

HABIT

2

Begin with the End in Mind



**Control
Your Own
Destiny**

OR SOMEONE
ELSE WILL

“Would you tell me please which way I ought to walk from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where—” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way to walk,” said the Cat.

FROM ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND



It’s a rainy day and you’re stuck indoors. You and a friend decide to put on some music and do a jigsaw puzzle, for old times’ sake. You pour out all 1,000 pieces, spreading them out across a large table. You check out the lid to the box to see what you’re putting together. But there’s no picture! It’s blank! How will you guys ever be able to finish the puzzle without knowing what it looks like? If you only had a one-second glimpse of what it’s supposed to be. That’s all you’d need. What a difference it would make! Without it, you have no clue where to even start.



Now think about your own life and your 1,000 pieces (at least 1,000!). Do you have an end in mind? Do you have a clear picture, even an idea, of who you want to be one year from now? Five years from now? Or do you feel lost?

Habit 2, *Begin with the End in Mind*, means developing a clear picture of where you want to go with your life. It means deciding what your values are and setting goals. Habit 1 says you are the driver of your life, not the passenger. Habit 2 says, since you’re the driver, decide where to go and draw a map of how to get there.

“Ummm, hold up,” you might be thinking. “I’m too young to have an end in mind. I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up, and frankly right now I don’t care.” If it makes you feel any better, I’m grown up and I still don’t know what I want to be. By saying *begin with the end in mind*, I’m not talking about deciding every little detail of your future, like

choosing your career or deciding whom you'll marry. I'm simply talking about thinking beyond today and deciding what direction you want to take so that each step you take is always in the right direction.

Begin with the End in Mind—What It Means

You may not realize it, but you do it all the time. Begin with the end in mind, that is. You draw up a blueprint before you build a house. You read a recipe before you bake a cake. You create an outline before you write a paper (at least I hope you do). It's part of life.

Let's have a begin-with-the-end-in-mind experience right now using your tool of imagination. Find a place where you can be alone without interruption.

There. Now, clear your mind of everything. Don't think about texting your friend; forget about that zit on your forehead. Just focus with me for a second; breathe deeply, and open your brain wide.

In your mind's eye, visualize someone walking toward you about half a block away. At first you can't see who it is. As this person gets closer and closer, you suddenly realize, believe it or not, it's *you*. But it's not you today, it's you as you'd *like to be* one year from now.

Now think deeply.

What have you done with your life over the past year?

How do you feel inside?

What do you look like?

Has your personality grown? (Remember, this is you as you would *like to be* one year from now.)

You can float back to reality now. If you were a good sport and actually tried this experiment, you probably got in touch with your deeper self. You got a feel for what's important to you and what you'd like to accomplish this next year. That's what beginning with the end in mind is all about. And it doesn't even hurt.

As Jim discovered, beginning with the end in mind is a powerful way to help turn your dreams into realities:

When I feel frustrated or get depressed, I've found something that really helps me. I go someplace where I can be alone, and then I close my eyes and visualize mentally where I want to be and where I wanna go when I am older. I try to see the whole picture of my dream life—and then I automatically begin to think about what it's going to take to get there, what I need to change. This technique started when I was a ninth grader, and today I'm on my way to making some of those visualizations become a reality.

In fact, thinking beyond today can be really exciting and, as this high school senior attests, can help you take charge of your life:

I've never planned a thing in my life. I just do things as they pop up. The thought that one should have an end in mind never, ever entered my mind. It's been so exciting to learn, because I suddenly find myself thinking beyond the now. I'm now not only planning my education but also thinking about how I want to raise my kids, how I want to teach my family, and what kind of home life we should have. I'm taking charge of me—and not blowing in the wind anymore!

Why's it so important to have an end in mind? I'll give you two good reasons. The first is that you're at a critical crossroads in life, and the paths you choose now can affect you forever. The second is that if you don't decide your own future, someone else'll do it for you.

Let's take a look at the first important reason. So here you are. You're young. You're free. You have your whole life before you. You're standing at the crossroads of life and you have to choose which paths to take:

Do you want to go to college? Graduate school?

Do you want to travel? Learn another language?

Should you try out for a team?

What type of friends do you want to have?

Will you cut class again?

Do you want to date? What kind of person?

Will you have sex before marriage?

Will you drink, smoke, do drugs?

What values will you choose?

What kind of relationships do you want with your family?

What will your attitude toward life be?

What will you stand for?

How will you contribute to your community?

The paths you choose today can shape you forever. It's both frightening and exciting that we have to make so many vital decisions during the seven years of teenagehood, when we're so young and full of hormones, but such is life.

What About Friends?

Take your choice of friends as an example. Have you ever noticed what a powerful influence they can have on your attitude, reputation, and direction? The need to be accepted and be part of a group is powerful. But too often we choose our friends based on whoever will accept us. And that's not always good. For example, to be accepted by the kids who do drugs, all you have to do is do drugs yourself.

The wrong group can lead you down all kinds of paths you really don't want to be on. And retracing your steps can be a long, hard journey. Sometimes it's actually better to just hang out alone, to be honest.

If you're having trouble making good friends, remember that your friends don't always have to be your age. I once spoke to a guy who only had a few friends at school, but he did have a grandpa who listened to him, made him laugh, and was a great friend. It filled the "popularity" void he had in his life.

It can feel empowering to connect with people over the Internet or through apps, especially when you're struggling to connect with people in person. Ben's story goes like this:



Last fall I got pretty into online gaming, and it was a really good way to connect with people who were into the same kind of stuff as me, stuff that other people called “nerdy.” I didn’t know that many people at my new school, but I had this really amazing supportive community online.

There were chat threads that all the users commented on, and there were some really interesting people on it. It felt safe to finally talk with people who didn’t make fun of me for being into games, and I thought about meeting a group of them in person. Then I remembered hearing news stories about cyberstalkers and online harassment, and that kinda freaked me out. I just realized that I had to be smart—I mean, all these people I was talking to seemed cool, not dangerous, but I just knew I shouldn’t share personal info with them or meet them—because really, I didn’t know who they were! So I told them I didn’t feel comfortable meeting and most of them agreed that was cool, so we just left it as an online friendship. Only once did someone really creep me out—one user asked me for my address and photo, but before I even started stressing about it, I realized I could be in control of the situation. I blocked them and never heard from them again. Actually, having this community online has made me more confident, and I’ve been making more friends at my new school.

You can’t be too careful about sharing personal info online, and Ben seems to have got it down. Even if you video chat with someone or follow them on Instagram and they seem nice or attractive—there’s no way of knowing that they’re not a total psycho in person.

What about sending explicit texts or sexting photos of yourself—even to someone you already know and trust? It might seem funny at the time, but who knows what the person you’re sending them to will do down the road. What if you and your boy- or girlfriend break up and they wind up sharing your texts or photos to hurt you? Ouch! It seems like once a week some celebrity or politician is getting in trouble for that sort of thing. If you keep your end in mind and avoid these kinds of situations, there’s way less risk of having someone take advantage of you.

The long and short of it is, just be wise when choosing friends and partners. Be selective about the people you trust, because so much of your future hangs on whom you hang out with.

What About Sex?

And what about sex? Talk about an important decision. If you wait until the “heat of the moment” to choose which path to take, it’s too late. Decide now. The path you choose affects your health, the way you feel about yourself, how fast you grow up, your reputation, whom you’ll date and perhaps marry, and so much more. Think this decision through . . . carefully.

One way to do this is to imagine the kind of person you hope to end up with. How do you hope your future mate is leading his or her life right now?

In a recent poll, going to movies was ranked as the favorite pastime of teens. I love movies, too, so I'm right there with you. But I'd be careful about the values they promote. Most movies lie, especially when it comes to issues like sex. They glamorize sleeping around and having one-night stands without addressing the potential risks and consequences. The movies don't show you the life-altering reality of contracting a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) or a disease like AIDS. They rarely address what it's like to become pregnant and to have to deal with everything that brings with it. They don't tell you what it's like living on minimum wage because you had to drop out of high school (and the father of the child is long gone and sends no money), or what it's like spending your weekends changing diapers and caring for a baby instead of cheering on your volleyball team, going to dances, and just being a kid.

We are free to choose our paths, but we can't choose the consequences that come with them. Have you ever gone water sliding? You can choose which slide you want to go down, but once you're sliding, you can't very well stop. You must live with the consequences . . . to the end. A teenage girl from Illinois shared this story:

I had one bad year—my freshman year—when I did everything from drinking, drugs, older guys, bad crowds, etc., mostly because I was frustrated and unhappy. It just lasted a year, but I'm still paying for those past mistakes. No one forgets and it's hard to have to deal with a past you aren't too proud of. I feel as though it will haunt me forever. All kinds of people still come up to my boyfriend and say, "I hear your girlfriend drinks, and smokes, and is easy." And things like that. But the worst is probably the fact that every time I have a problem of any kind, I immediately think, "Maybe if I hadn't done that, everything would be okay."

What About School?

What you do about your schooling can also shape your future in a major way. Krista's experience shows how much beginning with the end in mind in your educational pursuits pays off:

As a junior in high school, I decided to take an Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. history class. At the end of the year, I'd have a chance to take a national exam to qualify for college credit.

It was difficult to keep up, but I was determined to do well in the class and pass the exam. With this goal in mind, it was easy to put in my full effort.

One assignment was particularly time consuming. The instructor asked each student to watch a documentary on the Civil War and write a paper on each segment. The series lasted ten days and each segment was two hours long. As an active high school student, it was difficult to find the time, but I did. I submitted the report and discovered I was one of only a handful of students who watched the series.

The day of the exam finally arrived. The students were nervous and the air was thick. The test administrator announced, "Begin." I took a deep breath and broke the seal on the first section—multiple-choice. With each question, I gained confidence. I KNEW the answers! I completed the section several minutes before I heard, I finished "Pencils down."

Next we would each write an essay. I nervously opened the seal of the essay book and scanned the questions quickly. I answered a question related to the Civil War using references from my reading as well as the documentary. I felt calm and confident as I completed the exam.

Several weeks later I received my score in the mail—I had passed!



• WHO'S IN THE LEAD?

Besides being at the crossroads of the most important decisions you'll ever make, the other reason to visualize your future is because if you don't, someone else will do it for you. As Jack Welch, former teen and current business executive, put it, "Control your own destiny or someone else will."

"Who will?" you may ask.

Could be anyone—friends, parents, the media. Do you want your friends to tell you what you stand for? You may have fine parents, but do you want them to draw up the blueprint for your life? Their interests may be far different from yours. And how about the media? Do you want to adopt the values portrayed in video games or gossip blogs or on TV?

By now you might be thinking, "I'm gonna chill and worry about the future when it comes. I like to live in the moment and go with the flow." I agree with the *live in the moment* part. We should enjoy the moment and not have our heads too far in the clouds. But I disagree with the *go with the flow* part. If you decide to just go with the flow, you'll end up where the flow goes, and sometimes it's headed straight downhill into a pile of sludge. You'll end up doing what everyone else is doing, which may not be *your* end in mind at all. "The road to anywhere is really a life to nowhere," the saying goes. You need to decide what direction feels right to you. It's really never too early.

Without an end in mind of our own, we often wind up following anyone who's willing to lead, even into things that won't get us far. It reminds me of an experience I once had at a 10K road race. Some other runners and I were waiting for the race to start, but no one knew where the starting line was. Then a few runners began walking down the road as if they knew. Everyone, including me, began following. We just assumed they knew where they were going. After walking for about a mile, we all suddenly realized, that like a herd of dumb sheep, we were following some dingus who had no idea where he was going. It turned out that the starting line was back right where we had begun.

Never assume that the herd must know where they are going because they usually don't.



A Personal Mission Statement

So if it's so important to have an end in mind, how do you do it? The best way I've found is to write a personal mission statement. A personal mission statement is like a personal credo or motto that states what your life is about. It is like the blueprint to your life. Countries have constitutions, which function just like a mission statement. And most companies, like Apple and Pepsi, have mission statements. But I think they work best with people.

So why not write your own personal mission statement? Many teens have. They come in all types and varieties. Some are as long as a whole Bible passage and some are as short as a 140-character Tweet. Some are poems and some are rap lyrics. Some teens use their favorite quote as a mission statement. Others use a picture or a photograph.

Let me share a few teenage mission statements with you.

This first one was contributed by a teen named Beth Haire:



First and foremost, I will remain faithful always to my God.

I will not underestimate the power of family unity.

I will not neglect a true friend, but I will set aside time for myself as well.

I will cross my bridges as I come to them (divide and conquer).

I will begin all challenges with optimism, rather than doubt.

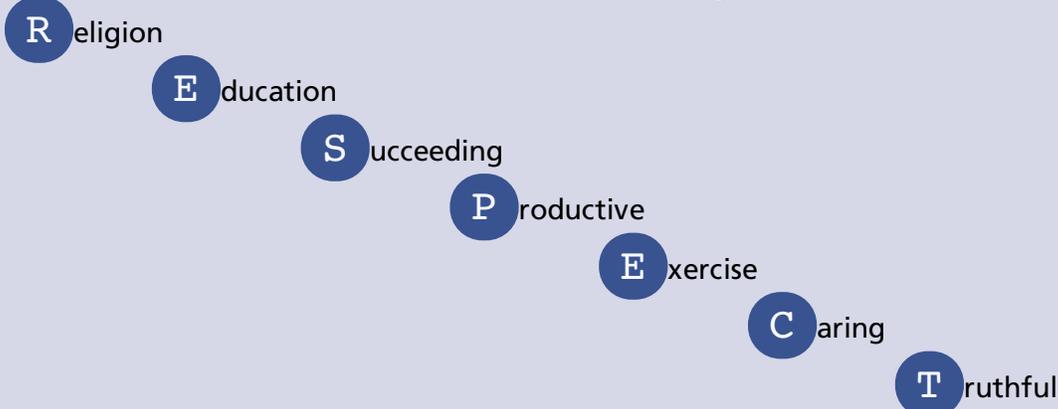
I will always maintain a positive self-image and high self-esteem, knowing that all my intentions begin with self-evaluation.



June's mission statement comes from a quote from her favorite musician, Taylor Swift:

"To me, Fearless is not the absence of fear. It's not being completely unafraid. To me, Fearless is having fears. Fearless is having doubts. Lots of them. To me, Fearless is living in spite of those things that scare you to death."

Steven Strong shared this one:



I met a teen named Adam Sosne from North Carolina who was familiar with the 7 Habits and was “on fire” about his future plans. Not surprisingly, he had a mission statement, which he volunteered:

MISSION STATEMENT

- Have confidence in your-self and everyone else around you.
- Be kind, courteous, and respectful to all people.
- Set reachable goals.
- Never lose sight of these goals.
- Never take the simple things in life for granted.
- Appreciate other people’s differences and see their differences as a great advantage.
- Ask questions.
- Strive each day to reach interdependence.
- Remember that before you can change some-one else, you must first change yourself.
- Speak with your actions, not with your words.
- Make the time to help those less fortunate than yourself or those who are having a bad day.
- Read the 7 Habits every day.

Read this mission statement every day

So what can writing a mission statement do for you? Tons. The most important thing it will do is open your eyes to what’s really important to you and help you make decisions accordingly. A twelfth grader shared how writing a mission statement made such a difference in her life:

During my junior year I couldn’t concentrate on anything because I had a boyfriend. I wanted to do everything for him to make him happy, and then, naturally, the subject of sex came up—and I wasn’t at all prepared for it, and it became a nagging constant thing on my mind. I felt like I wasn’t ready and that I didn’t want to have sex—but everyone else kept saying, “Just do it.”

Then I participated in a character development class at school where they taught me to write a mission statement. I started to write and kept on writing and writing, and kept adding things to it. It gave me direction and a focus and I felt like I had a plan and a reason for doing what I was doing. It really helped me to stick to my standards and not do something I wasn’t ready for.

A personal mission statement is like a tree with deep roots. It’s stable and it’s not going anywhere, but it’s also alive and continually growing.

Standing like a tree with deep roots helps you survive all of the storms of life that beat you up. As you’ve probably noticed already, life is anything but stable. Think about it. People are fickle. Your boyfriend loves you one minute and then dumps you the next. You’re someone’s best friend one day, and they’re talking behind your back the next.

Think about all of the events you can’t control. Your family has to move. Your mom loses her job. The country is at war. A family member dies.

Fads come and go. Skinny jeans are popular one year and out the next. Vampires are the thing. Vampires are overrated.

While everything about you changes, a personal mission statement can be your deep-rooted tree that never moves. You can deal with change if you have an immovable trunk to hang on to.



• UNCOVERING YOUR TALENTS

An important part of developing a personal mission statement is discovering what you're good at. One thing I know for sure is that everyone has a talent, a gift, something they are good at. Some talents, like having the singing voice of an angel, attract a lot of attention. But there are many other talents, maybe not as attention grabbing but every bit as important if not more—things like being a good listener, making people laugh, forgiving, drawing, or just being nice.

Another truth is that we all blossom at different times. So if you're a late bloomer, relax. It may take you a bit longer to uncover your talents.



After carving a beautiful sculpture, Michelangelo was asked how he was able to do it. He replied by saying that the sculpture was already in the block of granite from the very beginning; he just had to chisel off everything else around it.

Likewise, Victor Frankl, a revered Jewish-Austrian psychiatrist who survived the death camps of Nazi Germany, taught that we don't *invent* our talents in life but rather we *detect* them. In other words, you are already born with your talents, you just need to uncover them.

I'll never forget my experience with finding a talent I never thought I had. To fulfill Mr. Williams's creative writing assignment for freshman English, I excitedly turned in my first high school paper, entitled "The Old Man and the Fish." It was the same story my father had often told me at bedtime while I was growing up. I just assumed he had made it up. He didn't bother telling me he had stolen the plot directly from Ernest Hemingway's award-winning novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. I was shocked when my paper was returned with the

remarks, "Sounds a bit trite. Like Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*." "Who's this guy Hemingway?" I thought. "And how come he copied my dad?" That was my poor start to four years of rather boring high school English classes, which were about as exciting to me as a clump of dirt.

It wasn't until college, when I took a short story class from an amazing professor, that I began to detect my passion for writing. If you can believe it, I even majored in English. Mr. Williams would've freaked.

The Great Discovery

The Great Discovery¹ is a fun activity designed to help you get in touch with your deeper self as you prepare to write a mission statement. As you walk through it, answer the questions honestly. You can write your answers in the book or you can just think them through. When you're finished, I think you'll have a way better idea of what inspires you, what you enjoy doing, whom you admire, and where you want to take your life.

¹ For additional worksheets of The Great Discovery, please call 1-800-952-6839.