

How to Change Your Life By Mark Manson

When most people set out to change their lives, they often focus on all the external stuff, like a new job or a new location or new friends or a new romantic prospect and on and on. The reality is that changing your life starts with changing the way you see everything in your life.

So below are some specific ways you can start to change your life right now:

1. Do Something. Anything.

A lot of people get stuck when they try to change their lives because they don't know "where to start" or "what to do." The simple answer is: to do *something—anything, really.*

The motivation to do anything—like change your entire life around—doesn't just come from some magical, mystical place within you. *Action is both the effect of motivation and the cause of it.* You'll figure out whether or not it's right or not in good time (trust me), but only if you *stop procrastinating* and start engaging with the world.

I call this *The "Do Something" Principle*. And I developed it by accident back in my years as a consultant, helping people who were otherwise immobilized by fears, rationalizations, and apathy to take action.

What I found is that often once they did something, even the smallest of actions, it would soon give them the inspiration and motivation to do something else. They had sent a signal to themselves, "OK, I did that, I guess I can do more." And slowly we could take it from there. If you want to change your life, don't set out to accomplish all you've ever dreamed of. That is daunting and demotivating. Just do a small action that nudges you in the right direction, *anything.*

Have to redesign an entire website? Sit down and design the header. About to tackle a large project? Start on the outline. Want to make friends in a foreign country? Go out for a beer and see what happens.

These small actions will spur you on to do more, and before you know it you'll have accomplished the goals that initially seemed so daunting. You've changed your life for the better.

2. Recognize That Everything You Do Has a Cost—Be Willing to Pay It

A lot of life ultimately amounts to a series of tradeoffs. Everything has an opportunity cost, and the big things we want in life—like *happiness* and *healthy relationships* and *wealth*—they all have big opportunity costs. You don't get to have the dream career at the top without putting in your time at the bottom, then taking a risk or twelve and *breaking a few hearts* along the way.

So the most important question you can ask yourself isn't about *what you want*, it's about *what you're willing to suffer for*?

For most of my adolescence and young adulthood, I fantasized about being a musician—a rock star, in particular. Any *guitar* song I heard, I would always close my eyes and envision myself up onstage playing it to the screams of the crowd, people absolutely losing their minds to my sweet finger-noodling. This fantasy could keep me occupied for hours on end. The fantasizing continued through college, even after I dropped out of music school and stopped playing seriously. But even then it was never a question of if I'd ever be up playing in front of screaming crowds, but *when*. I was biding my time before I could invest the proper amount of time and effort into getting out there and making it work. First, I needed to finish school. Then, I needed to make money. Then, I needed to find the time. Then... nothing.

Despite fantasizing about this for over half of my life, the reality never came. And it took me a long time and a lot of negative experiences to finally figure out why: I didn't actually want it.

I was in love with the result—the image of me onstage, people cheering, me rocking out, pouring my heart into what I'm playing—but I wasn't in love with the process. And because of that, I failed at it. Repeatedly. Hell, I didn't even try hard enough to fail at it. I hardly tried at all.

The daily drudgery of practicing, the logistics of finding a group and rehearsing, the pain of finding gigs and actually getting people to show up. The broken strings, the blown tube amp, hauling 40 pounds of gear to and from rehearsals with no car.

It's a mountain of a dream and a mile-high climb to the top. And what took me a long time to discover was that I didn't like to climb much. I just liked to imagine the top.

If you want to change your life, don't ask yourself what you want. Ask *what you're willing to suffer for*. That's the answer that will make a difference.

3. Embrace the Fact That No One Cares

Look, I know you were told that you're a special little snowflake in a sea of otherwise normal people, but I have some bad news for you: *you're actually not all that special* (that, and people are too concerned with themselves to begin with).

But before you hit the back button on your browser, I want you to consider just how liberating that is: *No one cares. You are free to do whatever the hell you want and no one will care if you fail spectacularly*. If anything, they'll respect you more (for like, 5 seconds and then they'll go back to *posting selfies on Instagram*).

So instead of basing all your life decisions on what others think of you or what you do or how attractive you'll appear in your new car, figure out exactly what it is *you* value most in your life.

Ask yourself: *What does a successful and meaningful life look like to you?* Did you grow up wanting to be a pilot? Do you dream of having a family with five kids? When you close your eyes, do you see yourself waltzing down the red carpet in your designer gown, your path lit by a hundred camera flashes? Once you're clear on the life you genuinely want for yourself, ask yourself: *What is it that I want from this life?* Do you want to be a pilot because it's cool? Or because you want to be rich? Or are you simply fascinated by the marvel of human technology and want to master the skill of flying an aircraft?

Asking yourself *why* you want what you want will help you uncover the values that underlie the life you've imagined for yourself. Yes, you want the life of a pilot. But is the value you're really after appearances, money, or mastery of skill?

Not all values are created equal. Some are better than others. If you find that your values hurt rather than help, you can work to *update them into better values*—values that are evidence-based, constructive, and controllable rather than emotion-based, destructive, and uncontrollable.

Once you know what you value (and have replaced bad values with better ones), you are free to build the life you want knowing no one cares if you fail.

4. Focus More on Habits, Less on Goals

A lot of books and self-development advice focuses on goals and “systems” of developing, like, S.M.A.R.T. goals and creating an unrelenting focus on accomplishment.

There's nothing wrong with having goals, but obsessing over them is often counterproductive because, in reality, achieving a goal isn't always what it's cracked up to be. Instead, I like to focus on creating a *system of healthy habits* that focus on the *most important, highest impact* areas of my life. My goals pretty much take care of themselves at that point.

In a nutshell, habits comprise three main parts:

1. An environmental cue
2. A behavioral response
3. A reward (or the removal of an unpleasant stimulus)

The more often the cue, behavior, and reward occur in close time and proximity to one another, the stronger a habit becomes.

To create a new, healthy habit—or to break a bad habit—you'll want to be as intentional as possible with all three parts. You can manipulate your environment to introduce cues that you can then intentionally start to associate with a desired behavior and reinforce it all with a reward.

Let's say you want to start working out on a regular basis. Instead of just focusing on developing the habit of "working out," focus on developing a routine around initiating a workout. This may seem like a subtle difference, but it's actually huge. An easy way to do this is to choose a cue that already occurs regularly in your daily life, such as getting home from work. Then, during the early stages of developing your workout habit, focus your effort on going straight to your room after you get home and changing into your workout clothes. Then go fill up your water bottle and head straight to the gym or hit the running trail or whatever. You want to develop the habit of putting yourself in the position to work out regularly, which makes it more likely that you'll work out regularly.

After a while, you'll start to notice that when you get home from work (environmental cue/trigger), it takes little to no effort to go to your room, throw on your workout clothes, and head to the gym (habitual response). You'll even start to look forward to it, and maybe even feel like something in your life is off when you don't work out. And that's the power of habit.

To reinforce the habit, use the "reward" component of the habit equation. With our exercise example, you might get done working out and treat yourself to a (healthy) snack or maybe schedule a post-workout rest session by watching an episode of your favorite TV show.

If you're not sure which habits will change your life, I recommend focusing on building one single compounding habit. Compounding habits—like exercise, healthy eating, and sleep—have a multiplication effect across several or even all areas of our lives.

For example, exercise helps you maintain a healthy body weight, but it can also give you more energy and focus throughout your day, it improves your mood, helps you sleep, and so on. All of these benefits have their own ripple effects across your life: you're more productive at work/school, you're more pleasant to be around when you're with friends, family, and significant others, you look and feel healthier.

Pick a compounding habit and develop a routine around it. Then your goals will take care of themselves. This is how you change your life, one habit at a time.

5. Figure Out Who You Are

Simple question: do you *really know who you are*? I mean do you know *what drives you*, what terrifies you, why you do the things you do, and do you know how others perceive you too? Self-awareness is, somewhat paradoxically, in short supply these days (self-delusion, on the other hand, is not). But there's really no way to change your life if you don't know what you're changing about *yourself* in the first place.

So be aware of what you're doing, and why you're doing it. Life sucks, and we respond to this suckage by distracting ourselves. We transport our minds to some

other time or place or world where it can be safe and insulated from the pain of day-to-day life.

We *stare at our phones*, we obsess *about the past* or our potential futures, make plans we'll never keep, or simply try to forget. We eat or drink to dull the reality of our problems. We use books, movies, games, and music to carry us to another world where no pain exists, and everything always feels easy and good and right.

There's nothing wrong with distraction. We all need some sort of diversion to keep us sane and happy. The key is that we need to be aware of our distractions.

But we need to make sure we're choosing them, not the other way around.

6. Focus on Fewer Things (and Get Really, Really Good at Them)

One of the consequences of living in a time with seemingly endless opportunities is that you have to choose which opportunities to pursue (everything has a cost, remember?). And I hate to break it to you, but *you can't have it all*. And so, for the vast, vast majority of things you do, you will simply be average. *That's OK*. You don't have to be a superstar at everything you do to *live a meaningful life*.

But if you can do one or a few things really, really well, you'll be ahead of almost everyone else who's distracted by their *smartphones*.

7. Stop Trying So Hard

As counterintuitive and counterproductive as it sounds, a strange thing happens when you try too hard. Trying too hard to be cool often makes you look desperate and uncool. Trying to be happy *often makes you miserable*.

But there's a simple fix that requires that you look at things a little differently than you have been. As hokey as it sounds, *be grateful* for what you have while you're working towards what you want. Everything you need to be happy is *likely right in front of you*. Start taking the time to appreciate the *simple pleasures in life*, like having a beer with a friend, taking a walk in nature, calling your grandma and telling her you love her, going to a game with your buddies.

These things might seem mundane, but if you can't enjoy the simple joys in life, you won't enjoy much if and when you actually do change your life either.