

Five reasons why you'll love the Five Minute Journal

1 It's the simplest, most effective thing you can do every day to be happier. It's been proven over and over again that shifting your focus to the positive can dramatically improve your happiness. The key is consistency. With a positive quote every day, a weekly challenge and a structure to help you focus on what's good, you'll find *The Five Minute Journal* to be a great way to start and end the day.

2 It's built on proven principles on positive psychology. Somehow, it took psychologists as a community about 80 years or so to realize it's better to focus on the positive behavioural traits as opposed to depression, anxiety and perceptual disorders. This journal has been created by combining the practical elements that can make the difference in your life. You've been spared the hours and weeks of moving through dense academic jargon. It's all here. And it's been made easy.

3 It's a journal for people who don't write journals.

If you're the kind of person who always wanted to write a journal, but life, excuses and email took precedence, look no further. *The Five Minute Journal* was designed for you. Whatever your excuse for not keeping a journal is, this notebook will eliminate them.

4 You'll have a snapshot of your days, weeks, months and years.

When was the last time you saw pictures from a few years ago? Did you pause to feel the nostalgia and smile silently to yourself? Imagine if you could have the same experience by just flipping to a certain day on a specific year in your life, you could zoom in on who you were, what you did and how you felt on that day. It'll be your own chronicle of memories, ideas and dreams.

5 Have a problem sticking to a commitment? Good.

You'll love *The Five Minute Journal* (see page 42). Inside you'll find tips and tricks to fool proof your commitment to write frequently. How often do we shirk away from a commitment that's good for us? Overweight doctors, procrastinating professors and unfaithful presidents prove this point. You'll discover simple, effective actions you can take to stay the course of writing this journal and in other areas of your life that are important to you.

It's all possible. In under five minutes a day.

How it Works

*“We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”*

—ARISTOTLE

Chances are you've come across quotes like the one from Aristotle on the left. They make us evaluate our present habits in a split second, and think about the things we need to change. Even if you consider yourself to be ambitious, chances are you find it difficult to implement a series of new behaviours in your life.

You see, common sense is not common action.

That's why 44% of doctors are overweight.¹ You could bet they spent the majority of their youth buried behind a book telling them about the merits of exercise and diet. Repeat after me – reading a book on how to ride a bicycle does not qualify you for the Tour de France.

Current research in self-control and self-regulation shows willpower to be a limited resource similar to a muscle that tires with use.² Chronically stressed humans find it difficult to resist temptation, ranging from the seemingly benign like a latte, to a no holds barred shopping spree. What is one to do? Forgo the shopping spree and opt for the latte? Or is there another option?

Fortunately, with a little help from standing on the shoulders of proverbial giants of real world achievement and science, we bring to you this neat little journal. Don't let the simplicity fool you, it combines several principles that combine seamlessly to weave the fabric of your new life.



Basic Principles

THE BEGINNING AND THE END

“Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.”

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Wisdom from ancient and modern times point to the beginning and the end of the day as a time to think, evaluate, and correct course. Regardless of when your day begins or ends, few people have established positive rituals that allow them to thrive. Contrary to popular opinion, such established positive rituals aren't restricted to the domain of ultra successful CEOs or Buddhist monks.

We recommend you keep this notebook with a pen attached right at your bedside, in an inviting place. Let this be the first impulse when you wake up and the final impulse before you sleep. Let *The Five Minute Journal* hold that coveted spot on your bedside dresser just the perfect arm's reach for you. You will be richly rewarded.

In about five minutes per day, you can establish a positive pattern of thinking and acting when it really matters. It's the ideal time window that allows for minimal effort for wild reward otherwise known as think hard, work smart. Onward.

Why should I write right upon waking up?

Have you ever had a day when you woke up and it felt like everything was going your way? Things just felt easy, even effortless and all you wanted to do is smile?

Is there a way that you can get a taste of that everyday?

The Five Minute Journal is designed to help you do just that. You're fresh, still waking up and have the precious opportunity in the first few minutes to set the tone for the rest of the day. The journal asks you the precise questions that will create positive habit loops.

Make sure to write the journal first thing in the morning, even if you are:

Still sleepy? Thanks for sharing. Write it anyway.

Feeling lazy? Thanks for sharing. Write it anyway.

Late for work? Thanks for sharing. Write it anyway.

Growth isn't all roses and honey. It isn't always comfortable. And it doesn't come with a cute bow tied over it.

The reward of growth is priceless. Growth can lead to fulfilling relationships, great health and a good night's sleep.

Resistance is the opposite of growth. It is the cause of depression, weakness, and credit card debt.

When you write the journal everyday, you push past resistance. You give yourself the opportunity to grow. You make the commitment to keep going. To make your mark on the world.

Why should I write the journal right before going to sleep?

What do you typically do before you go to sleep?

Do you have a routine?

The average American watches 5 hours and 11 minutes of TV per day.³ If by the time you read this and the TV isn't as popular, then you are most likely on your laptop or a new electronic device.

Much of this happens before sleep.

What if you chose to use this time to invest in yourself?

In your well-being?

Writing the journal before you go to sleep is a step in the right direction. Let it be one habit that you do everyday (we also recommend brushing and flossing your teeth).

Spectacular results are a product of intelligent design and herculean consistency. Take the example of maintaining harmony in relationships. There are some individuals who choose to live with intense drama that could rival a reality TV show.

Yet there are others who continue to deepen their love and hardly fight.

There is a little known secret that is shared by couples in fulfilling relationships. It made them happier and creates lasting bonds.

Here's the secret: They resolve any conflict before they go to sleep. With love, honesty and trust.

In the same way, it's important that you write the journal before you go to sleep. You'll find that *The Five Minute Journal* instantly helps you shift your focus on the positive and short circuits negative thought loops. No matter how your day was, you'll sleep a bit better than you would have otherwise. Priceless.

Make sure to write the journal before going to sleep, even if you:

Had a long day? Thanks for sharing. Write it anyway.

Have a pounding headache? Thanks for sharing. Write it anyway.

Early morning tomorrow? Thanks for sharing. Write it anyway.

***Never go to sleep
without a request to
your subconscious.***

THOMAS EDISON







The Morning Routine

TODAY'S GRATITUDE LIST

What are three things that you can be grateful for today?

One of the greatest gifts of being human is the ability to choose what to focus on. Regardless of what happens on the outside, if you're perfectly calm and still on the inside, you can handle anything. Few of us have the emotional and mental balance of a monk. Zen-like skills notwithstanding, the best way you can begin your day is by counting your blessings.

It's the antithesis of a bad-hair day, waking up on the wrong side of the bed. We suggest the best side of the bed is the one closest to this notebook.

No matter where you are and what your situation is, your focus can be shifted to something positive. Here's how it looks in practice.

I am grateful for...

1. *I'm grateful for the warm bed that I sleep in.*
2. *I'm grateful for my body that is working in perfect harmony.*
3. *I'm grateful for the incredible friends in my life.*

* Here is a little secret to the gratitude list: Try writing things you are grateful for that you may not yet have in your life. Let's say you really want to be in a healthy relationship. Then write ... I am grateful to be in an incredible healthy relationship with a partner of my dreams. Just don't forget to clearly define this man/woman which is a whole different exercise.

What is gratitude?

This nifty emotion defies easy classification. Gratitude, derived from the Latin word *gratia* (meaning grace, graciousness or gratefulness) eludes easy explanation by academics. Definitions such as “the willingness to recognize the unearned increments of value in one’s experience” look great on term papers but don’t get the point across. We will not attempt to disguise imprecision with ten dollar words.

Gratitude is the experience of counting one’s blessings.

It is the feeling that embodies the word “Thank you.” It is the unexpected reward of a kind deed that is magically produced by your brain. It’s the cute, tingly feeling in your body that makes you smile at strangers.

Why scientists love gratitude?

Even after cutting through the smoke of Law of Attraction-style belief systems, gratitude has shown to be quite transformative in humans ranging from housewives to nursing students.

A 2003 study by Emmons and McCullough found that keeping a daily gratitude journal leads to not just an increased sense of well-being but also better sleep, willingness to accept change and also help and lower symptoms of physical pain.⁴

Delving deeper into the world of brain science, there's another study that illustrates the immediate effectiveness of gratitude. Turns out, gratitude could be the ultimate magic pill for 'happiness' (drugs notwithstanding).

In a 2008 study, subjects experiencing gratitude were studied under fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and it was found that they were influencing their hypothalamus in real-time.⁵

The hypo-what?

The hypothalamus is the teeny part of your brain that directly influences sleep, eating and stress among an array of other important functions. Gratitude also stimulates the part of the brain associated with the neurotransmitter dopamine – the 'do it again' chemical – which is responsible for the creation of new learning pathways.

Bottom line: **Write the journal.** Every morning and every night – it's the closest thing to a magic pill.

Turns out scientists, jihadis and atheists actually agree on this.

CREATING A BETTER DAY

What would make today great?

Have you had the experience of buying a new car and seeing the same model everywhere you go?

If you're a woman, have you noticed when you wear a certain shade of lipstick, you're automatically cued to the shade of lipstick that other women are wearing? Have you had the experience of falling in love and seeing everything through rose coloured glasses? Or automatically noticing how someone has the same shoes/haircut/shirt/shoes?

These experiences are universal. Why do they happen?

There's a small part of your brain at the back called the reticular activation system (RAS) that turns on and off your perception of ideas and thoughts and determines the lenses through which you look at the world. When you take an action like buy a new car, you've taken a major step in redefining your possessions and your RAS changes to accommodate your new acquisition. And everywhere you go, your RAS will gently remind you of this change by pointing you others who have the same car as you.

When you write 'What would make today great?' you're taking a step to influence your RAS to point out and engage in activities that would make your day better. You're building new pathways in your brain that allows you to 'see' what you can do to

improve your well being every day. You're creating a new program in your mind that naturally learns to improve your happiness. Doing this consistently gives you consistently better days. It's that simple.

One study found that people who just thought about watching their favorite movie actually raised their endorphin levels (that chemical in your brain produces to make you feel happiness and well being) by 27 percent. Often the most enjoyable part of an activity is the anticipation.

To illustrate this with an example, let's introduce you to Katie. She's an ambitious twenty something whose favorite part of *The Five Minute Journal* is 'What would make today great?' because it gives her an excuse to brainstorm ideas to spice her day up. As soon as she wakes up, she spends an extra minute before writing out this section.

This is what a random day in her journal looks like.

Example:

1. Take extra time for myself before leaving work
2. Give a thank you note to mom
3. Sleep before 10 pm

Notice she makes sure she writes down what she has control over. She could write a sunny day. However, she has no control over whether the day would be sunny or not. She focuses on the specific actions she can take in the day to make it great. So, it's your turn now. What would make today great for you?

DAILY AFFIRMATION

The Daily Affirmation is a statement of what you want in your life.

If you've read this far, chances are you're interested in creating something amazing in your life and you're going to get it. You've got ideas about the person you want to be and of the future you want to build.

Cut to a study conducted by Ali Crum from Yale University and Ellen Langer where they performed an experiment to study the effect of brain priming on the staff of seven different hotels. Of the total participants, half were informed about how much exercise they were getting everyday through their work, how many calories they burned, how similar vacuuming is to a workout, etc. The other half were given no such information.

Several weeks later, it was found that the first group who had been primed to think of their work as exercise had actually lost weight and even their cholesterol levels dropped. Incredibly, these individuals had not done any more work nor had they exercised any more than the control group.⁶

Hence the operative question – how can you prime your brain to cash in on this?

The Daily Affirmation is a simple statement that defines you as you want to be in present tense. Every time you write your affirmation, you prime your brain to start building this belief in your mind. With consistency, you'll start to notice evidence in

of your belief and begin to create evidence of that belief in your mind.

Here's how it works in practice: Let's say Bruce is interested in building his confidence in everyday life. He wakes up in the morning and writes in his journal –

I am confident and comfortable in my own skin.

As he goes on his day, he naturally starts to notice the world from this perspective. Let's say he buys some tea and smiles at the cashier. His subconscious begins to think "Ah, this must be happening because I'm confident and comfortable in my own skin." Everyday he writes in the Journal, he begins to prime his brain to this belief.

Don't underestimate the effectiveness of this exercise. If Will Smith, Jim Carrey and Arnold Schwarzenegger found value in it, you can too.

Here are some examples of how this looks in the journal:

Here are some examples:

I live with passion and purpose.

You could also get nice and specific:

I am in a loving and passionate relationship.

I earn \$100,000/year.





The Night Routine

THE AWESOME THREE

What are three awesome things that happened during your day?

Possibly the best moment in the day is allowing yourself to take inventory of all the positive moments – big and small. The Awesome Three is your personal collection of the expected and unexpected bounty of awesomeness that you experienced in a day.

To illustrate the effectiveness of this one section, we turn to Quora – a social networking platform that allows intelligent people around the world to share insights, answers and knowledge. One such question relating to happiness gleaned a powerful response from a social marketer Brad Einarsen which was supported by leading psychologists such as BJ Fogg.

He shares his strategy:

When I was in a dark period, I instituted a simple rule that changed my life.

Rule: When I arrive home from work, the very first thing I tell my wife is the best thing that happened that day.

No exceptions. No complaining. Just the best thing that day, even if it was just a good cup of coffee. This had the effect of starting our evening off on a positive note and it changed our relationship.

And it can change your relationships too. When you write the Awesome Three, you count your blessing in the day – in reverse. This has the effect of allowing you to ‘prime’ your brain in reverse and can change not just your relationships with you loved ones, it can change your relationship with yourself.

For the first few weeks of listing your Awesome Three, start with something simple:

I remembered to floss.

A friend recommended a wonderful book for me.

Today's weather was really good.

I saw a cute stranger at the coffee shop.

The barista remembered how I like my Americano.

Slowly, you'll start getting better at this. Through the magic of discipline, the list will start getting better and better. Remember to review The Awesome Three every month to see how you're changing and moving forward.



THE TIME MACHINE

If you could magically go back in time and change something you did today, what would it be?

From movies ranging from Back to the Future to Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, the yearning to go back in time and change something is universal.

Let's milk this concept. Think of this as an imagination exercise where you get the chance to go back in time and change one thing you did during the day.

It could be saying (or not saying) something to someone.

It could be waking up earlier.

It could be trusting your gut with a decision.

The time machine is your personal reminder that you have the power to change your perception of the past and influence the future. In a very real way, you shape your future just the same way pro-level athletes and NASA astronauts do. The technology is available to you. It's the magic between your ears.

How it works: Your perception shapes your reality. And we've already established that priming your brain to automatically scan for the positive in the beginning of the day is an incredibly effective way to start the day. However, during the day, chances are your automatic responses most likely kick in.

Frustration in traffic or slow internet is a universal first world problem. Here's where you can remedy this – when you write The Time Machine, you get to update your perception of the actions you could take in the day. You begin to look at actionable ways in which you could have done something different to make your day even better.

Let's say Rob walked into a store and saw a pretty girl. He looked at her admiringly but didn't muster up the courage to walk up and say hi. He might have kicked himself for not approaching her. However, all is not lost. When he writes the Time Machine that night, he realizes if he could magically go back in time, he would have mustered the courage to say hi.

He writes:

I walked up and said hi to the stranger at the coffee shop.

And he begins to start building a pattern in his life where he looks at problems and looks at the actions that he can take to move through them. In time, this exercise can begin to shift how you look at problems and help you automatically take the actions you want to take.

Here are some examples:

1. I make my bed in the morning
2. I wake up right when the alarm goes off (didn't snooze).
3. I go to the gym in the morning.

Most people find themselves smiling when they're writing this (hint, hint).

Weekly Challenges

The weekly challenges will encourage you to take actions beyond your comfort zone, where real growth happens. They're given on a random day per week instead of the daily quote.

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

A few thousand years ago, our ancestors dealt with challenges dangerous and diverse: staying warm enough in sub-zero temperatures to fighting other tribes and animals for basic survival. This was the paleolithic man, designed by nature to be incredibly adaptable; he thrived through thick and thin, wars, famine, and ice ages.

Fast forward a few thousand years and the defining challenge of twenty-somethings in our era seems to be getting to Level 3 of Angry Birds. Progress indeed.

The weekly challenges provided in this book will help you to discover your fears and treat them as allies in your development in life. Treat each challenge as a mission and experiment in life. You might just enjoy yourself in the process.

My Commitment

I, Sabrina Smith, commit to writing *The Five Minute Journal* for at least 5 days in a row, starting May 1.

Writing this journal is really important to me because,

- I am committing to my best life
- I want to create more abundance in my life
- I need more discipline in my life

If I finish 5 days of writing this journal, I will reward myself with
A ski trip with my significant other.

If I don't finish 5 days of writing this journal, I will promise to
Donate \$100 to a charity I don't support.

I will do the following things to ensure that I will do *The Five Minute Journal* every day:

- Keep my Five Minute Journal right by the bedside
- Brush my teeth only after I've done the journal
- Set my alarm only after I do my night journal
- Share my commitment with someone I love
- Treat myself to a warm, delicious cacao drink after my morning journal

FILL IN THE BLANKS

I, _____, commit to writing *The Five Minute Journal* for at least 5 days in a row, starting _____.

Writing this journal is really important to me because,

- _____
- _____
- _____

If I finish 5 days of writing this journal, I will reward myself with

If I don't finish 5 days of writing this journal, I will promise to

I will do the following things to ensure that I will do *The Five Minute Journal* every day:

- _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- _____



The Sticky Solution

“Improvement isn’t inevitable. Change is.”

—UNKNOWN

Congratulations! You’ve just committed to 5 consecutive days of sticking with this journal. It is a commonly held notion that if you push through resistance and take specific action for a certain amount of days in a row, it becomes an established habit. To give you a head start and ensure that you’re sticking with it, here’s a healthy push to help you make sure this habit sticks:

The Bad News: Research in 2010 has shown that 88% of people who make New Year’s Resolutions fail.⁷

The Good News: You’re better than that. You’ve already taken many steps to ensure you’re on the right track.

The Better News: You’ll be getting tips and tricks to bulletproof your commitment in the next pages.

Truth & Actions

How do you know you're better today compared to three years ago?

You don't, unless you're keeping track. It's all too common to assume, we're clearer, more mature, smarter and wiser in our forties than our teens but age isn't correlated with wisdom. An ignorant twenty-something is likely to end up a spectacularly ignorant eighty-something. Conversely, an intelligent teenager intent on seeking wisdom might reliably end up as a wise, oracular sixty-something. The difference? Read on.

Scary Truth #1

Minuscule activities in your life lead to massive improvements (and setbacks).

That job fair gets you your dream job. A new friend devoted to fitness inspires you to train regularly, getting you in the best shape of your life. Starting your morning off on the right foot leads to the most productive days you've ever had. That's the objective of the journal you're holding.

Alas, all changes aren't positive. That traffic jam to the interview crushes your dream job opportunity. An irate family member keeps you up at night, replaying nightmarish scenarios of what you should have said or done.

Fortunately, the universe isn't all chaos. Through it all, there are always patterns, guiding lines and natural rhythms that yearn to be discovered by the penetrating mind. This is liberating.

Scary Truth #2

If you're not moving forward, you're most likely moving backwards. There is no standing still in life.

Unless you methodically track and do a complete analysis of your day, figure out the activities that are effective as well as the ones that aren't - your daily activities aren't much different from a cow's unconscious grazing on the field. There is no clear purpose, no guiding light that strings your actions together - they are steeped in unconsciousness.

Liberating Truth #3

The right action is the universal problem solver. Sit down with a cup of your favourite beverage. Proceed to reflect on the following questions:

What's your biggest challenge?

This can be anything from creating a better relationship to feeling comfortable in your own skin to making more money. Chances are there's something that's on your mind most of the time. Put it on paper.

What is one identity statement that would change everything for you?

Create an identity statement that remedies the above challenge. Every challenge has a remedy. Use this statement in your journal. Stick with this statement till it becomes true in your life. Read the preceding statement again. Engrave it in your mind before moving ahead. Examples:

I am giving and receiving profound love.

I feel fit and slim.

I feel engaged and excited during my day.

I'm living the lifestyle of my dreams.

Your identity statement:

What are three major obstacles that would stop you from writing the journal (morning/night)?

Write two actions you can take per obstacle to make sure you don't succumb to laziness.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Choose a way to keep yourself accountable for writing the journal:

- Pick a close friend/significant other you can rely on to check on you daily through text – a la an AA Sponsor.
- If you're more comfortable pen and paper, just check off every day that you finish the journal in a calendar. There's nothing like a powerful visual reminder of commitment.

