

A Guide to Making This Your Best Year Ever

Happy New Year my friends! It's that time of year when we start afresh, with a blank slate, and think about the possibilities that the new year holds for us.

I love this time of year. It's a beautiful thing to reflect on your past year, how you grew and what you learned, and then say goodbye to the year. And then to think about what you might create with this year, the gorgeous freshness of it all just invigorating you.

But it can also be a fruitless effort for many people, making resolutions only to break them within a week or two. I am not about New Year's resolutions, because they are things tossed out lightly with no structure in place for success. Let's not repeat that mistake this year!

We're going to create aspirations that will actually happen. We're going to dream, to choose lovely focuses for ourselves, and then put a plan in place that will make them a reality.

Let's look at how to make this year our best year ever.

What Do You Want Your Year to Be?

I like to start out by reflecting on my last year ... you saw a bit of that when I wrote the [Essential Zen Habits of 2017](#) post, but I've been journaling about it, looking back on my calendar and emails and journal entries and monthly reviews. It was a fabulous year, and I got a lot done, struggled and learned and grew.

So take a minute to reflect on the past year for yourself. Then give it a bow of gratitude, and say goodbye.

Now it's time to think about the coming year ... what do you want to create out of this beautiful blank canvas?

I like to ask myself:

- How do I want to grow? What do I want to learn? What skills and capacities would I like to develop?
- What areas of my life need some refreshing? Health, mindfulness, relationships, work?
- What do I want to put my focus on, if I could just choose 4-6 things to focus on?
- If I were looking back on 2018 a year from now, what would be fantastic to see? What changes would I be psyched to have happened?

For me, I've picked a handful of focuses:

1. Meditation/mindfulness
2. Healthy eating
3. Fitness
4. My mission (work focus)
5. Deepening personal relationships
6. Practicing yoga

Your list will look different, of course. Take a minute now to write down your 4-6 focuses for 2018.

Why Are These Important?

As you look over your list of focuses, ask yourself why they're important. Is it really that important that I practice yoga? If so, why?

For example, I might think, "Well, it would be nice to have a regular yoga practice. I could use the stretching, for sure." But that's not important enough, and when I don't feel like it, that won't be a strong enough reason to push through my discomfort.

A better reason: "Yoga is a mindfulness meditation, and becoming more mindful, pushing into discomfort and uncertainty, are the training I want to do that feels most meaningful to me. It sets an example for my kids, it trains me to be able to help my readers, it makes me a healthier and happier person."

Now that's a reason to get me off my butt, away from my computer, and on the mat.

Take a moment to reflect on why your focuses are important to you. What will get you on the mat?

What Rituals Can You Create?

It's one thing to say, "I want to get fitter this year," or "I'm going to write a book this year!" ... but it's another to actually make it happen.

The best way to make big things happen, I've found, is to create actual daily rituals that you'll practice every day (or at least, every day that you're able to).

A ritual is a practice that you hold to be special, not to be taken lightly, that you set apart from the rest of your day. It's something you surrender yourself to, not allowing yourself to reject the parts of it you don't like, but just giving in to the experience fully.

An example might be a writing ritual, where you decide to write every morning at

daybreak, shutting off your phone and Internet and just writing with a distraction-free writing app (like Ommwriter). You start by clearing your space, setting an intention to focus and pour yourself into your writing for 20 minutes. You set a timer, and then you give yourself fully to the writing, not allowing yourself to switch to other tasks until the timer goes off. When it goes off, you bow in gratitude to the practice. (This is just an example, you don't have to do it this way.)

In this ritual, you have a structure and a regular sequence ... and in this sacred structure, you'll find yourself wanting to rebel. You'll see your habitual tendencies to run away. You'll see your ego thrashing about. And that's where the true learning of the ritual takes place — in the actual practice. In the discomfort of staying in it. Rituals can be transformative if you open yourself up to them.

My rituals for this year, to support my 2018 focuses:

1. Morning meditation
2. A Focus Session (to work on my mission) in the morning
3. Cook a healthy meal (to be eaten at breakfast & dinner)
4. Afternoon workout or run
5. Evening yoga
6. Formally close my eating period for the day at 7pm (meaning I won't snack after that)

I have some relationship practices that I plan to set up as well, but for now, the rituals above are what I want to create.

Now pick *just two* of those to focus on this month. Then two next month. Then another two the month after.

Pour everything you have into practicing those rituals, daily. Now let's talk about setting up a structure to make the rituals stick.

What Structure Can You Set Up?

So you have some focuses, you have some rituals you'd like to create ... but how will you actually make them happen? How will you stick to them this year, as opposed to what you've done in previous years?

This is where structure comes in.

If you pick two rituals for this month, you can create some structure for making them actually happen:

1. **Pick a time and place.** What space will you do them in? What time of day? Be

specific.

2. **Set up two reminders..** One on your calendar or phone (digital reminder) and a note near where you'll be at that time of day (visual reminder). For example, I might have a phone reminder to go off at 9am every day so I'll do my Focus Session ritual, and a note by my computer that I'll see at that time.
3. **Write down your ritual.** When it's time to do your ritual, what will you do? Clear away distractions? Practice with a yoga mat or pen and notebook? Set an intention to be fully present? Bow, light incense, stretch? Set a timer? You don't have to do these things, but write down the sequence of your ritual. On paper.
4. **Create accountability with others.** Share your intention to practice with others, and see if others have a practice they'd like to stick to. Form a Facebook group or just commit to checking in with each other weekly on a certain day every week.
5. **Review daily, weekly and monthly.** Set a reminder to journal about your rituals and focuses at the end of the day. Or review the previous day at the beginning of each day if that works better for you. This daily review doesn't have to be long (one or two sentences) but it helps to form the habit. Set a weekly reminder to review how you did (just a couple sentences) and then share it with your accountability partner(s), and renew your intention for the coming week. Then do the same thing for the end of each month — how did you do, what did you learn, what obstacles came up (and how will you adjust for them going forward), and what is your intention for the coming month?

I find each of these five elements to be incredibly helpful and important. I *highly* recommend that you do this for each of the two rituals you plan to focus on this month, and then again each month for other rituals you want to create.

If you do these actions — pick a few focuses for the year, create rituals to make them happen, and then create this kind of structure to make the rituals stick — I believe this is going to be your best year ever.

Let Me Support Your Best Year Ever

I have two ways that I'm offering to support you in these focuses for this year ... I hope you'll take me up on one of them:

1. **Sea Change Program:** This year, my Sea Change Program is focused on helping you stick to the habits you want to create. We have a library of about 20 video courses and 20+ article-based habit modules that you can choose from — pick a handful to focus on for now. And we're creating accountability (a larger Facebook group, habit-focused teams on the forums, and even one-on-one accountability partners if you like). Finally, I have a habit tracker app (called **Habit Zen**), I offer monthly video webinars, and I'll be doing Q&As on the forum to support you. Join me!
2. **Habit Mastery Course:** If you want to do a deep dive and learn to get better at

creating habits in general, my Habit Mastery Course is still open. It's a 12-week program with two video courses a week, video & audio interviews with the best habit experts in the world, bonus ebooks, a weekly Q&A, and a Facebook group to support you. Check it out!