



WAKE UP

The Morning Routine

That Will Change

Your Life.

JEFF FINLEY

Copyright © 2015 by Jeff Finley. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission. ISBN: 978-1508715092

*To all those with the courage to live life
on their own terms, in alignment with
their truth and their hearts. Because of
you, I know it's possible. Thank you.*

What's Inside?

Acknowledgements.....	vii
Introduction	1
Waking Up	5
My Story	6
What Does it Mean to Wake Up?.....	18
How to Build Habits.....	27
Mistakes and Excuses	28
Change Your Habits, Change Your Life.....	31
The 3 Keys to Habit Change	37
Keystone Habits.....	42
Wake Up Early With Ease	44
Mornings Should be Fun	45
Just a Little Every Day.....	48
Create Your Ideal Morning Routine.....	55
Morning Routine Basics.....	56
Finding Clarity and Inner Peace	58
Cultivating Self Knowledge.....	72
How Gratitude Leads to a Better Life	85
You Really are Amazing.....	90
Move Your Body.....	100
Overcoming Challenges	115
I'm Not a Morning Person	116
Not Enough Time	120

The Willpower Problem.....	124
I'm Too Tired!	128
Snooze Addiction	130
How Much Sleep Do I Really Need?.....	133
Bedtime Matters.....	137
Brain Fog and Grogginess	142
How to Kill Procrastination	144
Overcoming Resistance	154
Staying Motivated	159
Dealing With Burnout	165
But I Have Kids.....	169
Experimenting With Seasons	172
It's Easier With Friends.....	175
Always be Learning.....	179
Life-Changing Reading Habits.....	180
Listening to Podcasts	186
Watching TV, Movies, and Videos	188
Growth Through Direct Experience	191
Final Thoughts.....	197
Resources for Personal Growth.....	199
About the Author.....	201

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who helped me write this book. Thanks to Hal Elrod for inspiring me to wake up early and Tony Stubblebine and Esther Crawford at Coach.me for encouraging me to teach the habit. Thanks to my editors and proofreaders Kathy Kovacic, Kim Finley, Shellah Inman, Rob Filardo, and Natasha Lynn. And finally, thank you, the reader, for taking time to read my story. I hope this book inspires you in some way.

WAKE UP

INTRODUCTION

I'm writing these words at 5:51 a.m., which is earlier than I typically wake up. I couldn't get back to sleep so I decided to stay up and write my book's first page. This is what can happen when you wake up early, before everyone else, to focus on your own personal development.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Personal development is kind of a dry term. It doesn't sound very cool or fun. In my opinion, our entire lives should be focused on personal development. It means creating the life we desire and becoming our truest, most authentic self. Then finding the bravery to show it to the world.

JEFF FINLEY

I got into personal development when I tried habit-change as a [way out of my depression](#). I used an app on my phone that made it fun to check off habits like push-ups and journaling. Dozens of habits and thousands of check-ins later, I feel safe, not to mention thrilled, to say I'm no longer depressed and happier than ever. This stuff changed my life, seriously. I am writing this book to show you how I did it.

WHY THIS BOOK?

The main reason I wrote this book is because I had to take what I've learned and put it out there. If someone else can benefit, even just a little, that makes me happy.

Some of this stuff is not always easy to talk about with people because not everyone is ready to change their life. I like to think I'm having a conversation with someone else who cares about taking responsibility for their own life as much as I do. It keeps me company. I like that.

WAKE UP

This book is about how to wake up early. But it's more than that. It's about how to wake up to your true self and know your purpose. But first I will show you how you can build the habit of waking up early. Then I'll teach you about the habits that changed my life and how you can implement them into your morning routine.

I'll share what I know about each habit from my own experience and research. I wouldn't say that I'm an expert on these, and I am certainly not a scholar. I'm just a guy who was tired of feeling stuck and hopeless and decided to do something about it.

This book is a little different. Sure it will teach you how you can beat procrastination and learn some new habits. But it's also very personal. I include a lot of my own first-hand experience. Some books like to include studies, statistics, or other factoids to convince you of their points. But to me, those books lack personality. I want you to get to know the person behind the words.

JEFF FINLEY

You'll get to know me throughout this book. I hope I can relate some of my struggles and triumphs in a way that inspires you. Because we are all in this together.

I'm not even a "morning person." I would actually consider myself a "[night owl](#)" who developed a waking early habit to add more peace and happiness to my life. Not only did it work, but it opened my eyes to a part of myself that I had been ignoring. This I might call my true self.

There are books out there that will teach you how to master habits, get super fit, or meditate like a monk. I've read some of those books and they are amazing. I'm going to give you a splash of what I've learned.

Use this book as a guide to build yourself your own killer morning routine. One that brings you peace, joy, clarity, and purpose. I'll be here rooting you on and if you ever have any questions, you can always email me at jeff82finley@gmail.com

WAKE UP

CHAPTER ONE

WAKING UP

We are sleepwalking through life and we don't even know it. Days, weeks, and years pass by and we feel like we haven't been able to catch our breath. We work hard at being a good person, employee, or spouse but end up overworked, distracted, stressed out, and depressed. It's confusing because we are sold happiness in a coffee mug, beer bottle, new clothes, fast food, and entertainment. We know it's empty. But how do we wake up to real happiness?



JEFF FINLEY

My Story

Let me start by telling you my story. When I started tracking my habits in 2012, I was pretty deep into depression. This was just one thing that helped bring hope and inspiration back into my life. I had been battling burnout in my work life and stagnation everywhere else. For seven or eight years, I had been putting much of myself into my career as a graphic designer and business owner.

I loved almost every minute of it, but the last two to three years I started to feel tired and no longer motivated by the fame and fortune that inspired me before. I used to care about being a big deal, but I was tired.

This lack of motivation was mysterious. I'd always been somewhat of an attention seeker, but in a positive way. As a childhood artist growing up, I got a lot of attention for my drawings. I even had a friend in middle school who collected my work and I felt important.

WAKE UP

After art school, I was offered a partnership at the design firm [Go Media](#) in 2006. They were impressed with how I had made a name for myself as a freelance designer for the music industry at a young age. They liked how I got excited about social media and online marketing. I thought of us like a band of rock stars (except we were designers) and wanted to take the world by storm!

We built up quite a following and even had some incredible years financially. I am really proud of the work that we produced together and the opportunities that arose as a result. I was able to design t-shirts and posters for a living and then even write a book about it called [Thread's Not Dead](#). We started selling leftover illustrations as stock images and it turned into half of our company business! In the midst of all this, I started a conference for creators called [Weapons of Mass Creation](#) (WMC Fest) and that became my big focus the past couple of years.

When I look back on it, I felt like I was living and working my dream. But as the years passed

JEFF FINLEY

I found myself getting more burned out. I didn't care about getting famous anymore. We had our moments, but it became a grind trying to recreate the magic over and over. We were endlessly searching for that "next big thing" and I felt like I exhausted all my great ideas and had nothing left in the tank.

The conference I was running turned into a full-time job as an organizer, and I was leaving behind the creative work that I had been doing all my life as an artist. I missed it.

The burnout led to feelings of guilt because I wasn't *supposed* to feel this way. From the outside looking in, I *was* living the dream! I had a ton of creative freedom and autonomy, a good income, and had respect and adoration from my peers. What more could I want?

That guilt led to depression and for a good year, year-and-a-half, I was miserable. I think I was hurting projects more than I helped. I mustered up courage to come to work every day and I

WAKE UP

always saw the glass half empty. I no longer was my optimistic, positive self. This went on and it wasn't until January 2013 that I told my business partners I was depressed.

Boy was that scary. I avoided telling them for so long. I felt ashamed for being depressed and holding back the company. I felt guilty for asking for help, too. I didn't even know what I wanted, I just knew I wasn't interested.

I laced up my boots and toughed it out like any responsible person would. I co-organized another successful year of WMC Fest and we saw attendance rise and more national eyeballs were taking notice. However, my contribution to the organization was becoming less as my event director and core team started doing the majority of the heavy lifting.

Organizing the event became a huge burden on me year after year and I just wanted out. I felt guilty for wanting to quit something that was gaining momentum and was looked at as an inspiring

JEFF FINLEY

event that made the world a better place. What kind of person bails on that?

At some point, I started finding relief in articles in Leo Babauta's [Zen Habits](#). Articles that turned my attention toward a simpler life. A life focused more on the present moment and enjoying the simple things. This seemed *extraordinary* to me. I got excited about an article I read about [having no goals](#) anymore. That tells you where I was!

Reading articles on *Zen Habits* inspired me in many different ways. One, I loved the calmness and clarity. And two, I loved the idea of building positive habits.

I tried a few, like decluttering or single tasking, but never was able to stick with any. I tried meditating, but I didn't get any more out of it other than a brief moment of escape before I had to enter the real world again. I tried taking one of Leo's clutter-free courses but wasn't able to stick to the habit of getting rid of things daily.

WAKE UP

The *idea* of positive habits stuck, though. Changing enough small things about my day that it could lead to a more profound lifestyle change in the end was enough to get me back on my path.

I started reading more about habits and found people like [James Clear](#) and [Nathan Barry](#). I downloaded the [Headspace](#) app to learn more about meditation. Around this time is when [Lift](#) came out and I felt inspired by the beautiful design and the ability to create a list of daily habits on my phone and check them off each day. It kept track and the community gave me positive encouragement for keeping streaks alive.

I started adding habits to improve my diet, health, and well-being. This was all good, except I could not consistently do it. I would settle back into old habits and routines and I would become apathetic toward keeping the habits up. I knew when I was doing these I was happier and felt productive. But when I wasn't, I felt sad and depressed.

JEFF FINLEY

If I could only find the time.

I felt like if I could carve out time every day to do my habits, I'd have more success. I decided the solution was to *start waking up early*. I hated the idea at first, but it was pretty much the only way I knew I could do it. In a moment of inspiration I set my alarm for one hour earlier. The very first day I missed my alarm and woke up late! The first week was very rocky and I quickly gave up.

Around this time I read the book the [Power of Habit](#) - which taught me about triggers, routines, and rewards. This was something I actually remembered from *Zen Habits* but never put into practice. If I could make getting up early a habit, I knew I'd fill it with the positive habits that made me happier.

I needed a good reward for getting up early. So I started by watching an addictive TV series every day. I just had to crawl over to the couch and turn on Netflix and I'd consider that a win. I would sip my coffee and the show would hold my attention

WAKE UP

long enough for me to wake up. After it was over, I had about 30 minutes before I needed to get ready for work, so I did my push-ups, reading, and a few other habits.

That worked out pretty well, but I started to slip as I got bored easily and wasn't getting much sleep. I wasn't going to bed any earlier so that made it hard.

Right around then was when I found the book [The Miracle Morning](#) by [Hal Elrod](#). It was highly rated on Amazon and I decided to pick it up. Boy this was a *game changer* and just what I needed! In fact, I highly recommend you read it as well!

Hal's book made me look at my morning routine in a completely different light. It blew the doors wide open. In fact, this was the first time I had ever heard the words "personal development." Actually, that's not true. I remember coming across Steve Pavlina's blog [Personal Development for Smart People](#) several years prior, but it didn't appeal to me at the time. Hal was the first one who made it

JEFF FINLEY

sink in. He quoted one of his favorite people [Jim Rohn](#), “Your level of success will seldom exceed your level of personal development.”

It was this focus on personal development that excited me. It was a complete lifestyle change. A paradigm shift. For most of my life I felt like I needed to focus on things *outside* of myself to become successful. I thought I needed to build things in this world that earned me money and respect which would translate into success and happiness. I thought I was only as good as the work I produced. And if nobody cared about it, then nobody cared about me.

I realized I was wrong. It works the other way around. I needed to care about *me*.

The idea of “achieving happiness” never really entered my life until I started to feel depressed the majority of the time. I wondered what happened to my happiness. Where did it go? I had it most of my life, but suddenly it was missing?

WAKE UP

Personal development and happiness became my new mission.

Personal development is about working on becoming the best version of yourself. Everything in your life is an opportunity for growth and learning. It's about letting go of limiting beliefs that hold you back and embracing ones that bring you truth, love, and empowerment. Steve Pavlina uses the phrase "live consciously" which is essentially a reminder to stop sleepwalking through life. Wake up to the present moment and live it thoroughly.

Put another way, live *on purpose*. Consciously choose what you do while having full awareness of this choice. You shift your perspective from "reality happens to me" to "I create my reality." And that is a powerful paradigm shift.

Most people live a state of consciousness that one might consider unconscious. There is a certain level of self-awareness we have at different times in our lives. We spend our days reacting and putting out fires and answering to other people.

JEFF FINLEY

Every day becomes filled with other people's priorities and we often find ourselves with hardly any time to ourselves.

This is why people use the biggest excuse of all, "I don't have enough time" to do things they know are good for them. They prioritize everyone else in their life. This is noble, but it's misguided. People come and go, but there is one person who you spend your entire life with, and that's *you!* How much time do you spend doing things that make you happy? Do you do those things on purpose? Do you know if those things are actually bringing you happiness? Or a temporary escape?

I challenge you to look at your life differently.

Look at it through the lens of the ultimate creator. What kind of life would you design for yourself? What's the most fulfilling and rewarding life you could experience?

In my opinion, life is to be enjoyed, not endured. If you can shift your perspective to one that *you* are

WAKE UP

the creator of your life, rather than simply a victim of circumstances, you start to feel the power. You are responsible for the good *and the bad* in your life. Once you realize that, your whole world can open up. If you give yourself permission to dream and fantasize about what you can create for yourself in this life, knowing it can actually come true: life gets a whole lot more exciting!

Let's get this started, shall we?

We're going to carve out time to work, play, and *be* with ourselves every day. We do that by waking up early before everyone else. That time is our precious me time. There's a reason Hal Elrod called it the *Miracle Morning*. It's not about getting up early to check email or get more done in the day. You will find it to be quite the contrary!

Doing less is oftentimes more fulfilling when done consciously. You can look at waking early as a productivity habit, but try to think of it as the most sacred time of your day. The one that only *you* understand and truly know. The time where

JEFF FINLEY

you get to be honest, authentic, and truly heard. That's because you are allowing yourself time to be with and care for yourself like nobody ever has.

What Does it Mean to Wake Up?

We all wake up in the morning after a night's sleep, right? So by definition, the act of waking up implies that we had previously been asleep. While this book is most definitely about waking up early, it's also about waking up another way. Waking up to your true self. Your true purpose.

Waking up to your true self implies a different level of awakening. A profound realization. Some might call it enlightenment, but that's another topic. Like I said before, many people look like they are awake in this world, running around, driving from place to place, typing on their keyboards and smartphones, or chatting with friends and family.

But the truth is they are in fact asleep. They are dreaming. They are just unaware of the dream.

WAKE UP

Author Don Miguel Ruiz talks about [humanity's collective dream](#) of the planet. We live in a reactive world of multi-tasking and distraction. The idea of there being a different way of living, a simpler one that brings more joy and authenticity seems too far out.

The idea that a life of enjoyment and fulfillment instead of suffering and stress seems like the dream we all wish we were dreaming instead.

The encouraging thing is more and more people *are* waking up. There are [Facebook groups](#) and [Reddit communities](#), for example. Just do a quick Google search on humanity's shift to higher consciousness. We are also waking up to our spiritual essences without the need for religion or dogma. Even our supernatural and extrasensory abilities like intuition and "[the clairs](#)" are coming online! These are needed in a world that is becoming increasingly dependent on left-brain logic, technology, and artificial intelligence. And don't get me started on [Starseed](#) activations!

JEFF FINLEY

It's really an exciting time to be alive!

The good news is that it's 100% attainable by everyone right now. To say that it's far off is like saying that it's a destination or somewhere to get to. But in reality, it's merely a mindset switch. A lightbulb going off. An "aha" moment.

An awakening.

Take four minutes and listen to [Alan Watts's The Dream of Life](#) on YouTube and see what I mean.

Have you ever visualized the life of your dreams? Have you ever actually given it more than a passing thought? Like I said, for most of us, the life of our dreams doesn't seem attainable. We're conditioned to believe we have to be a certain way, to have a certain job. We are conditioned to work hard and sacrifice and wait for it to pay off in the future.

I don't know about you, but I don't want to wait for the future. I want to live the life of my dreams right now. I want the same for you.

WAKE UP

There are many books out there about pursuing your passion, quitting your job, starting your own business, etc. The idea of pursuing your dreams is definitely not uncommon. But in a world where so many people are encouraged to pursue their dreams, why are so many of us scared, worried, and depressed?

I will be the first to tell you that the whole idea is extremely difficult. Because for most of my life, I thought I was doing just that! I knew from an early age I wanted to be an artist of some type. So I lined up my college education and career choices around it. And I definitely had success and even had a taste of fame here and there. I had some exciting years, but after awhile I found myself unhappy and eventually depressed.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

I'm not going to give you a clinical version of depression. It's not a disorder or disease or something you catch. It's not something you cure with drugs. To me, depression is a *stifled soul*. And

JEFF FINLEY

to cure it, we must look at what our soul needs. Generally it's some form of creative expression that is yearning to come out. And for whatever reason, we don't let it. Are we too afraid of being who we really are?

The soul speaks to us through intuition and emotions such as inspiration and joy. We all know what those feel like. But if you are consistently unable to act on your inspirations, then the body begins to shut down. Our minds develop defense mechanisms to keep us safe and we feel that if we acted on our inspirations, we might disrupt the security of the life we have created for ourselves.

As children we loved to express ourselves creatively. It comes naturally. But as we grow up, we are domesticated. We are taught what it means to be an adult and how to get a job and fit into the culture around us. We dial down our expressiveness bit-by-bit. Sometimes we take a job that we don't really want but it pays well. Many aspiring artists, dancers, or writers become engineers, doctors, and lawyers because of well-

WAKE UP

meaning encouragement from their families and teachers. Not to say those fields are bad, but we are raised to fit into a certain role in life.

Fitting into that role is often rewarded very well. Getting good grades in school, behaving properly, pleasing the right people to get ahead... Those are all rewarded with praise, money, and advancement. We feel good about those things and we feel like we're making progress. As the years go by, we start to grow tired. It starts to feel like a rat race. If we are lucky, our childhood passions might have become hobbies or pastimes, but many of us are too busy working and pleasing other people that we have no time for ourselves.

To battle the fatigue and burnout, we consume caffeine and prescription drugs to make us feel alert and focused. Instead of being told how to cultivate our own energy levels, we are sold energy in a can or coffee mug. And instead of being educated on how to relieve stress naturally, many rely on alcohol and television to relax or escape from their problems. An ever-increasing

JEFF FINLEY

sense of discontent and unease grows within us. We feel stuck. We've come this far, we don't want quit. We don't want to lose what we have. It seems our culture has developed a genius system of keeping us perpetually tired and discontent so it can sell us products that temporarily relieve the symptoms, but don't cure the problem.

We are conditioned into this lifestyle from an early age. The idea of "you can be anyone you want to be" is something we are all taught. But you can only pick from a few choices! What about being who you really are?

I believe I was lucky. My parents and peers picked up on my creative abilities when I was young and encouraged me all the way. My Dad never liked his jobs and didn't like authority much either. My Mom was about as supportive as you can imagine, and helped me believe that I could actually achieve what I set my mind to. They didn't try to tell me to be anyone other than who I wanted. They didn't want "the man" getting me down. I gravitated toward alternative culture, punk rock,

WAKE UP

and DIY folk music and had an affinity for their raw, independent lifestyle, minus the drugs and alcohol.

Despite being encouraged to be myself, I still adapted to try to fit in and make a living. At the time I wasn't even aware of it. There's a blend of knowing what I want to do and knowing what my options are. And then trying to fit them together. It always seemed like there was a gatekeeper or some other authority figure in the way of letting me "in." I would come across resistance like this all the time. Out of desperation, fear, or necessity I would do things that I thought I should do. Like spend tens of thousands of dollars on a college education. If I knew then what I know now, I might have reconsidered.

When I admitted I was depressed in 2013, it was something I never thought I'd say. I had always believed I was living a great life that had purpose and clarity, but it started to get foggy after awhile. I said "yes" to many things I probably should have said "no" to. I let people into my life that dug at

JEFF FINLEY

my self esteem and distracted my attention away from my passions. I was trying to please so many people and felt like I was spread way too thin. This created a fractured soul. There were many times I wanted to just throw it all away.

I had to look my depression squarely in the eye. I had to look at my habits and tendencies. I had to consciously make time to focus on my own well being. So that's why I started getting up early in the first place. To create time for me. It wasn't selfish, it was necessary. I envisioned a morning that was peaceful and calm without distractions. I pictured myself doing yoga, meditating, and sipping tea as I watched the sun rise. That seemed so much more real and authentic than trying to figure out why our social media posts don't have as many "likes" as they used to. Sigh.

So in June of 2013, my morning routine was born. I had no idea that it would change my life completely.

WAKE UP

CHAPTER TWO

HOW TO BUILD HABITS

In order to make time to build a life changing morning routine, we need to build the habit of waking up early. This will give us a foundation to where all other habits will fit. From my own personal experience, the wake-up-early habit was indeed the most life changing habit I've ever done. Simply because it carved out the space for me to consistently do all these other great habits.



JEFF FINLEY

Mistakes and Excuses

Before we dive in, let's get the excuses out of the way. Most people who try to wake up early encounter the same problems. Here's a list of the most common ones. I will get into solutions for these problems later in the book.

Not enough time. This is the biggest excuse in the book. We all have 24 hours in a day. And we all have free will to make choices on how we spend those 24 hours. Can you do it?

Not enough willpower. This is another common complaint. Here's the thing, willpower is like a muscle. And sometimes our muscles are weak if we don't use them a lot. If we aren't used to exercising, we tire easily. Willpower is just like that. If we rely on willpower alone, we're going to burn out fast. In the *Overcoming Challenges* chapter, I will teach you ways to conserve and strengthen your willpower and make it easy.

I need more sleep. When people start waking

WAKE UP

up early, they usually sacrifice sleep to make the time. This is actually OK at first, but it catches up with them later. There are many factors that go into feeling rested and excited for your morning routine no matter how many hours of sleep you get. I will show you some strategies and tips that will put this excuse to rest!

I can't stay motivated. Welcome to the club. I'm writing this book and sometimes I can't stay motivated. It's something all of us face. I have been burnt out and have killed my morning routine before. But I somehow find a way to get back on and get inspired.

I keep hitting snooze. I used to hit the snooze several times every morning before I would get up. I'd set my alarm a half hour earlier just so I could hit snooze a few times! But I figured out a way to never hit snooze again, and it's simpler than you think.

My brain is foggy in the morning. Well of course it is, you just woke up! We can't expect to be

JEFF FINLEY

alert and ready to go as soon as we wake up. This groggy state is usually so uncomfortable that all we can think about is going back to bed. It clouds our view of our routines and habits. Everything looks grey and dull. It's hard to be excited when you're looking through the fog. But I've got a fresh perspective that I think could make this experience more pleasant.

I have kids or family obligations. I will admit that I cannot truly know what it's like to have kids and be responsible for other people in that way. But what I do know is that many successful people with children found that waking up early before the kids was entirely possible. They just had to adjust their schedule and priorities.

I'm burnt out. When I first started my morning routine, I was so excited I couldn't even sleep the night before. After awhile I started to get bored and lose interest. I wasn't getting enough sleep and the excitement wore off. I'll get into how to deal with burnout or the urge to quit in the *Overcoming Challenges* chapter later in this book.

WAKE UP

I'm bored. This is similar to being burnt out. The excitement of your routine will inevitably wear thin and you will get bored. This is a fact. But again, we are in control of our routine. We have free will and can make choices on what to do about it. Sometimes we get in a groove, and that feels good. But then it turns into a rut and we are stuck. I'll show you how to keep your mornings fresh.

Change Your Habits, Change Your Life

Have you thought about habit change before? Have you ever considered what you do every day? A lot of people run their lives on autopilot and in their words, "it's all a blur." One day bleeds into the next and they are too deep into reacting and catching up that they cannot take a step back.

Before I got into habit-change, I was still somewhat of a self-help nerd. I loved reading blog articles on 10 Ways to Be More Productive, or 15 Hacks to Better Email Management. I did read books on lifestyle design such as Tim Ferriss' [The](#)

JEFF FINLEY

[4 Hour Workweek](#). I always seemed to look at life as a constant learning process. I enjoyed trying new apps and tools that could give me some sort of edge in saving time, being more productive, or even as far as making me happier.

But over time all these productivity hacks and efficiency boosters seemed to get on my nerves. I was addicted to [productivity porn](#). You know, where you spend more time reading about productivity than actually being productive? Where it's more fun to try out yet another to-do list app instead of just getting stuff done?

I became a big fan of GTD, the [Getting Things Done](#) methodology. I loved the idea of "Inbox Zero." I loved the idea of treating my life like an ongoing project. But if anyone's ever tried GTD, it's hard to maintain. We eventually fall back into old habits. I did many times. I started to become overwhelmed and even productivity porn wasn't interesting to me anymore. Coincidentally, this was near the time I was falling into depression.

WAKE UP

While reading *Zen Habits* in the late 2000s, Leo Babauta's perspectives on habit change really resonated with me. I would credit him for being the spark that caused me to look at my habits with the intention of changing them.

Most of what we do every day is habitual. From the time we wake up in the morning, we have habits. Brushing our teeth, showering, making coffee or breakfast, driving the same route to work every day. At work we have habits, like checking email first thing in the morning. We are checking our phones or social media every time we are waiting for something. We tend to get lunch the same time and same way every day. We eat the same kinds of things for dinner. We pretty much have a routine that we have settled into whether we like it or not.

When I started looking at my own routines, most of it was built around other people's obligations and requests of me. Is yours like that? Think about it. My wake up time was dictated by having to be at the office at a certain time. At work, there was

JEFF FINLEY

always a barrage of email requests, inter-office chats, meetings, and client projects. After work was the same routine of making dinner, taking a nap, doing chores, watching TV if I had time, spending time online, etc. I did make sure to have time for hobbies like making music, breakdancing, or reading. But largely, my routine was pretty routine if you know what I mean.

During my depression, this stuff started to get to me. I started to feel overwhelmed. Even my self-initiated projects were taking on a life of their own and I found myself doing things I didn't really want to do. But in the background, I kept finding inspiration from *Zen Habits*. The idea of a simpler life kept nagging at me. But what was I doing about it?

Leo wrote a post on *Zen Habits* about [becoming an early-riser](#) and creating a morning ritual. This idea seemed lovely to me. But like so many of us these days, the only action I took was a Tweet and a Facebook share. I must not have been that committed. But over time, this idea of becoming an

WAKE UP

early riser kept coming back. Leo's approach to a simpler life and being deliberate about everything you do made me happy. I was ready for a change, I just didn't know when it was going to happen.

When I found the habit-change app [Coach.me](#) (it was called Lift at the time), I could enter in any habit I wanted and check into daily. It would track my streaks and give me encouragement. A cool feature was that other users could give me "props" for completing habits and I could do the same for them. Some of the more popular habits like meditation would have thousands of people doing it. And if I didn't know what habits to do, I could simply browse through the app and try new ones. If I didn't like it, I could dump it.

Suddenly habit-change was fun. Here was my motivation to get started. The app used popular gamification principles and a clean reward system to encourage you to check in daily. I started adding all sorts of habits. Meditation was a big one as it was a perfect escape from my stressful days. I would also take on habits like drink more

JEFF FINLEY

water, exercise, walk, yoga, stretch, gratitude, etc.

My experience using the app taught me a lot about habits. I started noticing which habits I checked into frequently and which ones I put off until tomorrow. I started noticing what habits felt difficult and which ones were easy. And I started noticing how good I would feel checking off habits on a daily basis. I felt like I was getting somewhere.

Unlike a video game, I wasn't making progress in some virtual world. I was making progress on things that were important to me. It got me thinking a lot more about what was *actually* important to me. Knowing I could turn any goal or aspiration into a habit allowed me to reflect on my life and start choosing my actions more consciously.

Another thing happened when I started checking into these habits. I wanted to learn more about them. What was meditation exactly? I knew it as a stress reliever and that's about it. It's like when you pick up a guitar and start playing for the first

WAKE UP

time, it doesn't sound good at all. At first it's fun to make noise, but after awhile you want to know how to make music. And so I would read up on meditation or eating better. I would read about habit change in general. The book [*The Power of Habit*](#) was huge.

The Power of Habit is one of the best books about habits. It taught me a few lessons. One important lesson is the cue, routine, reward pattern. But instead of cue, I like to use the word trigger.

The 3 Keys to Habit Change

The three keys are trigger, routine, and reward. Trigger is how a habit starts. It's the thing that sets you off. For example, let's say your habit is brushing your teeth. Your trigger is simply waking up in the morning. Or every time you have to wait for something, you look at your phone or open a new tab.

Routine is the activity that takes place after you are triggered. This includes doing the habit. So

JEFF FINLEY

after waking up, your routine is going to the bathroom and brushing your teeth. And after that brief moment of boredom, your routine is to get your phone out and scroll through Twitter, Facebook, email, Instagram, Reddit, or whatever distraction you enjoy.

The reward is that pleasurable feeling that reinforces the habit. It's what keeps us coming back for more. When you brush your teeth, you have that clean-mouth feeling afterward. When you look at your phone, you're looking for that little rush of positive emotion from a new message, comment, or email. Or the novelty of new information.

Leo also talked about this pattern. Since our habits are built on this pattern, how can you use this to create *good* habits for yourself?

It's easier to start looking at our current habits and becoming mindful of our triggers. Take one of your worst habits, one you'd love to change. It could be smoking, drinking alcohol, eating sweets,

WAKE UP

or playing video games too long. Then look at what triggers those habits.

In my [podcast episode on habits](#), my co-host George, a former smoker, explained that his triggers were often social in nature. If someone else was smoking, he was more likely to smoke. If he felt anxious around people, he might escape outside to light one up and get a break from the action. If he was feeling stressed, he might reach for a cigarette.

This was a great discovery! Because once you are able to recognize your triggers, you are more likely to be able to change your habit.

We know that smoking is notoriously hard to quit because nicotine is an addictive substance. And most of the “rewards” we get from our habits are the result of some sort of addiction. Usually it’s because of the release of “feel good” chemicals in our brain like dopamine, serotonin, or endorphins.

Now that you have thought about what triggers

JEFF FINLEY

your habits, what is the routine? For coffee lovers, there's perhaps a morning ritual surrounding their coffee making. For yoga or meditation, maybe you light some incense and say a quiet prayer or mantra before you start. It's the cycle of actions you take surrounding your habit.

For me, whenever I'd sit down to watch TV, I would feel the temptation to grab a snack first. My snack of choice was a bowl of cereal. I'd be triggered by turning on the TV, then I'd go through my routine of pouring myself a bowl of cereal and plopping down on the couch and hitting "play" on whatever it was I was watching.

And what are the rewards for performing your habit? What are you actually getting out of it? Is it a relief of stress or tension? Is it a soothing feeling of comfort? Is it the feeling of being liked, accepted, or involved? Is it the satisfaction of being in-the-know? Identifying your rewards is important because it helps you learn about what your cravings, likes, needs, and desires are. We can later use those rewards to help us build

WAKE UP

positive new habits. Now that you've thought about the trigger, routine, and reward pattern for some of your habits, let's try to create a new one. What's it going to be? Well, the most obvious one for this book is the wake-up-early habit. Not just because it's the subject of this book, but because it's a keystone habit.

Habit	Trigger	Routine	Reward
brushing your teeth	morning alarm sounds	go to bathroom, brush your teeth	clean-mouth feeling, more awake
checking your phone	brief moment of boredom, waiting	check social media with no real purpose	avoided boredom, feeling of being caught up
snacking during TV	TV turns on	get a snack, press play	tasty snack, watch TV
smoking	socially anxious	go outside to smoke	avoided uncomfortable situation
make the bed	wake up, step out of bed	make the bed look tidy	feeling of accomplishment

JEFF FINLEY

Keystone Habits

A keystone habit is one that inspires other positive habits around it. For example, if you exercise, you are more likely to eat healthy, and drink more water. One great example of a keystone habit is the simple act of making the bed in the morning. Making the bed is a really easy habit to do.

The trigger is waking up and stepping out of bed. The routine is to simply organize the blankets and pillows in a way that looks nice to you. The reward is seeing a tidy bed and the satisfaction of accomplishing something as soon as you start the day.

When done deliberately like this, it sets a tone of positive progress in your life. As little as it is, what this habit does is help rewire your brain to be more effective at accomplishing things. This easy success helps you get inspired to add other habits to your life. It helps turn you into a person that consciously changes their lifestyle and habits. It's so simple, yet so profound.

WAKE UP

The wake-up-early habit is not just a keystone habit, it's a *breakthrough* habit. One that breaks through the well-defined routines and ruts you are in and exposes new, fresh territory to be explored. It creates a gap of time in your daily schedule that you can fill with positive habits as you choose.

Waking up early doesn't require special skills either. It's simply an exercise in self-discipline and self-care. If you wake up early, you are more likely to do the things that move your life in the direction you desire.

Before I started waking up early, I was inconsistent with my habits. I would try to find time in my normal routine to do them and sometimes I would completely forget. I was overwhelmed already and trying to find time to meditate and exercise in my already busy routine was harder than I thought.

To make it easier, *Zen Habits* recommends only doing one habit at a time. I like that idea because our mental energy is focused on a lot less. We

JEFF FINLEY

can make one habit happen, right? I suggest doing one at a time until you feel ready to add more. So the one habit we will focus on first is building the breakthrough keystone habit of waking up early.

Wake Up Early With Ease

The simplest way to start waking up early is to set your alarm earlier and then do it.

It's as simple as that, really. But why is that so hard? Most of us feel like time is scarce and sleep is precious. So the idea of sacrificing sleep feels like the worst idea of all time. Waking up before you *have* to? Forget about it!

By now you should be inspired enough to want to make a change in your life. Most people aren't. You're reading this book so you must have some motivation already. Let's put it to use!

We have to turn waking up early into a habit? Why? Because habits reduce the need for willpower.

WAKE UP

When your alarm is going off and it's dark and cold in your bedroom, your willpower is extremely low. We are usually warm, comfortable, and half asleep and the easiest thing to do is to go back to sleep. Even when we decided that getting up early was good for us.

We want to use as little willpower as possible because habits allow us to work on autopilot. We don't need willpower to brush our teeth or take a shower—at least not all the time! We don't need willpower to drive to work, because it's so ingrained in our routine. We need willpower to start something, but to keep it going we need to build it into a habit. The easiest way to start the wake up early routine is to make it fun.

Mornings Should be Fun

Try to remember a time when waking up early felt effortless. A time when you couldn't resist getting out of bed. You jumped out of bed. You woke up even earlier because you were so excited! You could hardly sleep the night before!

JEFF FINLEY

You've got to have some mornings like that in your life, right? For many of us, Christmas morning as a child was one of those mornings. As children, that morning was filled with magic, curiosity, wonder, and of course, loads of presents under the tree! The anticipation was killing us. So we sprang out of bed. There were mornings where my siblings and I tore open presents before my parents even got up. I feel bad for them now!

Other times I remember being excited to wake up were mornings when we would be going on vacation or on a trip of some kind. Maybe something special was happening at school and I just couldn't wait to go. Maybe someone made you breakfast in bed?

When was the last time you were that excited to wake up in the morning?

What was it about Christmas and those special occasions that made it so compelling to wake up early? It didn't even matter how much sleep we got the night before. And often we could hardly

WAKE UP

sleep because we were so excited.

How can we instill even just a fraction of that level of excitement into our mornings? What would surely motivate us to get up early?

For me, I know this is hardly “Christmas-like” but I used my mild addiction to watching TV shows like *Breaking Bad* and *The Wire* to my advantage. Instead of watching it at night, I watched in the morning. I set my alarm 90 minutes earlier and was actually excited to wake up and watch the show. I’d be eating breakfast and drinking coffee. And this really worked for me in the beginning because it got me out of bed. That, and the thrill of doing something new and bold like waking up before the sun came up!

By the time the show was over, I was awake. I still had some time before I had to start getting ready for work so I used that time to work on my other habits like meditation and reading. My morning was already so much better than before! I checked off “wake up early” off my habit list, as well as

JEFF FINLEY

several others. All this happened before I left for work and I was already more productive. I started feeling great about my ability to accomplish things. I was making time for myself.

Just a Little Every Day

Finally, the last bit of advice on habit change is this. Keep it small. Keep it tiny. Habit expert [BJ Fogg](#) writes a lot about this and it's one of the core fundamentals that *Coach.me* was based on. It's all about bite-sized chunks that you can do every day without a lot of willpower.

Lets break down exercise as an example. My previous stints with exercise went like this: I'd go long periods without exercise and suddenly have a realization that I was getting fat, lazy, and out of shape. So I would feel bad about myself and then go to the gym or hire a personal trainer and work out really hard. I'd go for a long jog around the neighborhood. I would have a couple of days or weeks of accomplishment, but eventually would grow tired keeping up with this. I even signed up

WAKE UP

for a gym membership under a two-year contract at \$50/month. I went three times.

Do you see my problem? I did too much. I put too much pressure on myself and set the bar really high. Not only have I observed myself following this pattern, but several of my coaching clients do the same thing. It's in our nature. We get a spark of inspiration and energy and we use all of it at once and we burn out. We are unable to maintain our intensity over the long term.

The secret is just doing a little bit every day. Over time this adds up to huge change.

Jeff Olson wrote an entire book about this called [*The Slight Edge*](#). It's another one of those game-changer books that I really recommend. Whether you call it tiny habits, the slight edge, or baby steps, it's all the same. Start small and set the bar really low.

Instead of the on-again, off-again habit of exercise, I wanted to build a sustainable habit that kept me

JEFF FINLEY

moving every day. I told my life coach [Dr. Jody Stanislaw](#) that I wanted to exercise three days a week. And she told me to do even less! She said go to the gym once a week. “Put it on your calendar,” she said. “If you schedule it, it will get done.”

If you only commit to once a week, you take the pressure off yourself all those other days. I found when the time came for me to go to the gym, I was really excited for it. And relieved I didn't have to go any other day that week.

Then I started feeling a desire to want to go again. And this is when you should raise the bar, when you feel a genuine desire. Not when you feel like you *should*. I have learned that “shoulds” are not the proper motivator for human beings with a soul. True desire is. I read a great article called [The Crossroads of Should vs. Must](#). Look it up.

My point is, Jody recommended starting really small and building slowly. This creates lasting change. She has seen it time and time again with her clients. I really recommend this method too.

WAKE UP

But let me provide a counterpoint.

Sometimes we just need to start off with a BANG! Why do so many people sign up for marathons? Or want to climb Mt. Everest? You don't see people out there hiking over the hill in their neighborhood hoping one day they'll eventually make it to Everest? Sometimes setting a big goal can spark an immense amount of inspiration and creativity.

We will need to combine the BANG with the baby steps. You need to create a bang to clear the space and then use baby steps to fill the space and sustain it.

I've seen people try to start waking up early with small increments like five minutes, then ten minutes, etc. I don't think it works very well because what do you honestly think having five extra minutes is going to do for you? What's the motivation? It's gone in a snap! Waking up five minutes early is like not waking up early at all. You aren't actually creating much space.

JEFF FINLEY

I recommend one hour early to start. Or if that scares you, try doing only 30 minutes. But if 60 scares you, I think you should try it. It's not like running a marathon. You don't need any extra skill to wake up 60 minutes early as opposed to five.

Remember, it's about *blowing shit up* and creating a space of your own. That's what this is all about. And in this case it's go big or go home.

The tiny habits will apply to the individual habits that make up our morning routine. When I started, I woke up 90 minutes early because the shows I was watching were almost an hour long. It was a necessity! But if you don't plan on using this technique, then 30 minutes should be fine.

After you get up 30-60 minutes early at first, you'll discover you want even more time. You'll crave getting up even earlier! That's how we can build on this habit.

The baby step approach could apply to waking up early but only doing this routine a few days a

WAKE UP

week. The problem with that is it's hard to build consistency with your sleep schedule. If you aren't ready to go all the way, then maybe do it once a week and see what it's like. Or do it on workdays, and sleep in on weekends. But most sleep experts say you should consistently wake up at the same time every day to build your rhythm. If you sleep in every other day, it's hard to get into a nice rhythm.

Having said all this, there is no right or wrong way. The whole point is to notice your tendencies and where you get stuck. Try waking up early for a week or two and see how it goes. What went wrong and what went right? How can you improve it? Did you give yourself enough time?

Once the initial excitement subsides, you'll need to rely on another critical point: *knowing what you're going to do* the next morning. For now, let's take it one step at a time. Build the wake up early habit until you are ready to start adding stuff to it. The first step is to blow a hole in your routine.