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Why can't I force myself to go to the gym before work? Get my high-priority work done before I check my email? Stop letting my expense reports pile up? Why am I so bad at changing?

Even the most motivated people can get stuck, frustrated, and lose hope during the process of behavioral change. As a time coach, I see this happen when clients become so fixated on specific tactics — getting up at 5 am, say, to make time for the gym, or a hard-and-fast rule that they never check email before 10 am — that they lose sight of the fact that many methods could lead to achieving their larger strategic goals.

Yes, habit change takes discipline, patience, and practice. But no, it shouldn't feel like you're constantly trying to force yourself to do something you *really* don't want to do. That's unsustainable. To make new habits stick, they must work with the reality of who you are and what's best for you.

To identify tactics that will actually work for you and keep your focus on your big objectives, start by **determining where you're stuck**. Identify a few areas where you've seen little-to-no behavioral change despite your best efforts — for example, blocking out whole days for big projects or going to the gym first thing in the morning. Then zoom out to determine your real goal. Why was this activity important to you in the first place? Maybe you want to feel like you're finishing priority tasks, or have a healthier, more physically active life.

Now **brainstorm other tactics** you could use to achieve those goals. If you've never managed to block out an entire day for your major projects, try finding two half-days instead. If you hate the gym or aren't a morning person, don't expect yourself to go there first thing in the morning! Instead,

consider options like a bike ride after work or exercises you can do at home before bed. Identify activities that align with your natural tendencies.

You may need to try out a few different tactics until you discover when you can be most consistently effective. **Test one of your hypotheses each week.** For instance, you could try going for a bike ride after work for one week, and then the next week see if you can do exercises at home before bed. Observe what seems to fit most naturally with your schedule and motivation levels. Arrange your schedule in different ways and see what produces the best results. Once you've identified that sweet spot, guard that time from meetings and other activities.

If you need accountability, get it. Top performers embrace this reality and surround themselves with strong teammates and assertive assistants. They know that these individuals will help shore up any weaknesses and allow them to fully use their strengths. There's no shame in surrounding yourself with people who will check in on you and ask you about the status of key projects or goals, whether that means hiring a good project manager or a motivated personal trainer.

But if there are tasks that you really struggle to do, delegate them or outsource them. It's better to not spend willpower energy forcing yourself to do what other people can do for you. Save that effort for activities you can't transfer to anyone else. Make a list of activities that you tend to fall behind on, such as filing expense reports, setting up meetings, or updating tracking documents. Then, see if you can find someone within your organization, an outside contractor, or a technology tool that could take these items off your list. If necessary, clear this strategy with your boss before proceeding. When it comes to chores like errands, you can do everything from ordering groceries to having shampoo delivered automatically online from Amazon. You can also hire assistants to do activities from organizing an event to picking up dry cleaning through companies like TaskRabbit or Fancy Hands.

By staying focused on the goal and experimenting with tactics, I've seen people who have never kept routines start to exercise consistently, make progress on priority projects, get on top of e-mail, and accomplish all sorts of other goals. Keep these principles in mind, and you can—and will—achieve lasting behavioral change.

Elizabeth Grace Saunders is a [time management coach](#) and the founder of [Real Life E Time Coaching & Speaking](#). She is author of [How to Invest Your Time Like Money](#) and [Divine Time Management](#). Find out more at www.RealLifeE.com.
