



Annual Review

A Busy Person's Guide to Accomplishing
Your Goals in 2026

“Every leader does year-end review and comes to conclusions of one sort or another. My observation is that two leaders looking at the same information will not see the same thing. The one who’s a more skilled analyst, who digs deeper and wider, will benefit more.”

— Super Bowl Winning Coach Bill Walsh

1. The Key to Success

The most important driver of success is knowing what you want.

While success means different things to different people, the most important definition is yours.

Are you going after what YOU want, or what others tell you to want?

When you know what you want, you can direct your choices and attention toward getting it.

Be honest with yourself about what you want.

What I want in 2026 is

2. Fire Yourself

The fundamental algorithm of life is to repeat what works and stop what doesn't.

It sounds so simple: do more of what works and eliminate what doesn't.

While it's easy for us to see effective and ineffective behaviors and actions in others, it's very hard for us to see them in ourselves. There is, however, one trick I've found useful for seeing ourselves with new eyes.

Imagine you were just fired, not from your job, but as the CEO of your life. A world-class executive has replaced you. They have one goal: To help you get what you want.

They're going to look at everything in your life through that lens. They see your scrolling, your nose picking, even when you're lying to yourself.

Effective behaviors and actions move you closer to your goals. Ineffective behaviours and actions don't. The new CEO needs to answer these two questions:

What is working that we'd be crazy to change?

What is not working that we'd be crazy not to change?

3. Maximize Focus

Excellence demands elimination.

Most people spread themselves too thin, taking on too many projects and not really getting much done.

This year, we're going to narrow the focus and increase the intensity.

List your top 10 professional goals for 2026

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Now circle only 3. Everything not circled is not a priority.

All the energy spent on things not circled comes at the expense of your circled goals. For every goal you check off, you can circle or add one new one.

4. The Gap Principle

Procrastination is most frequent when the gap between where you are and where you want to be is too large. When the finish line is over the horizon, your brain treats the effort as a pain rather than an opportunity.

If you want to write a book, you can't think about "writing a book." That's a mountain. You need to break it down into chapters, then into paragraphs. Anyone can write a single paragraph. You can do that right now.

Think of a marathoner whose legs start to hurt four miles in. If they focus on the 22 miles remaining, they'll quit. The distance is paralyzing. But professionals have a trick: they shorten the horizon. They focus on the next stop sign. The next corner. The next light.

By narrowing the gap, they stop fighting the distance and start building momentum. The stop sign isn't the finish line, but reaching it provides the small win needed to keep the legs moving. The marathon is the goal, but it's never the next step.

Your challenge: List three things you're currently avoiding. For each one, identify the next smallest step you can take to make progress.

1.

2.

3.

5. Easy Mode

We often treat "Hard Mode" as a badge of honor.

We brag about late nights, frantic deadlines, and high-stress mornings. But looking back on the year, ask yourself: Was it hard, or did I just make it that way?

Hard Mode is like showing up to a test having not studied. You might ace it, but you're not doing yourself any favors. And it's exhausting.

Easy Mode is the art of doing all the little things today that stack the deck in your favor. Think of them as small, boring wins that make victory seem effortless.

When you go to bed on time, you make tomorrow easier. When you study, you make your test easier. When you take care of your body, you make it easier to fight illness. When you list your goals for tomorrow every night, you make it easier to accomplish them.

Where are you playing life on hard mode? What can you do to make it easier?

6. The Inner Circle

You become who you spend time with.

If your network doesn't match your aspirations, it's time to change your network.

Outliers are incredibly selective of the people in their lives. Not just the people they get very close to, which is a small inner circle, but all the people in their lives. Every person in your life is either positive, neutral, or negative.

Score each person:

- +1: Energizing, inspiring, helpful
- 0: Neutral impact
- -1: Draining, limiting, negative

List the 5 people you interact with most (in person and online)

Person:					
Information quality (do they know things you need to know?)					
Growth catalyst (do they push you to be better?)					
Energy impact (do you feel energized or drained after interactions?)					
Future alignment (are they going where you want to go?)					
Values and Ethics					
Score:					

Remember: Letting go of draining relationships isn't selfish. It's necessary for growth.

7. Automatic Rules

Rules turn your desired behavior into your default behavior without resorting to willpower.

When you have a rule that you "workout every day" or "never eat dessert," you stop negotiating with yourself. You no longer have to wake up and ask, "Do I feel like it today?" The decision was made months ago.

Positive rules stack the deck in your favor.

Example: My rule is that I work out every single day. The duration and scope changes based on the day, but the fact that I sweat doesn't.

Anti-rules protect your time and energy.

Example: My rule is: I don't hop on calls with people who aren't my friends to pick my brain.

Now it's your turn.

List 3 rules that stack the odds in your favor.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List 3 rules that protect your time:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Still Curious?

Three quick things before you go.

1. I have a podcast I think you'd like.

The Knowledge Project offers deep conversations with the best in the world that go beyond the usual advice to uncover the timeless principles that drive success.

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The [coolest project](#) I've ever been a part of. We released a beautiful boxed set this year.

All the best in 2026,
Shane