

My Thirty Day Challenges



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“Balancing on My Toes” is an original column appearing every other Friday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Angel M. Ethell. Angel lives in the Chicagoland area with her family: sons Teen (13) and Lil G (2) along with their little sister Cassie Pie (dog), her partner Daddy G and father-in-law Grandpa G. She loves learning new things along with learning that she might not always be right... 100% of the time. Archived columns can be found [here](#). BMT-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Thirty days. That’s all it takes. What am I talking about? Self improvement. Some say it takes two weeks to create a habit, but I say why chance it, make it a whole thirty days. I have been creating challenges for myself in varying degrees ever since I first came onto the notion of the thirty day challenge. I happened upon this idea while taking Bikram yoga. The hot kind with a lot of humidity, but I digress. Bikram’s thirty day challenge was too much for me to go to, one class a day for thirty days, because of scheduling conflict, but the seed was planted. The more I thought about it the more I began to think that it is a perfect amount of time for a challenge and there is no better time for a challenge than right now. The proverbial right now anyway. I believe it is the perfect amount of time because it can be broken up nicely into different time blocks; ten days, seven days, five days, even three days if the challenge is specific enough. Mine have not been so far.

My First Real Challenge to Myself

My first challenge to myself is a personal one, but for the purpose of this column I’ll share. I was going through a rough time and was taking my frustration out on my loved ones. Can you guess yet what it was? Yup – not yelling, and working on inner peace. It went well I think. The realization that I needed to do better was a big help. Learning my triggers and centering myself after a trigger is switched was a really big step for me. I did become more calm and I stopped yelling so much, which made life much happier. Much like a child if my basic needs are not met, I get cranky. Sleep is a big one if you can imagine.

Challenge Number Two

I didn’t really pick it back up right away. Life got better so I got lazy. I have a tendency to do that. Too bad I can’t challenge myself to not be lazy, but I know myself and I would

totally fail. Its just too vague. So, one day I found myself on Cracked.com, reading a column about how men write into the site often asking what they don't have that other men supposedly have. His answer? Drive and something to offer. If you don't have any marketable skills you will not get a job, and the same goes with dating. Off topic? Nope, because he mentioned that if one were to work at it, one could create a skill set if one had the drive to do it. Much like becoming a writer. Well, I was looking for a job at the time and it spoke to me. I'm a terrible typist, so I decided to break out the 30 day challenge again and practice my typing skills. I'm okay at extemporaneous typing, but my copying really sucks, so I began typing for thirty minutes a day out of a book to practice. And of course I did get better, but I failed my challenge. Life got in the way and I was not motivated enough to move my schedule around. This was a really good lesson for me for a couple of reasons. One, I need to be more dedicated if I am going to have better follow through, and two, I learned to be kind to myself because even though I failed I did do a pretty good job while I was doing it. Even failing can teach us something.

Third Challenge

This challenge was really to see if I could make a physical change and go a little greener in the process. For thirty days I didn't wash my hair. I did cleanse it, but I didn't wash. I had been reading about the "no poo" method of hair cleansing which basically just changes the chemicals one uses to wash their hair, but the baking soda does the same job as shampoo. My hair is a frizz ball. I have used many different cleansers and products to try to tame it to no real avail. I was sick of wasting money on products that just didn't really work. While I was doing research on the no poo method I came across honey washing. It is really good for the scalp and I really like out-of-the-box thinking. For thirty days I used honey water only in my hair. I saved money, because after a week or two it doesn't need as many rinsings, and I also saved time by not using other products both in the shower and after. This changed the way I think about hygiene care and am seriously contemplating switching for my whole household. So challenge accomplished. It has been almost a full two months now and if my hair does not look better it is at least no worse for the experiment.

My Challenge in Process

This challenge breaks up the time block into 7 day segments. I am currently beginning my fourth cycle of seven days. This challenge also challenges my laziness a bit. It requires that I get up and get moving instead of sitting and enjoying my morning leisurely. Because of chronic lower back pain that I have been living with for most of a year I have decided that if it is not going to get better on its own I better help it. I looked into simple stretching routines for a morning warm up and decided on Sun Salutations. I really love yoga and this asana (pose progression like in tai chi) seemed like it would help me get back to my old self while I was doing Bikram often, which I really miss. It has been working, I think. For the first seven of the thirty days I performed only three salutations. This was just to get used to

getting up and doing stuff right away (I did mention I was lazy) which helped me when I moved into five salutations and then seven, each in a seven day time block. Tomorrow starts the fourth block of seven days and I am going to move to ten salutations. While discovering my body can move like it used to I also discovered it takes a lot of time to do this routine in the morning. That means I have to get up earlier than I like to make time for this in my life.

Anyone Can Do It

This is such an easy concept, but it is a real challenge. I have been using this as an opportunity to better my self and really enjoy the medium. I have gained so much from the few challenges I have done that it may be hard for me to give myself attainable goals to follow, which is a lesson in itself. I can realize when my cup is not full which leads to bad behavior that I will end up regretting, so I learned to take care of myself just as well as I take care of the others around me. This makes me a better parent and partner. I've learned that I do not have to follow society (which I already knew because I've always been weird), and that it can be cool to be crunchy, and I continue to learn how to reach my goals. How to plan and organize, how to dedicate myself and how to follow my own rules instead of the ones I think I have to follow. I am always thinking of my next challenge and am excited for the future. I'm thinking of eliminating food that I didn't make at home next as I tend to eat out a couple times a week for lunch and dinner. Anyone else make self challenges? I'd love to hear about them.