

**Get-It-Done Guy's**

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**9 Steps to  
Work Less  
and Do More**

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**STEVE ROBBINS**



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# INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, they promised us paradise. We invented machines and discovered electricity. We could make clothes, build houses, and do stuff better than we ever could before. Where this was leading was obvious: a world where we spend all our time living for our passion. We become artists and philosophers, dress in flowing, comfortable clothes, and use our matter duplicators to provide for our daily needs. Right.

It didn't work out that way. Instead, those of us who are employed work longer hours than ever. We all work *way* harder than our hunter-gatherer ancestors ever worked. Our lifespan is about three times what theirs was, too. That's the good news. The bad news is that we spend so much of that working, we probably end up with less actual fun during our lifetime.

I've never liked hard work. At age twelve, I discovered computers. What wonderful devices! Figure out a solution to a problem, program it in, and the computer will solve it for you again and again. It was a lazy middle-schooler's dream; I had discovered my first tool to work less. I could solve problems once, and spend all that free time eating Cheetos and playing Pong (if you're

under thirty-five, think of Pong as Halo III with a one-pixel screen). While I was blissfully munching Cheetos, the business world also discovered how to work less with computers, Day-Timers, and calculators. As they happily prioritized tasks, they never talked about working less and doing more. Instead, they used the impressive-sounding word *productivity*. Suddenly, it was all the buzz. By the late eighties, productivity had become entrenched as our national religion. Want to win an argument? Just say, “My idea will make us more productive.” The Holy Grail of productivity is so deeply ingrained that your opponents will lay down their swords, bow their heads, and defer. After all, what could be better than an idea that will make us more productive? No one even bothers to ask. And that’s a real shame. Because if you look closely, you’ll notice that being more productive isn’t doing much for us individually.

Part of the problem is structural: The benefits of productivity don’t get spread evenly. So if you want to get stuff done faster and actually have it improve your life by allowing you to work less, you have to do things that will help you work less and do more in *all* areas of your life.

That’s where I come in. A career in startups and ten years coaching entrepreneurs, businesspeople, and students has given me ample opportunity to help people in all walks of life get their chaos under control so they can start working less, doing more, and having the life of their dreams—even if that just means eight hours of sleep each night! On top of this, I’m an organization geek myself. On a bright, sunny afternoon, my idea of a good time is visiting a stationery store to buy new pens and then organizing all my pens based on which ink flows best on the beautiful sixty-pound satin-finish notebook paper I also just bought. Yes, I’m pasty white. And what might once have been a therapy-inducing obsession has given me the ability to help people with tans get organized. Life works in mysterious ways.

Unless you're reading this book for the sheer joy of reading—in which case, you have odd taste in leisure reading—you bought this book believing life will be better by owning it. Maybe you want to overcome your procrastination habit, untether yourself from your technology, or learn how to beat distractions and focus better. Those are good goals. Maybe you've heard my Get-It-Done Guy podcast and want to support me because you love me, you *really* love me. That's an even better goal.

Fortunately for those of you who want a better life full of working less and doing more, most of *my* life has been spent in a neurotically compulsive drive to figure out how to do everything better, stronger, and faster. There are dozens of ways to streamline everything you do, from managing multiple projects at once, to dealing with tidal waves of incoming cruft that pervades the modern work world, to even caring for your macaroni and glitter sculpture of Queen Elizabeth.

I've reduced the quest to work less and do more down to 9 simple steps. Each step will help you work less. A lot of what we humans do doesn't serve us very well. It doesn't move us toward our goals, it doesn't make us happy, and it makes us chip our nails and need manicures.\* It's time to change that. Each step will also help you do more. Once you've stopped with the work that isn't serving you, you'll learn to do what you're already doing, but in different ways. You'll learn to recognize when you can get a little more oomph out of life without putting in any more oomph. In fact, you might be able to put in some “aaaahhhhh . . . yum” and get a little more oomph. And if that isn't everyone's dream, I don't know what is! With these 9 steps you'll be working less and doing more in no time:

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\* It's the twenty-first century, men. Manicures are very hip.

**STEP 1: LIVE ON PURPOSE.** If you're anything like me, a lot of what you call work has very little to do with getting anything important done in life. Like when I compulsively check my social media sites every hour. That kind of thing must go.

**STEP 2: STOP PROCRASTINATING.** What is procrastinating except the very art of not doing the very stuff you know is most important? We'll cover how to nip this in the bud, or at least arrange for someone to kick you into action when you're delaying. And just in case you're someone who claims being kicked into action doesn't work for you, we'll get out an ostrich feather and tickle you into action instead.

**STEP 3: CONQUER TECHNOLOGY.** Our supposed savior, technology, is for many of us the greatest obstacle we have to being truly productive. You'll learn how to use your technology to help you focus, instead of . . . hey, hang on a second. There's an instant message coming in. . . .

**STEP 4: BEAT DISTRACTIONS TO CULTIVATE FOCUS.** Do you have any idea how much time is wasted multitasking? A lot. If you eliminate distractions and keep yourself focused, you can toss yourself into the kind of flow where the results come fast and easy. And you'll do it entirely without the use of pharmaceutical supplements.

**STEP 5: STAY ORGANIZED.** When you have a place for everything and everything is in its place, it's no work at all to find what you need, when you need it. I'm not just talking about physical clutter; this is also about organizing your thinking, your projects, and your processes. Reclaim all that time you otherwise spend hunting for the next step, the next paper, or the next person by knowing exactly where to go and what to do when you need it.

**STEP 6: STOP WASTING TIME.** Sometimes you appear to be doing exactly, precisely what you should be doing but are actually wasting time that could be spent doing something more meaningful, like eating bonbons and sipping fruit-flavored beverages in a hammock strung between your computer and your door frame.

**STEP 7: OPTIMIZE.** Doing things twice bores me silly. *Especially* when it comes to making mistakes. In this step you'll learn how to do things once or twice, streamline them to the point where the task is completely brainless, and . . . Let's just say that I'll leave you to connect the dots. Think, "brain-eating Zombies." The implications will jump right out.

**STEP 8: BUILD STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS.** You can't get there alone; you need someone to program the GPS while you're trying to read street signs. Relationships are, ultimately, how everything gets done. Together, we can do far, far more than we can alone. For example, one of us can measure while the other mixes, and then we can both eat the cookies when they're ready. You'll learn some excellent ways to create and deepen the relationships that matter most.

**STEP 9: LEVERAGE.** The ultimate in doing more, our final destination of leverage will give you several ways to make sure when you do get results, you get better, stronger, and faster than you'd ever dreamed possible.

With each step, you'll reclaim more and more of your life. You will begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Your shoulders will feel lighter and your body will vibrate with energy as you wander through fields of lilies. That's because with each step, you'll find yourself honing in on the things that

actually move you forward, and learning the skills you need to resist the busy-ness that pulls you away from what you're trying to achieve.

These steps aren't just theory! They have come from years of working with clients, helping them make actual changes in their lives. Each one will come with stories, examples, and specific tips that show you how the step can be applied in many different areas throughout your life. With these 9 steps you'll do so much more, and you'll work so much less, that your boss will promote you; your husband, wife, spousal equivalent, or polyamorous family unit will beam proudly; and your kids will gasp in awe and blame you for everything just a little bit less than they currently do.

## A WORK LESS, DO MORE WARNING

A word of caution, however. Getting everything done in less time is wonderful, it's very wonderful. But it comes with a hidden dark side. If you aren't careful, you'll end up working *more* than when you started. That's why you absolutely must understand how to ensure this doesn't happen.

There's a lot more to life than getting stuff done, but if you aren't careful, you'll never find out. When you start to work less and do more, you'll be more productive. That's a good thing, right? Not necessarily! They promise if we get more productive, the economy will soar, and we'll be living the Good Life in a magical land of plenty. "They" are our secret, shadowy overlords. We follow their brainwashing and sometimes, we *do* get more productive. And the economy soars. That's all for the better, isn't it? Well, er, no. Not unless you happen to be the economy. And you aren't the economy, you're you.

From the perspective of you, it doesn't work that way. Haven't



you noticed when you get more productive, your workload decreases but within a few months, you're back to your previous level of frantic? Or maybe even worse?

You start getting more done in less time, so you have more free time to enjoy the finer things in life, like eight hours' sleep. *But that free time doesn't stick around.*

Your boss swoops by, sees that you are taking time to inhale and exhale, and instantly gives you another project to work on . . . or, worse, *you* start to freak out after your third deep breath and frantically go looking for new work. Over time, every life improvement increases how many commitments you have. Your systems can handle a dozen projects at once, but *you* have limits. Our technology has sped up the world so now we don't wait for the world anymore, the world waits for us. *We* are the limiting factor. (All the more reason for the machines to revolt and do away with us.)

This book will be useful only if you get to enjoy the fruits of your own efforts. If you get better at what you do and then overload yourself, you're no better off. Pay close attention to the chapter on focus. After you've started saving time, say no when anyone asks you to take on new commitments—even if the anyone is you.

If necessary, don't tell anyone you're saving time. Continue to complain occasionally about your heavy workload and how you never seem to have as much free time as you want. Then spend your newfound free time doing things that are fun, meaningful, and life-enriching!

Along with this book, you'll find a resource Web site at GetIt DoneGuyBook.com that will include links to tools, information, books, and other resources to help you put these principles to work. Once we're all working less and doing more, we'll take all that time and effort we're saving and have one heck of a party. It

will feature fruit-flavored beverages, Oreo ice cream cake, and celery stuffed with hummus for those who prefer a low-carb diet.

I hope you enjoy taking this journey as much as I enjoyed creating it. Now go on; your free time is waiting.

## STEP 1

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# LIVE ON PURPOSE

Here's the number one principle and our first step to working less in your life: Stop doing stuff that doesn't help you reach your goals. It sounds simple, doesn't it? It's a shame almost no one does it. The most common way we work more and do less is by working on the wrong stuff. We spend our time doing, doing, doing, even if the doing has nothing to do with our goals, business, or life. Surely I'm not the only one who has spent five hours a day spewing one-line nonsense "status updates" on my favorite social media Web site, and then wondered why I'm running so hard just to stay in the same place.

Of course, it's much easier to say "work on what's important" than it is to do it. In this first step to working less and doing more we will explore how lacking clarity about our goals both at work and at home can be our doom. I will help you overcome this problem so that you never waste time working on the wrong stuff ever again—or at least not when you follow my advice. In this chapter you will learn how to identify your ultimate goals for every situation. Then I'll explain how you can develop a life map so you'll know when you're on track and when you're just fooling yourself with busywork.

You can get hijacked into nonsense-land when you don't know what you want. Before you can streamline life, you must know your goals. If you don't know where you're going, you can't make getting there effortless. When you know your destination, you can chart a course in advance. Moment-by-moment, you can make sure you're doing things that take you where you want to go. Otherwise, all your activity is nothing more than busyness.

We'll start by making sure we're doing the *right* things. It's not always obvious, though sometimes your gut tells you there's got to be a better way. My friend Michael discovered that as a parent.

## MEET MICHAEL

Michael was mortified. His teenager Skyler's room was, to put it mildly, like an antechamber from the inner circle of heck: strange growths on the walls, mysterious smells belching forth from unidentifiable piles beneath the bed. At night, shrieking cries could be heard from behind the closed bedroom door (is that what kids today call music?). Michael's solution was simple: Ask Skyler to clean up. When that didn't work, he offered video games as bribes. And when *that* didn't work, he resorted to yelling. Soon, Michael was nearing a nervous breakdown. Skyler, however, just turned up the stereo one notch and went back to whatever it is that teenagers do inside their lairs.

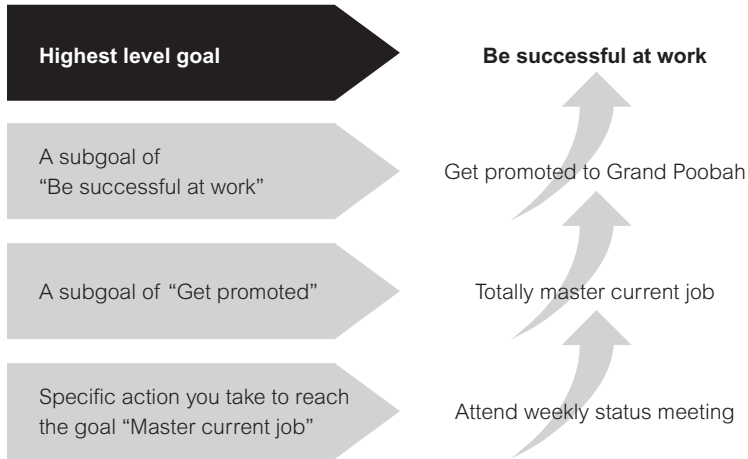
As Michael told this story, I tried to imagine his life. My time is spent dancing through life, smelling daffodils and singing songs. Michael's time is spent obsessing about his teenager's room. He plots and plans and bribes. When we have lunch, he hardly notices my unbelievably witty and insightful conversation. Instead, he moans about his son the whole time. As if

living with the youngster wasn't bad enough, he must relive every agonizing moment out loud. Michael realized something wasn't working about the situation, but he had no idea what to do. He was providing a living case study of the most important thing you'll ever learn: The key to working less is being on purpose.

Michael doesn't wake up thinking, "My life purpose is having a kid with a clean bedroom." At some point, he decided a clean bedroom was important. He thought it was the path to some *other* goal. Sadly, he's forgotten the other goal and is fixated on the whole room thing. This happens to all of us—we get distracted and lose sight of our ultimate goals. We decide we want to finish that project at work by tomorrow, so we e-mail our coworker Bernice to get her notes on the project. Her response is so engaging that six hours later, we suddenly realize we've had a fabulous bonding experience with Bernice and done no work on the report.

## YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS

The first step in living on purpose is to get really good at identifying goals. Big goals, little goals, medium-sized goals. Everything you do at any moment has a bunch of goals attached. You see, goals don't hang out alone; they travel in packs. Really big goals—like "be successful"—are made up of subgoals. Those are made up of smaller subgoals, and so on. Finally at the bottom are specific, concrete actions. But all these subgoals offer enticing diversions where we can conveniently get off course, giving us the chance to waste time and energy. If a subgoal wanders off course, so do we, and we never get what we want. If your highest-level work goal was to be successful at work, the following table will show you how your goals might break down.



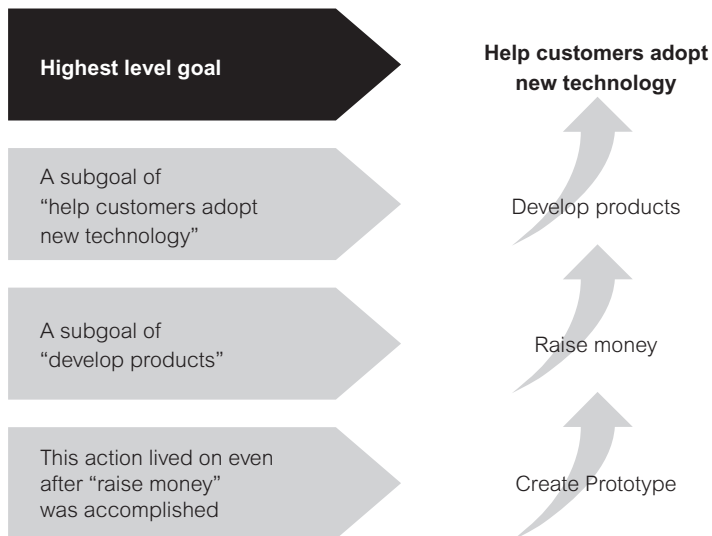
Yes, you can see that your subgoals of getting promoted and mastering your current job, and yes, even your action of attending weekly status meetings all relate to your highest-level work goal—being successful.

Michael's love of clean teenage bedrooms isn't one of his highest-level goals, it's a subgoal of some larger goal. My guess: Michael's high-level goal is to be a good parent. He believes he has to do that by teaching his son to be a responsible adult (which is a subgoal). And *his* parents brainwashed him into thinking that being a responsible adult means having a clean bedroom, which led to his action of yelling at Skyler to clean the bedroom.

Someone else with the same high-level goal of being a good parent might have different subgoals and use different actions as a result. Their subgoal might be to spend quality time with their kid and their action might be talking to their kid about school at dinner. Or perhaps they would play baseball together, or go out for manicures together, or play baseball *and* go out for manicures together. Heck, if it were me, I think teaching your kid to be a responsible adult means letting a kid keep their room however they want it, and letting *them* deal with the consequences

when the pizza grows legs. Whatever your subgoals and actions, they'd better match your big goal. Otherwise while trying to be a good parent, you risk pulling a Michael. You'll spend your quality together-time yelling at your child and making them hate you.

This mismatch between goals and actions is hardly limited to parenting. One company I worked with had an overall goal of making it easy for an entire industry to adopt a new technology. A subgoal was raising funds from the board of directors, which included some prominent financiers. Their fund-raising subgoal's action was developing a prototype product to show the board. The investors would be so dazzled that they would write a big fat check. The prototype took on a life of its own, however. Even after money was raised, it lived on as an entirely separate project. It kept sucking up time and resources without contributing one bit to the original goal of building a product customers would buy. Here's how their goals broke down:



## MAKE SURE YOUR ACTIONS MATCH YOUR GOALS

Living on purpose means stopping to make sure your actions still match your big goals. But you need to keep the big picture in mind to do this. Without knowing your higher-level goals, you don't know whether your actions are helping.

To understand why the big picture is important, let's consider the time-honored, time-wasting tradition, the status meeting. You might think its purpose is obvious: Share status. Yes, but what's the goal of sharing status? What's the higher-level goal here? Is it to coordinate when one person's work depends on another's? Is it to build team cohesion? Is it to brainstorm solutions to project emergencies? Is it to have an excuse to eat fat-free, low-cal, diet donuts and decaf coffee? Without knowing the goals above "share status," it's hard to know if the meetings are even useful. If we're sharing status to coordinate—a higher-level goal—but people are already coordinating via e-mail, then the meeting is useless. Knowing the higher-level goals helps make sure our actions are still moving us forward.

If you know your higher goals off the top of your head, great! Knowing that will clue you in about what your lower-level subgoals and actions should be. It doesn't work in reverse, though. Knowing a lower-level action or subgoal gives you no clue about the larger goals. At least not until you ask "Why?"

When you get buried in details is when you risk wasting time on actions that won't actually help you reach your subgoals, high-level goals, or both. Asking why you are doing something serves as a check and always moves your focus back to the big picture. Asking why helps you find out if your actions have come unglued from your goals. In theory, you could do this as often as every day, reviewing your to-do list to make sure it ties to your bigger



goals. In my perfect fantasy world, I check my actions against my goals every day. In real life, once a week or once every other week is more realistic.

### Use a Goal Ladder to Check Your Actions and Goals

You can build a goal ladder around your actions to check them. A goal ladder is a quick, written recognition of how your actions and subgoals link to your larger goals. It lists your actions, the goals the action is trying to reach, the goals of that goal, and so on.

Poor Michael is yelling at his kid. That tells us nothing about his goals. Maybe he's worried the room is a health hazard. Or he has extradimensional sensitivity to messy rooms within a one-hundred-yard radius. Or maybe he's seeking unconscious revenge for the years he spent as a father when he really wanted to be pursuing an Olympic gold medal in squeegee juggling. We can build Michael's goal ladder by asking "Why?" to find his subgoals and highest-level goals.

"Why are you so concerned about Skyler's room?" I ask. "Because," Michael replies, "Skyler needs to learn to be responsible. That's my job as a parent, after all."

Aha! Michael just confirmed our earlier theory that he's really trying to be a good parent. Here's his whole goal ladder around yelling at Skyler:

#### PARENTING

**Main goal** Be a good parent.

**Subgoal** Teach kids to be responsible adults.

**Action** Demand kid clean room.

Now that it's starkly on paper, Michael can make sure his actions are meeting his ultimate goal of being a good parent. He does this by starting at his topmost goal and asking "How can I reach this goal?" If his answer isn't the same as his actions, he's found a mismatch. Here's what we found when I stepped him through the questions.

"Michael, how can you be a good parent?" I ask. "By helping Skyler become a responsible adult," he replies. So far, so good. His subgoal matches, so we know there's alignment, at least in Michael's mind. Let's go one more level.

"And how can you help Skyler become a responsible adult?"

"By letting Skyler make his own decisions and accept responsibility for the consequences."

Isn't *that* interesting? Michael *didn't* say, "By demanding Skyler clean his room." He wants Skyler to make decisions and accept the consequences. That's exactly what's happening! Skyler *is* deciding to have a messy room. He's handling the consequences, a yelling father, by turning the volume on his stereo up to eleven. But because he forgot his larger goals, Michael didn't notice he was achieving them.

Letting go of his room-cleaning fetish and redesigning his goal ladder so that it reflects his actual subgoals would serve Michael well. If he ignores his true subgoals and clings to the wrong actions, it will lead to nothing but trouble. He'll spend years in conflict. Skyler will move out and become independent, and instead of reigniting his Olympic ambitions, Michael will blow his savings on therapy to deal with having such an ungrateful offspring. Skyler will keep a neat apartment once there's no parent to rebel against, and life will go on. Michael's problem is that his goal ladder wasn't aligned.

When you feel dissatisfied, or when you're working too hard,

the problem could be a mismatch between your goals and actions. Write out your goal ladder and make sure it all lines up. First start with your actions and ask “Why?” to find your subgoals. Keep asking why until you map up to your larger-level goals, at least two or three levels.

Now double-check the alignment by starting at the top. Ask “How can I reach this?” but don’t peek at your existing subgoals or actions, just answer. *Then* look at your subgoals. If your answer doesn’t match, you know your subgoals have become unhinged from your real goal. Then also look at your actions. If your actions don’t ultimately jibe with your highest-level goals, your actions aren’t working, either. Now either change your top-level goal or begin changing your subgoals and actions until they’re in alignment.

Before getting better at what you’re doing—which we’ll get to later—you must make sure what you’re doing matches all your goals and subgoals! Otherwise you’ll just get better at doing the wrong thing. Getting better at doing the *right* thing is the key to working less and doing more. So let’s discuss how to identify the goals at the top, which drive your entire goal ladder.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR TOP GOALS

You may know what your own personal top-level goal is, but at work, the top goals come from the organization. It’s usually called a vision or mission. The subgoals are strategic initiatives, and below that are projects or goals. Different companies have different names for them. All that’s important is that they point you in the direction of meeting the topmost goals. If you were working for a financial software company, your goals might break down like this:



If your actions don't match your projects, or your project doesn't fit the strategy, you can work your butt off and it won't help the company one bit. In fact, when earnings dip next, executives will scramble to "return to their core business." They will notice your project isn't adding value and lay you off, with genuine tears of dismay. At bonus time, they'll tearfully collect a bonus of 190 percent of their already-inflated base salary for having the strength to oversee such unpleasant and regretful layoffs. It will never cross their mind that it was their job to keep the organization aligned in the first place.\*

If you're in a management position you can align your organization using the same tools we just used with Michael. Ask the people who actually do the work, "Why are you doing this?" Then ask their managers, and their managers, and their managers. You will end up with a neat map of what everyone *thinks* they should be doing.

\* Yes, some companies have no mission, or they have a stated mission that is the opposite of how they act. Fixing *that* is going to take more than I can fit in a footnote, so for now, pretend your company has a mission.

Then do a sanity check. Make sure that if you ask “How?” to the biggest goals, the answer is at least vaguely related to the organization’s subgoals. In most places, you’ll find a mismatch—or several—somewhere along the way. A top goal may be “to provide excellent medical care for patients,” and one of the intermediary goals may be “cut costs by 15 percent,” which is being carried out by skimping on care quality, an action that clearly doesn’t fit in with the top goal. If you find the conflict, but can’t make it right yourself, your best bet is probably to work toward both the top and intermediary goals, knowing they can come into conflict. When you must choose between them, the choice is yours. The idealist in me says to do what’s right for the patients. My realist says to do what’s right for the patient, within the cost-cutting constraints. My cynic says to hunker down and cut costs, since the chances of anyone you know personally being killed by your inferior medical care are small enough that you can afford to ignore the moral implications of your actions and retreat into the justification that you would lose your job if you disregarded cost-cutting. And your job, presumably, is more important than someone else’s life.

Remember our employees who created a prototype that became a completely separate development effort for their board of directors? If they had stopped to identify their goal in hour ten of the prototype, they would have realized that there were better uses of their time. For example, building a real product that would help their customers adopt the new technology in their industry.

## **CREATE A LIFE MAP SO YOU CAN LIVE ON PURPOSE!**

If you’re going to have a life of working less and doing more, I’m not going to let you do it just to feed the ever-gaping maws of your corporate overlords. The “do more” is all about doing *life*.

Specifically, *your* life. If you're a corporate overlord reading this, pretend for a moment that you're actually a normal human being who wants to live your own full, satisfying life. That's what we're all about.

Next we're going to create a Life Map you can use *every day* to know what is and isn't moving you in the direction you want. It will help you not only work less and do more of your ideal life, but find that work stops being work when you're living an aligned life. It becomes play.

A Life Map is simply a general goal ladder for your life. Rather than doing a separate goal ladder for every action you take, a Life Map lays out an overview of the different levels of goals in all aspects of your life.

Your Life Map starts with whatever a full, satisfying life is *for you*. It is the destination at the very top of your personal ladder of goals.

Write down your vision for your life. What do you hope to accomplish in this lifetime? This is for *you* to answer. Not your spouse, not your parents (*especially* not your parents), not the media, not your religious organization or your secular book club. What's *your* vision for your life?

A lifetime of taking your cues from everyone else can persuade you to want what they want, instead of what *you* want. A coaching client once landed the perfect job: a fabulous offer from a consulting firm that was a perfect match for, well, what everyone with his pedigree wanted. He didn't seem very excited when he told me. I pointed this out. He grinned sheepishly and admitted he wasn't really very interested in the job.

"Then why are you considering consulting?" I asked, incredulously. "Because that's what my parents would want," he replied. "Do you often make your choices based on what your parents want, rather than what you want?" I just had to know. "Yes," he said. Well, I just *had* to deliver the kindly felt, but still gleefully

satisfying coup de grâce. “Does that work? Is it giving you the life you want?” He looked up in surprise. “No. I want to be a high school teacher.”

It was a career his parents would not have chosen for him. It was a career his peers would not have chosen for him. But it is what he wanted. He hadn’t admitted it to himself in years. When we spoke three months ago, he had just finished a semester as a teacher and loved it. Time will tell if it’s the right full-time career for him. Either way, he’s starting to leave behind everyone else’s agenda for him and connect to his own.

### **Identify Your Life Vision**

Ask yourself, “What would be a fulfilling life?” Be inspiring! Think about your role in the larger world. For example, “To raise my kids to have opportunity, happiness, and success.” Or “To end poverty.” Or “To be the kind of person people look up to.”

While writing this chapter, a Get-It-Done Guy listener wrote in saying, “I have lost track of that 50,000-foot level, and may have given up on some dreams prematurely or unnecessarily.” I know that you, gentle reader, are still deeply in touch with your dreams, so the next few sections will be pure review. Humor me. Identifying your goals and dreams is central to creating a work-less-do-more lifestyle.

Whole books have been written about how to discover or craft your life mission. This isn’t one of them. Let’s try a few quick hits. If these don’t get you going, check out one of the excellent books on [GetItDoneGuyBook.com](http://GetItDoneGuyBook.com).

We all had dreams as children. Some of them made us wet our beds and wake up screaming in terror. Those dreams, you can leave in childhood. But too many of us also left our inspiring dreams in childhood. We left them in favor of “being sensible.” Our dreams don’t go away, though. They become a nagging

presence, whispering “sell out” every time we meet someone who *is* living what we gave up. Now’s your chance to bring that dream back and use it to find a passionate overarching life direction. Start by reconnecting to your dream, as I did. This will help you know where you’re going, so you can begin making all your work lead straight to the dream.

As a child living in a traveling New Age commune, I put on magic shows at KOA campgrounds in return for free lodging. I loved performing! And my parents saw how to combine my love of performing with our need for lodging. They had brilliant legal minds, you see; child labor laws don’t apply if you don’t pay the child. Call it “chores” and they even praise it for giving kids responsibility.

Regardless, I *loved* performing! I really loved it! But then a few years later, I moved into my own apartment and discovered responsibility for real. I was a convert. I put away childish things like magic, went off to get a degree in computer science and then an MBA. By the time I got a good, upstanding job in business, I was so sensible that it *hurt*. And it really *did* hurt.

Deep down, I still wanted to perform. It wasn’t even that deep down. At business school, other kids brought slide decks to management communications class. I brought a five-foot satin cloak and used a fake French accent to give my presentation. You’d think I’d have gotten a clue. Nope. I blotted it from my memory. “I must be practical,” I told myself. “Performing is too much fun. It will distract me from the serious business of living.”

I continued this foolish logic for eighteen years, feeling more and more like I was living the wrong life. It was only after starting my podcast and realizing it gave me such joy that I began to reawaken to my media and performing aspirations.

My dream: to be able to reach and connect with millions of people. Fortunately, it was kind of easy to uncover; the satin cloak was a minor giveaway. Yours may not be so close to the surface.



If you aren't lucky enough to have a suppressed dream torturing you throughout your day, it's time to ask your intuition or, as I call it, your Little Voice. Remember, without knowing what you want out of life, you can't construct a Life Map to help you get there. And without knowing your purpose, you won't know what to work less and do more *of*.

Your Little Voice is your source of inner wisdom. It sounds hokey, and maybe it is, but even an engineer-and-business geek like me has inner wisdom. You must, too. Our Little Voice knows what we're about, and when we're making our best decisions. The velvet Elvis poster you bought, thinking it would look great in your living room? Your Little Voice knew the truth, if only you'd listened. It's hard to listen, though; it's Little. Most of the time, it's drowned out by your Big Voice. Let's listen to the Little one.

Grab a piece of paper, a pen, and a calming beverage. As you sip, quiet your mind. Breathe slowly. Imagine a white cow . . . in a snowstorm. . . . Ask your Little Voice, "What do I care about so much I want it to be the direction of my life? What is my highest purpose?" Then listen. Don't expect anything profound. If it feels as if you're trying to force your Little Voice to talk, *stop it!* Just sit still and listen. Eventually it will say something, hopefully in a language you speak. Write down what it says. *You don't have to believe it.* You don't have to approve of it. Just write it down. Then put it away and take a break.

Go do something that satisfies your Big Voice: Play a violent video game, knit an anatomically correct image of Michelangelo's *David*, or call your neighbor and exchange utterly untrue, dastardly rumors about your local city councilman. After your break, bring out your sheet. Reread it. What did your Little Voice say that was worth listening to? You're separating yourself from the Little Voice by time and by writing. You're getting its words on paper, so they're not trapped inside your head, and you're giving yourself a chance to enter a new frame of mind before you read them.

Perhaps your Little Voice said something like, “Your purpose is to build a family and home for everyone you love,” or “Your purpose is to help save the world by inventing clean fusion” or “Your purpose is to collect a matchbook cover from every dive bar between here and Poughkeepsie.” Use that as your dream for now. If it’s not quite right, you’ll feel it and change it as you build your map.

If you’re really stuck, grab a piece of paper and a pencil. Imagine you’re talking to the Deity of Your Choice, and he, she, it, or they ask, “Did you live the life I gave you to its fullest?” If you answer no, imagine he, she, it, or they asks the follow-up question: “What would have been a better life for you?” Grab your paper and write down *twenty* answers to the question. Yes, twenty. The first five will be easy. Then they’ll get harder. You’ll have to dig for the last several. But where are you digging? Through your subconscious mind, of course. Chances are that a couple of the items on your list will strike a chord.

Once you have your list, close your eyes and put your finger down at random. Open your eyes. Congratulations—whatever is under your finger is your life purpose.

Oh, you don’t like it, you say? Well, then, cross it off the list. Close your eyes and try again. Keep going until you’ve found your dream.

Sometimes you’ll choose a dream that has some higher-level goals attached, so let’s make sure you’re really finding your top life purpose. Start with your dream and ask Why. If you still don’t have a dream, use “I want to be rich, famous, and have perfect skin.” Now ask Why, then take the answer and ask Why again. Keep asking until you get to something so big it’s Your All-Encompassing Life Goal. When Michael asked Why, he found he wanted to be a great parent. One more Why and he simply said, “Because that’s who I want to be in this phase of my life.” When you get an answer like that, you know you’re there.

If you're scared to commit, remember *you can change this as often as you wish!* It's your life, after all. Change is normal. When you were eight, you thought living in a giant chocolate-chip cookie house would be the coolest thing *ever*. As you grow up, you learn that chocolate chips melt in the summer and make lousy furniture. Now you want to live in a condo in a full-service building with a doorman who will fetch you chocolate-chip cookies on demand. You are allowed to update your dreams whenever you wish.

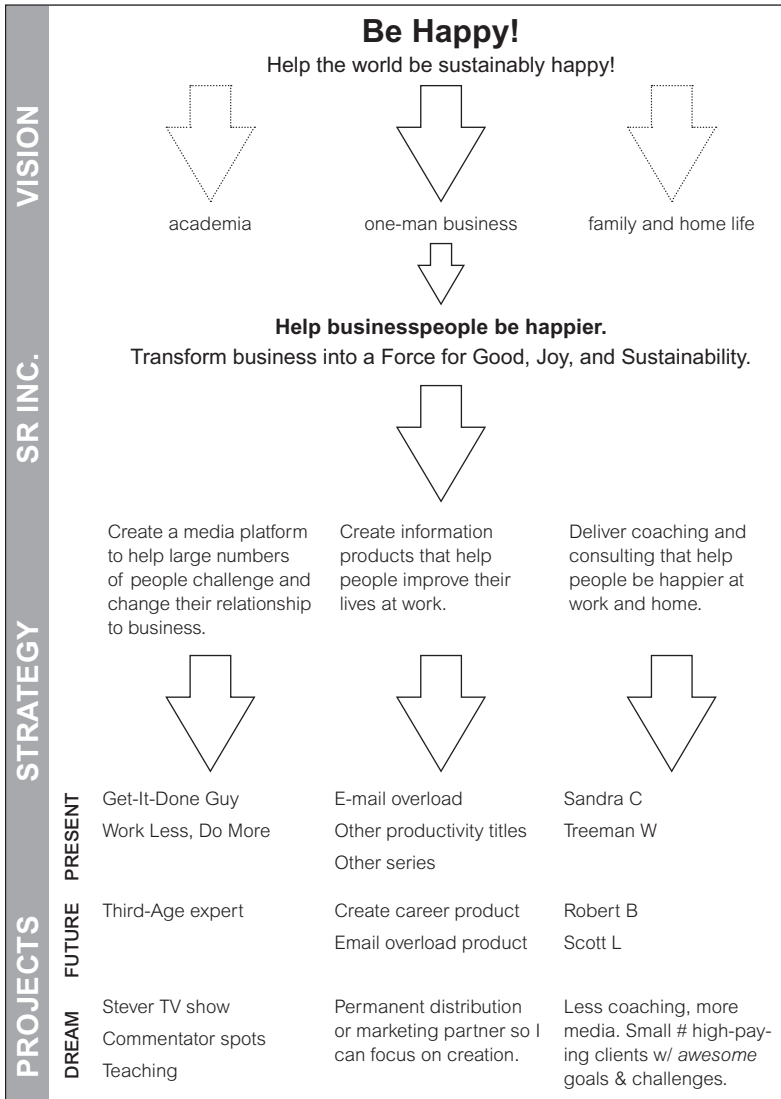
(Keep this in mind when you're planning your career. Twenty-year career plans can be dangerous. By the time you're thirty-five, following a plan created by a fifteen-year-old—however well-intentioned—may not be your wisest choice.)

Instead of calling this your Life Goal, we'll call this your Life Vision or Life Mission or Life Purpose. It means the same thing but sounds much more impressive, and will garner secret admiration and envy from listeners when you share it at cocktail parties.

Beneath your Life Purpose, write your career purpose. If you're self-employed, this is the vision/mission of your company. If you're employed by someone else, this is the vision you have for why you're in that job or profession. Since what you do at work is presumably all intended to help the company succeed, its vision becomes your vision while you work there.

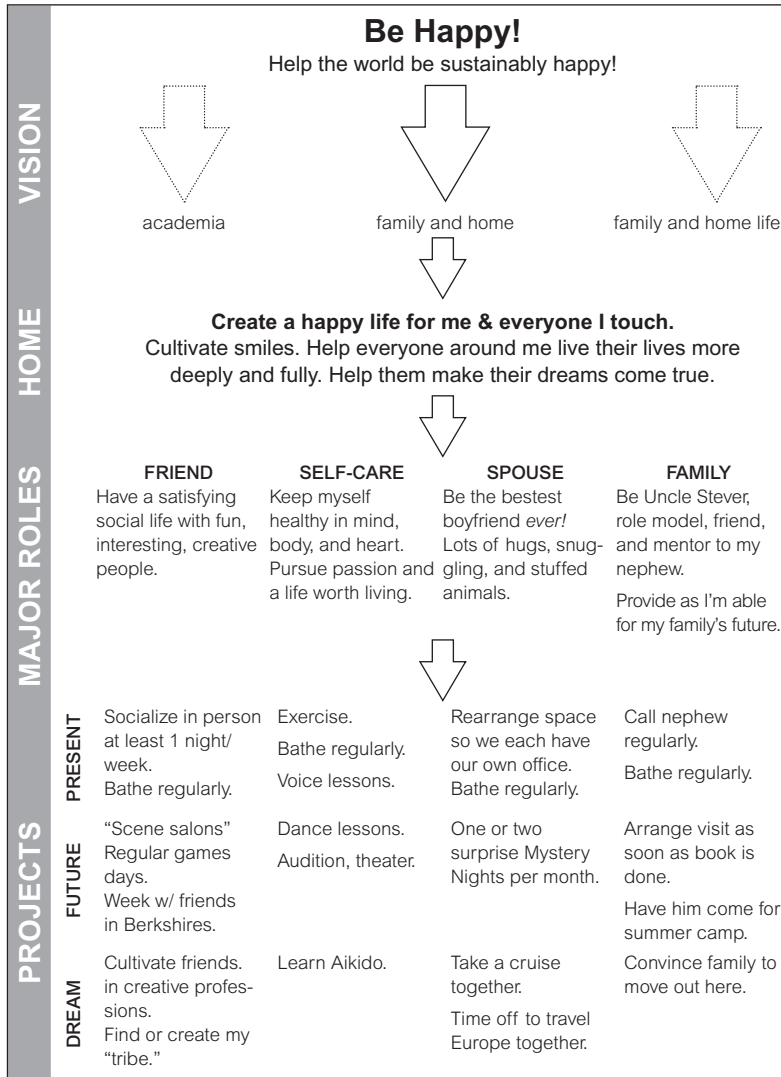
Below the company vision are the major goals you're working on to fulfill the vision. You find them by asking, "How can I achieve the vision, given my current resources and environment?" Underneath each major goal, ask, "What projects fall under this goal?" I divide my projects into current projects, future projects in the pipeline, and dreams the Tooth Fairy will grant as wishes (apparently she prefers children, whose teeth fall out naturally. She was quite unmoved by the teeth I left under my pillow. She didn't like the pliers' marks).

Here's my Work Life Map.



Even if you believe you don't have separate work and home lives, you have concerns in life other than pure work concerns. Create a second map, but don't put a business mission in the second line. Instead, put whatever guiding principle you may have about who you want to be in your home life.

Now ask, “For each major area of my life (family, work, social, religious), what could bring me closer to my vision that would be fun, motivating, and stimulating to accomplish?” These are your next tier. Under that, list all your projects and activities. Here’s my Home Life Map.



## Make Sure Your Life Maps Are Aligned

With goal ladders, we asked Why and How to move up and down the ladder and make sure it was aligned. Your Life Map is no different. Make sure it's aligned by starting at the top and asking "How will I achieve this?" If the next line below isn't your answer, then you know your life is out of alignment. Ask How until you've reached the bottom of your map. In my Home Life Map, I double-check my home vision by asking "How can I create a happy life for me and everyone I touch?" My answers include things like "have a satisfying social life." Those answers are, indeed, what I've written under my "Major roles" line. At least for now, life is in alignment.

Also review your Life Map starting at the bottom. Ask Why for each line. The answer should connect to the goal above. If not, you've found a disconnect to fix. For example, one project on my Work Map is "find a marketing partner." I ask Why and my answer is "to build a successful product business. I bring the content and want someone else to bring the marketing." That matches my business strategy "creating an information products business." Again, alignment!

## Use Your Life Maps to Stay on Purpose, Daily

Your Life Maps are your tools for working only on what brings you your greatest goals. They're your broad-stroke goal ladder you can use to keep your life in alignment every day. They help screen opportunities and serve as a daily touchstone to reorient you on what's most important. Life Maps also help surface conflicts that hold you back.

In addition to helping you figure out all your goals, your Life Map will help you decide what *not* to include in your life. When something new and shiny enters your life, your Life Map will tell

you where it fits in. Michael's purpose is to be a good parent. If he gets a once-in-a-lifetime chance to spend twelve years staffing an Antarctic research station in complete isolation, he may be conflicted in an agony of indecision. As attractive as subzero temperatures and polar bears may be, Michael's Life Map will quickly show him that it's not for him, at least not without revising his entire life.

My Life Map tells me when to say yes or no so I don't waste time working on something that won't help me reach my goals. Imagine someone offering, "We love your work! Come be the Grand Poobah of our new company making automatic banana peelers. Wouldn't that be fun?" Oh boy, fun! I love fun! My natural tendency would be to say yes! But not so fast.

Where does this fit on the map? It's work, so I pull out my Work Life Map. I start at the bottom and figure out where it belongs: project, big goal, company, or new life vision. Is it a project under a current big goal? Nope. It's not about media, products, or coaching. Is it a new big goal supporting my company vision? Not really; banana peelers don't really make business happier.

If I said yes, this would mean a whole new set of strategies and projects, so the only place this fits is right beneath my life vision, as a whole new company. Is there room in my life for another company? Absolutely not, unless I drop my current company. Sadly for the future of Banana Peelers, Inc., the answer is no. I won't be their Grand Poobah. If I hadn't realized that yes would require rearchitecting my entire life, I might have said yes and ended up with two entire jobs' worth of work! No saves the day.

### **When to Review Your Life Map**

Your Life Map gives you a quick, one-glance overview of your priorities. When you find yourself caught in some activity for a

while, glance occasionally at your Life Map and ask why you're doing what you're doing. Maybe it will connect to your Life Map somewhere. Sometimes, it doesn't. Yesterday, I spent hours reading fascinating, gripping, engaging Web sites. Then I glanced at my Life Map. My social-media-addicted brain cried in dismay as I reviewed my Life Map, noting that (big surprise) commenting on blogs is a very low-level activity. Finishing this book is more important in the grand scheme of things. I closed the soul-destroying Web browser and eagerly returned to my manuscript.

Here are some of my favorite times to review my Life Map to bring me back on track:

**When surfing the Web, reading e-mail, or doing anything online.** Commenting on a blog about celebrity acne can wait. At least, I'm pretty sure it can.

**Before running errands.** Do I really need new boxer shorts right now? Maybe I'll just do laundry, instead.

**Making outbound phone calls.** Aunt Sally will still be there tonight. Maybe I can call her then, and make progress on my life during the day today.

**Doing administrative stuff.** Filing bills makes me feel so organized! I just love filing! But administrative tasks rarely make progress on my most important goals. We'll learn how to deal with administrivia elsewhere in the book. Your Life Map will get you back on path if now isn't the best time to address envelopes.

As much as I'm sure you want to, you won't always be using your Life Map to link up addressing envelopes or filling out TPS



reports with your grand Life Purpose. The lower levels on your Life Map, your actions and projects, are a fine roadmap for day-to-day priorities. When you have five conflicting to-do's and there's only time to do three, look over your Life Map and use it to get a sense of which are more important in the grand scheme of things. Then do those. And when you think "Maybe I should reformat my presentation before giving it," reviewing your Work Life Map will let you return to your priorities, realize another reformatting isn't essential to the survival of the universe, and move on to something more important than changing the fonts in your presentation . . . for the nineteenth time.

### **When Your Life Maps Don't Line Up, It's Time for a Change**

You may find the pieces of your Life Map don't line up. Your big goals may be "Switch to lower quality, lower-cost suppliers" while your Life Purpose is "Produce a masterpiece with everything I do." Or your specific project, "Drop kids at orphanage and take a year off," doesn't match your role as "Faithful, devoted parent." That's how you know it's time to reevaluate. Mismatches make far more work in the end. Your actions will take you far from where you want to be, and later you'll have more work to get back on course. And that isn't including the legal costs involved in dealing with a messy divorce.

As for Michael, a glance at his Life Map was all it took to realize yelling was a crummy way to get Skyler to take responsibility. He was doing tons of useless work banging his head against Skyler's messy bedroom and getting nowhere. In any event, the clean room wasn't even the best way to teach responsibility. Instead, Michael started talking to Skyler about life, and offered his help when *Skyler* was thinking through decisions. One day

while talking about dating, Skyler mentioned that a messy room might make a bad impression on a romantic prospect. Michael wisely kept mum.

Now that you have *your* Life Map and know what it is your life's about, use it! Notice when you're wasting time on things that aren't related to your big goals and life purpose. That's work you're doing that's not getting you what you want in life—the very opposite of working less and doing more—of what matters. So stop. Find projects that actually fulfill your purpose. If you spend hours each week volunteering for a nonprofit that gives you no work or personal satisfaction, that's a lot of time working for few results. If your days are filled with meetings that don't help you reach your goals, they're prime targets for elimination. You're just wasting time out of habit. Start using that time for something else. Look at your Life Map, at the projects and dreams that flow from your highest-level purpose, both at work and home. Quit your nonprofit, say no to meetings, and start doing what connects to your real purpose. “That sounds great, Stever,” you say, “I'm not feeling superenergetic right now, though. Maybe tomorrow.” Er, no. Not tomorrow. Today. Now. Turn the page. In our next chapter, we will tackle that most insidious beast: procrastination.

## CHAPTER RECAP

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- The best way to work less is to make sure you only do work that helps you reach your goals.
- Your entire ladder of goals and subgoals must be aligned, otherwise you'll waste work.
- Your Life Map, or goal ladder for your life, becomes a way to pull yourself back when you get sucked into the details.

- When the goals and subgoals on your Life Map aren't aligned, you've found an opportunity to choose better subgoals or a more appropriate big goal. Align your goal ladder and your goals will reinforce one another instead of wasting your time, attention, and work with conflicting priorities.

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