was only meant to give the introduction to this chapter some

motivational touch. Although it is not the only reason. You see, when the project or task you have undertaken becomes difficult, your default response is to absolve yourself of the responsibility to finish the task.

You can approach this escapism by creating narratives or running back to old narratives that, in most cases, make you look like the victim. These narratives help you re-live yourself of the guilt of not completing the task. We will call them *lies*. *Lies* because if we don't see them that way, we will be tempted to believe that they hold some truth. Also, for every *lie*, there will be a corresponding *line(s)* to protect you from the influence of that *lie*.

The first and easiest *lie* to tell yourself is "*it doesn't matter if I finish or not*. We stretch it further, "after all, it's a personal goal and is totally my business if I finish it or not." At first glance, this statement sounds like it holds water. Here's why. We are not supposed to do things because of what other people think of us, that is true. The only problem is, you know what you just did. And it matters what your conscience thinks of you.

Remember our talk about the 3 selves? Yes! That phenomenon will return to haunt you when you keep abandoning ship on your way to goals that matter to you. This abandonment can have serious effects on your self-perception and mental health. This is not me talking. There is enough research to prove that when there is a discrepancy between who you are and your

ideal self, bad things begin to happen to your mind—depression, self-hate, suicidal thoughts. Who wants these?

These bad things happen because, like the bad feeling you get from others' disappointment, you feel much worse when you disappoint yourself. Your mind knows that unlike external disappointments, which were not under your control, you were the god of your won misfortune here.

An effective *line* to keep this *lie* away would be to visualise the victory you would feel after crossing the finish line of your goal. When you finally upload the song, when you finally unveil that painting, when your crazily-detailed thesis is published. At that point, you know you did this and no one can take it away from you. You are a god.

You do not want to rob yourself of the euphoria of victory. Every step is bringing you closer to your victory. Your doubts will never come close to the high of victory when you hit that goal. Constantly remind yourself of this.

The second *lie* is less moral. It is more about your ability to get the job done—"*I don't have it in me to do this*". This plays out when the goal requires you to push certain physical and intellectual limits. Think running 5km, 10km or postulating a new scientific theory.

The difficulty in these kinds of tasks often crops up when your body —your muscles or mental faculties—is trying to fall into sync with the new level of challenges you are throwing at it. I have never postulated scientific theory but I have done the 5km run.

The programme entails running thrice a week for ten weeks. It starts from 2km per run day and works it up to 5km. At the end of the programme, you would have an accumulated distance of 100km under your belt in 10 weeks.

I tried the running programme twice before I decided to complete it even if I break my body. And trust me, my body broke; in different places at different times. It felt like the punisher was doing a round check on my body; from my legs to my back to my chest to my nasal cavity.

As I kept monitoring my performance, I realised that I got faster as the distance increased. It dawned on me that I was not feeling pain because my body could not do it. My body was saying—via pain and discomfort— "bro, this is new and I don't like it".

The first moral of that story is, the run was thrice weekly. And I had 4 days a week for my body to adjust itself to the new reality. Systematic mental and physical rest and recovery periods is the first *line* to silence this

lie—"*I don't have it in me to do this*". Such rest gives you time to analyse and absorb the changes you are experiencing.

The second moral lesson is, even when all the signs say you are at your breaking point, so long as you don't break, you are not at your breaking point yet. You must also note that how you approach the task determines how your body responds.

So, when you approach your objective equipped with the *line*, "I know I have it in me because I'm not broke," you simply keep going. This is the second *line*.

Line one: rest and recover as part of the game plan. *Line* two, approach the task like you've got it in you. The discomfort you experience is a positive sign that you are getting something done.

As a caveat, if you do breakdown in the process, give yourself the rest and attention your body needs and then review your approach towards the goal. Ask; Is this the best system? Do I need to incorporate more rest or adjust my rate of mental and physical exertion per session?

There are many quality blogs and books that will show you best practices on how to approach tasks in different areas of life. The breakdown

is not an indicator that you do not have it in you. It is an indicator that you are not approaching the task the right way.

The third and final *lie* we will consider at is, "*no one will see the value of my efforts*". This *lie* is a direct consequence of ostentatiousness—the tendency to want to impress people with your skill or abilities.

The truth is, if the goal in question is truly personal, if it can help you live your best life, then the steps you take do not affect those around you. This is because you are the only one with the complete map of where you're going.

Sometimes, your goals might appeal to others because it coincides with what others around you are hoping to achieve. Most people only value things that have a place in their hierarchical map of the meaning of life. And if your goal is not something that people around you value, then that's okay. Your personal goals are supposed to help you believe in your abilities as a person.

The first *line* to keep this *lie* away is, competence and confidence in one area of your life directly affect how you approach other areas of your life. Take my 5km-run story for example. No one will give me a medal or some

other reward for running 100km non-competitively. But the confidence that comes with that experience cannot be taken away from me.

As long as external recognition is not your highest reward—as should be the case—then the opinions of others should not determine how you value your efforts. Your kingly act of conquering unexplored territories of yourself is its own reward.

Thus, when you are tempted to quit because your goal does not have universal relevance, remember that accomplishing your goal will draw you closer to your ideal self. It will make you confident in your abilities and by consequence, help you live happier. In my opinion, that trumps the significance people attach to your goal. When the curtains are drawn, you have to be able to lay down, reflect on your strides and be truly happy with the life you are building for yourself.

Bliss, or the Lack of It

Every project is interesting until, say, two months in. You don't know why you are doing it and you cannot find the motivation to keep doing it. Logically, you can justify why it is important but when it's time to put in the work, there seems to be an imaginary wall that separates you from the task. In short, you are out of gas and there is nothing you can do about it. Or is there?

Well, the mainstream approach to creating plans to accomplish goals comes with a major flaw. We will discuss the process of planning to achieve your goals. But for now, let us explore why most of the plans we set up, especially for personal goals, end up in the trash after the first few weeks.

The issue with most action plans is the fact that we only focus on the lower limit of input per session. So, a reading plan will look something like this "Read at least 30 pages a day every weekday."

While this is good, what happens on the days when you are feeling hyper-motivated and you feel you can shoot it up to 70 or 80 pages? Well, you do it.

This overachievement, however, will haunt you in subtle and destructive ways. The first implication is that—whether you realise it or not—your brain is now aware that reading 80 pages a day is possible and so for every day you do not meet this subliminally assigned benchmark, you feel you have let yourself down.

What this means is, on paper, you are still working with 30 pages a day. But it is no longer satisfying. The dopamine hit that reading 30 pages a day is supposed to give you—which will keep your brain looking forward to the next session—is no longer there.

Your brain has been exposed to a much more satisfying feeling—reading 80 pages a day. A good analogy to explain this effect would be to taste something like a watermelon after having marshmallows. It just tastes bland and unexciting.

Limiting forward in planning is a way of controlling not only on the lower but also the upper end what will go on at every given session of approach toward your goal.

A reading plan with a forward limit will sound something like, "Read 30 pages a day, no more, no less". At first, it seems restricting but isn't that the point? A clear goal makes it hard to miss and easy to determine when you have done well during every attempt towards your goal.

Therefore, on the day you are feeling super excited but have to stop yourself at 30 pages, your brain is feeling short of the *hit* and will quickly remind you to get back to the task at the next available session because it knows good stuff.

Second, limiting forward maintains the integrity of the plan. When your brain knows what to expect at every given time, there is an easy adaptation to the dynamics of the task rather than preparing for an unknown situation. Will it be 30 pages today? 40 or 90? What if I set a precedent today

that I will probably never meet up to again? All these questions become irrelevant when the upper and lower limits of the goal are pre-defined.

By practising forward limiting, you can motivate yourself. On days when you feel less motivated, it is easier to get your mind out of the sombre state and into the right frame. This is possible because your mind has adapted to what follows when you achieve the day's quota towards your goal. Your mind classifies the task at hand as a routine and memories of countless—or at least enough—previous sessions give you the chutzpah to follow through.

Reading 50 pages past your allocated quota can feel blissful at the moment but is it worth the feeling of falling short that it smears on every other session that doesn't hit the mark? Is a one-hit-wonder, quota-smashing evening worth sacrificing your long-term success on the overall goal?

Consistently following the plan might seem to lack bliss, especially on days when you're feeling hyper. But it is this ability to push forward the excitement unto the next session that reaffirms to your mind the integrity of the plan. If you stick with the plan for long enough, you will find that your ability to control not just your lower limit but your upper limit makes you feel in control of the plan. It gives you the confidence to keep at it till the end.

Another advantage of having a plan with an upper limit plays out when insecurities try to sabotage the plan. This is especially when you are making some progress. When you start to doubt or the memories of past failures try to dampen your effort, you must remind yourself about a simple requirement you need to achieve without giving it too much thought.

This clarity of expectation makes it easy to recognise that if you've been doing it before and nothing is changing with the approach, then there is nothing stopping you from keeping the flame burning.

The consistency of the target quota of effort per session also brings predictability to the timeline for achieving the goal. Without this consistency that comes with an upper limit, the same effect of wanting to do more than the lower limit of the task will playout with the timeline of the goal.

Your mind goes, "If I can keep doing 50 pages a day, I'll be done with this project in 4 months rather than 6", putting more pressure on you than you can naturally take.

To avoid a patchy, undefined execution of your plans—that makes you feel up today and down tomorrow—design your execution plans to be as detached from emotions as possible.

The forward limiting strategy does this efficiently. Whether you are excited or had an unpleasant day, you know what is expected of you without giving it too much thought. This stability will help you to avoid moments that question your goal, help you trust the integrity of your plan and secure the timeline of your goal.

These elements of integrity and security reduce uncertainty and make it easy to believe that the goal is achievable even as you work on it bit by bit.

Time and Pain

I concluded the section telling you that the security of the elements surrounding your execution plan helps you follow through. As nice as that sounds, you and I know that taking that approach toward any activity would be pure naïveté.

In every plan lies the potential for chaos. What this means is your execution plan should include failsafe mechanisms to ensure that chaos does not hinder progress.

One effective way to handle chaos is to visualize situations of chaos. Picture yourself working out the situation and keeping up with the implementation of your plan. At first sight, it looks like a wishy-washy

approach to problem-solving but it holds more power than you can initially see.

This principle works just as the process of doing good works. First off, you picture yourself in a certain situation—being good to someone else who needs help. Then in some other seemingly unrelated scenario, you find yourself acting out the plan of goodness you visualised only a few weeks ago.

The same works with goals and chaos or unplanned events. The key is to periodically picture yourself in unpleasant situations that may sabotage your plans or efforts and then picture how you would manoeuvre yourself out of that difficulty. What this process does is to create a repository of knowledge which your brain can draw from during a time of actual chaos.

The advantage of having a premeditated response—or a series of responses—is that you can approach the problem objectively.

Since you are not in the actual moment of chaos when you create these responses, you can act without a sense of desperation and anxiety. You can dissect the possible situation into its parts, see the big picture and know what actions will produce the best outcome.

Thus, when chaos strikes, you can regulate yourself and decide what the best line of action would be. The real-life scenario will not always turn

out exactly as you visualised but it will give you a fighting chance to react better. This way, you not only preserve the integrity of your plans but you also solve the problem at hand.

Giving a specific example may undermine your creative way of going through this process. Therefore, I will not do so. Depending on the type of goal you are rooting for, the extent of disruption that an unplanned event can create will vary. The moral of this practice is to help your mind adjust to the effects of unplanned variables in record time, too. You can then incorporate a solution quickly so as not to disrupt the flow.

Even when such disturbance is inevitable, say, you fall ill, you can say "okay, this has happened and I cannot change it, let's keep going". It seems easy to imagine now, but in that real moment, especially if the chaos—such as burnout or even depression hits your psyche—you may blame yourself for not being *strong enough* and believe that you do not have what it takes to keep going.

Picturing such moments and creating a plan for how you will pick yourself up and keep going will increase your chances of picking yourself up and charging towards your goal.

Dealing with chaos involves dealing with the unexpected. How about when expected occurrences such as progressing toward the goal are not forthcoming. This experience can be as disheartening as a terrible unexpected event because it is; but a special kind.

Initial progress in anything is always obvious, as there is often no prior knowledge to compare with what you are gaining. In the first week, it's 1 plus 500, which mathematically is a 50,000% growth. But 3 weeks later it's 1,501 plus 500 or only 33% growth. By the third month, it becomes 6,001 plus 500 or an 8% increase in knowledge, skill or whatever else the metric is. I call this the *slowth of growth*. Corny terminology but you get the picture, don't you?

Although the actual amount of knowledge gained has not changed in value, its perceived impact is continually dampened by the previous knowledge. And if you do not observe how much knowledge is gained per time as opposed to the rate of growth, you will be deceived into thinking that you are no longer making progress.

This *slowth* problem will have a huge impact especially when the goal is an intangible endeavour like learning to code, for instance. In the first few weeks, learning the whole syntax of a new language, learning what is possible and seeing how fast you are catching up will be thrilling. But as the weeks go

by and all you are doing is learning a few new tricks, it starts to feel as though you are plateauing.

In my experience, the key to solving this sort of problem is to find a way to put yourself to the test. This will give you a feel of how much progress you are making. But don't do it too often else it will defeat the aim. This periodic test aims to see how much growth you have achieved after keeping up with your plan for long periods.

The timeframe will depend on the accepted learning curve period of your field. It may be monthly, quarterly or every 6 months. The idea is to measure your growth based on how much *actual* growth is going on rather than the *perceived* growth. More often your perceived growth will appear to be decreasing as you progress with your plan.

Thus, unexpected occurrences or unmet expectations may stand in your way of finishing what you have started. With proper perspective and the right approach, however, you can defeat *unfinishing*.

Chapter 4
What Does It Mean to Finish?

For the master *unfinisher*, this chapter is an attempt to explore the unknown. The amazing thing about finishing a project, especially one that takes a lot of time and investment, lies in the fact that finishing day comes with a stint of bitter-sweet emotions. Looking back on the day I finished the 5km running programme, I did feel like some sort of beast.

I felt it as such a substantial achievement as to post on my Facebook timeline! But then, at the end of the day, a silent hum started to build up. A hum that questioned and undermined the thrill of achievement I had felt earlier. It was the question "*then what?*"

To finish a thing is to come to the end of a journey, to reach your destination, to have an object or feeling of achievement which can never be taken away from you. For one who hardly finishes things, it is to come to a place where you feel you have finally conquered yourself in that area of your life. You feel invincible at that moment. It is a beautiful feeling every human should experience. You feel a primal sense of power over yourself and the surrounding elements.

The phrase *to have an object or feeling of achievement* from the previous paragraph only draws our attention to something fundamental to every goal. The significance of the achievement of every goal is duplicity.

The end of a goal has its *emotional dimension,* which serves to give you a sense of victory at the moment you accomplish it. The second dimension of every worthy goal is the *monumental dimension*—something you can look at and say, *I did this.*

It is this monumental dimension that refreshes you with memories of what it feels like to finish the goal. These feelings then give you satisfaction long after the moment of victory has faded away. Without a monumental component, finishing anything is only but a fleeting emotion that will fade and leave you wanting more.

Therefore, if you look at my 5km-run story, fitness is not an exhaustive goal. It is a moving target. The body is constantly changing. Owing to this fact, my body could not serve as a lasting monumental representation to make me feel like I don't need to keep exercising. Actually, I did not last a week before the desire to push myself overwhelmed me.

But for other goals, like writing a book or putting out a collection of paintings, we can say there is a definitive point you can look to and call the

end of the pursuit. The book or artwork becomes the lasting evidence of your victory.

This process, however, requires some level of clarity and order to aim, pursue and know that you have arrived at the goal. This is one concept we will explore in this chapter. Arriving at a clear destination or state of being that will culminate to achieving the goal.

However, if you do not apply caution on your way to achieving this, you may end up hunting for quicker or more effective ways of reaching the goal. This is true especially for challenging goals. If you are not careful to pick a path, you will find yourself hunting for solutions so much so that the hunt becomes the primary goal. We will delve into this phenomenon and proffer solutions in the ensuing pages.

Finally, we will explore the possibilities you can leverage once you have settled on a pathway to achieving your goal. We will also develop a method for working with the pathway you feel will guide you towards achieving your goal. This will involve learning how to treat the pathway as a tool rather than a pattern set in stone.

As I stated earlier, the methods I share here are more or less guides which you can adapt to fit your context. I hope that by the end of this chapter,

you will have gained a clearer picture of how to own solutions rather than letting them own you.

Clarity

Clarity about a goal is not just to know where you are going but to be convinced about where you are going. This multidimensional requirement necessitates drawing up a plan for action from a perspective of *monumental* valence as well as the *emotional* significance of the goal.

The approach towards clarity of goals should first be reflected in the meaning of the process of coming to clarity. Rather than seeing the process as *setting* a goal, a more rational approach will be to view this process as *building* a goal.

I like to call it *building* a goal because this already gives insight into what the process entails; a foundation, the skeletal structure, the covering, the finishing. All these components come together to form a goal whose origin and destination are known. Not objectively alone but from a perspective of their significance to self and the elements of your existence.

To build the emotional side of a clear goal is to revisit the concept of *selves* as discussed in chapter two. And pass the *monumental* dimension of the goal through the filter of your different selves – *the ideal, ought* and *actual*.

This filtration process is meant to question the foundation of the goal. To test where it has the potential to lead you to when it is achieved. That is where will the achievement of this goal lead me to in my journey towards a higher self? This applies to goals that have a significant external representation or pivotal internal meaning.

Once you have clarified the relevance of the goal, it becomes reasonable to explore the valence of the monumental side of the goal to your life in the *real world*. This is because ultimately, a goal should have some sort of advantage in your human experience.

Will it give you more opportunities to be successful in your career? Will it make you healthier and happier? Happiness is subjective. This aspect is relevant because as established in the introduction to this chapter, it is the continued positive effect of this *monumental dimension* that reinforces the emotional satisfaction that comes from achieving the goal.

Therefore, evaluating the alignment of the goal with your ideal self ensures that the emotional component of the goal is not founded on some empty metric. This is crucial because, if emptiness becomes the emotional effect of the goal, then the monumental component will ultimately morph to become a physical representation of emptiness—at least to you.

We see this every day with people who seem to *have it all* but wish to do away with everything and start all over. This means that the physical things have a different emotional significance bestowed by the emotional foundations upon which they are built. Give some deep thought to this. It will save you a lot on the journey to achieving your goals and in the life that follows after the journey.

Now that we have discussed the *clarity of the emotional significance* component, let's turn our attention to the clarity of the monumental aspect of the goal. This dimension of goals is what we see in literature. A common way to approach this is the SMART method. With SMART as an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound.

So far, our focus has been on goals that lead to a feeling of wholeness, a sense of higher self and the conversion of potential abilities into reality. This has been a conscious journey to turn your attention towards a drive for wholeness of experience rather than an *absolutist* bias toward productivity, so to speak. This is not an argument against wanting to be deeply driven but to have an experience of wholeness and a feeling of *I can live with myself, I'm not leaving important things off the table*.

We will return to the SMART method later. But first, let me lay an even clearer precedent so that the descriptions I will be sharing have more

significance. Even with boring and compulsory goals such as writing a term paper, if you own the goal and attach a touch of self-expression to its significance, it becomes easier to achieve. This way, you have given the goal a deeper meaning, as opposed to some activity you have to do. Okay, let's get back on track; clarity!

The interpretation of the SMART methodology can be quite tricky. The significance of each term varies depending on the nature of the goal. But I will do my best to cover each item multi-dimensionally without spreading them too thin.

Specific

This term describes the end of the pursuit. "I want to put my room in order." This is a valid goal, albeit subjective. Your idea of *order* defines the end of the goal. These sorts of goals are devoid of clarity because we cannot define them. This explains why they often fall by the wayside. A good approach would be to research on what an orderly room looks like, create a mental picture of that and then follow until your conscience tells you "achieved!"

Conscience is a powerful tool in accomplishing these kinds of goals. You cannot truly lie to yourself unless you choose to ignore your conscience. This process holds for the majority of goals for which we lack objective metrics for gauging their accomplishment. For definitive goals like losing 5kg

of weight or reading a specific number of pages of a book per day, they are pretty straightforward. You simply pick a finish line and get to it.

Measurable

How do you measure how much order you have restored to your room? That is not so easy, is it? I'm deliberately targeting the trivial tough questions because mainstream literature often approaches the most obvious areas like sales performance or weight loss.

We have majored on the big picture and ignored the trivial tough questions of everyday life. These trivial aspects make up the big picture.

In my opinion, the key to measuring such complex goals is to be a responsible human being. An uncommon trait these days. A responsible human being will take the time to evaluate their actions vis-à-vis their satisfaction with their ideal self. The conscience—a living conscience—helps here.

Attainable

The attainability of a goal involves examining the realities of your life and then mapping them against your goal. The idea is to check if the goal is obtainable within the parameters of your current reality. In reality, almost any goal is attainable if you are diligent enough to understand the level of *death* you

need to die and then follow through. Is it possible to become president of your country by the next election? With your current political standing and track record, can you pull it off?

A great way to know if a goal is attainable is to draw a parallel to something similar you have done before. After that, evaluate it to see if you can make the stretch.

Else, if the goal is something you have never tried before, it is wise to do your research about the area. This will tell you if it is something you have within you or more importantly, something worth pushing yourself toward. Which brings us to the next term of the mnemonic…

Realistic

This implies questioning the importance of the goal. Say, the emotional component argument but on a more localised level. Why would you want to be president of your country by the next election? If it is something you have always wanted to do then why not? But given your current political position, can you pull it off by the next presidential elections?

If you are a company staff or something related, then your career goals must be relevant not just to your internal feeling but also how it affects your external reality too. Take the example of being creative with a term

paper for instance. This sort of goal has a dual significance, first to you and then to your professor.

Your professor sees the difference—I'll assume positive—in your work and gives you a commensurate high grade. Therefore, it's a win-win situation for you internally and externally. This example points to the fact that wholeness can and should match with making meaningful progress on both sides—internal and external.

Time-bound

The goal should have a start and end date. Earlier, we addressed the complexities that can arise from dealing with the timeline of goals. Therefore, there is not much to say here. Time limits simply help you frame the project or task appropriately and eliminate uncertainty. We will discuss how to set this timeframe and what you must do within this time frame.

We have addressed how to approach the subject of clarity from an internal, emotional perspective and the monumental, external or tangible perspective. I deliberately avoided specifics with the SMART methodology. I only explored that part to give you an idea of what to look out for when defining the external component of your goal.

The actual process of implementing the SMART methodology varies for specific goals. There are lots of materials on the internet you can consult for specific guidance based on the kind of goals you are pursuing.

Satan, Be Gone

When mapping a strategy for your goals, pay keen attention to the fact that you have multiple routes to achieving it. Also, factor in your peculiarities as an individual. This way, you will devise a more suited strategy for yourself.

In August of 2019, I was running my internship programme at a research institute but I was not particularly involved in so much research— thanks to my poor work ethic at the time. I was not down for the *pain* partly because I did not know where that experience would fit into my goals. This thought pattern eventually proved to be a lie and led to the genesis of this book. But that's a story we will explore later. For now, let us zero in on how I built a formidable distraction from the truth.

As a result of the feeling that I was wasting time, I sought something else to fill up my downtime. After about 3 weeks of searching, I decided to learn Data Science. "How do I go about it, though?" This question bugged me for another 3 weeks. Within this period, I read tons of blog posts,

browsed courses, YouTube videos, the entire package. By the end of this exploration, some things kept popping up. I made a list.

The list contained all the fields that must be in place for me to have a smooth journey to becoming a Data Scientist. With this knowledge, I rummaged through the internet for courses that would give me foundations in the necessary fields. Lucky me, I found a course that covered ALL! It was 29 hours of videos and supporting content but what did that matter? I had hit the jackpot and would surely be done with this in a month. Or so I thought.

In the middle of my journey, I stumbled on a course in Numerical Analysis using Matlab—a programming language—which I took. I devised a brilliant plan to take the Matlab course to brush up on my programming and math skills then power through the Data Science course head-on. Alas, what could've taken me a month spilt into the following year. Thanks to issues with my computer, which I replaced, I ended up finishing the Matlab course in January 2020 and the Data Science course in May.

The months between deciding on Data Science and finally achieving my goal was one of the most painful periods of my life. It became obvious that the problem was not the goal. The problem was something more disturbing, me! In simpler terms, I was the *Satan* that had always hindered me from achieving my goals.

I share this story to say that lack of a clear pathway to achieving a goal can sometimes be a mask for deeper issues hindering you. So, you may be tempted to devote time to gain clarity because, after that, there will be no hindrance to your goals, right? Wrong!

From my story, clarity is not all there is to progress. Clarity is important. But at the onset of your journey, you only need as much clarity to get you started. It's like driving at night. You cannot see the whole stretch of road. But if you follow your headlamps, you can make the journey that way.

If you pursue clarity more than you need to, you will fall into a Blackhole. You will make much progress when you are in the game learning your way through it.

It is best to gather the basic details about what you need to achieve your goals. You will learn the rest as you progress through the journey. If you settle for a fully thought-out plan before you start. You will always come back for a complete revision when the unforeseen factors of the journey become clear to you.

These unforeseen factors may have escaped your view for several reasons. For one, you did not think to look that way because you have had several preformed notions about your chosen area. Second, the experts who

dish advice on your chosen area may have considered these unforeseen factors too trivial to mention because they are experts. However, those factors still have a significant effect on newbies like you.

This discussion spells out what can happen when you approach a goal in a *strange* domain. The reason is, if you already had so much knowledge in this area, then you won't budge before getting in on the action.

Thus, the 'Satan' of getting ahead can come in 2 forms; the pursuit for unprecedented levels of clarity beyond that which is necessary and 'internal issues'. These *internal issues* can range from fear of failure, self-doubt, anxiety and a host of other limiting emotional states. All these issues culminate to – and are acted out as – procrastination.

To avoid these traps, you must do what I call a *pre-goal exploration*. This *pre-goal exploration* can be a short, unstructured interaction with the area of your goal. This interaction will enable you to build a skeletal structure with which you can approach your goal and then build on from there.

Back to my Data Science story. After finding the ideal Data Science course, I started taking lessons in September 2019. But I got discouraged because it seemed too long and was not moving as fast as I anticipated. It turned out that one hour of knowledge videos was not the same as one hour

of entertainment! Then the rest of the story follows; taking the Matlab course first and then crushing the Data Science course afterwards.

Upon later analysis, I realised the Matlab course which was 13 hours of multiple 20-minute videos was a pre-goal pursuit into the world of self-paced courses. Within that period, I learned a lot about how I learn and the structure I naturally was drawn towards. This knowledge helped me break down my approach toward the 29-hour Data Science course.

To state the fact, *Satan* can be removed from your pathway selection and progression toward your goal if you know just enough to make progress. You can do so either by theoretical research or by testing the waters in a related but less consequential area. After that, create a skeletal framework you can apply to your real goal with much more confidence.

Method, Not Madness

When you have outlined the framework for approaching your goal, you must develop a timeline for implementation. You don't want to leave the pursuit of your goal at the mercy of some *inspiration*.

This strategy is important because it helps you to remain on course with your goal. The objective here is not to trap yourself in a routine but to

put some responsibility on you; to keep pursuing your goal whether you feel like it or not.

Setting up a timeline gives you coordination. When you know the goal is not going to be completed for another 9 months, you won't expect it to end in 3 months even when it gets unexciting. Timelines help you set your sights straight on the expected outcome.

The process of creating a timeline involves taking stock of the factors of your existence during the goal's execution period. Time is a zero-sum dimension. Therefore, if you decide to go hard on your goal, it will be at the expense of some other aspects of your life.

For instance, if you decide to give your weekends to your goal, then there will be no hangouts with your friends for the entire duration of the goal. It may seem doable when you are excited about crushing your goal. However, it is important to pause and think about the consequences of your actions.

Sure, if you block out all weekends for 30 weeks, you will make significant progress fast. At least in theory. But do you know what happens when people suddenly cut down on expensive lifestyle to adopt a savings culture after a financial seminar?

Yeah...that one! They save up for 3 or 4 months. After exhausting their will power, they re-emerge with another spending spree because "You only live once!". The same thing will happen when you create a goal pursuit schedule that disregards the current structure of your life.

Back to our weekend scenario. If the weekend hangouts are a key relaxation and coping mechanism, then something like toning down on the weekend flex, as opposed to killing it, would suffice.

In that case, you might accomplish the goal in 6 months instead of 3 but you will finish with your life intact. You will be proud that you maintained the core elements of your lifestyle and still achieved your goals; if lifestyle change wasn't the goal.

The process of setting up the methodical approach should include the defence lines against dropping goals. That is, limiting forward and reminding yourself of the victory you will enjoy when you hit your goal.

I deliberately picked these two *lines* against some of the *lies* discussed in chapter 3. The reason is, they are perfect examples of practices that can and cannot be penned on paper respectively. You can design the milestones of your pursuit to reflect limiting forward by stating exactly what you expect to have done by a specific date, no more, no less.

However, you cannot predict the days when you will feel demotivated. You need to remind yourself why you started and why you need to finish. What you can do is to know when you are tending towards emotional pitfalls by practising steps to enhance your emotional consciousness.

An example is to take time to process thoughts when you feel off. The goal is to pinpoint the source of the abnormal feeling and then work out a solution or move on with your task regardless.

It may seem as though it makes no difference when you cannot solve the problem immediately. But trust me, just knowing what went wrong goes a long way to making you feel on top of your game. It is easy to figure out the solution because you can now tell if the issue is spillage from some other area of your life.

As I have said before, it helps to create a visual representation of the timeline for achieving the goal. You can always look-up this timeline to track your progress and adjust when unforeseen circumstances pop up.

You must only refer to this timeline when necessary. Do not go staring at your vision board every morning especially if the goal will take you months

This becomes crucial if you planned around other current pursuits such as a busy period at work or a crucial time in your academic pursuit.

Imagine staring at your timeline daily to spot progress that is only visible after a week. Amid a busy schedule, it will send the wrong messages that you are not making progress when in fact you are looking for progress on the wrong timescale. It is much better to keep the timeline at the back of your mind and only refer to it when you need to. I.e. when you are ticking-off a milestone or doing a periodic review.

Studies by ace psychologist Gabriele Oettingen supports this point. The study shows that, contrary to the self-help industry mantra of *think positive*, if you over engage in a positive fantasy about the process of achieving a goal, you are less likely to accomplish it.

This is because as you keep thinking about the goal, you step into fantasy mode and finish the goal. Thanks to the ability of the human mind to experience reality in abstraction, you get yourself to experience the high of finishing the goal even when you have only figured out your first move.

This mental sense of completion makes you less willing to pursue the goal in reality. Your mind has been exposed to the satisfaction from the actual

pursuit. Without a concrete game-plan, you will only have the goal in your mind.

You can avoid overthinking the goal when you create a well-thought-out method that factors in the elements of your current life and is visualised on a goal timeline. With this structure, you can avoid fantasising. You will only think about it and become conscious of the goal when it is time to get at it.

If you follow these steps to create a game-plan for your goal and then follow through, you will be on your way to accomplishing your goals with ease.

In the final analysis, you must remember that this goal-building process is predicated on your consciousness of your tendencies and the elements of your existence. It involves leveraging the positives and creating systems to overcome the negatives as opposed to setting a goal and then struggling to keep up with rules which do not even apply to you.

Chapter 5
Now That We're Here…

On our journey from *unfinisher* to *finisher*, we have gone through a couple of phases. In chapter one we discussed the feelings surrounding episodes of *unfinishing*. We then we unmasked some of the phenomena that surround unfinished goals.

We also explored some of the limiting beliefs and practices that may truncate your pursuit or toughen the process of achieving your goals and possible ways to remedy them. In chapter 4 we discussed how to build goals and set up the right structures for their completion.

This chapter will focus on the changes you must consider once you have followed through with every step recommended here. I will shed light on the unique challenges that will surface after transforming your outlook on following through with your project.

In case you haven't noticed, all you now know about going from an *unfinisher* to a *finisher* is *theory!* It's the same way you learn something new on the internet and feel like an expert until you start to practice. You must

follow through with the disciplines that convert that head knowledge to working knowledge.

I hope that this process will not spiral into a shadow chase. Therefore, you must focus on the significance of the process rather than the disciplines alone. I have reiterated this warning in many different ways. Asides head knowledge, this is where internal change happens.

Also finishing the goals you start is no guarantee that your life will suddenly fall into place. Although you now have a new superpower—finishing what you start—you must learn how to wield it to your favour.

While writing this book, I studied the relationship between procrastination and personality types. My goal? To draw insights about the ideal behavioural traits of someone likely to get things done.

After conducting a 44-question survey on 100 respondents, I analysed the data and some interesting insights popped up! I'm super excited to share my findings with you. It will help you uncover the areas you need to adjust to mentally position yourself for success.

In the final analysis, I will help you create the right framework to incorporate and implement the strategies you learned in this book. It will benefit you in more practical and rewarding ways.

It's No Magic!

In the process of becoming your ideal self, you will realise the need to amplify certain traits and simultaneously suppress others. This simultaneous amplification and suppression require the exertion of willpower to reorient your reflexes and old behavioural and mental routines.

If you have ever tried to install a new habit or uninstall an old one, you will realise how much you had to heighten your consciousness. You start to put yourself under the microscope to monitor the traits you want to amplify or suppress.

I noticed this trend personally. In my case, I could not actively tame more than 3 to 5 areas of my life simultaneously. Or monitor several habits at the same time.

This led me to believe that the human brain might have a limit to what it can focus on per time. A limit within which every individual can manage how many habits they want to install or uninstall. This limitation, I believe, is our mind's way of ensuring focused learning. We can call it quality control. Literature is replete with facts to prove that willpower is a limited resource. Therefore, this experience I just highlighted is a basic extension of that discourse.

One might start to think that self-transformation would take eternity because, with hundreds of areas to improve upon, how much can you do within one lifetime? Good for us, we can bank on the brain's ability to habituate multiple activities. In his ground-breaking book, *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg explains that among the new habits you choose to install, those with a more powerful positive effect on your psyche gets ingrained faster. With practice, these activities sip past the active learning barrier to become your default behaviour.

In my experience, this transference of old activities into the habitual realm leaves us room to learn new things. The more difficult or consequential a new habit is, the more space it takes up within the active learning centre of your brain.

What this implies is that to change your life, you must consciously create a *list* of behaviours you intend to alter and then go at them one after the other. If one habit clashes with another such that it inhibits the success of the other, the suppressed habit will automatically fade away. Therefore, you must ensure that essential parts of your life are not broken in a bid to incorporate new behaviours else you lose.

The implication of this limited willpower and habituation process on personality means that people can be classified based on their degree of

unconsciousness in carrying out beneficial actions. For simplicity, we will call this combination of factors the *responsibility loop*. 3 classes of people emerge from the responsibility loop

1. The super-functional
2. The functional and
3. The dysfunctional

1. The Super-functional

The super-functional human being is the one who can do between 40 to 80 hours of quality work per week without feeling like they deserve a 6-month vacation twice in a row to recover. This is the effect of the responsibility loop in at work over a prolonged period.

These people have been out there consistently, coming up with solutions to counter ineffectiveness in their behaviour. A striking trait of this class of people however is their super-functionality which they cannot explain. Through multiple years of surmounting their limitations, their subconscious mind is now teeming with positive chunks and pieces of one method or the other. Thanks to the dopaminergic loop system.

If you are familiar with AI terminologies, this is like a convoluted neural network of behavioural patterns which super-functional people cannot

explain. Where is the logic in having a formula where you need a million input variables and each input has a weight which affects the formula in ways you cannot fully explain. They are all inexplicably linked to thousands of other variables. I think the complexity of this explanation already drives home my point.

2. **The Functional**

The functional person is someone whose depth in the responsibility loop is so deep that their methods are still explainable in logical terms. That means they can put in 20 to 40 hours of meaningful work a week and still have a life on the weekend because there is some explainable structure behind this.

The functional person has not gotten to the *religious* depth of the super-functional person. Therefore, they still need to make some active push to churn out quality results. This can be expressed as vocalised exhaustion. Only that this time, it is accompanied by a recognition of the importance of the work done and the *ginger* to do even more.

3.   The Dysfunctional

The dysfunctional person is one who only has the basic traditional methods of productivity in place. These ones will give in to the slightest distraction. It could be Netflix, social media or even fantasies of effective living.

A dysfunctional person can go weeks without being productive. They will later turn in anywhere between 0 to 10 hours of quality work in a productive work week. All figures used so far are not definitive. They are only meant to give you a picture of the relative level of output expected from these different sets of people.

So far, you have seen how we develop habits and the 3 levels in the *responsibility loop*. You will agree that most people fall into the dysfunctional category in one aspect of life or the other. This determines how much they can achieve in a certain area of their lives. I used work output in this explanation for easy understanding. Thus you can have *super-functional*, *functional* and *dysfunctional* people in physical work, mental work, education, emotional intelligence and most important to us, finishing the things you start.

Because our lives are somewhat nested by nature, being dysfunctional in a key area of your life can radically impair your ability to be super-functional or functional in other areas that are connected to that area.

I have always had a thing against learning from people who have become gods in their domain because of the concepts we have discussed so far. As opposed to seeking the best of the best, the celebrity of the industry, I prefer to seek for the fast-rising guy with proven systems. Someone who can articulately explain the method behind his productivity—a functional person.

This is important because as we have seen earlier, the super-functional in a domain can no longer explain what they do. They simply act on gut feelings groomed over years of experience.

Therefore, to move from *unfinisher* to *finisher*, you must humbly accept your dysfunctional state in the domain of finishing the things you start. Then you can work to set the *responsibility loop* in motion.

As you practice the methods we have discussed and search for *finishers* on the *functional* level of the *responsibility loop* who can explain their methods from start to finish you begin to build your mental repository of patterns which support *finishing*.

Learning from a functional person—as opposed to a super-functional person—is more logical. The reason is, the super-functional person, due to the effects of time and a focus on higher-level pursuits, will give advice that

seems logical to them but will prove detrimental to any *dysfunctional* person who is determined to grow.

Due to the *super-functional*'s distance from the dysfunctional state, they have lost touch with some of the realities of being dysfunctional. As such, their advice will contain too many missing links. The super-functional fellow assumes these links to be inconsequential. However, these are the very links that determine the utility of the advice.

The *functional*, however, are more articulate in discussing their methods. They are closer on the spectrum of the *responsibility loop* to the *dysfunctional* people. Consequently, they are better positioned to offer help in areas they've succeeded in not-too-distant past.

As a disclaimer, this is not an anti-*super-functionality* argument. In fact, this same structure of who-to-look-up for guidance plays out progressively. The *functional* necessarily needs to look up to the *super-functional* and transit from logical explanation to gut feelings too. This is an argument for the habit of seeking help from those *directly above* you on the spectrum of ability in any domain.

The arguments in this section explain the importance of time. To progress from *unfinisher* to *finisher*, you need an assimilatory period of

conscious and subconscious balance before you find yourself effortlessly enjoying the process. It's no magic!

All this time…

Your being stuck in a loop of *unfinishing* might be an advantage. The fact is, without a clear plan, what you had in mind to do might lead you on an abysmal path. My guess is, if you crafted a well-thought-out plan to follow, then maybe you would have already figured out a way to get there.

Without a genuine plan detailing what you want to achieve within your lifetime or the foreseeable future, you will only have an increased amount of time allotted to doing nothing.

This will arise as a consequence of an unclogged *drain,* so to speak. Picture yourself as a wash hand basin with a lot of activities flowing in and *unfinishing* as the clog in the pipe that's preventing free flow. It is basic knowledge that when inflow is more than outflow, there will be a build-up. Also, when the outflow exceeds or matches the inflow, then there won't be any build-up.

The same principle plays out in your life. So, when your current activities are part of a bigger picture, one thing will often lead to another

thing(s). This will ensure that you always have activities in your basin which are moving you closer to your ideal goal.

The alternative to this would be to have one-off activities that do not lead to more meaningful work after their completion. Or which lead to more meaningful work in many other directions, because of their disjointedness.

Let's focus on this disjointedness for a moment. In chapter one—under *Why it Never Ends*—we talked about this issue as fear of the unknown or the *what next?* conundrum. From this viewpoint, being an *unfinisher* might be saving you from yourself.

You may have been stuck in one place for a good reason. It may not necessarily be ideal but it is good. Finishing a task or a goal is both an independent event and a piece of a bigger puzzle. So think through the projects you started but were unable to finish or are currently struggling to finish. How do they come together in the grand scheme of things?

Will all the goals you have been pursuing stack up to build a life you will be proud of? Or will you find yourself split in different directions at the end of every goal? Is there synergy in your pursuits or is it just a game of doing stuff as they pop up?

A good example would be the *gold rush* for online courses at the start of the global lockdown due to Covid-19. You may have hopped on that train and started several courses; some of which you could not follow through. Could it be that your inability to finish those courses was a *blessing* in disguise? Perhaps being stuck has been an unintentional, non-ideal way of providence trying to save you from yourself.

With this introduction, it is important to see each of your goal as a piece in a puzzle. Every goal should bring you closer to an envisioned spot. As stated in Greg McKeown's *Essentialism*, you can channel your energy in a million directions and make an inch of progress in a million different directions or you can channel all that effort in a limited number of directions and make ginormous progress in those areas recognised as highly consequential at the end of the day.

I'm not trying to pull off some self-help industry jargon talk here. But if we are to follow Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000-hour rule, it would take 3 hours of conscious effort, 300 days a year for 11 years to become a master at anything. You could go for 6 hours a day for roughly 6 years.

What this implies is, as much as your new project will only take up a month or week, it is more important for the project to line up with a much

bigger, wholesome, meaningful end. This will save you the ache of having a bunch of disjointed finished goals nested within an unfinished life.

Abstraction is such a powerful force. It is a powerful force responsible for the emergence of false courage and stability. When you think about it, what sponsors the massive amount of raw negative energy released on social media?

The abstract negative energy—though potent—is released in a manner that does not allow for actual confrontation. Most trolls and savage netizens will react differently when faced with a similar situation in real life. Most of them cannot give out the raw reactions they do on social media.

This same narrative also applies to handling issues that pertain to the future or your life goals. Interestingly, the opposite set of interactions happen. When you are having an abstracted conversation with yourself about your hopes and aspirations for the future, you are more likely to romanticise the situation and tell yourself all sorts of white lies. This is how you protect yourself from the strong, unpleasant truth.

Whereas, when you sit with a pen and paper, you realise how inescapable some realities can be with time. You cannot hide from the truth indefinitely.

From the moment the idea for this book dropped in 2019, I'd always felt I had everything figured out. All I need is to create a system to act it out. But in early 2020, as I wrote chapter 4, I realised I had completed almost all my goals—thanks to the finishing methods I adopted. However, I felt neck-deep in anxiety whenever I think about the future.

In those moments, I realised my *unfinishing* problem was protecting me from the reality that I did not have a real plan. I simply had a list of things I thought if I burned through, would magically unlock the next phase of my life.

Alas, after accomplishing them, all that's left is an open field of nothingness. It felt like everything had ended. It felt like I strolled to the edge of the earth—if the earth were flat.

The terrifying thing about this process became clear because of some knowledge I'd been exposing myself to. I knew full well of my responsibility to figure out a most basic and coherent plan and stick with it as much as it made sense.

Avoidance was not an option at this phase. Also, I was reading Jordan B. Peterson's *Maps of Meaning* where he talks about how ignoring a small problem today will make it grow into a dragon as the amount of obscurity in

that area grows over time. He also hinted how seemingly small issues, if ignored sufficiently enough, can morph into a life-altering situation when it can no longer be ignored.

I held deeper conversations with myself. Conversations that are still going. I found myself going into a nihilistic place. Confronted with this shattering reality, I started to question a lot of the things I was doing. But I kept on with my routine as much as I could because I knew there was residual value in the status quo.

If not for anything, this status quo allowed me to wake up to my daily goals. If these weren't there, I would have *tailspinned* into depression. For the first time, I felt the power of doing something that matters and is of consequence to the world. I realised this while working on my renewable energy business.

Following that path, as my mission, gave me the strength to keep doing what I do. Being in business gave me a reason to keep believing in myself. In the final analysis, it was not so much about what I was *finishing*. What I was finishing and how it all connects to a final goal now mattered more.

What this means is the dreaded conversations such as "What do I want from life?" or "Where will all these lead to at the end of the day?" become vital. Why? Things can get messy pretty fast when you unlock your ability to see everything from the end.

As you embark on your goals, you want to ensure that they ultimately help you maximise the value of time. This will save you from looking back 3, 5 or 10 years from now wondering what you did with your life. You successfully planted foundations, even laid some blocks but you never raised a complete structure.

The ability to finish what you start is only a tool. You must use this ability in a way that infuses meaning into every milestone you hit. Finishing what you start is necessary but it is not the prime determinant of a meaningful life. It is what you finish and its significance to the grand scheme of things that matter the most.

"I AM KING"

The Backstory

In December 2019, my brother and I were at home with family for the Christmas holiday. Over the years, holidays are periods we share ideas and decide our next move based on what we have experienced throughout the year. We find ways to leverage this wisdom to better our lives in the coming year. This section is a spin-off of one of such conversations.

My brother shared the idea that to win in an absolutely or relatively uncharted territory, it is important to establish dominance as the king of that niche in one of 2 ways. In relatively uncharted territory, you examine your abilities as it relates to that domain. Then you assign yourself a position in the dominance hierarchy of that domain and then project that.

In the case of absolutely uncharted territory or an existing territory where no one has risen to create order, you create the dominance hierarchy. This automatically makes you king. It works something like this: if eloquence is becoming a thing in a region and no one has created a hierarchy and you know you have profound eloquence. You can refer to yourself as the most eloquent in that region.

It is funny. But if no one arises to challenge you, then it slowly starts to register that you are the king of eloquence and suddenly the value chain starts to pay tribute to you.

Months later, it occurred to me that, to be in the position to say "I am King", you must possess some personality traits that will enable you to muster the courage to make such claim. The claim could be explicit or implicit by your actions. You must defend that position when your dominion is challenged.

To give structure to this thought train, I came up with the "I am King" theory. But before I go into the details, I would like to justify this section. This section is meant to influence the way you generate and pursue your goals. The aim is to put yourself in the right state of mind to generate worthwhile goals that not only satisfy you or connect to a bigger picture, but goals that can help you make significant progress as in your chosen career.

The Theory

The initial hypothesis of the I-am-King theory recognises that there is a gap between intention and doing. This gap could be information. It could be planning or scheduling gaps. These gaps require motivation to fill up.

The motivation will come from your motivation centre. While formulating this hypothesis, I arrived at 2 primary types of motivation centres to fill up this intention-action gap They include, *Group Primal Instincts* (GPIs) and *Individual Primal Instincts* (IPIs).

The GPIs are fuelled by your desire for survival, safety and acceptance by society. People who operate based on GPIs are deeply concerned about what others will say about them. They are hypersensitive to judgement. And they will recoil when life requires them to do anything—outside the ordinary—that stands them out of the average crowd. They just want to be *normal.*

On the other hand, people who are fuelled by *individual primal instincts* are willing to accept responsibility for what they become. They will not sacrifice this responsibility on the altar of conformity. They are motivated by dominance and conscientiousness. They know their stuff. They work diligently and are willing to take credit for their work. They gladly shoulder the responsibilities that come with being different. They love to be distinct from the norm. They have a palpable resentment for remaining commoners in the crowd.

To prove my hypothesis, I sought help from the world of psychology. After panning through tens of academic and industry papers, I studied the

relationship between personality types, procrastination and academic performance.

The personality types of the individuals in my survey revealed their predisposed behaviour within themselves and towards others. That way, I determined whether they rely on traits leaning towards a group or individual primal instincts.

The procrastination test served as a measure of how long it takes for them to cross the intention-action gap. Finally, the academic performance data informed my conclusions as to what set of personality and procrastination make for high academic performance—which can be extended mean measurable productivity.

To achieve this objective, I ran a survey for procrastination based on Ley's Procrastination Scale. Also, the survey includes a 4-factor test for human behavioural traits based on the DiSC assessment (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness/Compliance), developed by Harvard psychologist Dr William Moulton Marston. This survey was administered to 100 participants who also shared information on their current or previous academic performance (CGPA) across various fields of study.

I analysed the data generated by conducting correlation tests between and within the different sets of factors; using correlation standards suggested on the *Emory College of Arts and Sciences*' Department of Psychology website. I observed some fascinating trends. Before spilling the details, I must define the components of the DiSC test; Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness, as they fit into this context.

The DiSC Terms

The *Dominance* trait describes people who are prone to focus on accomplishing results and are task oriented. They will often go straight to the point and will, in most cases, be blunt about the situation at hand, regardless of how it makes others feel.

Although their goal—in most cases—is not to hurt people but to call attention to work that must be done. This can be summarised as confrontational and confidence.

The *Influence* trait describes someone who emphasizes on persuading others. They are open and having good relationships with people. They are optimistic, enthusiastic and will generally not feel so good when ignored. These are the people who like to own the room but will cooperate with others to achieve the end goal.

The *Steadiness* trait describes a person who is big on cooperation, sincerity and dependability. They will function best when things are done steadily and calmly. They function best when there is some sense of security in terms of the support of others and clearly defined roles and outcomes. They will don't do well under pressure.

The *Conscientiousness* trait describes a person who pays much attention to quality, accuracy, expertise and competence. They will approach situations from a place of objective reasoning, wanting all the details so they can establish correctness. They fear being wrong and will generally like to work alone.

The Results

The results show that *Dominance* does not correlate with procrastination and academic performance. However, it has a strong negative correlation with *Steadiness*, no correlation with *Influence*, and a moderate negative correlation with *Conscientiousness*.

In plain language, knowing the *Dominance* trait degree of an individual will not give you information about their tendency to procrastinate or their level of productivity. What it will tell you, however, is that they will work well

under pressure, may or may not be influential and may not have the patience for nitty-gritties.

Influence has a weak positive correlation with procrastination and a moderate negative correlation with academic performance. At the same time, *Influence* has a strong negative correlation with *Steadiness* and *Conscientiousness*, while having no correlation with *Dominance*.

In plain language, a person who measures high in *Influence* may have the tendency to procrastinate, will be collected when under pressure but will focus on the fun part of work; leaving the details for the more focused people around.

Steadiness has a moderate positive correlation with procrastination and no correlation with academic performance. It also has a moderate negative correlation with *Conscientiousness*, while having a strong negative correlation with *Influence* and *Dominance*.

In plain language, a person who measures high in *Steadiness* will procrastinate on work to ensure that everything is in place. They are unwilling to seek help or confront situations to create ideal situations for work. But they will accept help if offered. Also, they will lay low, work in the background and be somewhere in the middle in the productivity spectrum.

Conscientiousness shows the most distinctive relationship with procrastination and academic performance. It has a moderate negative correlation with procrastination and a moderate positive correlation with CGPA. *Conscientiousness* shows a moderate negative correlation with *Dominance* and *Steadiness* while having strong negative correlation with *Influence*.

In plain language, a person high in *Conscientiousness* will tend to be productive and stick to the schedule of activity whilst shying away from power play and social interaction. Thus, they may have great ideas but experience difficulty in defending them; except in cases where the exclusive determinant of success is ability, which is hardly ever the case.

The Interpretation

Observing these personality traits, it is easy to see that *Influence* and *Steadiness* fit nicely into *group primal instincts* as they express proclivity for acceptance and security within the confines of acceptable social behaviour.

On the other hand, *Dominance* and *Conscientiousness* describe individual primal instincts as they represent the tendency to express one's opinion and to think independently even when they go against the norm, respectively.

Now, all this comes together to say, to live up to the I-am-King ideal, you must not only assert dominance but also show competence by incorporating conscientiousness into your being. From the results, it is clear that dominance will get you attention but it won't mean that you are contributing much in terms of productivity.

Also, conscientiousness alone will help you generate ideas and produce meaningful work but you might not have any impact because of your aloofness. Therefore, the most effective way to establish yourself as the king is to be a good balance between conscientiousness and dominance. This combination of traits is the most common among the most influential people in any industry.

This claim is demonstrated in studies by Tom Henkel, Professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. After studying 753 experienced managers over 2 years, results showed that the majority of managers were high in *Dominance* and *Conscientiousness*.

The study further explains that these traits enabled the managers to be outgoing and at the same time reserved enough to carefully analyse situations and find the best possible solutions before making decisions. This combination is the secret to making decisions confidently, as you have the details and the chutzpah to defend your position on the subject matter.

Therefore, when you say or act "I am King," you are saying "I have the ability to stand by my ideas. I have generated these ideas through careful analysis of the data and all available options. I can do this!"

"I am King" and Finishing

When you adopt the I-am-King mode of being, you can generate goals you want to pursue; after weighing your options and then stand by them even when opposition rises externally (from other people) or from within (in form of doubts and distractions).

You must also realise that in so far as you are not out to trample on anyone or downplay the significance of other people, you must rely on your *individual primal instincts* if you intend to make significant progress as a person.

Differentiation and uniqueness take guts. It takes your ability to generate unique ideas and stand by them no matter the challenges. It is this uniqueness and the accompanying results that the marketplace rewards with influence, impact and income. *Individual Primal Instincts* help you generate the level and nature of motivation you need to bridge the intention-action gap for epoch-making ideas.

This last portion may have leaned towards wining in your professional life. However, it also applies to the context of this book which, beyond *productivity,* is also about the wholeness of the individual.

Although there may be no *marketplace* to reward your secret victories, there are friends and family with who share in the effects of those personal victories. You must always negotiate your decisions with these close family and friends because you need their support one way or the other.

You can defend your personal decisions knowing that they are founded upon carefully selected values—your decision filters. This way, you can gain the reward of your uniqueness among other people as opposed to caving under pressure.

Congratulations! You Finished

Throughout this journey, we have explored the experiences of an *unfinisher*. We examined why you don't finish what you start. We went through the stages of *unfinishing* and how to overcome them. We demystified goal building and how to follow through with your goals. We explored the steps you must take to maximise your new-found superpower as a *finisher*. We also concluded on the best mode of being you should adopt to keep winning.

In the end, it boils down to a case of the blue pill and the red pill. You can choose to go on the journey to empowerment and take full responsibility for your life, or you can choose to continue living as an *unfinisher*.

The sad truth with remaining an *unfinisher* is that options were given to you. As we discussed in *the inconsequential abstract*, ignoring the straight narrow path to becoming a *finisher* may not seem to have much effect today. As time passes, however, it will be more evident that it is not an ideal mode of being. Worse, you are now implicated by the knowledge you have gotten from this book.

Practising the steps towards *finishing* will be challenging on various levels but it will help you develop a functional relationship with yourself. You will develop high levels of self-awareness that will radically change the way you approach your life.

Writing the last lines of this book was an emotional ride for me. I have gone through myriads of the self-awareness-developing events we discussed. Most of them are a direct consequence of writing this book. At the same time, this amazing feeling of achievement lends credence to the empowering effect of finishing what we start.

You have finished this book. You have gotten new knowledge. But don't stop there. Take stock, gather the facts and chart a course to finish those tasks you have always wanted to finish. Dare to know what lies beyond. And when you have explored and shaved off the dead pursuits, you will be proud to call yourself a *Finisher*. Not just of tasks and goals but tasks and goals with meaning, direction and a sense of wholeness.
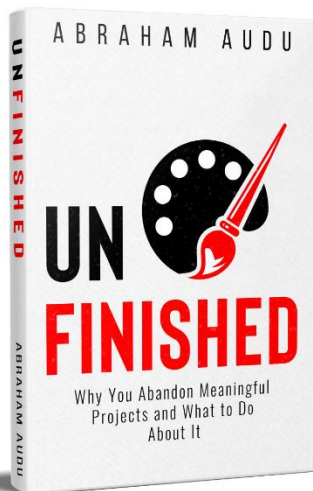
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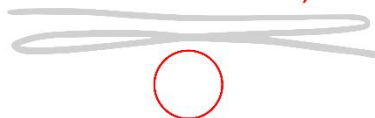
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ABOUT THE BOOK

Have you ever really wanted to finish something you've started? Of course you have! But why is it so hard to get motivated and actually stick with it? To say nothing of the feeling that once you're in the middle of a project, you lose all interest in seeing it through to the end. We all know that feeling - we start a new challenge with enthusiasm, but after a few days or even hours, we lose interest and are happy to shelve our work.

As you will discover in UNFINISHED, this doesn't have to be the way things are. Once you know yourself better, the sources of your anxiety can be easily addressed. By learning how to recognize and manage your own thoughts about not finishing, you can find a more fulfilling way to live your life. This book helps you identify why you decide not to finish in the first place, as well as providing practical methods to help you finish the things you start.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Hello, I'm Abraham Audu, CEO Periva Energy Systems; a growing renewable energy business committed to providing constant affordable electricity to homes, businesses and institutions in Nigeria via solar-inverter systems. I love to research on technology and the human condition - how we process life events and navigate through life.

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