

10 Practical Strategies for Accomplishing Big Goals from a (Former) non-Runner



I started running in September of 2012, training for my first race in January of 2013. Before that time, I hated running, and when we had to do the mile in school, I always failed. At the time I began, I didn't know if I could even complete a "couch-to-5K program"! Between January 2013 and December 2018, however, I've run **14 5Ks, 15 10Ks, 13 half marathons, and 1 full marathon** (with 2 more marathons on the calendar)! When I started I could barely get through a single mile in 25 minutes; now I average about a 10.5-minute pace per mile for a 5K.

Through this process, I learned several things about training for races that apply to all types of goals—vocational, spiritual, relational, personal, etc.—not just fitness goals. If you have something you want to accomplish but haven't been able to make it happen, these strategies are for you, and the bigger your goal the better! The goal has to matter to you! (See my book [Once Upon YOUR Time](#) to learn about your "Motivating Why.")

1. Set a specific goal and invest in it right away.

For my 5K goal, it was a financial investment—I signed up for the Neverland 5K at Disneyland and paid the fee. And once I paid for it there were no refunds, so if I didn't do it I wasted the money and I hate throwing money away.

For your goal, it may be financial. Most goals have some kind of financial commitment or requirement to them, but it could also be a time commitment, a relational commitment, or even a spiritual commitment. I know one person who wanted to prioritize his Bible reading, so he made a commitment, "Bible, then breakfast." The investment in not eating was a great motivator for him! Whatever investment you make, it needs to be something significant to you.

2. Tell *everyone* about your goal.

OK, it doesn't literally have to be everyone, but make it as many people as you can—and then a few more just for good measure.

Even though I'd paid the money, I knew I still had a way to back out, so I told everyone about my 5K goal. I posted it on Facebook. I told every coworker and friend at church I could have a conversation with. And as I completed each day's run, I posted it to Facebook. If I skipped a day, people would know and they'd ask about it. I created as much "positive peer pressure" as I could so I'd be encouraged or shamed, depending on what I needed, to keep making progress.

If your goal is to stop doing something, tell people who are in a position to help you enforce that. If you eat from the candy dish on people's desks in the office and your goal is to cut back on that, tell the people who have the candy your goal and ask them to call you on it if you come to get some.

The flip side of that is that the more progress you make and the more consistent you are, these same people who are watching you become inspired by you.

3. Celebrate the victory.

In my case, the first one was "I completed a 5K." Since then, just with running it's included every race, and several milestones along the way, like the first 20-mile training run I did and my first sub-10 minute mile. Don't let the victory go by without intentionally recognizing and rewarding yourself for it!

If it's a short-term goal, celebrate when you accomplish it. If it's long-term, define some intermediate steps and celebrate each one of those. A key to making progress in life is to "set yourself up for success," and one of the ways to do that is to recognize when you've had a success—big or small.

4. Keep a "Success Journal."

For me, every day I ran it went in the journal. So have other things, like completing each section of the books I've written, and having a difficult but important conversation with a family member.

Every day, write down 3-5 success that you've had during the course of the day (if you're doing it at night) or that you had the day before (if you're doing it in the morning). And they don't have to be "I went an entire week without eating Girl Scout cookies." It could be "Ordinarily I would have eaten an entire box of Thin Mints, but today I only ate half of one." If you're trying to get up earlier and

you usually hit the snooze alarm three times but today you only hit it twice, that counts. For anything you're trying to accomplish, if you took a step that direction, count the step!

5. Use structure to your advantage.

I had no idea how to go from “I hate running and don't know how to start” to actually completing a 5K, so I downloaded a couch-to-5K app for my phone and that training plan gave me the structure I needed. Even now, I have a written training plan for every race (or race weekend) to make sure I stay on target and get in the condition I need to be at the time.

Regardless of how long-term your goal is, break it down, then break that down more. Take 5-year goals down to 3 years, then those down to 1-year goals, then those down into 90-day pieces, and even smaller. Take a 3-mile run and break that down into running intervals that start at 20 seconds of running and 3 minutes of walking, and make the running intervals longer and longer until you get there.

The point is to get it so “bite sized” that you can look at your plan and know exactly what you have to do next, and what's next after that—and that they're all manageable. It's almost impossible to schedule goals, but you *can* schedule tasks and projects, so do that in service of your goal.

6. Use whatever tools you need, but be willing to drop them.

I started with a couch-to-5K app, but when I reached that distance goal and wanted to stretch, I switched to a new app.

There are a lot of great tools available, and you should use whatever works for you at a particular step in your journey. But the tool is not the Holy Grail. When a tool starts effective but becomes ineffective, find a new tool.

7. Set a new goal before you've completed the current one.

This is especially important when there is an ongoing benefit to the primary goal. In my case, I knew running was helping me physically and emotionally, so I needed to keep doing it. If I didn't have a race coming up, though, I wouldn't because it still wasn't all that fun. And if I waited until one race was done to get another one on the calendar, it just wasn't going to happen. So before I even ran the Neverland 5K, I signed up for the Dumbo Double Dare (a 10K and half marathon the same weekend) coming several months later. That would keep me running after my first goal was done.

As you get close to accomplishing your goal, set the next one. Otherwise it's too easy to coast as you get towards the end of one, then it slips a bit, and then it falls away entirely. Having that next one can keep you pushing through.

8. Allow yourself some grace, but don't get complacent.

I had a 9-week program that I gave myself 13 weeks to accomplish. Since I had no idea how well I'd do, I gave myself a cushion in case I needed to repeat a week of training here and there. As it turned out, I didn't need the cushion so I changed my goal from “Complete a 5K and don't die” to “Complete a 5K in under 45 minutes.”

You may not need to build in a cushion, but accept that you may need it. If you don't need the cushion, stretch your goal. Either way, you're human, so give yourself some grace.

9. Get a partner in the process.

I told my brother-in-law, Stuart, about my race goal because he was a runner in high school, and I knew he would hold me accountable. He actually did one better and trained with me. It's really hard to skip a workout when you know someone is planning to do it with you.

This could be an accountability partner or someone who will work on a similar goal in parallel to you, and you can motivate each other and hold each other accountable.

10. Get a coach.

Stuart ran track and cross-country in high school and has kept up with running since then. He agreed not only to run with me (to give some accountability and someone to run with at least once every couple of weeks like I said before), but he agreed to coach me, too.

I was running with my body far too closed off and wasting a lot of energy. I didn't know that, and I couldn't see myself. I needed someone besides myself who could see me, what I was doing wrong, and what I was doing well. He could encourage me and challenge me. He could help me reinforce my strengths and adjust for or eliminate my weaknesses. He could help me make sure I didn't injure myself and completely sabotage my goal. I've come a long way with his help.

If you've got something big you want to accomplish, a major challenge to overcome, or a significant change you need to make, [you need a coach, like me](#). Someone like Stuart has been for me. Someone who can help you see where you are, what tools and talents you have, and help you get from here to there.

These are 10 strategies to accomplishing big goals. How do you decide which ones you need—or if you even need something not listed here? Ask yourself this question:

What is every realistic way I could fail to accomplish this goal?

Then create a safeguard to prevent that from happening. (That's another place [a coach, like me, can be very helpful](#).)

Mine was such a big goal for me that I had to do all 10, and for the most part I had to do them all at once. Sometimes it's not one or two strategies—it may be 5 or 6 or all 10. If it's important enough to you, and you're intentional and strategic in your approach, you *will* accomplish your goal! And even if you don't quite make it all the way there, you've come a long way from where you were, and that itself is a win!

Keep moving forward,

Randy Crane

Leaving Conformity Coaching

(Follow my training runs and more on Instagram. [@Belqarion42](#))