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How to Stick to Your Goals When Life Gets Crazy

I played baseball in college. During the offseason, my teammates and I would battle through friendly Strongman competitions where we would flip a giant tractor tire, drag a sled full of weights, and generally push, pull, and throw heavy, oddly-shaped things.

Occasionally, there would be an event where someone would complain about “not being built for this” or about “not training for this type of thing.”

Eventually, my roommate responded to the whining with a simple phrase: “Train for chaos.”

“Train for chaos” was a simple way of saying, “Don't tell me that the circumstances aren't ideal. Tell me that you're going to make it your responsibility to be better prepared next time.”

You may not find yourself flipping tractor tires anytime soon, but you can adapt this philosophy from “train for chaos” to “plan for chaos.” I find that this mentality can be incredibly useful when it comes to sticking to your goals and living a

healthy life — especially when life gets busy.

Here's how you can use this idea...

Plan for Chaos

Let's say that you have a goal that you want to stick to consistently. For example, working out (<https://jamesclear.com/start-working-out>) three times per week or meditating for five minutes each morning.

If everything goes as planned, then sticking to your goal isn't too difficult. If you wake up on time, then you should have the extra five minutes to meditate in the morning. If rush hour traffic isn't bad, then you should be able to make it to the gym before going to your kid's performance tonight.

Basically, if there aren't any unexpected interruptions, then it just comes down to getting started (<https://jamesclear.com/start-succeed>).

But when life gets busy and chaos starts to happen, that's when we start to come up with excuses. Phrases like “I wasn't expecting X to happen...” start creeping into your life and you end up pushing off the goals that you said were important.

The chaos and unpredictability of life is one of the factors that makes sticking to your goals difficult. Which brings us to the important questions...

How can you stay consistent when day-to-day life is so unpredictable? How can you plan for chaos?

Reduce the Scope, Stick to the Schedule

As you probably know, my writing schedule is to publish a new article every Monday and Thursday on JamesClear.com (<https://jamesclear.com/>).

Last April, I was traveling internationally when I had a terrible case of food poisoning. I wanted to publish a good article that day, but this unexpected sickness made things difficult. So, I told myself, “If I don't have a post written before 11pm, then I'll publish one letting people know that it's coming later this week.”

A few hours later, I published an article that said, “This post is coming! (<https://jamesclear.com/post-is-coming>)” I hated publishing something that wasn't useful, but I still proved to myself that I could stick to the schedule even when the circumstances weren't ideal.

I've written previously about adopting the mentality of “reducing the scope, but sticking to the schedule (<https://jamesclear.com/time-management-tips>).” The basic idea is that on any given day it is more important to stick to your schedule than it is to meet your expectations.

For example, my expectation is to write a useful article every Monday and Thursday. But it's more important that I stick to the schedule and maintain my habit for the long-term (<https://jamesclear.com/habits>) than it is for every post to be incredible.

In my experience, the If-Then Technique is one of the best ways to stick to your schedule when life gets crazy.

The If-Then Technique

The If-Then Technique is the perfect way to plan for chaos and stick to your goals even when life gets crazy. Why? Because it forces you to create a strategy for reducing the scope, but sticking to the schedule *before* you actually need to do so.

All you need to do is complete this phrase: “If [something unexpected], then [your response].”

For example...

- If I don't wake up in time to run tomorrow morning, then I'll run after work.
- If I can't make it to yoga during my lunch break, then I'll take a stretching break this afternoon.
- If I buy something unhealthy for lunch, then I'll cook a healthy meal for dinner.

The If-Then Technique forces you to consider the unpredictable circumstances that so often enter our daily lives. And that means you have fewer excuses for doing nothing and more options for sticking to your goals.

You can also use this technique as a way to plan for poor performances as well. For example, a basketball player could say, “If I miss 10 free throws at practice, then I'll visualize myself making 20 free throws before I fall asleep tonight.”

It's a useful way of forcing yourself to consider how you will practice deliberately (<https://jamesclear.com/deliberate-practice>) rather than just putting your time.

Where to Go From Here

Having a busy day, dealing with unexpected delays, getting sick, and traveling for work are just a few of the thousands of tiny emergencies that prevent most people from sticking to their goals. It doesn't have to be that way, though.

If you choose to plan for chaos and use The If-Then Technique to outline ways that you can “reduce the scope, but stick to the schedule,” then you can find options for staying on-task even when your day gets off-course.

When you can't do it all, do something small.



Thanks for reading. You helped save a life.

Whenever you buy one of [my books](https://jamesclear.com/books) (<https://jamesclear.com/books>), join the [Habits Academy](#)

(<https://habitsacademy.com>), or otherwise contribute to my work, 5 percent of the profits are donated to the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF).

With each donation, AMF distributes nets to protect children, pregnant mothers, and families from mosquitos carrying malaria. It is one of the most cost-effective ways to extend life and fulfills my bigger mission to spread healthy habits and help others realize their full potential.

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