

# FINISH WORK BOOK

By Jon Acuff, Finisher

The goal of this workbook is simple.

If you do the exercises in it, you will dramatically amplify your ability to finish.

That is not to say you must do them all or that you must do them perfectly. Oh the irony of trying to perfectly do exercises from a book that speaks against perfection.

Inside these pages are all the exercises from my book, "Finish." Pick and choose the ones that make the most sense for you, depending on what part of a project you are working on right now. I broke it down by chapter so that if you have any questions, you can quickly refer to the book for further explanation.

**Let's go.**

## 1. The Day After Perfect

The first chapter was strictly a setup chapter for the rest of the book. Every other chapter has a long list of activities, but this one is primarily focused on one thing, admitting it won't be perfect. That's the entire idea. How do you execute that task?

The easiest way is to write the following phrase on a notecard and carry it around in your pocket.

"It's not supposed to be perfect, it's supposed to be finished."

For bonus points, hang it up somewhere that you'll see it. You might not need to go as extreme as my friend who has his goals on a waterproof pad in his shower, but maybe you can put it up next to your bathroom mirror.

Or, if you're no longer living in a world of paper, keep it in your phone. Make it your wallpaper or your background. The specific location doesn't matter. That you see it regularly does.

Why do you need to do this? Because perfectionism is sneaky. It tends to come back into your life when you least expect it. You'll have to refer to this card a lot of times, sometimes multiple times in the same hour during stressful seasons.

Also, keep an eye out for the first lie of perfectionism, "Quit if it isn't perfect."

## 2. Cut Your Goal in Half

The goal of this chapter is to get us thinking about the size of our goals. Throughout the book, I attempt to tear down popular sayings about goals that are fun to say on Instagram, but are not actually true. In this chapter we discuss the idea that you should, "Aim for the moon because if you fail, you'll land amongst the stars." That one is not even a little bit true, but it does speak to our innate desire to "Go big or go home" when it comes to our goals. Here are the activities that will help you right size your goal.

- A. This isn't the first goal you've attempted. Think back to other goals from your past. Were they too big? Did you overreach and get disappointed? Write down what happened.

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- B. It's difficult to cut a feeling in half. We must move beyond emotions when it comes to finishing. What's a number you could associate with your goal? Will you read ten books? Declutter four rooms? Lose twenty pounds? Make five thousand dollars? Try to get at least one number you can measure.

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- C. Sometimes, it's not the goal that needs to change, it's the timeline. Decide which activity you need to do most, cut your goal down or increase the timeline you give yourself to finish it. In some situations, the goal has to happen and can't be cut in half but there is more time available than we initially thought.

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- D. Share your goal with someone you trust and ask them if it's too extreme. Make sure it's not your crazy friend who is always trying and failing at huge goals, too.

- E. If this whole chapter made you extremely uncomfortable, spend a few minutes answering the question "What's the worst that could happen?" Have fun with this exercise and go extreme with your predictions of massive failure. It's OK to laugh at this particular fear because chances are, you'll never fail as bad as you fear. I've yet to meet someone who lost their house because they failed to write the novel they always dreamed about.

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- F. Not every goal is personal and easy to change the shape of. How do you apply the 50% rule to work goals? The key is to get the size of the goal correct at the very beginning. Spend a few minutes thinking about your corporate culture. Are people allowed to be honest about goals or are questions viewed as doubt and negativity? Have you ever seen a corporate goal that was too big and too aggressive? What happened in that situation? Did it hurt the team?

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Expect to bump into the second life of perfectionism during this stage, which is "Your goal should be bigger." Perfectionism hates the idea of chasing a small goal.

### 3. Choose What to Bomb

It's popular to think that if you have a goal in one area of life, you should have a goal in every area. We tend to think this way because deep down we hope we can get it all done. You can't. That's not failure, that's reality. The heart of this chapter is making a choice between shame and strategy. Shame tells you to keep adding task after task, believing you can do it all, until you collapse. Strategy tells you to pick what you can't possibly get done ahead of time and then not feel guilty about it. Here are some specific ways to pick strategy.

- A. Make a list of three things you could bomb during your goal. Have fun with it. Don't critique the list right now, just write down ideas. For example, I have a busy travel season every fall. Knowing that, I reduced my gym class membership from unlimited usage to eight times a month. That might not seem like a lot, but I know I won't be getting in often so why should I pay for it? (To be honest, perfectionism told me I was a loser for doing that, but I knew it was the right decision.)
  - i.
  - ii.
  - iii.
- B. Use the red light, green light approach to sort through your list of ideas. Red light activities are things that make it harder to accomplish your goal. Green light activities are things that make it easier to accomplish your goal. Do your best to eliminate the red lights.
- C. For time drains you can't bomb, figure out a way you could simplify them. In a work setting, simplification might mean being willing to delegate a task to a coworker instead of doing it yourself. Another example is with social media. One way to simplify building a platform is to schedule tweets and Facebook posts ahead of time. Doing that reduces the amount of time you'll spend personally bouncing around those sites because you won't be on them, you'll be using a tool like Buffer.

D. Write down, either here or in a secret place no one will see, three relationships you might need to pause in order to finish your goal. Keep in mind, we're not talking about ending relationships. Let's not be that dramatic about this. We're talking about taking a break from a situation so you can focus on other things.

i.

ii.

iii.

In this stage, you should be ready for the third lie of perfectionism, "You can do it all."

#### 4. Make It Fun if You Want It Done

When people ask me what was the biggest surprise I had while researching “Finish,” this is always the point I share. We tend to get super serious about our goals and often only think miserable ones count. Shout out to everyone who hates running and is trying to lose weight by running!

It turns out that fun isn’t just a bonus part of chasing a goal, it’s a critical part. In the following activities, we’re going to do our best to add more fun to our goal. That’s an important distinction, we’re not just looking for fun goals. We’re deliberately adding fun to whatever goal we care about most. Lots of goals aren’t naturally fun but that doesn’t mean we can’t intentionally add fun to them.

- A. Are you good at pursuing fun goals? Think back through a few of the goals you’ve worked on in the past. Were any of them fun? Were any of them too serious and boring? Knowing this will give you a sense of how much fun you might need to add to your new goal.

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- B. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being clinical and boring and 10 being a party, how fun is the goal you might be working on? The number you pick doesn’t need to be perfect. It’s OK for your answer to be a range like “2-3.”

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- C. Decide whether you’re motivated by fear or reward. Remember, a fear motivation for a health goal might be, “If you don’t lose that weight, you increase your odds of a heart attack.” A reward motivation might be, “If you lose that weight, you’ll get to fit into your favorite jeans again.” Keep in mind that for some goals, you might be fear based and for others, reward based. We tend to flip flop depending on the goal.

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- D. Fun is often weird. (See my story about lighting a balsam candle whenever I worked on this book.) To flesh it out a little, finish this sentence: “This is weird, but I find \_\_\_\_\_ fun.” Be as honest as you can with this exercise. You’re the only one seeing this, it won’t be judged. The weirder the better. Remember, I light a candle when I write. That is weird.

This is weird, but I find \_\_\_\_\_ fun.

- E. If your goal isn't fun yet, pick three small points of fun you can add to your goal. They don't have to be expensive or massive. Once, while trying to lose a few pounds, I decided to eat sea salt almonds instead of plain. Why? Because I hated plain almonds and the 10 calorie difference was worth it. Was adding sea salt a huge difference? Of course not, but I promise those almonds were a lot more fun than the regular ones. And keep in mind, the fun doesn't have to be crazy and neon and big. Salt on almonds is maybe the quietest fun ever recorded in the history of mankind.

i.

ii.

iii.

- F. Fun isn't just something you add to personal goals. It should be added to work goals as well. Often, it's even more important to add it to work since sometimes fun doesn't naturally happen there. What are some simple ways you could add a bit of fun to your work day? It can be as small as adding a 10-minute afternoon walk around the building to as big as finding a promotion and chasing after it.

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Of course, perfectionism won't let you have fun without making a comment. The fourth lie of perfectionism is "Fun doesn't count."

## 5. Leave Your Hiding Places and Ignore Noble Obstacles

Sometimes, the reason why you're not finishing isn't as simple as a lack of information, funds or time. Often, the reason it's hard to push something across the finish line is that we've clogged our lives with hiding places and noble obstacles. In this section, we'll work to identify the ones we're dealing with and come up with a better plan.

- A. Identify your hiding places with these three questions:
  - i. Do you find yourself going there accidentally?  
Remember, no one accidentally ends up working out. We tend to accidentally binge watch a whole series when we take our phones to bed though. So, is there an activity you jump into without really even thinking about it?
  - ii. Do you have to play Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon to justify why you're giving it time? I could argue that seeing movies is a good way to inspire creativity, but the truth is, that's more of a reward than it is honest research for my next business book.
  - iii. What do your friends think?  
Long live friends who will tell us the truth. What do your friends think about the things you spend time on during the week?  
Remember, ask someone who has the type of life you'd like. If you ask your laziest friend if you're lazy, they're probably going to say, "No! Not at all!"
- B. It's one thing to have that first talk with a friend. It's another thing to give your friends the permission and power to tell you when they see you hiding. Make it easy for them. No one wants to hold a serious intervention with you every time they see you posting 1,000 updates about "Game of Thrones." Tell them to simply send you a short text. It doesn't have to be intense.
- C. Some of the distractions we have while trying to finish are actually great things we should pursue, just not right now. Start creating a list of "next goals" so that you have a home for any new ideas that come up. It doesn't need to be complicated. It can just be a list in a notebook or a note on your phone.
- D. Find a hose, like Jason, our furniture builder. Try to simplify your goal in one way. Remove an obstacle that stands in your way for instance. That's one of the reasons I bought a road bike instead of a mountain bike. I knew that if biking meant I had to load the rack on my car, drive to a trail, find a parking space and in general, add 30 minutes to the activity, I wouldn't do

it that often. With my road bike, I can walk out the door and be on my way in a matter of minutes. If my real goal is to increase the amount of exercise I get, it wasn't difficult to see that a road bike was the best solution.

- E. Finishers make things easier and simpler. Ask yourself these two questions about your goal:
  - i. Could things be easier?
  - ii. Could things be simpler?

The reason it's important to ask these questions, even if they feel silly, is that they fly directly in the face of what most of us learned about goals growing up. Make it easier? Make it simpler? That feels like cheating! Only, it's not. It's the best way to actually finish.

- F. Admit and eliminate any side goals you have taken on. Spend a few minutes and make sure some side activities haven't crept into your life.
- G. Ask a close friend what he or she thinks your noble obstacles are.
- H. Do a final check for the word "until" in your goal. That's a delay word and we often end up saying, "I can't work on my goal until I have enough money, until my schedule opens up, until more people support me."

## 6. Get Rid of Your Secret Rules

This was my favorite chapter in the book and probably has the hardest activities, too. It's just not that easy to work on secret rules, in part because they're hidden and also because they're so personal. It takes a lot of self-awareness to even see them, never mind replace them. That said, it's not impossible and dealing with them gives you the biggest advantage to actually completing your goal.

- A. Listen for a few secret rules and write them down. (This will take longer than one sitting since you're asking your head to Google something that might be hidden.)
  
- A. Smoke them out with these four questions:
  - i. Do I even like \_\_\_\_\_?  
Don't use methods you don't enjoy. If you hate dealing with your email, see if you can hire a part time assistant to help.
  
  - ii. What's my real goal?  
Often, the real goal hides behind a series of fake goals. Spend some time trying to get to the heart of the matter.
  
  - iii. Does the method I'm using match who I am?  
If you're not naturally detailed and hate being organized, why are you trying to implement a goal that demands you be both?
  
  - iiii. Is it time to quit?  
Quitting the wrong goal is not something to be ashamed of, it's something to celebrate. Now you can actually work on what you care about.
  
- B. Write the truth next to each secret rule. To find it ask, "What does that mean?" and "Who says?" For example, if your secret rule is "Success is bad," you would then ask, "What does that mean?" and the only possible answer is "Failure is bad." But no one would believe that if they actually thought about it. With my goal to read 100 books, at first I thought graphic novels didn't count. Then I asked myself, "Who says?" and I realized I was the one in charge of the challenge not some faceless committee.
  
- C. Create a new rule to replace the old one. The easiest way to do this, is to reverse the old rule. If you believed that asking for help on a goal didn't count, the new rule is "Always ask for help from as many people as possible."
  
- D. Enlist a friend to help you see when you're living by a secret rule. This is probably going to be someone you are at least good friends with because sharing a secret rule can be a little awkward. Don't ask the barista from your favorite coffeehouse for help with this one.

## 7. Use Data to Celebrate Your Imperfect Progress

I'm not naturally a data person. It's not something I do easily and it's not something I've ever done just for fun. The deeper I got into this project though, the more I saw how important data was to success. Call it your GPS or your road map or your menu. However you look at data, it remains the same. It's the truth.

In the fog and swirl of emotions, data cuts through like a laser. Let's talk about a few ways to track it and use it.

- A. Write down one to three things you can track concerning your goal.  
In the book, I provided 20+ examples but I'm sure you can come up with a few that are unique to you. For example, in order to get motivated for my book launch, I turned the tweets into a game. Every time I tweeted a link to the book, I paid myself 10 cents into my Betterment investment account. (I know, I know, I'm a baller.) Adding up what I had "earned" at the end of each week was fun.
- i. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Look back at the starting line. Do you see how far you've come, and how much progress you have made? Write this down. This is one of those simple perspective changes. On a scale of 1-100, where are you right now on the path to completion?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Review a goal from the past to see if you can learn anything. Ask these questions:
- i. What happened the last time you attempted a goal like the one you're planning?
  - ii. If you haven't done this goal before, what happened with a similar goal?
  - iii. Who was involved last time?
  - iv. How long did it take?
  - v. How much money do you need to finish it?

- vi. Was there a deadline? (The project has to launch by \_\_\_\_\_)
  - vii. Were there consequences if you didn't finish it?
  - viii. If you finished, did you get a reward?
  - ix. If you didn't finish, which part tripped you up?
  - x. If you could do it differently this time, what would you change?
- D. What's the way you work best? Refer to the example in the book about my friends who were productive on the airplane and needed to find ways to recreate that on land.

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- E. If you're already in the middle of a goal, decide if you need to adjust your goal, timeline, or actions. Is one or more of those three factors out of place? Despite your best efforts at the beginning, did one of those three get grossly underestimated?

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- F. Sometimes in work-related projects, you don't have access to the goal or the timeline dials. All of your focus needs to be on the actions dial. What actions can you take at work to increase your activity toward your goal? Ask your manager for suggestions.

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## 8. The Day Before Done

A. Identify which of the final fears of perfectionism you struggle with the most. (If any.)

i. The fear of what happens next. What are you afraid of?

ii. The fear that it won't be perfect. (It won't be. That's OK.)

iii. The fear of "what now?"

B. Write down the name of one friend you can reach out to. Go find one, and perhaps even more important, go be one for someone else.

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C. Answer the question, "What am I getting out of not finishing?" Because you're getting something. Be honest with yourself. And if you find something, make the reward or fear motivation even bigger.

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I honestly don't think you have to do everything in this resource. Why? Because you're unique. You've got opportunities and skills and obstacles and talents I don't know anything about. My hope is that you'll use that list like a menu, picking and choosing what makes the most sense for you and your goal right now.

The things we want to do in life don't have to be complicated. If you track your data, you won't get lost in the middle of your goal. If you reach out to friends, you won't have to carry the whole thing by yourself. If you stop going to your hiding places, you'll have a lot more time for the things you care about.

It might sound too simple to be true, but it is.

We live in a world of bottomless opportunities and endless distractions.

For people who don't finish, that's bad news. It's only going to get harder. For those who can get to done, the world is going to be amazing.

Let's be those people.

Starting is fun, but the future belongs to finishers.