



HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL

10 STEPS YOU CAN FOLLOW
THAT TOOK ME TO PORTUGAL

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By Mystique Macomber

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For everyone who believed in me. Thank you for your love and encouragement.

10 Steps to Achieve Your Goal

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Why I wrote this guide

I'm not usually impulsive, but I was about Portugal. Basically, I blurted it out without knowing what I was doing or saying.

“I want to move to Portugal.”

Once spoken, it became my reality, my touchstone. I *needed* to do it, to make it come true.

During the next year, I made it happen. My impulse became reality as I moved to Portugal's capital city, Lisbon.

Reflecting on it, I realized it was a formula that others could follow to achieve their own goals. There's nothing magical about it – no luck involved. Just determination and a willingness to put in the work to make it happen.

Achieving a goal will take work and a commitment on your part. But anything worth having is worth working for, right?

Why you should use this guide

I don't have all the answers. As much as I'd like to say I do, reality says I do not.

But I know this worked for me. It is a formula that others can use.

It's a combination of visualization, writing, research and work. That's why it works so well for me – I'm a word person. By writing it down, it helps me visualize it, solidify it and make it real.

If you also are a “word” person, you may find this guide helpful. (Even if you're not a “word” person, you may find it useful.)

I talk about words a lot in this guidebook. Words have weight. They carry meaning. Use them to your advantage.

There are lots of other steps here, too, which I found helpful to achieve my goal. But if you do nothing more than write down your goal and work toward it, you'll be further ahead than people who don't have a plan.

How to see the big picture and the details (and why both are important)

I am enamored with impressionist painters – Monet in particular. He beautifully captures light and mood in his paintings, regardless of the subject: water lilies, fields, seaside scenes. You can look at one of his paintings and see the whole of it and the feeling he is trying to share.

But if you step in closer and look – really look – the image dissolves into brushstrokes. Carefully placed daubs of color create the whole image.

Since I've been living in Portugal, I also have been taking photos of the stone sidewalks. Nearly every sidewalk in Portugal is created with cube-shaped stones, usually white limestone. Black stones intersperse some walkways to create designs, from simple to elaborate. Business owners sometimes use them to place their name or street number in front of their doors.

Most are patterns: flowers; geometric shapes such as squares, diamonds, stars; or wavy lines. I've seen ships (Portugal's symbol) in several places. The oceanarium has many sea-related creations.

Usually, it's possible to see the whole design right away. I've been stumped, too. Sometimes, I am not sure what it is.

At those times, I find it helpful to take a picture. Seeing it on a screen helps turn the shape into something I can identify.

The jumble of white and black bricks comes into focus. The small parts stop being individual pieces and instead form the whole.

I use these to illustrate how it is with planning a goal. There are many small parts needed to achieve the goal – the big picture. Sometimes, we can zoom in and see the small parts – the little details that we need to put into place to create the whole.

Sometimes, it can be hard to even figure out what the big picture is. We seem to be able to see only the details – all the little things we have to do.

Throughout the process, it's important to keep both perspectives. You will need to focus on the small parts – often one at a time – like paint brushstrokes or individual bricks. But you need to remember what the big picture is, as well. Why are you doing this? What will you create when you achieve your goal?

Your plan can help you keep the big picture in focus and not get lost in the details. It also is a guide to creating that big picture. It will help you know the details you need to reach your goal. Your goal plan will guide your hand as you paint brushstrokes or place bricks in the right place to create the finished picture.

How I achieved my goal using this guide

Planning for Portugal happened at a time in my life when I was turning everything upside down.

When I realized how desperately unhappy I had been for so long, I wanted to change everything – how I lived, where I lived, with whom I lived. So, I did, piece by piece.



This sidewalk design stumped me until I took a picture. Then I could see it's looking down at someone who is crocheting.

Some things happened quickly, like moving out of my house into temporary quarters. Others, like actually moving to Portugal, took longer.

Having analyzed a lot of my life since that time, I know why I chose Portugal, but at that moment, I did a double-take myself. “What ...?” And then the immediate questions of “why” and “how” followed. I didn’t have answers to those questions right then, but I knew, instinctively, that it was the right thing and the right time.

What I told everyone – and it was true – is that I chose Portugal because I’d always wanted to live in other places. I knew I needed to choose someplace I’d been to and wanted to visit again. Portugal had a lot going for it – low cost of living compared to other countries in Europe and the US, low crime, friendly people, welcoming culture and beautiful country.

What I learned later is that the destination didn’t matter as much, nor did the time frame. Putting the plan into place and taking action was most important. I needed to take the first steps to make a new reality for myself.

But having a goal – a very specific goal – was key to my success. Because by the time I came up with this plan, it quickly turned into this mantra:

I plan to move to Portugal. I’ve always wanted to live other places. When I travel, I always think if it’s a place I’d like to live, and Portugal was a definite yes. It’s a beautiful country, and the people are so welcoming.

I plan to get a remote editing job I can do from anywhere. I’ll move to Tennessee and live with my sister while I look for a job and save up money. I’d like to be there by December (2018), but no later than next spring (2019).

That’s what I started telling people in March 2018. And I told a lot of people. Pretty much everyone who knew me got some version of it. Even people who barely knew me learned of my plan. When they would ask what I was up to or how things were going, I’d tell them about Portugal.

Of course, questions would come up about my family, my job, my life in Wisconsin. How well I knew a person determined how much I shared. Sometimes just saying I was divorcing and moving temporarily to Tennessee was enough.

Usually, people were surprised and pleased for me. Sometimes, they were incredulous that I’d even consider such a thing. I think this is because they couldn’t conceive of doing it themselves.

Often, people were encouraging. If circumstances were different, they very well could be making similar statements. But most people aren’t willing to turn their lives upside down.

No, it’s easier to say, “Oh, that sounds wonderful. I’d love to do that, but I never could.”



View of Lisbon at sunset.

You can, but you have to be willing to do what it takes to get there.

In my mind, the way to get there – to Portugal – was to take the following steps: divorce, sell or give away nearly everything I owned, sell my house, pay off all our debts, quit my job, move in with my sister, look for a remote editing job that would allow me to work from anywhere in the world, apply for a visa, save up money and move.

It's doable, but most people aren't willing to do that. They don't want to sell their houses. They don't think they can quit their jobs. They want to stay married or stay close to family.

Everything is a choice – even not choosing is a choice.

Ultimately, I could have gone about things differently with a similar outcome, but I didn't know that at the time. That was what I could see in my mind, so that's what I did, and it worked, with a few tweaks.

In the course of this book, I'll show you exactly what I did and explain what I'd do differently.

You can use the checklist and tips to achieve any goal – large or small. You just need to be passionate about it and willing to put in the time and effort toward it.

Chapter 2: Goal

Why it's important to have a goal

Without goals, we'd never do anything, would we? There would be no self-improvement on any level for us if we didn't set goals for ourselves.

Goals can help us become better at things or become better people. A goal can help you learn a new language, get a degree, buy a house, save money, get fit, make new friends.

Not every goal will require a step-by-step guide such as this one. But, if you have a big goal or if you have struggled with achieving a goal, then this guidebook can help.

Choosing a goal is the first step of your strategy. It gets its own chapter in this guidebook, because it is most important. By the time you get to the Goal Checklist, you should have chosen your goal.

How to achieve your goal

You can use this guide to achieve your goal – whatever it may be. Maybe it's something easy or small. Maybe it's big or scary.

If you follow the formula and go through the steps, you can achieve your goal.

Sounds easy? Well, it is, and it isn't. It will be work. You have to figure out exactly how to do it and take the steps necessary. This guidebook will help you organize your thoughts and plans to reach your goal.

Mostly, I wanted to be able to share with you that it works – it can be done. I'm proof.

I'm writing these words right now from Portugal. In less than a year, I went from being unhappy in my life circumstances to living my dream. I am experiencing life in a foreign country. I'm not just visiting or vacationing, I live here.

Of course, I was willing to make the necessary changes to reach this goal. You may decide you aren't willing to take the steps you need. That's OK if that's what you decide. Every person is different, and no two lives are the same. You need to be true to yourself and your dreams and goals.

If you are willing to make the necessary changes, you can achieve your goal.



On the balcony at my apartment in Alvalade, a neighborhood in Lisbon, Portugal.

You will change as you go through this process, too. That's normal. Sometimes we believe we are who we are meant to be and there's no changing. That's not true. During our lives, we always are changing and evolving. Hopefully, we are changing for the better.

Every day is a chance to start again, to change for the better. Start today – and you can do that every day.

As you change every day, so do those around you. In my experience, we want people to stay the same, but that's not realistic, is it? If we are changing and growing, so are the people around us. We need to be mindful of those changes and accept who they are becoming, as we hope they accept us and our changes.

If you struggle with change in yourself or others, ask for help from friends, family and professionals.

That's another thing I've learned. We are not alone, and there's no reason to go it alone. You are not the only person who feels the way you do. The circumstances that brought you here are uniquely yours, but many people have similar feelings, emotions and struggles. That's part of the human condition.

Be kind to yourself, first. Then, be kind to others.

In the course of my personal changes, I know I hurt other people. That still bothers me, but I try to forgive myself. It wasn't good for any of us to stay on the path we were on. We all deserve to feel good and pursue happiness.

How to choose a goal

I hope you already know what you want. That will make this easier.

But if you don't, it's OK. I didn't think I had a goal until I said it one day. Perhaps my subconscious mind had been working on it for a while – at least that's my best guess. Someone asked me the right question at the right time, and the result set me on my path to my goal.

There are other ways to choose a goal if you don't already have one in mind. Here are some suggestions. Try one – or all. Do what works for you.

Ways to choose a goal

Name your dream

Without putting too much thought into it – off the top of your head – *what do you want?* Where do you see yourself? What are you doing? Who's with you?

Maybe it's right where you are now. If so, good for you! But if there are things you would change, perhaps that should be your goal.

Answer the question

What do you tell people when they ask where you want to be in five years or 10 years? That answer can be a goal.

Brainstorm ideas

Get paper and pen or open a document on your phone or laptop. Set a timer for 15 minutes. Write down ideas for things you'd like to learn or do. Don't consider the merits or even how hard they would be to achieve. The goal is to write them down.

Maybe you'll have a lot or maybe a few. This is unique to you.

When the time is up, then you can go through your list and rank them or choose the one(s) you'd like to work on. Something will stand out to you as more compelling than the others.

Start simple

This goal doesn't have to be big or life-changing – at least not like my goal to move half-way around the world. Maybe you want to read more. That's a goal – read a book a week for six months.

Maybe you want to learn how to be a better cook, to paint or play a musical instrument. Those are goals you can achieve.

How about eating better, fitting into a favorite pair of jeans or honing muscles to take part in a charity race? Great goals, all of them.

Perhaps you want to find a better place to live, get a better job or go back to school. Achievable.

Take better care of your family, your planet or the neighborhood park. Help people get well, pets find homes or plants grow.

Be a better friend, unplug from social media, build a sandbox, make wine, go sky diving.

Truly, anything you want is achievable.

Choose a goal that's personal for you

You will note all of these goals are your goals. You can't set goals for someone else nor expect to achieve them. People are responsible for themselves. You can't make someone love you (or even like you). But you can work on being a better friend and a person with whom people want to spend time.

This needs to be *your* goal and dream. If it overlaps with someone else in your life – say a couple who want to help children by being foster parents – then it's a joint goal. Work on it together.

How I chose my goal

I was impulsive about my goal to move to Portugal. In hindsight and through lots of introspection, I realize it had been percolating for years. I had never addressed it or acknowledged it. Rather, it came out nearly fully formed, surprising me and everyone around me.

You may not want to be as impulsive as I was when choosing a goal.

But if it works for you, great. It worked for me.

I wasn't impulsive about achieving my goal, though. That involved the planning you see in this guide and more. I spent months – literally – learning everything I could about life in Portugal. I studied the language and figured out what I needed to know.

And I spent even more time figuring out a lot of things about myself. I had changed from a high school student who dreamed of visiting Paris to a middle-aged woman with a weird dream to downsize her life and move to Portugal. I needed to understand how and why that change happened.

Even though I live here, I learn things every day about this place. I notice things, figure things out and have “aha” moments. I often have realizations about myself, too. Those sometimes hit like a wave – “Whoa, I did not see that coming.”

I find it helpful to write about the things I learn about Portugal from living here and about myself. I don't usually publish those realizations, but I find it helpful to capture my thoughts. Sometimes I share them with people close to me, to get their feedback. I've realized that sometimes the people around me have a better grasp of why I do things than I do myself.

So again, what is your goal?

How to use this guide

You can read this guidebook from cover to cover or skip around. Use it as you need to achieve your goals.

Use the checklist in Chapter 3 alone or in conjunction with the other information in the book. The checklist is self-explanatory, so you don't need to refer to the book for details.

When I read something, I recall it at the moment. After a few days or weeks, I start to forget the details.

I don't expect you'll remember what was in this guide except that it contained a checklist you can use to achieve your goals. So, after you've read it, you can come back to that checklist over and over as you work toward achieving your goals.

Life isn't a one and done. Just because I made it to Portugal doesn't mean I'll never have another goal. Oh no, it's the beginning – one in a long line of goals to achieve. If I use the formula, it will be easier to achieve future goals.

I hope you'll use the checklist in the same way. Perhaps after you've done it a time or two, this will become second nature to you, and you won't need to refer to it. You'll have your own personalized version to achieve your goals! (If I had a goal for you, that would be it!)

The checklist that begins Chapter 3 breaks into sections in the pages that follow. You can jump around to find what you seek. Links within the checklist will take you to the section.

The checklist also is available as a downloadable from Google docs [here](#). Save it to your computer and call it up any time you need it for reference. You can customize it with your details. Add sections with your particular goals and notes. Link it to your calendar to track your progress.

(Step 5 in Chapter 3 includes links to sample outlines you can download.)

Chapter 3: The Goal Checklist

1. Focus your goal.
2. Write down your goal.
3. Visualize your goal.
4. Tell people about your goal.
5. Make an outline for your goal.
6. Do the work.
7. Ask others for ideas and help.
8. Keep your documents organized.
9. Set aside time every day for your goal.
10. Celebrate your achievements.

1. Focus your goal

Making a goal is most important, which is why it got its own chapter. (See Chapter 2.) Now, you need to focus that goal.

Characteristics of a good goal

As you begin this checklist, you should have a goal in mind. Here are some suggestions to know if you've chosen a good goal for yourself.

You can measure a goal

If you can't measure it in some way, how will you know if or when you've achieved it?

Another way to say it might be that a goal should include an outcome.

I want to be a better singer is a goal, but how do you measure it? Going from singing the shower to singing in a choir might be a way to measure it. Being chosen for a solo part in a choral concert is another way to measure the outcome.

Timing should be part of the goal. When do you want to achieve it? Choose a date, season, month, year – whatever makes sense for your goal. Maybe you want to do something consistently for a period of time. That should be part of your goal, too. That will help make it measurable.

A goal should be something you want

Don't pick a goal you aren't passionate about, or it won't happen. Maybe your doctor has said you need to lose weight, but you don't feel like it's a priority. That goal will be hard to achieve. It's much easier to achieve a goal you want. If it's a big goal that will take months or years to reach, you can achieve it if you want it.

After you've had some success achieving goals, you can try to tackle one you aren't sure is doable. If you follow the steps and put in the work, you'll be surprised at how it turns out.

But to start, choose something you really want, simply because it will be easier – and you want a success, right?

A goal should be specific to you

If your goal somehow involves someone else, you need to both be on the same page. Start with something that you can achieve on your own for yourself.

What I would do differently:

Nothing, at least not in my initial goal setting. I needed that goal to get myself moving. With the knowledge I gained from my experience, I would be able to create a goal that required less tweaking. However, I achieved my goal, and I'm proud of that.

For instance, having a baby is often undertaken by two parents. That doesn't mean you can't do it alone. Don't expect someone else to be part of your goal unless you've both discussed it and agreed on the outcome.

This checklist will work for big life goals, such as buying a home, switching careers and planning a family. If you want to use it for one of those goals, everyone affected should be part of the plan and process.

That's it.

I'm not going to tell you to start small. I didn't. I jumped in, both feet, sopping wet. You can, too.

You can start small if that's what you want. But chances are, if you're reading this, you want more than to achieve a small, simple goal.

Go big.

2. Write down your goal

Why it's important to write your goal

There is power in writing things down. It makes it more real.

Don't just type it, either. Take a pen and paper and write down your goal. You don't need to write down all the steps by hand – that might get tedious. But take a minute to write down your main goal – what you hope to achieve and when.

To stay organized and make it easier, type most of your plans, but write your goal by hand.

Keep a journal

I also propose you write or journal about your goal. And I suggest you do that by hand, pen to paper.

During the years, I've been an on-again, off-again diarist or journal keeper. Sometimes, I get into the groove, and I find great comfort and joy in writing consistently. I find it helps to write at the same time each day – either first thing in the morning or last thing at night. The journal on the table by my bed is a visual reminder. It's easy to open it and write a little.

I don't have expectations that I will fill a page or two. Maybe I write a sentence. Maybe I fill three pages. It doesn't have to make sense or look pretty. Rather, I try to write something every day.

I used a journal during my preparation for Portugal to record my thoughts and feelings about it.

There is great power in words, especially words we write. We internalize them. We remember them better. (Writing your lines is a trick to use when you're memorizing a part for a play.)

I've tried to journal on my phone. When I moved to Portugal, I came with very little, so I didn't bring a journal with me. Instead, I thought I would take notes on my phone. I did that about three times before it slipped my mind for a week or more.

However, I write every day but not in a journaling sense. I blog, or I work on one of my books. Sometimes, I simply write to get things out of my head. Less than half of what I write is fit for print for my blog readers. The rest is me looking at my life as I try to figure out why I am the way I am and what I can (or should) do about it (if anything).

I think often about my goals, though, and I write about them, as well: How I can achieve them. How it will feel to reach them. What else I want to do. Where else I want to be.

What I would do differently:

I would keep a physical journal. When I got to Portugal, I would have gone and bought one since I didn't want to carry it with me. Even if I didn't take it with me, I miss not having kept a journal of my time there.

Benefits of journaling

Review where you were and how you felt about it

Keeping a journal is a way to go back and see how you've been feeling, too. You can see how your feelings change over time – up and down days. There will be times you're discouraged. There also will be times you are energized and feel like you can do anything. Reading those affirmations and uncertainties can help you temper your fears. You can see how you rose from a low point. You can see that it's not always easy.

Write it and forget it

Even if you don't read what you've written, it's helpful to write it down. Write it and forget it. That's something I do sometimes. Writing lets me get things out of my head, and then I can forget them. If something is troubling you, write it down, but don't go back to it later. You could go as far as to burn the paper or throw it away, but for me, if I write it down and don't read it again, it's done.

Find a way to write about your goals, as well. It can be structured or unstructured, but I encourage you to journal in some form during this process.

Label your goal

As you work toward your goal, you're going to need a name for it. A good label is important.

Why you need to choose a label for your goal

Words have meaning. They carry weight. They trigger memories and emotions.

That's why it's important to label or name your goal appropriately. It should be something positive, something that fills you with hope when you read it or see it.

“I will fit into skinny jeans by my birthday” is a better goal label than “lose weight.”

The first is a visible, tangible goal. You know how it feels to fit into skinny jeans – or at least how you think you know how you'll feel. Whereas “lose weight” carries a lot of emotional baggage. “Lose” as a word has a negative connotation – we lose games, money, partners, jobs. “Weight” is a heavy word, indicating something dense, big or overwhelming.

Put those two words together, and you're not likely to want to work on that goal. Where do you even begin?

But change the words, and you've got something you can look forward to doing. It's exciting to think about getting into skinny jeans. You know people will notice and compliment you. You'll feel better about yourself because you'll be slimmer. You'll have more energy. And you'll be eating better and exercising more. All these things together will help you feel better.

And it all starts with the words you choose.

How to choose a label

Choose a label that describes your goal.

Choose words that have positive meaning for you.

You can be clever if you like or straight forward. This is your goal.

You might wish to choose a label you can shorten. For example, my first goal, “Quest for Portugal,” was short enough to use on folders and documents. My goal label for this book likely will change to “Achieve Goals Guidebook,” or something like that.

What not to include in your label

Your label doesn’t have to include every aspect of your goal. In both of my personal examples, I don’t have the timeframe included. That was part of my planning instead, but your label could include the time element if it makes sense to you. This is your goal. Do what feels right for you.

Avoid words with negative connotations. If you’re not sure, write the word, then close your eyes and think about that word. What is the first thing that comes to mind? Is it positive or negative? If you’re still not sure if you should use, try a different word instead. You can change it.

I know I’ve talked a lot about something simple like a label, but words are important. I don’t want to say this will make or break your goal, but it can make it more achievable. How you think about something can alter your experience. If you go into something expecting it to be a drag, chances are, that’s how it will be.

Think about a day at the beach. If you focus on a fun day in the sun, with family and friends, lots of laughs, warm water, cold drinks and good food, it will be like that. Instead, if you think about sand in your hair, dirty feet, wet towels, cranky kids, sunburns and exhaustion, you won’t want to go.

Words have weight. Choose them carefully.

How I chose my goal label: Quest for Portugal

My label for Portugal came from a similar thought process, although it was not my own.

When I decided to change my life, my husband was bewildered. Like me, he assumed we were “happy.” He thought our life together would continue, maybe in a warmer climate now that our kids were older and leaving home.

But I realized that I wasn’t “happy” and hadn’t been for a long, long time. Instead, I believed that my “normal” day-to-day existence was the way life was, and I should be content with it. For years, that was my experience. Until I started to notice things and think about them. I had conversations with friends who observed things about me. I had thoughts and “aha” moments that made me question everything I believed about where I was and what I was doing.

My dreams came flooding back -- of wanting to travel and live in other places. Of wanting to see more of the world, to experience new foods, new places, new people. I wasn't living the life I thought I wanted. I had been making do with getting by for so long – it was my “normal” life.

When my husband asked me, I told him I wanted a divorce. I told him I wanted to move to Portugal. That was the first time I said it – and I hadn't planned it. It just came out.

We didn't talk a lot about it. My mind was made up. I couldn't see another way. He was resigned to trying to “make me happy,” so he agreed, reluctantly. I know he held out hope I'd change my mind, even up until we left the courthouse the day of the divorce.

But he didn't want to call it “divorce,” a word with so much negativity attached to it.

He suggested we call it my “quest” instead.

I agreed. Words carry weight.

My goal became my quest for Portugal. It encompassed everything about what I wanted to do – not just divorce -- but all the steps toward my goal. It was the perfect title for my goal.

Your label can change

As you choose your label, realize it doesn't have to be perfect. You can tweak it, too, change it, make it better, focus it. This is a work in progress – all of it.

Don't think you can't move ahead without the perfect label or title. Call it something that has meaning to you.

For example, the label for this book goal is “First Draft of First Book: I am moving to Portugal or How you can achieve your goals.” It's not pretty, but it gets to the point. I want to finish the first draft of my first book. It's a guidebook about how my Portugal experience helped me achieve goals and how I can share that with others. It's the working title of this book.

The fact it's my first book is exciting, so I wanted to include it.

I never thought I would write a book. I had no desire. From my teen years, people would ask me if I was writing a book, had written one or had plans for one. My answer was always no.

What I would do differently:

If I could go back in time, I would tell my high school self that I may want to write a book someday. Because I had no interest then doesn't mean it never would happen. Somehow, though, I got it firmly embedded in my head that I didn't have it in me to write a book. Now, I wonder how many books I may have missed because of that false notion that became my reality. Remember, we always are changing and growing. Allow yourself to change your mind, too, at every age and stage of life.

I wrote a couple of children's books. But a 36-page book with a sentence or two per page is quite different from a 60-plus-page step-by-step guidebook.

In the course of learning a lot about blogs, writing, websites and helping people, I changed my mind about writing a book.

I saw that I could write a book – an electronic, or e-book, at least – with information to help others.

I've been tinkering with an e-book about how to be a better writer, which is the theme of my [website](#). No one wants to learn to be a copy editor, but everyone can enjoy being a better writer. At the end of each of my blogs, I provide tips on how to be a better writer. I was working on compiling them with additional information in book form.

I would write a little, put it aside, try a different tactic, put it aside. Mostly, my heart wasn't in it at the time. I also didn't have a firm timeline to get it done. I had not taken my own advice and made it a goal to achieve. So, the book is in lots of pieces in a folder on my laptop. It does not have an outline. (Author's note: It now has an outline and is in progress!)

It will offer valuable information when I write it. But I was drawn to this e-book instead, the one you're reading now. Call it a compulsion, but I realized I wanted – no *needed* – to finish it before I left Portugal. With a firm date in mind, I set this goal in motion.

My first e-book – it's exciting because I never thought I'd write one. See how we can change, even who we think we are or what we can do? Life is full of change – we are full of change. Accept those changes, grow with them and make yourself better because of them. That's the real beauty of living.

3. Visualize your goal

Why it's important to visualize your goal

If you can't see it, it won't happen. If you can't see yourself achieving your goal, that will be reality – you won't achieve it.

Maybe you think it's far-fetched or a long shot. That's OK if you actually can see it happening. Some people probably thought Portugal was a long shot for me – a lot of talk, but it would never happen. But it was my dream, and I could *see* it happening.

You've likely already been doing this step of visualizing as you've been planning your goal. It's common to think about what it will be like when you achieve your goal.



How to visualize your goal

But take some time and visualize your goal for this step. Close your eyes and think about it. See it in your mind.

Maybe it's like a photo or a movie. Where are you in it? Are you looking at it or are you immersed in it? Are you holding the camera or smiling at it?

Everything about this photo says "Lisbon, Portugal" to me -- the colors, the sky, the buildings, the plants, the perspective.

Use the following questions to help you think about achieving your goal. Then, write down your answers.

Questions to help visualize your goal

1. Where are you?
2. What does it look like? (Smell like? Sound like? Describe it to the best of your abilities. You might even want to write down what you're wearing or doing, if that's important to your goal. Be detailed.)
3. Who is with you?
4. How do you know you've achieved your goal?
5. How does it *feel* to achieve your goal?
6. How do you feel?
7. What words best describe this experience?
8. With whom do you want to share this?

You may have other things you notice about achieving your goal. Write down what you think about it.

Then, write down what you feel about it.

Feelings are often strong indicators of how we'll do at something. If we are full of hope and excitement, that's very different than if we are full of dread and worry.

How to address negative emotions

Do you have reservations? Are there any negative feelings, thoughts or emotions that come when you think about achieving your goal?

It's normal to have some reservations, especially about a big goal or dream.

In my case – moving to Portugal – meant giving up a lot. I was willing to do it – and I'd do it all again – but it still had an impact on me. My choices ended a marriage, sent my kids out into the world a little earlier than they would have chosen and separated me from friends and family by many miles. I left a job I really enjoyed and many people who meant a lot to me. It was scary to venture into the unknown in so many ways.

Visualizing my goal was tinged with those feelings, too. Yet, I couldn't conceive of not doing it. Truly, I left like this is something I had to do now. Often, I'd tell people I was at a "sweet spot – my kids and parents don't need me right now, so I feel like I have to do this."

Make a list of pros and cons

As you think about your goal and achieving it, of course, it's better to focus on the positive aspects. But be mindful of any negatives, too. You should think about why you have those feelings. Do the positives outweigh the negatives?

Sometimes, when I consider what I should do and I'm not sure of myself, I make a list of pros and cons. I write down the question/action at the top of the page, then list the positive and negative things about it. Often, it becomes obvious which way I should go as one side or the other fills up.

Sometimes, I'll make a list on both sides of a question and see how the pros and cons stack up. Sometimes, I'll also make a list of other considerations, things that aren't necessarily pros or cons. They may have an impact on my decision.

For example, if I am considering buying health insurance, I might create lists like these:

What I would do differently:

I would be gentler with the people I was hurting. While I didn't want to hurt them, I knew following my dream would do so. I wasn't always the kindest or more understanding about it. I focused too often on myself. However, I would not have changed my plans – just how I handled myself. It wasn't always pretty or nice, and I regret my reactions in certain situations. We can't control other people, but we can control how we react to them. That's something I would absolutely do differently.

What are the benefits of buying insurance? (Pros)

- Health care when I need it
- Coverage for appointments
- Prescription medications
- Meet government requirement
- Tax benefits

What are the drawbacks of buying insurance? (Cons)

- Cost
- Uncertainty of job status – can I afford it long-term?
- Rarely use it or need it
- Won't cover travel
- Hard to change plans if move
- Doesn't always cover what you need

Does that mean the “pros” or “cons” aren't valid? No, it means that one side outweighs the other. This exercise helps me assess both sides and make a decision.

Make a plan for worries

We don't know what the future holds. We only have today. But we can and should plan for what we'd like to achieve and do. Worrying about what might happen is the negative side. However, careful planning and preparation can limit many of our worries.

I'm familiar with anxiety. I can induce it by thinking about certain triggers. Doing things for the first time is extremely challenging for me, to the point I will avoid them, if necessary. The Internet and Google have allowed me to figure out a lot of things before setting foot into the world. I'm also good at watching other people and figuring out how to do things before I actually have to do them.

But with some things, you have to go, do and experience it, and that freaks me out.

And yet, I moved to a foreign country where everything is new and different. Sometimes, you have to face your fears.

The difference is that I don't worry a lot about other things – the what-ifs. Perhaps that's because I am a planner at heart, so I tend to cover a lot of things by being thorough to start.

For instance, if I'm going on a hike, I think through the day. I consider the weather, terrain, time of day and length of the hike, and I try to plan for everything. I will take a jacket in case it rains or gets cool. I will take water and a snack. I will wear a hat. Do I need money? How am I getting there? Can I fit this in my backpack? How hot will it get? Do I really want to carry this for three hours? What can I leave at home? What do I really need?

I don't see that as worry, though, but as planning and thinking through the possibilities. I don't worry that it will rain. If rain is forecast so be it. Worrying won't change the weather. I can choose to stay at home or take a jacket and make the best of it.

Consider the worst

If you worry about things, you can try this: I find it helpful to think through what's the worst that can happen.

How would you deal with that? Usually, the worst isn't going to happen.

[Tim Ferriss](#) addresses this in great detail in his book, "The 4-Hour Workweek." He will think about the worst that can happen in a situation and the likelihood it will happen. Then, he figures out what he would do if the absolute worst happened.

In my hiking scenario, maybe the worst is getting hurt on the trail and not being able to get help easily. How would I deal with that? Am I with someone? Can that person get help? How far from "civilization" are we? Can we call for help? If I'm alone, who knows where I am? Would someone know to come looking for me? When might that be? How long might I be there before some other hiker finds me?

My answers to those questions might change my plans for my hike. Maybe I map my planned hike and send it to someone with a note to check on me if I don't get back in touch by a certain time.

Preparation can take the worry out of many situations.

What I would do differently:

I would be realistic about what could go wrong. I actually did this worst-case scenario with my plan to move to Portugal. Unfortunately, I came up with a lot of really negative things that could go wrong. I had to stop and tell myself that it was very unlikely that any of those things would happen. (It didn't help that people around me would share their worries, too. If I hadn't thought of it already, now I would.) Because I have lived in Portugal, now I know what is a likely "the worst" scenario. And "the worst" still is not likely to happen. I would not allow myself to have all those negative thoughts or worries when they are unlikely to happen.

Write a list of reasons you want to achieve your goal

Before you let worry or anxiety overtake your goal, do this. Write down all the reasons you want to achieve this goal.

- List your reasons to remind you of why it's important and why you want to achieve it.
- It will be a boost to you when you need it.
- These reasons will help you explain your goal to others.

It can be a short list or a long one. You can add to it as you think of things. It doesn't have to be comprehensive to start.

It's easier to do something if you know why you're doing it. It's like the parent who said, "Because I said so." It's not a good motivator to clean your room or mow the yard.

Your reasons will be uniquely yours. Maybe it will boost your self-esteem or help you be physically stronger.

Reasons help explain your goal to others (Why you should list reasons to achieve your goal)

Of course, when people ask – and they will ask you – you need to be able to share some reasons with them.

You won't share all your reasons with everyone. Some reasons are private for you. But you should have some "public" reasons. My "public" reasons were pretty basic. Most people may be interested enough to ask, but they don't want to know everything.

"I want to live in other places, and Portugal is first on my list. When I travel, I always think if it's a place I'd like to go back to, and Portugal was a definite yes. It's green and beautiful, and the people are friendly."

That usually was enough of a public answer for people. They might ask about my job or my family, but those were different than "reasons" for my goal.

Reasons provide motivation

There's another reason for writing your reasons for wanting to achieve your goal. It's a great motivation for you. You will have days when you're feeling down or defeated. There will be times you feel like everything is conspiring against you. Sometimes, you may question your own sanity. (What the hell was I thinking?)

At those times, it's good to read why you wanted to do this in the first place. It can remind you of the passion and joy you felt when you committed to this goal. It can bring you back to a point where you can move forward again.

Reasons keep you focused on the positive

I'm a believer that what you focus on is what you'll get. If you focus on the negative, that's what you'll get. If you only ever think about all the things that will go wrong, guess what? Things will go wrong.

I wasn't always a believer, though. I used to think it was hokey. Then later, I thought it was for others, but not for me. I believed other people had the ability to be positive and get what they wanted, but that I was lacking in that ability. It was like some sort of magic, and I didn't have it.

Well, now I believe it is like a sort of magic, but we all are endowed. It belongs to each of us for our own personal benefit. (You can't make anyone else happy.)

Now, I have proof that it works. I'm living in Portugal. I'm "happier" than I've ever been. The possibilities are profound.

I realize for many years I was getting exactly what I expected. I didn't expect much, and that was the problem.

By finally deciding what I wanted and focusing on it, I was able to achieve something I actually wanted.

Figuring out the goal is the first step.

Writing down all your reasons why you want it to happen will put you on the path to achieving it.

My reasons for Portugal

My reasons for moving to Portugal were wide-ranging. It started with following a dream. I wanted to feel freedom, free from responsibility to anyone or anything. I wanted to rely on just me, to prove to myself I could do it. To experience another culture by living there for an extended time. To learn another language. To learn about myself. To figure out who I am, who I want to be, and who I am becoming.

To enjoy good coffee, wine and food. To meet new people. To disappear for a while. To downsize and get by with very little. To prove I don't need stuff. To maybe find "happiness" or at least pursue it.

What I would do differently:

I would allow myself to change my mind and not fight so forcefully against it. Here's a little deeper explanation of negative vs. positive thinking and where I used to be.

Many years ago, my husband was excited by [Tony Robbins](#) and similar motivational speakers. I felt like they were speaking a different language. I didn't get it.

What nonsense, I thought. We have our lives plotted and planned, and that's that.

The more I heard and read, the more I felt like it was something that certain people had – but not me. I just didn't see myself in that role. We went to several day-long conferences where speakers would pump you up. They encouraged you to do good things, be a better salesman or be a better person. It didn't stick.

I recall trying to read a Tony Robbins book, and it made me so sad, I cried. Can you imagine? Crying (and not tears of joy) over

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To see sunsets in a new place. To take pictures where the sky is a different shade of blue and all the buildings are colored like the rainbow. To feel the sun, wind and rain, sand between my toes, sidewalks beneath my feet. To smell flowers I can't identify, fruits and fish at the market, the salt of the ocean.

There are so many more reasons – some I can't even put into words. Many I didn't even write down, but I wanted to give you an idea of what the list might include.

You can see why some would be personal and some would be public.

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a Tony Robbins book.

I wanted to feel the joy he felt, but I had no idea how to begin. In hindsight, I was exceedingly unhappy and probably clinically depressed. His joy made me sad. And if Tony Robbins can't help you be happy, what hope do you have?

So, I became angry instead. I thought of it as folly, foolishness and nothing to be even bothered by.

My husband was confounded by my stance that it wasn't for me. He thought I disliked Tony personally. It was me, though. I disliked me and who I was.

Over time, I came out of some of that depression. I began to see and read different things that started to change my mind.

It was around that time that ["The Secret"](#) came out, and my husband was a huge fan, so I read it and watched the movie. We both read and watched a lot about the law of attraction. I began to understand that happiness was a personal thing – no one could make me happy.

It still took me many more years to realize what I wanted and do something to get it.

4. Tell people about your goal

Why you should tell people about your goal

Telling people about your goal serves several purposes:

- People will be genuinely interested, and it's a boost for your self-esteem.
- They can provide support and assistance.
- Sharing can be a motivation – public failure is not an option.

Not everyone will be supportive of your goal. People have their own issues, emotions, fears, dreams and goals. You can't control their feelings or how they respond to you. You can only control yourself and how you react.

So, if you're worried about support – at least to start – share your goal with people who know you and people you trust. Choose those who will understand what you're trying to do and why. Use their support to build up your feelings for success.

Sometimes we have negative people in our lives. We can't change them, that's not in our ability. We can choose how much we share with them and how often. It's OK to limit time with negative people. There's nothing that says you have to keep reaching out to those influences.

Instead, focus on the positive people – the ones who make you feel good about yourself and others.

Just as your words have weight, so do others' words. Find and surround yourself with people who use words well for good in their lives and others'.

How to tell people about your goal

Talk to people

I shared my goal of moving to Portugal with a lot of people. Of course, it came up through the course of my job and my community roles. Sometimes, it would be a casual, "What's new with you?" that would spark it.

That's the way to start a conversation – or stop it. "I'm moving to Portugal."

"Wha...?"

Generally, people were supportive. They would want to know why. Sometimes, they would dig deeper. There are some who would say, "Oh, I'd love to do that, but I never could."

The truth is, they could, but they choose not to. Anyone could do what I did, but they would need to make the changes in their lives for it to happen. Most people aren't willing to do that.

In my case, my desire for it outweighed everything else.

Still, because it was such a drastic change, most people were surprised and intrigued.

Some would wish me well but say they would never want to do it – and that’s true for them. We each have our own path, and no one’s is exactly the same as anyone else’s.

Write about it

Most people wanted to know how it turned out for me. They would ask if I would write about it, and I said yes. I’d been blogging, and I planned to continue.

I’m not sure if they were interested to know if I actually did it or if they wanted to live vicariously through me. Maybe a bit of both.

Of course, I also wrote about my experiences in my blog – my ups and downs. That’s a very public way of keeping your goal in front of people.

It’s not for everyone. Truthfully, not everything I write gets published, either, for a variety of reasons. But I’ve tried to be honest about moving to Portugal. I’ve shared my feelings, worries, successes and failures.

What I would do differently:

I would blog more about Portugal before I left the US. It was just such a part of my routine, that I only tended to write about the big things. Maybe it would have been too much, but people really connected with the posts I wrote about planning to move to Portugal. I wish I had written more about it before I moved.

Why it might be hard to talk about your goal

This might be one of the most difficult steps in the process. I recognize that. You may, as well.

Why?

It’s hard to share something personal, and our goals are very personal. These are our dreams, our hopes. We don’t want to risk having someone negate our dream. We don’t want someone to tell us it won’t happen, it’s foolish or far-fetched.

If we believe that, though, it’s not a good goal for right now. In my case, 10 years ago, I don’t think Portugal would have been a good goal for me. I didn’t believe then it was possible. If I didn’t believe it, no one else would have either. Maybe some would have been supportive, but they also might have pointed out the folly of my thinking.

Now, I see sharing goals as a way to hold myself accountable. The more people who know, the more likely I am to want to achieve it. Public failure is not an option.

That’s a big motivator for me – failure, fear of failure. I’m a perfectionist by nature (and nurture). Even in little things, I want perfection. It’s a challenge to let go of things that aren’t perfect and to be OK with mediocrity. It’s hard sometimes to do something for the joy of it and not the results. But the more I’m able to do that, the better I feel. (Someday, I might even be able to do karaoke, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves.)

5. Make an outline for your goal

Why make an outline for your goal

Maybe you remember being in school and needing to make an outline for a paper. Most people want to skip the outline phase and get to writing.

I've tried it, and it doesn't work as well. For short articles – blogs, columns, even newspaper stories – it's fine. You can keep your "outline" in your head. You know you need a start, middle and end. But for anything longer, you need a way to stay organized. An outline can help if you're writing a paper or achieving a goal.

If you don't like the word "outline," change it to "plan," "list" or something that works for you. We know the importance of words, but don't get hung up on this. You're creating a list of steps that you will follow to achieve your goal.

The purpose of making an outline is to stay organized, to know what you've done and what you still need to do. It's a visual way of seeing your progress. This is important when you're in the middle and feel like you haven't done anything. That's a common feeling, especially during a long project.

Simple outline example

The outline will be determined by your goal. It will have more or fewer steps, depending on how big your goal is and how much work you need to achieve. For example, if your goal is to learn to paint, your outline might look something like this:

Goal: Learn how to paint

- Research different painting techniques. (which do I want to learn?)
- Look up classes in my community. (cost, availability, reviews)
- Look up online classes (cost, availability, reviews)
- Determine which type of class I want to take.
- Sign up for the class.
- Take the class.
- Practice my skills.
- Complete a painting by the time the class has ended.

This is pretty basic, but you get the idea.

What I would do differently:

I would create a proper outline for my goal earlier. By the time I realized I needed one, I had several "list" documents started. I wasn't as organized as I would have liked from the start. Going forward, I will aim to start with a good outline.

How to make an outline

Think about what you do and don't know.

What are the steps you need take, logically, to get from where you are right now to where you want to be? Write them down. Include the things you know, and if you don't know, include a step to learn about it.

Let's use the painting example. If you're not sure which painting technique you want to learn, you will need to research them. You will want to take a class, either in person or online. Your research may turn up another option you haven't thought of yet.

You can (and should) continue to add to your outline throughout your goal process. You'll learn new things that you want to follow. You may discover another step you didn't realize you need to take.

Sample outlines

I have created a couple of fill-in outline samples. You can download them from Google Docs:

[Goal outline \(simple\)](#)

[Goal outline \(detailed\)](#)

How to use your outline

The outline is a handy tool when you have some time to spend on your goal. You can look at your outline and determine quickly what you want to tackle with the time you have available. It doesn't have to be done in order – at least mine wasn't that way. I had so many things to learn, I could jump around.

To use the painting goal as an example, let's say you have 5 minutes. You open your outline and decide to do a Google search of art classes in your community. That will take just a few minutes to see what's there. You can save the search to further explore later when you have more time.

If you have 20 or 30 minutes, you could go to YouTube and watch a few painting tutorial videos to see different techniques. Watercolor is very different from oil painting. While you're watching, you might wonder about the supplies you'll need and if the cost will be a factor. Is there a difference in paint costs? Brushes? Paper or canvas? Add it to your outline, so you remember to work on it.

You can use your outline to keep notes for yourself. I used it to keep track of what I needed to do, and I would keep notes in separate documents. There was far too much for me to do and learn to try and keep it in one place. I'll talk more about staying organized in Step 8.

If your goal is more limited in scope – such as the painting example – you may be able to keep notes in your outline.

You need to keep your outline, plan or list easy to read, follow and use.

Include a timeline for your goal

As we discussed in Chapter 2 about creating your goal, it's important to be able to measure when you've achieved it.

A timeline isn't absolutely necessary. I could have gotten to Portugal at any time, and that would have been an achievement. But a timeline helps in a variety of ways.

Why you should create a timeline

- A timeline will help you stay on task. Just as an outline will help you focus your efforts, a timeline will help you keep working toward your goal.
- It will create a sense of urgency. When you have a deadline for a work project, you know have to get it done. The same is true of your goal. If you have a deadline, you know the clock is ticking.
- If you leave it as someday, well, someday will never come. The same with tomorrow. You will never reach tomorrow ...

My first trip overseas was to Paris. I was almost 38 years old, yet to go to Paris had been a dream of mine since high school. When I finally got there, I realized I wanted to not just visit, but to live there.

I wanted to experience it like a local. I wanted to go the market, spend hours at museums, walk everywhere and drink coffee at a corner café. I did not want to be rushed to go, go, go and do, do, do, as I often am when I go for a short vacation.

After I visited Paris, if anyone asked, I'd say I wanted to go back when I could spend six months there.

Years passed. Talk of travel would come up with friends and acquaintances. We would share where we'd been and where we wanted to go. I'd always share my Paris story, that I would go back someday when I could stay for six months.

Finally, a friend asked, pointedly, when that would be. She meant it kindly – perhaps she really thought I had a plan with an actual date. My standard answer, “someday,” froze on my lips. I realized as long as it was *someday*, it would never happen. That was a defining moment for me that helped put me on the path to Portugal.

Even if it's broad, you need to have a timeframe, or it will always be *someday*, and it won't happen.

How to create a timeline

1. Set your end date

Start by setting your end date, and work backward from there. When do you want to achieve your goal?

This can be an actual date or a period of time – say six months.

While your timeline can (and probably should) be flexible, don't give yourself too much leeway with your final date. If you are too flexible, you may keep pushing it off and never achieve it.

That said, you may realize that your original timeline isn't the best for whatever reason. Maybe you want to climb a mountain. The season and conditions will dictate the best time to do that, so if you randomly chose a date, you may need to alter it. Perhaps you plan a long-distance hike, but your best friend announces she will get married when you will be "off the map." You may choose to alter the dates for your hike so you can attend her wedding.

This is your goal, so you can be flexible.

You may allow yourself a little more time than you think you may need to start. Or, you may choose to shorten your time to force yourself to act. That depends on your personal preference, your temperament and how well you know yourself.

If you're good at hitting deadlines, you can use that to your advantage – in either direction.

2. Set intermediate dates

Then, set intermediate dates for the smaller goals in your outline.

You can space them out – say once a month or once a week, depending on how many you have and how much time you have. Or you can do them by dates that make sense to you.

To use the painting example, if you want to learn everything you can about painting techniques, you estimate it will take four weeks to research them. However, you know it will take less time to find a local or online class, so you give yourself a week to research class options.

3. Add dates to outline and calendar

You need to be able to track your progress. Adding the dates to your outline will give you a visual reminder of what's coming up and when it's due.

If you add them to your personal calendar (Google, etc.), you can set reminders, as well. For example, you can get an email that reminds you this week you need to look up online painting classes.

What I would do differently:

I would pick a better date. I told people I wanted to be in Portugal by December or by spring at the latest. My dates were random. December would not have been a great time to go to Portugal. While winter there isn't like Wisconsin, it's not the best season to experience on a long first visit. Springtime in Europe is marvelous. I should have researched the seasons better and picked a date based on when it would be best to go there. Spring was fine, but I could have been more specific. I got there March 3, which was just the beginning of spring and a great time to move.

Adding deadlines in your calendar keeps them top of mind and makes them a priority. We usually only put things into our calendar that we intend to do or that are work-related – something we have to do. Make achieving your goal something you have to do. Treat it as a priority, and it will become one.

Add sub-goals to your outline

Why you should add sub-goals

You won't think of everything from the start. There will be things you don't know about when you begin the process and things that come up during it.

Adding smaller goals within your outline can be done at any time. I added it to the checklist here to let you know it can and will happen after you've started work on your goal.

Your outline won't be full and complete until you're done with it, and you've achieved your goal. It is a work in progress.

How to add sub-goals

As you find new things you need to learn or do, add them to your outline. Write them down and give them a due date, if necessary. Add them to your calendar.

Staying organized in your planning and progress will help you stay on track and on task toward your goal.

You can do this haphazardly, but it's easier if you keep it organized.

This is an example of adding sub-goals goals to my outline from when I was planning to move to Portugal.

I did a lot of research, so my outline included things like:

- Find out about credit cards/debit cards
 - What are my bank fees for using a card in Portugal?
 - What are the typical fees for using a card in Portugal?
 - How do ATMs work in Portugal?
 - What are the typical fees?
 - Are there are alternatives to get cash?
 - How much cash do I need?
 - Do businesses usually accept cards or am I more likely to need cash?
 - Do I need to let my bank(s) know I'll be traveling?
 - How do I do that?
 - Which card(s) do I want to take?
 - Do I want to get a new card for traveling?
 - Pros and cons?

Of course, there were lots of other questions that came up with all sorts of things. I kept a running list of things I'd think about that I needed to find answers to. My outline/list was a work

in progress, but by writing it down, I was able to check and be sure I'd answered all my questions.

I would use the outline to brainstorm what I needed to know or learn about during the process. Something would come up, and I'd use the outline to work through it.

This minute detail helped me cover nearly everything I needed to know before I got to Portugal. I was only blindsided by a few things, some of which I could have taken care of before I arrived, and some I couldn't.

Generally, I was pleased with how well my planning and research paid off for me. I felt very comfortable making this move.

Someone else might not have the same concerns or desires for all the answers. But, I'm a planner, and I feel better when I've answered as many questions as possible before I dive into something new.

Track progress by marking your outline

You also should decide how to note when you've completed parts of your plan.

- ✓ You could use checkmarks, ~~strike-through~~ text, highlighted text, colored text or a note in *italics*, for example.

Choose something that works for you. I tend to use a variety of marks. I highlight things I still need to do. I strike throughs things I have finished. I add italics for notes I want to check on again.

This will serve a couple of purposes:

- At a glance, you'll be able to see what's done and what still needs to be done. You won't waste a lot of time looking to see what's next or what to work on, especially if you only have a few minutes to spend on it.
- It also is a good feeling to cross something off a list when it's completed. Finishing a task you've set for yourself is satisfying. If you're a "list" person – someone who likes lists – you'll understand this. I've even known people who added things to a list in order to cross them off. (I'm not that bad.) But even if you're not a list person, you should track your progress.

I don't recommend deleting content from your outline as you finish it. You want to see your progress toward your goal, and you might want to refer to something later. While you might be

What I would do differently:

I would turn off two-factor authentication. I had it set up for extra security on some websites. Once I was in Portugal, however, I couldn't access text messages on my cellphone. (My provider doesn't offer overseas coverage, which I knew. I got a Portugal SIM card when I was there.) I could not change my number to a Portuguese number on the websites to be able to get text messages. I was able to get the important ones squared away by calling (banking was a big one). But on sites where I don't pay for membership, I was out of luck until I returned.

able to find a history version of your document, it's easier to not delete anything. Instead, find a way to mark it as done while still being visible.

6. Do the work

We've done a lot of planning, thinking and writing. Now, it's time to actually get working on your goal.

If you're like me, you've already started. You can't help yourself – you think of something so you look it up.

How to get started (if you haven't already)

Pick out the first part that you need to know about and start researching. Even if your goal is to fit into skinny jeans by your birthday, you probably need to do some research. What's the best way to lose weight and get in shape? What is likely to work best for you? Will you focus on eating better? Going to the gym?

Whatever your goal is, start working toward it. Maybe you need to start exercising every day by walking. Perhaps you need to clean out the pantry to get rid of the chips and cookies so you're not tempted to eat them. You can look up recipes that fit into your healthy eating plan. Then make a grocery list to shop for the ingredients.

This is where the work diverges. For me and my goal of moving to Portugal, I had a lot of research to do – A LOT. There was less for me to do physically and a lot I had to learn about.

If your goal is a physical one, you'll need to do physical work toward it. Whatever it is, now is when you start to work diligently toward your goal.

Tips to do the work

Use that tool in your pocket to your advantage. Your mobile phone is a handy device that can help you make the most of your time.

- Rather than scroll through social media – again – do a Google search to learn about some aspect of your goal.
- Watch a video that teaches you something you need to know.
- Find a blog to follow from someone who is doing what you want to do.
- Join a Facebook group for interests like yours. See how other people are doing what you want to achieve. Groups often can provide incentives and encouragement. You can support

What I would do differently:

I would join Facebook groups sooner. Some of the things I wondered about were addressed in the groups, but I didn't know that until after I'd done the legwork. These groups also can be a way to make friends before you even set foot in the country. Most people in the groups are friendly – and they know where you're coming from. They will welcome you easily. You'd also be surprised at the groups available! On my second to last day in Portugal, I ran into a woman who started a [Facebook group](#) for women over 50 moving to Portugal. I requested to join the group even though I was heading back to the States, because I will go back to Portugal. Maybe I can be a resource to women in the group, and it's a way to stay connected to the community I've grown to love.

others in their goals and get support in return. Avoid groups that are not supportive or that allow badgering or bullying. You don't need negativity on the path to your goal.

- Take notes about things you learn or think about. Your notes program or other apps are good for this. You even can use voice texting to take notes, if that's easier.
- Read or listen to books related to your goal. Or choose books that are inspirational to you, that will encourage you on your journey. Get a library card. Your local library will have books available for free and online. My library offers thousands of digital and audio books for free download. (You can listen while you do something else related to your goal, such as walk or sketch.)
- Listen to podcasts related to your goal or about achieving goals and dreams. Learn how other people were successful. What did they do that you can do, too?
- Use apps on your phone to track your progress. If you're getting in shape, you can use apps to track your steps, miles walked or run, exercise levels – you name it, it's available. (I like [Charity Miles](#) because it also supports the charity of my choice when I walk or bike.)
- Use apps to reach your goal. I wanted to learn Portuguese before I moved to Portugal. I installed an app ([Duolingo](#)) on my phone and made a goal to complete two lessons a day. Do a search in your app store to see what's there that might help you toward your particular goal.
- If you like music and are motivated by it, create a playlist related to your goal. Choose songs you like that have meaning for you. Pick songs that encourage you to work toward your goal. (A sad, romantic song that makes you wistful isn't the best music to use for a workout goal.) Then, each time you hear one of those songs, it will remind you of your goal and encourage you. (Think about how songs can take you back to a place and time. Use that to your advantage with music chosen for your goal.)
- Use your phone when you have a few minutes to kill, such as waiting in line, to look up something related to your goal. It's a great way to use your time.

Beware the rabbit hole (or how to avoid wasting time)

Any time you go online to look for something, you risk falling down the rabbit hole.

Alice in Wonderland falls down the rabbit hole and ends up where she never intended to be. You can get lost during your research. We've all done it. We start looking for something, and 45 minutes later, we're on an unrelated site watching cat videos.

That's the rabbit hole, and as interesting as it can be, it's also a time suck.

Despite all the time-saving devices we have in our lives, we often feel we don't have enough time. We don't need to waste any of it on unrelated topics.

If you are doing research toward an aspect of your goal, keep that top of mind while you do the work. If you find something that fascinates you that is unrelated, bookmark it for later. You can come back to it. But try to avoid distractions during your research.

If you need to find an answer to a question, be sure you find the answer or a path to find the answer. (Some answers aren't easy or black and white. Often, you'll be gathering information so

you can make a decision. “Should I buy health insurance?” is not a question you can plug into Google and get a definitive answer.)

What to do if you think you don't have enough time

So, the elephant in the room ... We all feel like we don't have enough time, right?

I used to feel that way, that there weren't enough hours in the day to do everything I needed to do, let alone wanted to do. I bet you feel that way, too, at least sometimes.

Yet, we all are given the same 24 hours a day. We can choose to use it as we wish.

If you work, you probably have a set number of hours you give to your job or employer.

You should sleep – good sleep is important for so many facets of positive existence. Don't skimp on sleep.

Of course, you have basic things, such as meals and personal time (bathing, dressing, grooming).

You will have some sort of household chores, more if you own a home and have maintenance issues.

If you have children, they require your attention. If you have young children, they need more of your time.

If you have a spouse or significant other, you will want to spend quality time with that person.

Exercise may be part of your regular routine.

There are friends and family who seek your time. Maybe you have a hobby or a pastime you enjoy. Perhaps you volunteer or enjoy helping others in some way.

That's a lot of time spent doing things we need (or want) to do. We didn't even touch on entertainment, such as Netflix, movies, concerts, books or social media.

(I believe social media to be a major time-waster for many people. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was TV. Now, it's social media. Don't believe me? If you have an Apple phone, it will track how much time you spend on each app each week. Check out how you spend your time.)

How do you fit it all into the day?

You prioritize. The things we have to do get done – work, eat, sleep, get the kids to school or soccer. Then, we choose what comes next. Neat freaks (like me) will have a clean house, while others may hire a housekeeper and head to the gym. Someone without children or a spouse may spend a lot of time on a hobby or volunteering.

There is no right answer and no one-size-fits-all (or even one-size-fits-most) choice.

You need to decide what's important to you. If your goal is important, you will make time for it. It's that simple.

If you're reading this, I have to believe it's important to you and you want to achieve it.

This is where the work comes in. I told you early on that you can achieve your goal if you're willing to put in the work and time toward it. You need to make time in your life for your goal.

I suggest you devote real time toward your goal. Only you can decide how much and how often. Hopefully, as you get into it, you'll want to spend more time on your goal. I realized I could achieve my goal when I put time into it.

It can be fun, too. Positive progress will make you want to do more. I loved learning about Portugal. Each piece of information helped solidify it, and I wanted to learn more.

Use your bits and pieces, too. Those minutes when you're waiting for water to boil, the washing machine cycle to end or folding clothes, you can be doing something toward realizing your goal.

But please, make real time for your goal, too.

7. Ask others for ideas and help

Why you should ask for help

You already may have realized you don't have all the answers. As helpful as the Internet is, it doesn't have all of the answers, either. (Shocking, I know.)

Who can help? Your network of friends, family members, co-workers, business owners or anyone else who has the information, ideas or skills you need to achieve your goal.

From a sounding board to specific skills, the people you know can be great resources. Chances are, they will want to help you achieve your goal. If you ask them and explain how you need their help, you can get what you need.

How to ask for help

Ask first

People rarely know exactly what you want or need. Sometimes, even if they guess, they may not step up and offer. They might think you don't want the help. Or they feel inadequate in some way.

We think about things in our own way. Because I like to do things by myself, I assume others do, too. But someone else might be a collaborator who really wants a partner to bounce ideas off.

I'm a good listener, but I'm not likely to say, "Hey, I'd be happy to collaborate with you on that project." But if someone says, "I need help figuring out how to write a goal. Do you have any ideas?" I'd be all over that. "Yes!"

As in Step 6, when we talked about not having enough time, somehow, we always make time for friends and family who need us.

We all want to be needed and useful. When someone asks us for our assistance, especially toward a goal, we are likely to agree.

What I would do differently:

This is a big one for what I would do differently, for a couple of reasons. If I had asked for help, I could have had the best of both worlds.

I got it in my head that to do this, I needed time to look for a remote editing job. I didn't think I could do that while I was working full time.

My solution was to quit my job and move to Tennessee to live cheaply with my sister while I looked for a job.

In hindsight, this is almost laughable. Of course, I could have looked for a job while working. I could have done it on nights and weekends or early in the morning. I didn't need to dedicate 40 hours a week to it, which I initially did. (I learned a lot, though, and I wouldn't trade that information and insight.)

If I had asked people for their input, I might have had someone

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If you ask and someone declines, thank them and move on. We can't know everything that is happening with anyone else. Don't take it personally. It's OK to say no and to hear no.

But, if you never ask, you'll never know.

Be specific

The best way to get someone to help is to be very specific about what you need. I'm more likely to want to help someone who says, "I'm struggling with finding the focus for a chapter in my book. Can you help?" Otherwise, I might think you just want me to listen while you vent.

Ask for what you need.

As part of my goal to move to Portugal, I needed to find a remote editing job. I realized a personal website was important to provide a place for my portfolio, blog and for people to learn more about me.

I asked my sister for suggestions for hosting and setting up a website. She also helped me troubleshoot problems and sent me links to resources so I could figure it out. She didn't do the work for me, but she was a resource to me during the process.

Had I asked her to create the website for me, she might have said no, because she had enough projects of her own at the time. But she could squeeze in a few minutes here and there for me. I didn't feel like I was asking too much, and she felt like it was something she could provide.

How to handle criticism

Be prepared to answer questions about your goal. If you ask for help, you likely will be giving that person the green light to ask questions and give opinions. This is good. We all have people whose opinion we value and whose guidance we seek. Other people can recognize things we don't always see ourselves because we are so close to a situation.

Some criticism will be legitimate. We don't get better if we don't improve, and criticism that's well-directed and constructive can help us.

However, you may encounter criticism from people who are negative because they don't know how to respond any other way.

You may wish to think twice about asking a person like this for help. If that person is the only one with the information or skills you need, you may feel that you don't have a choice. However, there

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point this out to me. But I was so set on my plan that I didn't ask, and no one offered any alternatives.

I could have kept my full-time job and banked the money from it until I got a remote editing job. That's what I would have done differently.

It turned out OK, and I like living in Tennessee. I needed that break from my life there, too. But in all honesty, I could have done that part differently.

likely are other options. Rarely does only one person have what you need. Brainstorm other options before you open yourself to negativity.

However, you won't be able to avoid all negative feedback. Even things that we expect others to support may raise negative feelings.

Maybe your goal is to run a charity race. You might hear: "Why do you want to do that?" "You're too old." "You'll hurt your knees." "I wouldn't want to do that – why do you?"

Think about how others might react to your goal and have some answers ready. It's good to stay upbeat and positive, especially if you're asking for help from others for your goal.

If you have a negative critical experience, go to your trusted sources for guidance. Your support people can help encourage you, offer suggestions or just let you vent.

It's OK to ask for feedback, too. I've specifically asked people for encouragement, a kick in the pants or a reality check. My trusted sources are happy to comply. Sometimes they give me not what I seek but what I need.

8. Keep your documents organized

Why organizing is important

My goal of moving to Portugal involved a lot of research. There was a lot to learn, and I knew I wouldn't be able to keep it all in my head. I kept folders on my computer, phone and desk to store documents and information I wanted to be able to access again.

Your goal may be similar in nature. You may not be able to remember everything – or maybe you don't want to. I prefer to keep the information in a document I can easily access later than to try and recall every detail. I know I will forget things.

Staying organized helps me recall what I've already found, where it is and how to get to it when I need it.

What I would do differently:

I would make notes in my outline about where I'd placed documents, so I could find them more easily. I didn't always do this – OK I rarely did this. I'm much better about it with projects I'm working on now.

How to stay organized with folders

Computer files

I started with a folder on my computer called Portugal for my outline and notes. I added other documents as I needed to, labeling them so I would know later what they were.

A computer folder can include notes, documents, photos or anything else related to your goal. Maybe you have music or videos. Those could go into the folder, too.

Websites

I added a folder in my web browser labeled Portugal. I bookmarked websites, pages, articles and information that I wanted to see again. I renamed the bookmarks so I could easily know what they were about. This was helpful if I was saving different pages from the same website. For example: Applying for a visa; visa costs; visa timeline; visa concerns.

Mobile phone notes

I started a notes file on my phone called Portugal. I would add things as I thought of them so I would remember them later. This was helpful if I thought of something while going for a walk or grocery shopping, for example.

I would leave websites open in the browser on my phone until I had time to bookmark them on my laptop. I saved a few favorite websites on my phone, too. I bookmarked a Portuguese/English translator and the metro website "Plan a Journey" page.

Paper documents

I also had a few paper documents related to Portugal that I put into a real paper folder. At the very least, your hand-written goal should be in a folder.

Email

I started a folder in my email program labeled “Quest for Portugal.” I added emails that were related to my goal. I didn’t worry about changing the subject lines on email, because I could find what I needed by doing a search.

9. Set aside time every day for your goal

Why you should work on it every day

As we discussed, finding time for your goal can be challenging, but if it's important to you, you'll make time for it. If it's something you really want, it's important, and you'll achieve it by putting in the time and work toward it.

Spending time every day will make it a habit. Working on it – even a little bit – will keep pushing you toward achieving it. Every day you spend working on it is one day closer to your goal being your reality.

Tips to work on your goal every day

Some days, you may not have much time, though. We all have responsibilities, and sometimes they don't leave much time for other things. Those are the days when it's good to look for a few minutes here or there to do little things.

Visualize

Spend time thinking about your goal, visualize it done, and think about how you'll feel. You can do that while you take a shower, drive to work or walk the dog. Whenever you have a few minutes when your brain is free, think about your goal.

Visualization throughout the goal process is important. It helps keep you enthused about your goal. It makes it more real. You are focusing on what you want, and you will get what you focus on.

Plan your next step

Even if you don't have time to physically act on your goal every day, you should spend a few minutes thinking about it, at least. Plan your next step, or weigh the options, so you can make an informed decision about which way to go.

Schedule time

Block time off in your calendar for your goal, and then work on it at the appointed time. Do the research, read, study, exercise or skill practice. Do whatever it is that you need to do to achieve your goal.

Whatever it is – however much time it is – aim to spend some time every day on your goal.

What I would do differently:

I would schedule more time for my goal. I sometimes left it until the end of the day when I ran out of other things to do. It wasn't always as much of a priority as it should have been. But when I'd get work done on it, it would feel good, and I'd be energized to keep going. If I had put it into my calendar, I may not have had any gaps when I went because I would have planned perfectly! Well, maybe not ...

Take advantage of free time

If you have more time – your afternoon suddenly opens up – tackle a bigger aspect of your goal. Maybe there is some research you need to do that you know will take longer, and you want to do it at one time rather than in pieces. When you get some free time, use it on your goal. You won't consider it time wasted when you achieve your goal.

Keep working your plan

You've heard the phrase, "Plan your work, work your plan." That's where you are right now. You've done the planning, now you are into the work.

Hopefully, you are seeing progress toward your goal. I encourage you to keep working toward it, even if it seems like things aren't moving as quickly as you'd like.

As you learn more and do any physical work, you should begin to see changes in yourself. If nothing else, you should be able to recognize changes in your mind as you focus on your goal. Does it seem more real and less like a dream?

Continue to tell people about your goal. Be enthused about it. Share your enthusiasm and excitement with people. Look for people with similar goals either in the real world or online to share and support each other.

The more people you tell, the more people will pull for you to achieve your goal. It feels good to know that others support you and believe in you. It's a boost for your self-confidence.

That's especially important in the days when it may not be going as well. We all have ups and downs, good days and less-than-good days. But each day is another opportunity for us to begin again.

If you've slacked from your goal in some way, you can come back to it. It will be there, waiting for you. Even better, it will be closer to finished than when you began!

Don't beat yourself up if you haven't done as much as you'd liked or hoped. You can always start again. Today is a new day. You can't go back, only forward.

There were times I wondered, seriously, what I was doing. But again, I felt like I had to go on. I had to keep working. Depending on how long your timeframe is, you may have many times when you'll be tempted to walk away.

Don't do it. If you've got this far, you're closer than you think.

What I would do differently:

I would look for people who had done what I wanted to do as resources. It would have been easy, but I didn't realize it until after I was in Portugal. As much as I dislike Facebook, it's a good tool for finding groups and people with similar interests and experiences. If you don't find an exact fit, you can start your own group!

Why you should update your plan

As you work on your goal, your outline or timeline might need to be adjusted. You might have a more focused goal in mind or it might shift. That's OK if it's what you want.

That's why it's important to be open to changes in your goal. Your plan may change. If you can achieve your goal in a way that's pleasing to you, then that's OK.

We are changing all the time, growing all the time. It only makes sense that our goals and plans will change, too.

Think about it this way: What was your goal when you were 10? How about 16? 20? Do you have the same goal today? Probably not.

We also have different goals at different times. Once, I wanted a house and a big yard. I got that. Then, when I no longer wanted or needed it, I was able to let it go in pursuit of a different dream.

Even my goals for this e-book have changed. After writing a lot of it, it's going to be a slim book – which is OK. But I'll call it something else. It can be a guidebook instead. But it's still designed in book form, and it will count as my first “book” in that sense.

How my Portugal plan changed

I've written several times that failure was not an option for me. As a perfectionist, I would strive to always succeed – and be the best.

By choosing this path to Portugal, I sacrificed things, people and relationships. Arguably, things weren't good in my life, so something needed to change. But my decisions made an impact on many people, from immediate family members to people I worked with.

Not wanting to fail was a great motivation for me. No one would have loved me less if I'd said halfway through, “I can't do it. I'm staying here. I'll keep working at my job and find another place to live.” Hell, some of them might have been happier about that – closer to the status quo and what they would do.

But that wasn't what I wanted. I had it in my head that I was moving to Portugal, and it became a compulsion for me. I had to do it – one way or another.

And I did it, but it's not the way I originally planned.

My first plan was to free myself (divorce, sell the house, pay off debt, get a job I could do remotely, save money, get a visa). Then I wanted to move to Portugal outright – not just for a few months.

Instead, I realized it was going to take too long to save as much money as I thought I needed to move here outright. The visa process alone can take several months, and you must show proof of income to apply for a residency visa. There was no way I'd hit December, and even spring seemed like a long shot.

I'd also told people I had a "sweet spot" – my parents and kids don't need me right now. I felt like I needed to go as soon as possible.

When my daughter said she was expecting a baby in the summer, I knew if I was going to Portugal, I'd have to come back. Many grandparents rarely see their grandchildren, because they no longer live in the communities in which they were born and raised. That's true of me and my children. But I also knew I wanted to be there for my daughter. That meant I needed to be back in the States by summer.

It was December at that time. The clock was ticking – figuratively, but I could hear time passing.

So, I considered how I could tweak my plan to still go to Portugal – to fulfill the bulk of my goal, and I hit upon a new plan.

I would go for three months on a tourist visa – no paperwork necessary because I'd be there fewer than 90 days. I could be there by spring and back by summer.

It still meant I'd have to find a place to live and go through everything related to moving there, minus the visa. My airline ticket would be roundtrip – not one-way.

It wasn't my original plan, but it still fulfilled my requirements for my goal of living in other places. I could still say I was moving to Portugal – because I was. It didn't change my feelings any about it. In fact, it was easier to swallow because it wasn't quite so permanent.

In hindsight, it was a good choice – a good plan I had not thought about at first.

What I would do differently:

I would apply for the visa for residency before I left. Now that I know that I want to go back, it would have been easier to have the visa in process. I still could have come back to the States for a while, but I probably could have returned to Portugal sooner with the work behind me instead of in front of me.

A friend had suggested I apply for the visa, but I didn't follow her advice. Looking back, it would have been the best course.

10. Celebrate your achievements

Why you should celebrate

Reaching a milestone or finishing a step is a reason to celebrate. You are building momentum. Good feelings bring more good feelings. It's contagious!

There will be many times throughout the process when you can and should celebrate. Maybe that celebration is a fist pump and a "Yeah!" because you crossed something off your list.

Other milestones may deserve a greater celebration. Let's say you're halfway to your goal weight. That's worth celebrating!

Of course, you don't want to celebrate in the wrong way. I'm not suggesting you eat something or do something unhealthy as a reward. For instance, if you're working toward getting into skinny jeans, you don't want or need an ice cream sundae.

We seem to be wired to reward ourselves with food or things.

Sometimes, rewards can be good motivation. For example, you tell yourself that when you reach your goal, you will buy a new pair of jeans. That ties into your goal. It can be a motivation if you don't often buy clothing for yourself. However, if you shop often, it might not be much of a motivation.

How to celebrate: Tips and ideas

- Tell someone! If you're excited and you share that with someone, that person will be excited, too. Sometimes, it's nice to share and have someone else recognize you. A heartfelt "Good for you!" can boost your esteem.
- Do something you enjoy. Go for a walk, go to the beach, go out for coffee, visit a friend, teach your dog a new trick, work in your garden, try a new recipe. You know what makes you feel good. Pick something as a reward for reaching a milestone toward your goal.
- Choose a reward associated with your goal. Example: Your goal is to landscape your backyard. You have your layout plan done. After several weeks of physical labor, you have

What I would do differently:

I would have a celebration movement from the start. But I didn't. Over time, it worked into that fist pump/"Yeah!", but it didn't start that way. That's the move that stuck with me. I used it in Portugal when I'd accomplish something new or something I'd been working on.

For example, all the metro stops have multiple stairs, usually two at each end of the block, or four per station. My goal was to exit the one I intended, but I wasn't always good about knowing which street or direction I wanted. Then I would try and visualize where the train was when I got on or off and where my exit would be. Sometimes it worked – and I'd actually do a "Yeah!" fist pump when I'd emerge from the right exit. Who knows what others thought ...

replaced sod, mulched trees and bushes and prepared flower beds. Your reward for finishing that part of the project is a trip to the nursery to buy annuals and perennials for your beds.

- Pamper yourself. If you have a personal, physical goal, you may want to pamper yourself for reaching a big milestone. A massage, manicure, pedicure or haircut is a great reward to help you celebrate and feel good about yourself, too.
- Come up with your own personal celebration move. I mentioned a “yeah!” with a fist pump. How about a dance move? A yoga pose? A jump for joy? You can do your own personal move any time you complete an action toward your goal. Team players have high fives, butt slaps and Lambeau leaps to celebrate. Come up with something uniquely you, then celebrate with it any time you’d like! (It will make you feel good each time you do it!)

How to stay motivated

Throughout the process of achieving your goal, you’ll have times when it feels so close, easy and real.

Then, there will be times when it seems like the moon is closer than your goal, and your chances of getting there are about as good.

This is normal. We all have ups and downs. There were times during my Portugal plan that I was so pumped up – it was so exciting! And there were times I wanted to cry – and did.

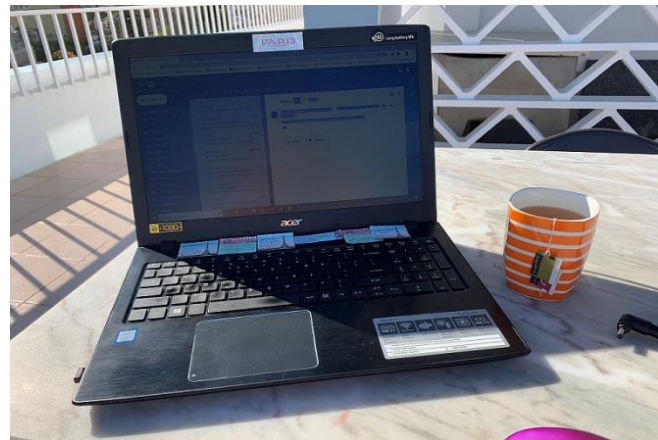
You’ll have doubts, maybe even questioning your sanity. There were times I’d shake my head and wonder what the hell I had been thinking.

I’m sure there were other people who thought the same thing for me. *Poor deluded girl*, they must have thought. *Pity about her. Portugal? Really?*

You’ll get through it, over it, around it – because this is your goal. You have your reasons for wanting to achieve it.

When you’re having a down day, a bad week or a longer struggle, go back to the beginning. Read your goal again and your reasons for wanting to achieve it. Close your eyes and visualize again how you will know when you’ve achieved your goal and how you will *feel*. See it happening. What does it look like? Where are you? Who is with you? What does it sound like? (You will visualize a lot throughout this process, but it really helps.)

Sitting here right now is the realization of my goal. I’ve got my laptop on the balcony, and I’m writing. The neighborhood around my flat stretches out. Orange tile roofs over pastel buildings. Palm trees, bright flowers, green leaves, sidewalks of cut stones laid into geometric lines and shapes. The blue sky. The warm breeze. The slight smell of the sea.



Writing on the balcony in Lisbon.

This is what I envisioned when I would think of living in Portugal. Doing my writing here, with a view you can't find in the States – a place truly foreign, yet home to me.

And here I am doing exactly what I envisioned all those times during the months I planned and worked toward my goal.

If I hadn't planned it, though, would it have happened? Maybe. I just know it works.

Write down your goal and why you want to achieve it. You will come back to it, and you'll want it when you need it.

Ways to stay motivated: Tips and ideas

Here are some other suggestions to stay motivated:

- Write yourself notes. I have some physical sticky notes I keep on my laptop because I see them nearly every day. I don't even have to read them to know what they say, but when I do, it's a little reminder to myself.
- Save words of encouragement from others. If someone writes you an email that's positive, save it in your goal folder. Same with any social media posts or comments. I can go back to comments on blogs to see kind words that friends left for me during the process. If someone actually sends you a card, letter or note, save that, too. You might even want to display it as a reminder of their encouragement.
- Social media can provide good examples of motivation – pretty pictures and nice sentiments. If something speaks to you, keep a copy of it. Even poetry and longer posts can be motivation. I like pictures of the beach, which always make me think of a phrase my cousin used: "The beach is calling."
- Not all social media is positive. It can be a time suck, but it can also be a support system and a learning structure. Some Facebook groups, for example, encourage people with similar interests to share information, ask questions, learn and support one another. If you join a group, be sure it's a positive experience. If you feel like arguing or you find people are more negative than positive, find a new group. (You can even start your own!)
- Find a touchstone or talisman for yourself. This can be something physical, such as a charm, gem, shell or stone. Choose something small that can fit in your hand or pocket. It also can be something you see, such as a picture of a beach or mountain. It also could be something you do, such as recite a line of poetry or a yoga pose.



The moon rises over Lisbon, Portugal.

One of my touchstones is the moon. Anytime I see the moon – no matter where I am, what I’m doing or who I’m with – I always think: “I am where I should be right now.” It helps me feel that I’m in the right spot at the right time. Things may not be perfect. I may not have reached my goal yet. Maybe I’m feeling a little down or sad. Maybe I’m missing someone or something. It could be that I’m feeling great and with people who care about me. It helps me to think each time, though, that I’m where I should be at that moment. It’s comforting. Find something that will help you feel motivated to continue toward your goal.

How do you know you’ve achieved your goal?

At some point – if you put in the time and work -- you will achieve your goal.

How will you know?

You will meet the requirement you set forth when you first made your goal and your outline. Maybe you finish an oil painting. Maybe you have a newly landscaped garden. Maybe you bought a house. Maybe you ran a half marathon. Maybe you wore those skinny jeans at your birthday celebration. Whatever your goal is, you’ll be able to say: I did it!

I did it. I’m living in Portugal. It’s not quite what I planned, but it’s still good. This has been such a fantastic experience, that it’s well worth the doubts and fears I had, everything I gave up and let go.

I’m a better person for it.

Best of all, I have proved to myself – if no one else – it’s possible to achieve a goal if you really want it. I really, really wanted this, and about a year from when I got the first inkling, I was living here.

How to celebrate your achievement

My celebration comes every day that I’m here. I wake up in a different city, in a different country, across an ocean. I celebrate it when I hear people speaking Portuguese. When I look out the window at a city that is becoming mine. When I realize it’s not that big of a city (or country) after all. I celebrate it when I think about where I’ll go next ...

Your celebration might be more like what we discussed earlier in this step.

Of course, you should tell people. Tell the people who shared your goal from the beginning. But tell others, too. Be proud of your accomplishments. No matter what your goal is, you should celebrate it. You made a plan, you set it in motion, and you achieved your goal.



Trams are icons in Lisbon.

Hang on to how you feel when you realize that you've achieved your goal.

Take some time to compare how it actually felt with how you thought it would feel? Did your visualization hold up to reality? Or was reality better?

I think because I spent so much time thinking about Portugal, it really is how I visualized it. (I had vacationed in Portugal a few years ago, so I knew what it would look like. But I needed to hone my feelings of living here.)

You should celebrate in a way that seems appropriate. If you're in those skinny jeans for your birthday, you better have a party or go out! A landscaped yard calls for a garden party to show it off.

Achieving a big goal might be the time to buy something to commemorate it. New living room furniture for your new home. A nice dinner out with friends to celebrate a new job or career path.

We don't celebrate our achievements as much as we should. I lived with Iranian and Portuguese flatmates who taught me to celebrate more and look for reasons to spend time together, share a meal, laugh, sing, and toast.

When you've achieved your goal – celebrate it! You deserve it, and all the good that comes with it.

Chapter 4: Where do you go from here

If you're like me, you've got a lot of work ahead of you to achieve your goal. There's an old adage that anything worth having is worth working for.

But unlike a job you might dread or household chores, working toward your goal should be positive. It should energize you. Rather than avoid it, you should look for ways to spend more time on it – that's how you should feel about it.

If you don't – then it isn't the right goal for you right now.

There are times when you'll have doubts, questions and fears. But you still should be excited and energized by the idea of achieving your goal.

As you work through problems, figure out solutions and overcome fears and doubts, you will be energized. We get a boost when we learn something new or discover something about ourselves, our goal or our world.

The best way to stay motivated and on task toward achieving your goal is to work on it and meet your sub-goals.

If you slack, you may get behind. Then, it might be easy to say, I'll do it later, or worse, I didn't really want it anyway.

Don't believe that lie. If you really want it now, chances are, you'll really want it later.

To be fair, during your work, you may discover a better goal. You also may learn something about your original goal that is a concern.

Let's say your goal was to get a degree so you can change careers. After beginning research, you realize it's going to be expensive, and you don't want to go into debt. You have to decide if you want to pursue your original goal or if you want to modify it. You could extend your timeline and take classes part-time as you can afford them. Or you could choose a career that doesn't require a degree.

That's different than lying to yourself that you didn't want to do it anyway.

Learn about yourself

Use this process to learn about yourself.

Going through the steps to write it down and come up with reasons might spark some internal dialogue. That's great. Use it as a way to get to know yourself better.

Even as we always are changing, we need to stay aware of that, and sometimes we are as clueless as those around us. Your tastes and interests can change. Just because you never liked cooking doesn't mean that always will be the case.

That was me. I didn't learn how to cook from my mom. She cooked, and I did the baking, mainly because she didn't like baking. Yes, there is a crossover between cooking and baking, but there are differences, too. I could make basic things, but I never learned knife skills or how to season anything as you cooked and tasted it. With baking, you follow the recipe – done.

After I married, my husband did most of the cooking.

I also hated grocery shopping – well, really any shopping. But I didn't want to go to the store and have to buy groceries, and yet I did a better job of it than he did. I'd come home with way more food for the same amount of money than he would. With a young family and a finite income, we had to save money where we could. I'd do the grocery shopping, comparing products to try and get the most out of our meager dollars.

Over time, he took over most of the shopping, too. It was easier, although he never really got good at comparison shopping.

When I moved out, I had to cook and shop for myself.

And guess what? I actually liked it.

A big part of it was only having to shop and cook for me and not a family of five. I didn't have to buy the cheapest – I could buy the one I wanted the most. It also coincided with a boom in organic products, which appealed to me. My income wasn't any higher, but I was only providing for myself. I could afford the \$4 eggs rather than the 79-cent ones.

Grocery shopping became a joy. I wasn't eating sugar, so I'd spend time reading labels to see what was in products. Then, I'd also consider if I could make them from scratch. (I may never buy mayo again – homemade is so good and so easy!) It could spend an hour at the store, picking out produce, reading labels and perusing the shelves to see what they had that might interest me. Gone were the days when I had to get something and get it home so it could be cooked for dinner ASAP.

I wouldn't say I'm good at cooking. But I have a few things I cook that I can serve to guests and they actually like. I'll continue to try different things, too, learning as I go.

If I believed forever that I hated to cook and shop, and I never allowed myself to change, eating wouldn't be a joy.

So, allow yourself to change, and embrace those changes when they happen. Chances are, you'll be a better person for it.



I can cook salmon with herbs de Provence, parsley potatoes and oven-baked asparagus with oil, herbs and cheese.

Beware of naysayers

Some people won't be happy you're changing or that you have a goal or a dream.

You know who those people are already. They are the ones who never seem to have a positive thing to say – they only focus on the negative. They are fearful of everything and everyone. They always see the dirty glass as half empty (and it probably would be better if it was emptied, washed and put back on the shelf).

Depending on who these people are in your life, you may be able to limit how much you share with them about your goal. If it's a big goal, you are going to have to mention it at some point. If you're moving to another country, you should mention it before you get on an airplane.

You don't need to allow them to hold sway over you, your decision or your feelings. It's OK to tell people you don't want to discuss something and to change the subject. Particularly if someone is being negative, it's OK to end the conversation. You don't have to be mean or nasty. But you can stand up for yourself, your beliefs and your dreams.

The openly negative people are the easiest to deal with. But you also may find people who surprise you with negative responses. People who care about you will be concerned. This especially is true if your goal is big and life-changing. They also will be concerned if it's not something they would do.

It's good for people to ask questions, to learn why you want your goal and to raise concerns they may have. They may think of something you haven't yet. People who don't understand something can ask good questions.

However, if they stray into obvious biases, always/never statements, phobias or unfounded fears, it's time to step away.

Changes – big changes – can trigger reactions in people, sometimes fear responses. Fears are rooted deeply in the brain and can be difficult to overcome. Fear can be debilitating for some people. If someone has a fear response to your goal, you aren't likely to be able to “change their mind.” You can try to assure them.

For instance, if someone was afraid of my move overseas because I'd have to fly on an airplane, I can't change that fear response. Citing statistics about air travel safety won't help. But, if someone is afraid because I won't know the language, and that's a fear for that person – I can assure him or her that I'm learning the language and many people speak English.

Generally, people were very supportive of my desire to move to Portugal. Most “negative” reactions were because they didn't want me to go anywhere. Portugal had nothing to do with it – they didn't want me to quit my job or leave my community. Even those weren't really negative. They wanted me to know they would prefer if I stayed.

I only had a few people who expressed odd concerns about my goal. It was because they had had a bad experience or just thought any idea not their own was foolish. But we all know someone like that. The best way to share information with that person is to make it a simple statement of fact.

Beware of Pollyannas

On the flip side, beware of people who are too supportive. It's not that we don't need support – we do. We need and love cheerleaders in our lives.

But if that's all we surround ourselves with, we won't have anyone to help us question and learn.

Most people – even our cheerleaders if they are good friends and know us well – will be able to give us good feedback. They are willing and able to point out things we didn't consider. They will ask good questions and raise legitimate concerns.

Having “yes men” around us will give false security, and we'll be less prepared.

Have you ever worked someplace where the boss didn't want to hear anything negative? It's not easy, is it? People tend to walk on eggshells. They cover up problems and hide trouble. That doesn't make it go away or get better – it masks the issues, which will grow larger.

When things finally blow up, there's a lot of finger-pointing. The boss and those higher up than him or her are left wondering how things got so bad.

You will have problems, issues, concerns and mistakes on your journey to your goal. That's OK. You can learn from them, work through them and grow from them. If I hadn't had some mistakes during my goal process, I might not have gotten here at all.

Use the people you trust to help ferret out the trouble spots, especially if you're not sure what they are. A good “devil's advocate” can help make your plan more solid.

Address your ego

Will anyone care but me?

Yes and no.

People who care about you will care about your happiness and well-being. They will want you to succeed and achieve your goal.

But, this is your goal, and it only will matter to you.

Others may enjoy seeing your progress. They will be fans and support you. If asked, they may provide specific help. Many will be there with a word of encouragement when you need or want it. They will admire your fortitude, strength, persistence or whatever it is that you need to achieve your goal.

At the end of the day, though, this is about you.

You have to care about it – deeply. So deeply that it doesn't matter if anybody else cares at all.

I wanted my goal so badly, I had to achieve it. When people would support me, it was welcome. But if every person had said, "No, you can't do it," I'd have done it to prove them wrong.

Fortunately, they didn't.

But I'm the one living in Portugal, and they have their own dreams and goals.

How can you be supportive of their goals?

Don't be so focused on your own needs that you ignore others'. We all are on this journey called life together. While we may be obsessed with our own needs, it's important to support those who support us. If we all help each other, we'll all be better off. "A rising tide raises all boats."

Conclusion

I achieved my goal, despite not having a real guide from which to work. I did a lot of it by trial and error. It was only after the fact that I was able to see the steps I had taken and put them into this guide.

I could have added or subtracted some steps and still got to where I wanted to be. You may find some steps more helpful than others.

I hope you come away from this guidebook with some new information or something that will help you achieve your goal. You may not use it exactly as written, but that's OK. It's meant to be a guide, to encourage you and help you toward your goal.

I will have succeeded with this guide if I'm able to provide a little bit of support, offer one thing you can use or one suggestion that's new or useful.

Thank you for reading. Here's to achieving your goals!



The gardens in Lisbon are beautiful.