

# GET Uncomfortable



**IT'S A NEW YEAR  
& EVERYTHING  
YOU'VE EVER  
WANTED AWAITS  
... ON THE OTHER  
SIDE OF A LITTLE  
DISCOMFORT.**

STORY BY CHRIS BURSLEM

**So here we are at the beginning of a new year.** The Earth has already set off on another orbit of the sun and over the next 365 days it will travel some 583 million miles. You too are beginning a journey but, in your case, the goal is to *not* find yourself in exactly the same place come the beginning of 2026.

You may be perfectly happy with your current circumstances and operating in a way that feels natural and easy. But we're also guessing you yearn for just a little bit more, to change something about the way you typically approach business and life, to be a little bolder in the face of the opportunities the world offers.

Being just a little dissatisfied with life regardless of our accomplishments seems to be wired into us — an evolutionary adaption to keep us on our toes. And this goes for business as much as personal growth.

You can reach the low-lying fruit with your natural abilities. But to get to the higher, riper, juicier fruit “you need to add more steps to your ladder,” notes marketer and business author Roy H. Williams.

“You have to identify your limiting beliefs and practices. You have to go outside your comfort zone.”

The problem is, change usually involves doing something difficult, scary or disagreeable. For Caitlin Neal of San Juan Eye Center in Montrose, CO, it's having tough conversations with staff and giving them more frequent expectations of performance. For Kari Keene of Keene Vi-

sion in Rock Hill, SC, it's overcoming her struggle with time management and social anxiety to attend Women's Networking League meetings; and for Will Taylor of Eye 2 Eye Contact, a mobile dispensary in Northville, MI, it's starting an optical podcast.

As the productivity guru David Allen has noted: “What we truly need to do is often what we most feel like avoiding.” There is nothing new in this understanding. From Zen Buddhism to the Stoics (the

“obstacle is the way”) to Carl Jung there's a long-held appreciation that resisting a task is usually a sign that it's meaningful to us in some way.

Indeed, “Do whatever you're resisting the most” makes for a pretty good philosophy of life.

But there's a valid reason we aim, aim, aim ...and don't pull the trigger. Action can require engaging with uncertainty or anxiety. Change requires surrendering control and security. Then the specter of failure lurks. And those instincts that are saying let's not do this are the same ones that have fueled your positive development thus far. It's amazing how little discomfort it takes to throw you off: The exertion required to take the stairs instead of the elevator, the fear of what someone might think of us for writing them a thank-you note.

Motivational literature urges you to lean in, feel the fear and do it anyway. “Seek the discomfort zone,” as management guru Tom Peters put it. “Master your fear of discomfort,” the blogger Leo Babauta writes, “and you can master the universe.”

It's hard to argue with. Growth requires discomfort. It's drilled into us from the first time we crash our tricycle or get crushed romantically. Suffering is part of showing up for life.

But ultimately such invocations are not all that helpful. Knowing —

and even experience — doesn't count for much when it comes to behavior change. “We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking,” the spiritual author Richard Rohr has written. Allen has noted how all good to-do items involve a “limb”: A hand reaching

for the phone, legs taking a step on the treadmill ... but the problem remains that first step. In the absence of some external threat (a deadline, social shame, a legal requirement), change typically requires a spot of grease to get us on our way or a mental hall pass allowing us to tiptoe around the monkey-mind that resists change.

In his best seller *Atomic Habits*, James Clear advises, “To form good habits, make them obvious, attractive, easy, and satisfying. To break bad habits, do the opposite: make them invisible, unattractive, difficult, and unsatisfying.” So if a business owner wants to improve her social media presence, she could create a content calendar in advance, limiting the effort needed each day. By preparing posts in batches, she reduces the friction of daily content creation, making it easier to stick to the habit. And by rewarding herself for completing the task with her favorite coffee she makes it attractive.

To be sure, there is no avoiding *some* pain. Behavioral change requires discipline and effort. The dumbbell has to be heavy enough to make the effort uncomfortable if you are to gain.

In the following pages, we provide ideas, tips and experiences from fellow ECPs, business experts and a range of authors in the fields from

productivity to psychology to hopefully allow you to break free from the constraints of your comfort zone and make some progress on something you care about.

“We are all living in cages with the door wide open,” George Lucas has said. In 2025, step out of the cage.

**“We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking.”**

RICHARD ROHR,  
SPIRITUAL AUTHOR



SET THE RIGHT GOALS

**IN LINE WITH** our overall goal to *act* in 2025, don't spend too much time preparing or doing the aforementioned aim, aim, aim routine. At the same time, you need to have an idea where you're headed. Best practices for goal setting suggest you:

→ Put pen to paper. There's evidence you're more likely to follow through and while it's not real progress, it can feel like it and get the ball rolling.

→ Set ambitious goals. But be happy to settle later.

→ Keeping goals vague sometimes produces higher rates of success but being specific prevents procrastination.

→ Set process goals, not outcome goals (more on this later); pick a time and stick to it.

→ The ultimate goal is to grow in some area of your business or personal life, not turn your daily existence into a grind. Think about how to make achieving your goals and making progress fun.

MAKE A DECLARATION

**SHOUT IT FROM** the rooftops. Establishing accountability with a friend, mentor or even a business magazine (see sidebar, page 30) can be motivating, even if it's a little negative, by exploiting your fear of having to confess that you never did what you said you would. If you'd rather not pester family and friends with your goals, goal-publicizing websites like Habit Town ([habit.town](#)) allow you to enlist random internet strangers to act as witness to your vows to change.

BURN YOUR BOATS

**FROM ODYSSEUS** to Hernán Cortés to George Washington, history and myth are replete with tales of figures who knew their willpower, ambition

or intentions were no match for their fears or the temptations of the world. Taking an action you can't undo can be a radical but often a better strategy than keeping your options open because as the writer David Mamet once put it: "Those with 'something to fall back on' invariably fall back on it." In life, as in a fight, the advantage often goes to the one with nothing left to lose.

LOWER THE STAKES

**PUTTING THINGS OFF** has a bad reputation in the fields of productivity and self-improvement. But what if you were to postpone the mental pressure that's holding you back rather than the task? Let's suppose you suffer from perfectionism. If you can't get rid of the notion that some task must be done perfectly, can you suspend that requirement just for now, resolving to revert to your perfectionism at some predetermined point in the near future? The essayist Anne Lamott, in her book *Bird By Bird*, calls this the principle of "shitty first drafts," but, like so much of her counsel, it applies beyond writing. Lowering the mental stakes lets you get around the paralyzing thought that this task is so important, you can't even begin. Nikki Griffin of Eyestyles Optical and Boutique, in Oakdale, MN, offers her own succinct take on this, "How do you eat an elephant...?" (The answer, in case you're stumped, is one bite at a time.)



CONFRONT YOUR FEARS

**TRY** actively confronting failure, as Seneca advised: "Set aside a certain number of days, during which you shall be content with the scantiest and cheapest fare, with coarse and rough dress, saying to yourself the while: 'Is this the condition that I feared?'" Don't want to eat dog food as the old Stoic advised? Try writing down all your fears for a week; you'll likely discover just how off target they are. Pablo Mercado of Highland Eye Boutique, Atlanta, GA, counsels: "99.999% of our fears come from the thoughts of what could happen, which almost never does. If you do not make the decision, you make no progress, but if you do and fail, you have made some progress, and know how not to do it." Dr. Cynthia Sayers of EyeShop Optical in Lewis Center, OH, says: "I usually say 'What's the worst thing that can happen?' as long as the answer is not 'death' than I'll go for it."

MOTIVATION IS FOR AMATEURS

**"MY MINDSET** in most things is to rip the bandaid off," shared Harris Decker of Eye Designs of Westchester in Scarsdale, NY. Your mind will prepare a surprising number of hurdles and traps to avoid you getting this big scary thing done. It will insist you need to be in the right state of mind ... End result? Important stuff doesn't get done. But the fact is you don't need to feel good to get going. It's often the

other way around. In the late 1970s, "behavioral activation" research showed that action doesn't depend on motivation; instead, motivation follows action — and therefore one key to boosting mood is to take the small steps simply to get started. The *4 Hours* blogger Tim Ferriss calls it the "Do Something Principle" — do anything no matter how trivial or menial that gets you moving in the right direction and then "harness the reaction to that action" as a way to build momentum toward that change, he says.

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

**TRACK YOUR** accomplishments on a chart. Do anything so that you can see progress because as Harvard Business School professors Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer showed in their book *Progress Principle*, nothing motivates an individual more than seeing progress on a meaningful task. And if you fall off? Similarly, get back on the horse with a low target. "Really, all you need to do is focus on having five good minutes. You can do a lot with five good minutes. Five good minutes of exercise can reset your mood. Five good minutes of conversation can restore a relationship. Five good minutes of writing can make you feel great about the manuscript again. And so it doesn't take much to feel good, to get back on the path, to continue to make progress," says Clear.

FIND YOUR IDENTITY

**THIS OFTEN STARTS** by changing your approach. "It's easy to think about the worst thing that can happen by trying something new," states Amy Donoho of 20/20 Optical in Fergus Falls, MN. "However, we like to think about the best things that can happen too." Try focusing on the type of person you want to become rather than solely on your goals. By shifting the focus to identity, habits become more sustainable, says Clear. "Your current behaviors are simply a reflection of your current identity. What you do now is a mirror image of the type of person you believe that you are (either consciously or subconsciously). To change your behavior for good, you need to start believing new things about yourself. You need to build identity-based habits." It's essentially a two-step process, says Clear. Decide the type of person you want to be, and then prove it to yourself with small wins. "And man, once we start to take pride in a part of our story, it's much easier to stick with those habits. If you take pride in the size of your biceps, you'll never skip arm day at the gym."

WRITE A CHECK TO THAT OTHER PARTY

**WITH THE POLITICAL** feelings still raw in the wake of the 2024 election, write a check to the party you didn't vote for and give it to a friend you can trust to mail it for you if you don't stick to your pledge. The idea comes from the late psychotherapist Albert Ellis, who noted that one of its effects was to put things vividly in perspective: going to the gym on a dark winter morning might seem awful, but is it really as awful as those people you detest getting that cash? Key point: it needs to be a sum of money that hurts.

THE TWO-MINUTE RULE

**IN A SIMILAR VEIN**, make the first few milestones easy. Clear says that when starting a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do to help overcome inertia. "(The rule) says

just take whatever habit you're trying to build and you scale it down to something that takes two minutes or less to do. So read 30 books a year becomes read one page or meditate five days a week for 30 minutes, becomes meditate for 60 seconds. You're just trying to master the art of showing up. A habit must be established before it can be improved. It's got to become the standard before you worry about optimizing it into some perfect thing," he says. The over-vigilant part of our brain responsible for protecting our self-esteem is lulled into dropping its guard when we tell it we're embarking on something minuscule and trivial, and it stops blocking the way. This is a practice Jen Heller of Pend Oreille Vision Care in Sandpoint, ID, has already implemented in her own fashion. "Sometimes it's best to start with the smallest of all possible steps — something that feels the least bit intimidating or hard — and repeat that times a million, forming

a base habit," she explained. "This is especially true when taking on new physical activities: a new sport, a new workout, an annual challenge. Then when you go to make the next step, the first part is already natural. At some point, ten progressions later, you'll look back and be amazed at what you can now do."

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

**HUMANS ARE** creatures of habit, heavily influenced by our surroundings. Context dictates our behaviors — larger plates lead to greater food consumption, kindness begets kindness. Eric Barker from the productivity website *Barking Up The Wrong Tree* advises manipulating your environment to make positive behaviors easier. He suggests evaluating your spaces — office, kitchen, bedroom — and asking, "What behaviors are encouraged here?"





Get Uncomfortable

# CULTIVATE PATIENCE

**PROGRESS TOWARDS** meaningful change often appears slow at first. Understanding this can help maintain motivation during periods where results are not immediately visible. “Cultivating patience and allowing for setbacks as part of the learning process is essential for long-term success,” says Clear, who calls these phases “The Plateau of Latent Potential.”

## DEVELOP A GROWTH MINDSET

**WE KNOW** you’ve heard it before, possibly repackaged as “failing forward” or something similar, but developing a growth mindset, where you view challenges as opportunities to learn rather than as obstacles, is an incredibly useful mindset. In *The Lean Startup*, Eric Ries notes that “little bets,” or experiments, are critical to moving a business forward in a safe fashion. “If you cannot fail, you cannot learn.”

## REFLECT AND REVIEW

**TO KEEP IMPROVING** over time, you need feedback. Time-management experts advise a “weekly review” of your progress. This practice helps identify areas for improvement and reinforces your commitment to your goals. Pete Drucker, author of *The Effective Executive*, was an advocate of such regular assessments: “Look for patterns in what you’re seeing: What results are you skilled at generating? What abilities do you need to enhance in order to get the results you want? What unproductive habits are preventing you from creating the outcomes you desire? In identifying opportunities for improvement, don’t waste time cultivating skill areas where you have little competence. Instead, concentrate on — and build on — your strengths.”



## INVISION'S 2025 'BIG SCARY' COMMITTERS!

**THESE FIVE BRAVE SOULS** committed to tackling their one big thing in 2025 and INVISION is here for the ride! We'll check back toward the end of the year to see if they overcame their fears, as well as challenges faced along the way and what they learned. Look for their bold updates in the last issue of 2025!



☛ Get rid of an insurance that does not pay. **Kaleena Ma, MK Vision Center, 3 Locations in New York City**



☛ I need to be better about being brutally honest on things employees need to work on. I don't like conflict or uncomfortable situations but I know that focusing on some of these things with certain people will help us run more efficiently. **Cynthia Sayers, OD, EyeShop Optical, Lewis Center, OH**



☛ Starting an optical podcast in 2025. **Will Taylor, Eye 2 Eye Contact, Detroit, MI**



☛ I'm using AI for cold lead lists to boost my patient base. It's scary because it costs money and we don't want to anger people or have it blow up in my face. We know with cold lists many won't be a good fit and constant rejection takes a thick skin, but I am committed to growing my business 2x. It is tough to put myself out there but I'll keep doing it. **Susan Elizondo, OD, Westlake Hills Vision Center, Austin, TX**



☛ I recently attended the first Women's Networking League meeting in my area. I struggle with time management and social anxiety in groups, but I went and enjoyed it although I was uncomfortable. I'm committing to attending as many of these meetings as possible, twice a month. I'm a new business owner and have so much to learn from the more seasoned business professionals around me. The more I attend and get to know these women, the more connections I will make and feel more comfortable asking for help and eventually, how I can help someone else. **Kari Keene, Keene Vision, Rock Hill, SC**

## BUILD AN ON-RAMP

**“WHEN I AM** home, I will get up a little earlier to do a breathing app to calm my nerves. I will arrive earlier than my scheduled time to give myself a few minutes to take some deep breaths before entering the building and then recite a positive affirmation to myself,” shared Danielle Doniver, of Heritage Optical in Detroit, MI.

It's an approach with merit. In *Deep Work*, author Cal Newport emphasizes the importance of establishing a ritual as part of your preparations to accomplish important work, claiming such rituals reduce the mental resistance to getting started on a task, and to signal to your brain that it's time to focus.

Whether it's a ritual that includes doing laps of your optical or greasing the wheels by removing every possible mental hurdle in front of you, the goal is the same — to build yourself an on-ramp that, once you step on to it, will launch you inexorably into a day of action.

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# MAKE IT ENJOYABLE

**“I SEE LIFE AS** a chapter book,” shared Amie Robinson of Spring Hill Eyecare in Spring Hill, TN. “A comfort zone is like a boring chapter that too soon loses interest. Go ahead, turn the page and open a new adventure.” So if your original goal is something like “come up with three new sales lines every day” and it just hasn’t gotten you jazzed, you’re likely not making progress because it isn’t very exciting. Pursue your goal or new habit with a friend or spouse. Gamify it. Make it a fun competition. And don’t forget to celebrate, even the smallest wins.

## AHTWOFY?

**ACCORDING TO** British author Oliver Burkeman, one of the most powerful ways to get out of a rut, drop a self-defeating habit, or trigger a similar positive change is to pose the question: “And how’s that working out for you?” “The genius of AHTWOFY?” he writes on his *Imperfectionist* blog, is in the way it acknowledges that the secret emotional payoffs we get from procrastinating, people-pleasing, holding ourselves to perfectionistic standards, or living an overly cautious life, are real. “But then it prompts you to wonder whether your current strategies are really helping you avoid the awful thing you feared to any significant degree anyway.” The sense of liberation to be found here is the one best encapsulated in the splendid Americanism: “Here goes nothing!”

## PLAY WITH FRICTION

**WHEN** we’re not making deliberate choices, we fall back on whatever feels the most comfortable or convenient. Thus, one of the best ways to break a bad habit is to make it less convenient by adding some friction. As advice site *Barking Up The Wrong Tree* explains, even adding an extra 20 seconds to your habit is enough to break the cycle. To watch less TV, take the batteries out of your remote. Cornell professor Brian Wansink’s research showed that just making food harder to reach caused people to eat less. Harvard’s Achör refers to it as the “20 Second Rule.” “The thing about willpower is that it runs out, so we often have to play small games with our minds to get them to do what we want. The ‘20 Second Rule’ is a great trick to save your willpower for bigger and better things,” he says.

## SWITCH TO YOUR OWN CALENDAR

**DESPITE THE** “new year, fresh start” premise of this story, there is nothing that says you need to be bound by the traditional calendar when setting goals for change. For consultants Brian Moran and Michael Lennington, thinking of life in 365-day units is not only arbitrary, it’s detrimental. A year is simply too big to get your head around, they argue in *The 12-Week Year*, and there’s too much unpredictability involved in planning for 10 or 11 months in the future. Jettison “annualized thinking,” Moran and Lennington insist. Their proposed alternative is to think of each 12 weeks as a stand-alone “year” — a stretch that is long enough to make significant progress on a few fronts, yet short enough to stay focused.

## AT THE BOTTOM IS DISCIPLINE

**YOU MAY HAVE** noticed a pattern to many of the tips cited here: Make it easy to do. Make it easy to show up. And make it fun, or at least satisfying. They are all valid strategies but there is also no escaping the fact that behavior change or getting things done takes some grit. Joseph Campbell, the mythologist perhaps best known for his invocation to “Follow your bliss,” on the grounds that pursuing what brings you joy and a sense of purpose can lead to a more meaningful life, acknowledged later that “Follow your blisters” probably would have been more realistic advice. The bottom layer of any pyramid of success is discipline. And it can be imposed from the outside or inside. Faced with moments requiring that grit, standard psychology is try one (or all) of these tactics:

- “Recognize that the event isn’t causing your dread — your interpretation of the event as dreadful is.”
- “Repeat a short, somewhat positive statement about the event, such as, ‘It wasn’t that bad in the past.’”
- “Realize the event is transient. It won’t last forever.”

## MAKE THE MOST OF GUILT

**RESISTANCE, AS WE** noted earlier, serves as a signal: it tends to attach itself to stuff that really matters. Attack your most guilt-inducing tasks, and you may find that you’ve attacked the most important ones too. That’s the thinking behind a Guilt Hour, as championed by productivity types. Schedule one hour a week for your team to sit down and nominate a task they feel guilty about not accomplishing and then give them the rest of the hour to get it done, or least make a significant start. The public confession aspect of this — along with the social accountability — is a key part of this, as is the scheduling of it.

# MAINTAIN THE MOMENTUM

**IF YOU SET OUT** on a new venture or habit-change project, one thing is guaranteed: You’ll have bad days. Clear argues it’s helpful to do something toward your goal, no matter how small: “If you show up on the bad days, even if it’s less than what you had hoped for, you maintain the habit. It counts for a lot to not throw a zero up for another day. (And yes, wall charts or in an app on your phone or laptop can help reinforce them by providing visual evidence of your progress). “If you maintain the habit, then all you need is time. Because the truth is, time will magnify whatever you feed it. If you have good habits, time becomes your ally, and all you need is patience,” Clear writes in *Atomic Habits*.

## REWARD YOURSELF

**COMPLETION OF YOUR** new habit should be a nice reward in itself but it doesn’t hurt to add another layer to get you across the finish line each day. Maybe you get to have your favorite type of coffee or little treat after that, or maybe you get to watch the highlights of the weekend baseball game on YouTube or get to take a walk in the woods. “So find some way to add some additional positive emotions to the experience because if you feel good about it, you’re going to want to repeat it. And this is something that in *Atomic Habits*, I call the cardinal rule of behavior change, which is behaviors that get rewarded, get repeated, and behaviors that get punished, get avoided,” Clear told the Brene Brown podcast.

## FORGIVE YOURSELF

**ACCORDING TO** some estimates, 80% of the chatter in your head is negative. It is something to watch out for when you’re needlessly hard on yourself



during your journey to institute change. “Self-blame shuts down learning centers in the brain,” says Tara Brach, a clinical psychologist and author of *Radical Acceptance*. “Actively offer yourself forgiveness by, for example, whispering ‘forgiven’ or putting a hand on your heart,” she says, adding that research shows that self-compassion is related to the pursuit of important goals, lower procrastination, and less fear of failure.



## SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

**THOSE AROUND** you affect more of your behavior than you think. Poor fitness, lateness, having children, charitable contributions, divorce, and stupidity are all — in the words of social scientists — contagious. It’s something you’ve known since junior high: Social norms and peer pressure are incredibly powerful — perhaps the most powerful and direct way to influence behavior change. People want to fit in, belong, be part of the tribe. The trick then is to surround yourself with people where your desired behavior is the normal behavior. “When you want to create a habit, think of who already does it, interact with them, and ‘catch’ their habit,” writes Joshua Spodek, a lecturer at Columbia Business School and columnist for [INC.com](https://www.inc.com).

## EMBRACE THE PROCESS

**IN THE BOOK** *Driven To Distraction At Work*, Edward Hallowell recounts the story of Joan Chittister, a Benedictine

nun. Talking with novice nuns at her convent, Chittister would ask them: “Why do we pray?” Their pious answers were all about praising God. “No,” the older nun answered. “We pray because the bell rings.” You can talk lofty principles all you like, but it’s structure — designating time for something, then doing it — that gets things done. Similarly, set process goals, not outcome goals, think quantity, not quality — i.e. “Make four phone calls per day” not “build a killer business network.” This runs counter to prevailing wisdom. Business gurus preach “outcome-oriented thinking”: visualize the desired end point and work towards it. And yet, writes sports psychologist John Eliot in *Overachievement*, “Nothing discourages the concentration necessary to perform well ... more than worrying about the outcome.” One of the key points in *Atomic Habits*, says Clear, is that “you don’t rise to the level of your goals, you fall to the level of your systems.” It sounds pretty dull. But that’s exactly as it should be — it makes behavior change non-intimidating, and thus it makes behavior change actually likely to happen.