Diligence

Take Action • Follow Through • Finish What You Start
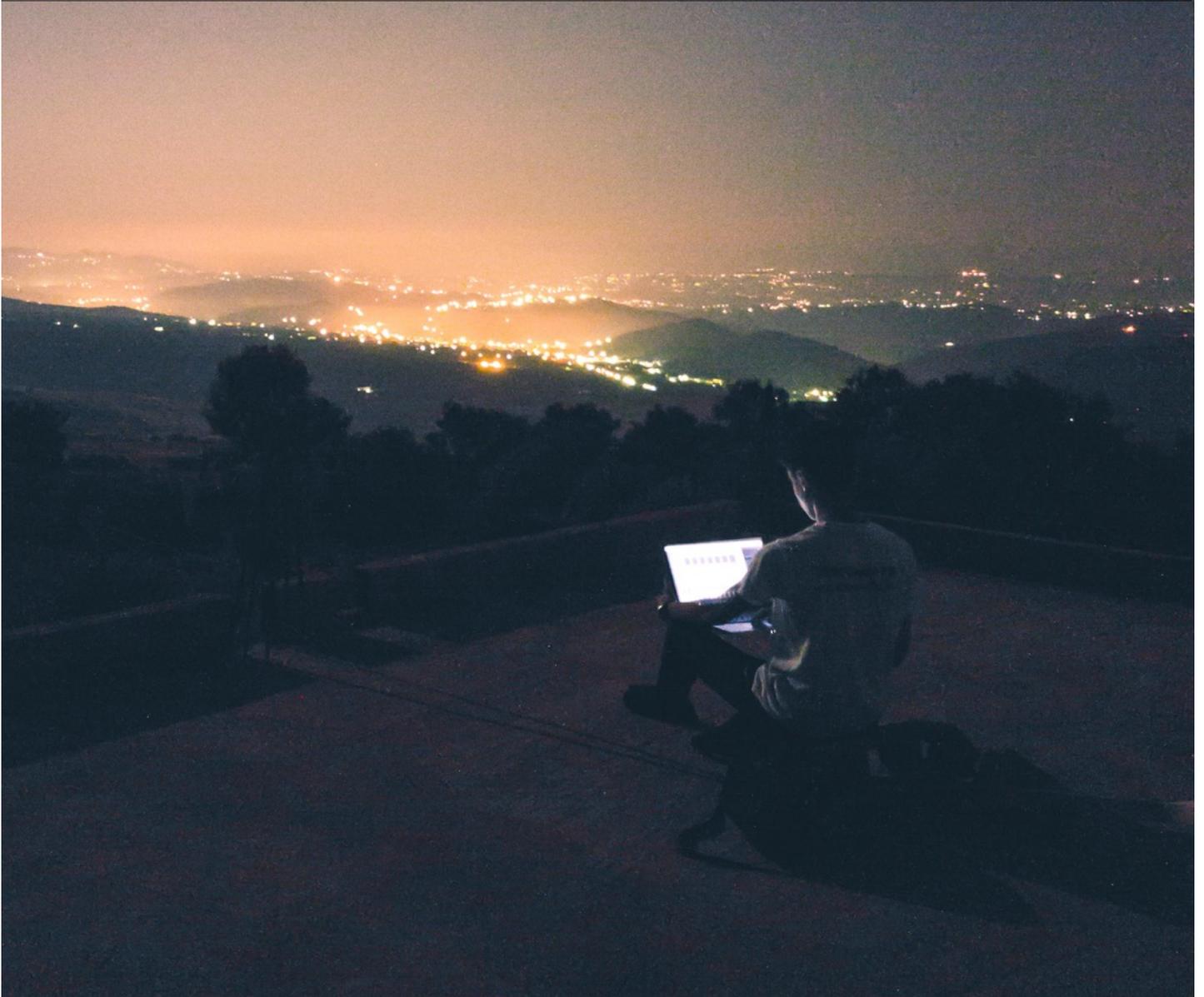
Table of Contents

Introduction

How often have you started a project only to leave it abandoned halfway through? Even worse, how many ideas are sitting neglected? What about the ideas stuck in your head, waiting to be written down?

If you're like most people, you've probably abandoned your share of dreams, goals, and aspirations. You've probably even gotten good at making this seem reasonable. After all, there are only so many hours in a day, and not every idea is worth pursuing. Right?

Well, maybe not. Consider this: what if you really could take action on your dreams? What if you could turn ideas into reality? Even better, consider how life would be if you could still finish those unfinished projects you already have scattered about here and there.

In this book, you're going to learn what it means to be a finisher. You'll understand why you drop projects and even attain the skills to start over. Even better, you'll find follow-through and finally take care of a few things you might have abandoned in the past.

In short, life is about to become very different. Welcome to the world of diligence and getting things done!

The Importance of Being a Finisher

Is finishing what you start all that important? Sure, it's probably good to get things done. After all, it always feels good when you finish a project. But in the long run, who cares if you have a few unfinished projects around the house, or you let a few things slide at work? So long as you're not putting anyone out, where's the harm?

Surprisingly, it matters more than you think.

Of course, we start with the obvious. Anytime you finish something, you're going to feel a certain sense of achievement. Achievement is a good thing. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the satisfaction of having gotten something done.

But there are other benefits to being a finisher. Let's explore a few.

It Feels Good
Finishing is full of positive emotions. Call it satisfaction, confidence, or anything you like. The truth of the matter is, you will experience a rush of sorts whenever you get something done. This has been tracked in scientific studies, where participants experience an increase in dopamine whenever they complete a task. This dopamine is why those games on your phone are so addicting: every time you complete a level, you're feeling like you just 'finished' something and are enjoying the chemical and emotional response to having done so. What makes this so cool is how much more of a rush you get when you accomplish something with a high level of engagement. The more you have to work for it, the better the happy feeling which comes with it.

You Learn What You're Capable Of
We all love an opportunity to prove ourselves. Here is where we gain confidence and show

others what we're made of. By finishing things, we know what we're able to accomplish. So do the people around us.

You Learn Perseverance

If you're always giving up before you finish, what are you learning about hard work? Finishing teaches us the art of perseverance. We know how to dig deep and keep going even when things get rough.

You Have Fewer Regrets

Ask yourself this: how do you truly feel about your unfinished projects? While you might say it doesn't matter whether you get things done or not, the truth is most of us carry with us at least a little regret when it comes to certain things. There's always a lurking hint of regret when we abandon a project, especially if you started with a lot of enthusiasm. Wouldn't it be nice not to have to carry these feelings?

You Build Respect

People look at you differently when they know you get things done. In the workplace, this can lead to added responsibility, promotion, and new opportunities. In a social situation, this manifests certain respect from others, coupled with a feeling you're someone who can be counted on when it matters.

You Like Yourself More

Speaking of respect, how do you feel about yourself? When you finish things, you start seeing yourself differently. You feel more self-assured because you know what you're doing and know you can be counted on to get things done. You start seeing yourself as someone worthwhile and even take pride in who you are.

The Hidden Benefits of Finishing

Before moving on, there are a few more things to consider. Some of the benefits of being a finisher are sneaky. These are traits we don't even realize we're building when we finish things. Think about these:

You Become Better Organized
When we finish things, we learn how long it takes to do these items. Now when we're planning to do similar tasks in the future, we have a better idea of just how long we're going to take. This knowledge means we can better organize future projects. We also have a better sense of how to prioritize what we're doing. Lastly, we even know whether we're on the right track or whether we need to step back and come at things from a different angle.

You Gain Focus
Finishing helps to underscore just why you're doing certain things in the first place. When you accomplish something, which is a piece of a larger goal, you regain the impetus needed to keep going, especially as you start to see the bigger picture come together.

You Feel the Love
Unfinished projects can sour any passion, especially if they've been dragging for some time. You might even be questioning whether you truly do enjoy any aspect of what you're doing; when you finish, though, the passion flares again. You remember all the reasons why you embarked on this journey in the first place.

You Become Fearless
Sometimes the reason we stall out in a project involves worrying about what comes next. You might even be afraid of the outcome or be

questioning your abilities to finish. These fears will stop you cold and even make you question yourself in other areas of your life. Finishing is a way of confronting these kinds of fears, giving them no further power over you.

You See the Future

Finally, finishing things helps you to understand better where you want to go next. With every finished project, you build a clearer path. You know what kind of life you want to have and what things you want to be doing to get there. You've glimpsed tomorrow and are ready to move on. This kind of clarity is something you can only gain after experiencing the culmination of what you've been trying to do.

Why Don't I Finish What I Start?

With so many positive benefits to being a finisher, it would seem like we would automatically finish everything we start. After all, why stall out if finishing is so good for us?

Typically, it's for the same reasons why we don't do other good things for ourselves. We're also not particularly great about eating kale or exercising for an hour every day. Or if we are, then there are likely other areas where we fall short, such as getting enough sleep or setting healthy boundaries with people.

In short, we're human, and sometimes, we have very human failings. We get busy, or we don't prioritize. Maybe we're just too tired to deal with one more thing. Let's take a closer look at the more popular culprits regarding not getting things done.

The Dirty Dozen

If these statements seem familiar, it's because you've used them or some variation of them in the past. If this is the case, don't feel bad. Everyone gets frustrated sometimes, which is what's at the heart of each of these excuses.

"This Isn't What I Thought It Would Be"
We all get what we think are great ideas in theory. Sometimes, though, they prove not to be as exciting or profitable as we think they might be. Once we dig into the hard work of making these kinds of goals a reality, we very quickly realize we're neck-deep in something else altogether. Unfortunately, quitting at this point can be a terrible mistake. While you might be discouraged because you've discovered something different, what you're not seeing is all the grand possibilities a shift in direction might lead you to experience. Stopping now could mean missing out on something amazing.

"I Don't Know What I'm Doing"

Have you ever been so excited about something, you just threw yourself in before you even knew where you were going? If you've ever stalled out because you suddenly had no idea just what you were aiming for, you know this landmine all too well. This kind of confusion is exactly what you get when you become unsure whether the work you're doing fits the goal or if you're unable to figure out the next action because you have no idea quite where you're going. Quitting here is the easy way out, or so it will seem at the time. What you often don't realize is how beneficial stepping back to redefine the goal would be. It only takes a minute to take something abstract and to turn it into an idea worth pursuing.

"I'm Bored"

If you've ever played a video game, then you probably are already familiar with the concept of "grinding." If not, it's not hard to understand. Grinding is what you call doing a repetitive task over and over, generally to build up a resource that will eventually carry you to the next step. In video games, these kinds of tasks generally give you coins to spend in the game. In real life, these kinds of tasks come up repeatedly, generally for much of the same reasons. The problem with this kind of action is it can get tedious very quickly, and you don't often see much benefit to it until you've been doing it for some time. Talk about boring! The problem is, many goals do require a certain degree of this kind of task. In short, nothing great will ever happen without some kind of hard work.

"It's Not Worth It"

When you feel like no one appreciates your efforts, it's hard to keep going. After all, what's the point if no one cares but you? Of course, this is exactly the problem with this kind of thinking. Why should you be worried about what anyone else thinks? Doing something which matters to you ought to be good enough. This is why quitting, for this reason, can be doubly damaging. Not only do you miss out on completing what you set out to do, but you're also sending yourself a nasty message regarding how little you matter. Talk about a blow to self-esteem!

"People Will Expect More of Me"

Success can be downright scary. With this statement is a healthy amount of fear. This is because getting through something difficult can be very life-changing. People do tend to

notice success. And yes, they might even shift their expectations of you because of it. But stopping, for this reason, means killing your future accomplishments and, at the same time, allowing your fear of not being able to succeed again to rule you. Is this really how you want to live?

"It's More Fun Where I Am"
Oddly enough, sometimes we never finish a project because we're just having too much fun. Imagine the college student who is living the dream. They enjoy being challenged intellectually, enjoying the social aspects of attending a college and embracing the academic experience. These are the folks who become career students, constantly shifting majors and staying in school perpetually because, to them, this is better than graduating. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking might seem okay at first glance, but it also keeps you from discovering what else life has to offer. How sad if you miss out on something spectacular because you were too busy staying in place to enjoy it.

"I Don't Have Time"
It seems today, more than ever, people have fewer hours in a day, which doesn't quite seem possible when there have been so many time-saving innovations in recent years. The problem is, there's always something which needs doing, and never enough hours in the day to get it done. More often than not, what we're saying when we make this statement isn't so much about having time, as thinking something else is more important, which needs to be done instead. The problem? We're terrible about prioritizing ourselves, so we very often lay aside the most important things for the sake of items that could easily be delegated or even forgotten. Instead of quitting, we might have benefitted more from deciding what was truly important in our lives.

"I Bit Off More Than I Could Chew"
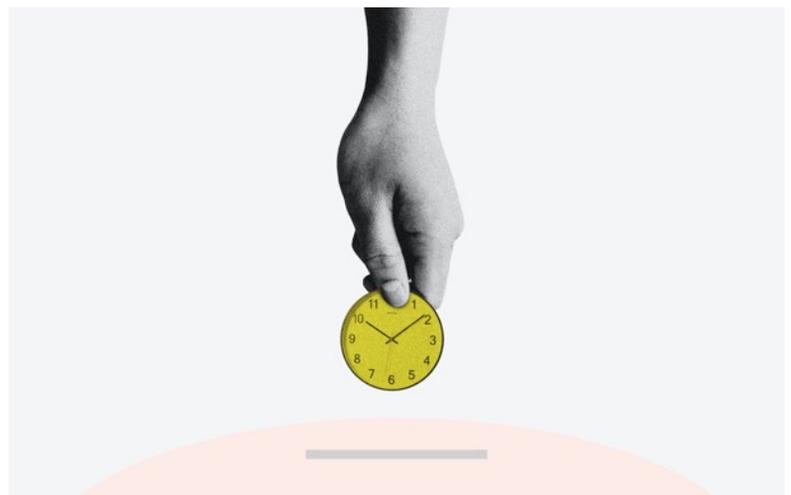
Ever feel like you're in over your head? Then you very likely created a goal that was much too big. Quitting, for this reason, means you took on something which would have been better off being divided into smaller goals. Instead of quitting, it would have been better to look for milestones or other ways to break up the task into something more manageable.

"I Have Too Much Going On"
If you feel like you're running in circles trying to get everything done at once, then your problem isn't with your project so much as it's with learning the art of saying, "No." Instead of quitting what's important, you would likely benefit more from stepping back from those things which don't serve any real purpose or which could have been delegated to others.

"I Never Finish Anything"
Too many previous failures can set us up for failure in our minds to the point where we'll even self-sabotage (generally subconsciously) rather than be proved wrong. But the biggest trap here is how incredibly easy it is to say these words to get out of ever having to try at all. What's worse? These words are an absolute lie. Everyone, at some point, has finished something or another, even if it's just your math homework back in the fourth grade. Consider this: Instead of focusing on the negative, wouldn't it be better to switch your self-talk over to something more positive? Imagine how you'd feel if you started noting all the things you have finished instead.

"It's Not Right"
To many people, finishing can be a real problem. They become caught up in the idea that what they're working on isn't going to be adequate somehow. Perfectionism can be quite a difficult roadblock to overcome, especially since it looks so logical from the outside. After all, wouldn't you want to do your best work before declaring something to be finished? The problem is, while in some cases this might be true, more often than not, this kind of tweaking can do more harm than good. Perfectionism can become a type of procrastination and an excuse to fall into some serious fears about not being good enough.

"I Don't Really Want to Do This"

This is perhaps one of the more honest and even raw or emotional pleas you might make to keep from finishing something. It could be whatever you started triggered some thought or emotion from the past you don't want to deal with. Or you're in the midst of a task you don't want to do but know you should (such as physical therapy after an accident). Sometimes you should heed this statement. If you honestly don't want to do something, maybe you *should* quit. The problem? Sometimes we have to do the hard things, whether we like it or not. Consider the example given regarding physical therapy. Quitting could be quite harmful to your health. What this means is you need to use these words carefully. Examine whether or not this particular task is one which you need to do anyway, whether you want to or not, before stepping back.

The Ultimate Excuse

You've got your dirty dozen of excuses, but there's one more statement which you need to consider as it's used frequently in conjunction with the others though it works pretty well all by itself:

Everything is Too Chaotic Right Now
Between politics, health scares, and crises of all sorts, there's no chaos where this particular statement doesn't hold up. There are dozens of reasons life could be considered chaotic:

- You're just starting a new job.
- You've been diagnosed with a serious illness.
- You're experiencing a financial setback.
- You're caught up in a crisis that affects your community (pandemic, wildfire, earthquake, etc.)
- Someone in your immediate family has died.
- You've just lost your job.
- Your adult children have just moved back home.
- You're retiring.
- You're getting married.

The list goes on.

Considering the scope of this statement, this kind of excuse can seem pretty reasonable until you consider one very important thing: there's always going to be a crisis. No matter what you're setting out to do, chaos will tend to lurk around the corner.

Of course, sometimes, you will need to step back when the crisis is taking up your entire life. This can happen, but there's a difference between a temporary stopping of things and quitting

outright. There are some things worth fighting for, meaning we might be better off pushing through anyway. Think about the single mom working days and going to college by night to make a better life for her children. Pushing through can have its benefits, which leads us to the next chapter, where we'll focus on how to take action even when it's hard.

Take Action!

Hopefully, by now, you've started thinking about some of those unfinished projects you have hanging around. Or maybe you're already inspired to dig into a new project. After all, things are going to go differently this time…aren't they?

The good news is, you're already ahead of the game. You have a clearer vision of why it's important to act diligently and finish what you start. By understanding why, you stalled out before, you know where to find the potential pitfalls. With this in mind, you're good to go.

Of course, this might feel a little scary. When you make a habit of leaving things unfinished, you start to think you can't get things done even when you try. You already know good

intentions are never enough. You've likely had many great ideas that you never even bothered to start for one reason or another.

Also, this might seem especially hard if your life is chaotic right now.

Here's where you may have to dig deep to find a little courage. Not a lot, mind you. You only need enough to start. The follow-through and eventual finishing of your project will be addressed later. With this in mind, it's time to stop overthinking things and jump in.

Remember, you're only trying to get started at this point. Nothing more.

The First Steps
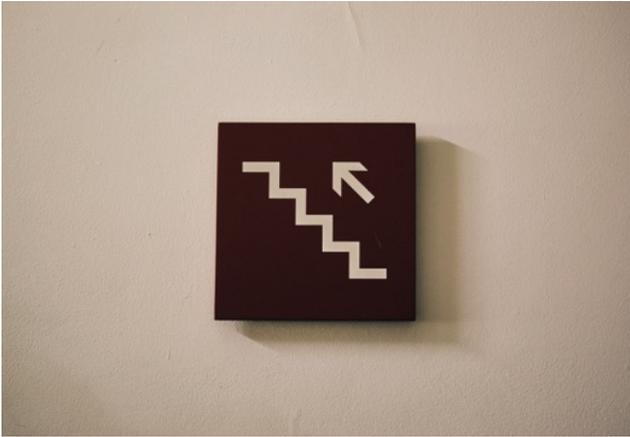
The following tips should be enough to get you in motion. Keep in mind, though, not every tip works for every person. If something here doesn't resonate or do much to get you started, skip it and move on to the next. With a little trial and error, you'll figure out pretty quickly what works for you.

Prepare Beforehand

It doesn't take much time to set out a few goals for what you want to accomplish. Create a to-do list or put a few items on your schedule, so you know precisely where you're starting when you set down to work.

Look at the Big Picture

Remind yourself exactly why you're doing what you're doing. Visualize the goal and the steps you need to take to get there. See your success.

Try a Quick Analysis

Before you even begin, take a moment to note how you feel. Hungry? Thirsty? Tired? Dealing with any problems beforehand will make you more ready to jump into work without distraction.

Move Around

Try taking a brisk walk or doing a few jumping jacks or something else to get your heart rate up and the blood flowing. You want to do just enough to get your energy levels up.

Drink Water

Did you know being well-hydrated makes you think more clearly? A glass of water before beginning can set your brain in motion.

Try Some Tunes

Some people work better with music. Try putting on something peppy for energy or music which inspires your creativity.

Dress the Part

This is especially true if you work from home, but dressing fully - and yes, that means all the way down to your shoes - has been proven to make a person feel more productive.

Work Out Some Rewards

Give yourself something to look forward to by putting together a reward system for reaching specific milestones.

Get Inspired

Do you have a specific individual you think of as being inspiring? A picture of your hero or some well-placed quotes can help you feel more motivated and ready to begin.

Listen Up

Make podcasts or motivational speakers part of your morning routine or commute. By the time you sit down to work, you'll be feeling the inspiration.

Use a Timer

If you're having trouble with the idea of jumping, why not give yourself a task with a deadline. Set a timer for five or ten minutes and tell yourself you get a break when the timer goes off. This can turn into a fun game of Beat the Clock.

Make a Game of it

Speaking of Beat the Clock, anytime you can make your task into something fun, you're already ahead. What are some ways you can turn what you're doing into a game?

Cue the Action

Turn off your phone, block all distractions, make sure you have what you need on hand. A few minutes of prep time before you get started can help you feel more ready to work.

Hyper Focus

Take your mind off the big picture by putting your attention on what's right in front of you. Hyper focusing on a specific task can be wildly productive.

Team Up

Don't rely entirely on your energy and enthusiasm to get started. Having an accountability partner or someone to work with can help to keep you on track. Also, working with someone else can be a very gratifying experience, helping you look forward to getting started.

Recreate the Flow

If you've ever been in the flow state, you know what it feels like to be in the zone. When sitting down to work, try to pull together those feelings, recreating the experience as closely as you can. You might be able to pull yourself back into it.

Make it Public

Hold yourself accountable for starting something by announcing your intentions to those around you. You could also use social media to help give you the nudge you need to get going.

Choose Wisely

Are you one of those people who likes starting with the big things first, or would you rather take care of all the little stuff? Knowing how you like the work can help you plan your approach, so you start in the 'right' place for you.

Use a Mantra or Trigger Action

Sometimes, people create a specific routine they do every time before they jump into what needs doing for the day. For example, some people make a routine of starting work when they finish a daily task, such as checking email. This conditions you to expect to work the moment this action occurs.

Jump

Speaking of jumping into work, why not try a headlong leap into action without stopping first to think about it. Just flinging yourself into the first task can be surprisingly productive and a lot of fun.

Follow Through

How does action feel? Hopefully, if you've started a new project or are preparing to, you have a lot of momentum behind you already. But will it last? Probably not. The sad truth is, at some point, we all start slowing down or making excuses not to put in the work we did initially. Why?

Welcome to the land of Follow Through. Follow-through is where you've probably slipped in the past. Think about this: you've started all manner of things with tons of energy and enthusiasm. But no matter how much you love your project, at some point, this energy is going to wane.

This is pretty normal when you stop to think about it. New things are always interesting. It's the familiarity that made your actions start to feel routine, especially if you were some ways away from completion. So, how do you get the energy back so you can keep going?

Let's explore this in two different stages: Dedication and Persistence.

Dedication

When you're thoroughly invested in something, believing wholeheartedly in what you're doing, you can't help but be excited about it. This is why dedication is so important to getting things done. When dedication is missing, we tend to grow bored or disinterested in the project. We'll question why we're doing it in the first place and then quickly lose all impetus when it comes to getting it done.

How can you build back dedication after you've lost it? Try these simple tips:

Remember the Dream
The first and best way to regain dedication is to remind yourself what you're fighting to achieve. Visualize the goal and pull up all the positive emotions which went with this goal. Don't be afraid to use reminders such as vision boards or other concrete reminders which keep the goal firmly in mind.

Have a Talk With Your Mentor
A mentor is generally someone you've brought into your life who has already achieved the things you want. By spending time with your mentor, you'll experience their dedication which in turn bolsters your own.

Consider Your Progress
Sometimes all it takes is a look at how far you've come to re-energize yourself. The road ahead won't look quite so long, and you can enjoy the momentum you've already built.

Embrace Flexibility
When things aren't going as planned, it's easy to feel discouraged. However, by being flexible,

you'll start to see new possibilities, which will add a layer of excitement that is necessary to dedication.

Have Faith

For dedication to be effective, it needs to be coupled with an element of faith. The assurance everything is going to work out, in the end, is a powerful motivator and will give you the impetus to keep going. So, in other words, trust the dream and know everything is going to be okay.

Persistence

Sometimes we don't have much of a choice when it comes to getting something done. We might never have felt particularly inspired about a project or have some kind of obstacle that will take concrete action to get past. These are the times where moving forward looks like a lot of hard work. Chances are, it probably is.

These situations tend to crop up when assigned a project by someone with a certain authority over us, such as a boss. Other times we experience a situation where we just know we have to slog our way through something because it's good for us, such as making goals to improve one's health after a medical scare. Whatever the case, in these situations, dedication might not be enough. You're just going to have to push through whether you want to or not.

This is where persistence comes in. The ability to show up and put the work in repeatedly, even when you do not feel it is a skill that is crucial when it comes to diligence. Thankfully there are ways you can build the ability to be persistent as well. Try these tips to keep you in motion:

Keep It Small
Anytime you try to work on big steps, you're going to wear down faster. For one thing, you won't see the progress the way you do with smaller steps. For another, this can be a surefire recipe for boredom. Divide your goals into little bite-size pieces, though, and you'll find it much easier to keep moving along, especially since every time you complete a task will feel like a victory.

Celebrate Often
Speaking of victories, whenever you reach those milestones, make sure to acknowledge them somehow. Rewards don't have to be big, crazy things. Even just getting up to move around for

a bit, the promise of some fresh air or time with the family dog can be rewarding. Hint: Use things you like doing as a reward over fancy snacks or things that cost a lot of money.

What's the Plan?

When pushing through, at some point, you're pretty much guaranteed to start lagging. Don't let yourself become blindsided by this kind of fatigue. Instead, create a list of options you can jump to when you start to falter and lose productivity. For example, your list might include stopping for a 5-minute break to check messages on your phone, switching tasks, or stretching and moving around for a bit.

Make it a Habit

When you're pushing through like this, leverage your schedule and turn daily productivity into a habit. For example, if you know you're going to be working on this project between 2:00 – 4:00 pm daily, then you'll find yourself automatically shifting into work gear during those hours without having to think about it.

Be Generous with Yourself

There will be a time when you fall off the rails and miss a day or two for some reason. When this happens, don't use this as an excuse to quit. Instead, be forgiving of yourself. Life happens. The important thing is to jump back in where you were and to keep going.

Know Your Limits

The problem with chasing goals is we get into this mindset where we need always to be working on them. While deadlines do exists, so does the need for your good health. At some point, you'd do better if you pause and address your own needs for a bit. Eat something. Sleep. Take a step back, and you'll be able to come at things fresh once you've had a chance to recharge.

By dedicating yourself and being persistent in your work habits, you'll find it easier to keep your momentum even when you've been working on this project for a while. The nice thing? Before you know it, you'll be crossing the finish line, and your project will be done.

Finish What You Start

Are you feeling better about being diligent and getting things done? If you're like most people, you're probably more enthusiastic, at least about new projects. But what about the old, abandoned ones you've left behind?

Chances are you have at least a few items lurking which you've always wished you hadn't dropped. In this chapter, you're going to pull those out and dust them off again. Here's where you finally finish what you start. We'll even make it easy by giving you a step-by-step guide to getting them done.

Finishing Up in 5 Easy Steps

Get Picky

Before you do anything else, you're going to need to pick your project. Which unfinished task is the most unsettling? What do you regret the most? Don't just grab whatever is the most recent or is convenient. For the best success, you need to make a meaningful choice. What is the one which matters?

Figure Your Needs

What do you have to have to finish this task? Before you even begin, make sure you have all your supplies. If you lack any knowledge, now is the time to learn. Don't even start until you have everything on hand.

Create a Game Plan

No matter what you do, don't jump in cold and just start doing things. While this might get you moving, you're going to crash and burn. You need to be intentional in your actions and create a plan which works. What is the end date you want this finished? What are the steps required to get there? What milestones can you set using this knowledge? Put your plan on a calendar and schedule the stages.

Make a Commitment

Now, go back over everything you've done to get ready. How do you feel about this project now? This is the point where you're going to make a conscious commitment to what you're doing. Say, "I'm going to finish this" out loud. Post messages to yourself as reminders if it helps. Tell others about your commitment and enlist their support.

Jump

Are you feeling ready? If you have everything from the previous steps, you are. This is not the time for second-guessing or holding back. It's time for action without overthinking. Take a deep breath and begin.

From here, the rest is just Follow Through (see the previous chapter if you need help). Use your schedule as you go—Check-in with yourself. If you're having troubles, pause to reassess. Do you need to shift a goal or create a different timeline? Make adjustments as you go, and keep moving forward until you reach the end.

It seems like it should be harder than this, doesn't it? This is the funny thing about abandoned projects. We tend to build them up in our minds to unmanageable proportions. We start imagining long and lengthy processes to finish. We start thinking things are impossible simply because it makes logical sense for this to be true. Otherwise, we would have finished. Right?

Probably not. As you've discovered by now, we're good at derailing ourselves. Sometimes, we need simple steps to get us started, and the rest all falls into place.

That said, if you find yourself struggling with the project you picked, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I finishing this because I think I *have* to or because I *want* to?
- Is this something I'm no longer interested in?
- Am I clear on my goal?
- Am I clear on the steps?
- Do I have what I need, or am I still missing something?
- Is there some other roadblock I haven't dealt with yet?
- Am I reacting emotionally to something?
- Is this something I might need help with?

Depending on your answer, you might still have some work to do before you're ready for your project. Getting further clarification, materials, or assistance might take some added work before you're ready to begin. Emotional triggers might need to be worked through. This may include the help of others, such as a mentor or even a counselor.

And in some cases, this might not be the right project for you anymore. You might have changed somehow and moved on.

The key here is to keep an open mind, and if you can, relax. The practice of diligence is meant to give you the ability to work on what matters most to you. It's meant to be exciting and interesting or at the very least give you peace about moving forward on something you need to.

Conclusion

Say goodbye to procrastination and hello to the new you!

Yes, you really can act with diligence and finish what you've started. You've already proved it if you've read this far. Now, all that remains is to apply what you've learned and start getting things done.

So, where do you want to begin? The future is in your hands! Whether you're about to embark on a new project or intend to pick up something you put down a long time ago, remember, you have the tools you need to make things happen. You've already learned the hows and

whys of finishing and even know how to build back momentum so you can follow through and complete what you set out to do.

Ready?

Let's begin!