

# #5

## FEET FIRST, NOT HEAD FIRST

*Small starts can lead to great success.*

*Do not be afraid of a small beginning.*

*Great things come afterwards.*

— SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

After nine months as a correctional officer, I couldn't stand it anymore. All I wanted to do was make soap. My ex-husband, whom I was putting through school at the time, said to me, "I'll tell you what—you can have three months to do this fun little hobby of yours. If you can make money in three months, we'll consider you starting a business." Thinking back, I can hear how patronizing that sounded, but at the time, I was just excited. I quit my job and started selling soap on the weekends.

My first weekend—at the Mount Vernon Tulip Festival—I sold a thousand dollars' worth of soap. I was thrilled, amazed, inspired. It was a huge light-bulb moment, where suddenly everything seemed to come together and make sense.

As a correctional officer, part of my responsibility had been trying to line up jobs for people after they were released. The goal was to keep people from ending up back in prison, but my work hadn't given me much hope for the system. Now, however, I was thinking, "How many people are out there who could make money from soap the way I am? I wonder if I can help them. Can I teach them how to make soap while I sell soap on the weekends?" My work in the prison had never seemed as though it accomplished much when it came to helping people. But soapmaking? "Oh my gosh!" I thought. "This is the way I can *really* help people. I can give them knowledge that will give them greater power and freedom. I can do this!" I was inspired.

I maxed out my credit card, put up a Microsoft Word document website, and started selling soap on the weekends while teaching people how to make soap during the week and selling them the ingredients. My weekday occupation turned into Bramble Berry, my business today that sells ingredients to soapmakers all over the world. I sold soap every weekend for five years, while I was building Bramble Berry during the week.

Life wasn't easy. I worked at Bramble Berry every weekday, then I'd come home and make soap and label soap at night. Every Saturday morning, I loaded up my little Subaru hatchback, strapped my display to the top, and drove to the craft show or farmers' market where I set up my booth and sold soap from ten in the morning until six or seven at night. Saturday nights, I often slept in my car, because I couldn't afford a hotel. Sunday morning, I'd do it all again, then load up everything in my car, drive back home, and do my Bramble

Berry work . . . until the next weekend, when I'd be off to another craft fair or farmers' market. Ever so slowly—painfully—year by year, Bramble Berry grew into the successful business it is today.

I'm not saying, though, that you should quit your job and launch headlong into whatever *your* passion is. Too often you hear people say, "Follow your passion," as though passion alone is all you need to find success. You don't have to dive headfirst into the deep end of the pool and then discover you don't know how to swim nearly as well as you thought you did. Instead, you can step into the shallow end, and then make your way deeper and deeper, one step at a time.

In my case, this meant I worked hard on the weekends to keep a steady income stream that would support myself and my husband, while at the same time I worked on growing Bramble Berry. I didn't dive in over my head before I knew if I could swim. I kept my financial safety net in place—selling soap on the weekends—until I was certain Bramble Berry could support me.

Following your passion is a great thing—but it doesn't necessarily mean you'll make a ton of money doing whatever it is. In fact, odds are good that at the beginning you won't make much at all. So start out small. Try a little something. Does it make money? If yes, great! Do it some more. Expand a little. If the answer is no, though, then you haven't lost more than you can afford to lose. Now it's time to rethink your approach. Try something slightly different.

And then go just a little deeper into the pool.



## **BUSINESS APPLICATION**

When we look at the world's most famous businesses, it's easy to forget that they came from small beginnings. The founders of companies like

Amazon, Apple, and Google didn't start out trying to create these businesses as they exist today. Instead, they started by creating something much smaller—an online bookstore, a computer, and a search algorithm.

They also didn't start out by going deep in debt to buy a fancy, impressive building for their new venture. They used the resources they had. Start-ups that began in garages are famous. Here are five businesses that began in a garage—and grew:

1. **Amazon:** When Jeff Bezos founded Amazon.com in 1994, it was completely run out of his garage in Bellevue, Washington. He didn't sell his first book until July 1995.
2. **Apple:** In 1976, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak started Apple Computers by hand-building fifty units of Wozniak's Apple I Computer in a garage.
3. **Disney:** Walt started his career filming the Alice Comedies in his uncle's garage. The short films would eventually become part of the original *Alice's Wonderland*.
4. **Harley Davidson:** In 1901, twenty-one-year-old William S. Harley drew up plans to create a small engine to power a bicycle, and then for the next two years, he and his friend Arthur Davidson built their motor-bicycle in a ten-by-fifteen-foot shed (which was pretty much

like a garage—except that garages hadn’t been invented yet).

5. **Hewlett-Packard:** In 1939, Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard founded HP in their garage with an initial investment of \$538. Their first product was an audio oscillator and one of their first customers was Walt Disney, who purchased eight oscillators to develop the sound system for the movie *Fantasia*.



## MAKE IT PERSONAL

- If money were not an issue, what passion would you put out into the world?
- Now think about a way you can start this passion feet first rather than head first. What could you try out in the very near future? How much do you stand to lose if it flops? Is that an acceptable loss?
- “Passion play” is something you do on the side or in your free time for fun and renewal because it inspires you and you’re passionate about it. It could be a hobby (knitting), it could be volunteer work (eldercare), or it could be a side business (healthy ketogenic cookies that ship all over the United States). What will your passion play be?



## INSPIRATION

When Philip Glass was a child, his father diversified his job as a radio repairman by stocking records. Then he brought home the records that didn't sell so he could listen to them and figure out why people weren't buying them—and this was when Philip was first exposed to a rich array of music, from bebop to hillbilly, as well as works by more offbeat composers.

When Philip grew up, music was his passion—but he made his living as a plumber and taxi driver. Even when his musical work was finally premiering at the Met, he was still doing plumbing, and he renewed his taxi license, just in case.

In an interview with the *Guardian* in 2001, he said that one time while he was working as a plumber, “I suddenly heard a noise and looked up to find Robert Hughes, the art critic of *Time* magazine, staring at me in disbelief. ‘But you’re Philip Glass! What are you doing here?’ It was obvious I was installing his dishwasher, and I told him I would soon be finished. ‘But you are an artist,’ he protested. I explained that I was an artist but that I was sometimes a plumber as well and that he could go away and let me finish.”

Philip Glass—who has written operas, musical theatre works, ten symphonies, eleven concertos, sonatas, and film scores—didn't earn a living from making music until he was forty-two!

Today, Philip Glass is one of the most influential modern-day music makers. He followed his passion in small steps all the way to greatness.





**A DEEPER DIVE:  
EMBRACE THE POWER OF THE TRUDGE**

*Great things happen when small steps are  
compounded by the power of time.*

*Success is easy if you think of it like rust.*

*It's inevitable if you keep at it.*

— FRED FRANZIA

On Friday, March 13, 2015, the boiler that heated our house mysteriously and randomly exploded. In the process, it took out walls, ripped out natural gas lines, and ruined the furniture and belongings in multiple rooms. Seven fire trucks and forty-two firemen responded to the emergency. It was a disaster. Since the nanny cam caught the explosion on video, our drama soon made national news.

My husband, Chris, and I had a one-year-old and a three-year-old, two jobs to manage—and no house to live in. During the months after the explosion, we had to move five times while coping with all the insane demands of our life. Fortunately, we gradually got past that crazy chapter of our lives, the kids stayed healthy, and (rather amazingly) neither my husband nor I missed a single day of work.

My husband isn't Superman, and I'm certainly not Superwoman. If we had stopped to think about the immense challenges we faced, then we would have been overwhelmed. The only way we coped was breaking down the craziness into smaller, manageable tasks, and then

divvying them up between us. We made a master list of everything that needed to be done, and we passed it back and forth to each other. Since our house was cordoned off during the investigation, we couldn't get to our closets, so someone had to buy clothes for all of us to wear. Someone had to deal with the insurance company. Someone had to figure out how to get into the house to get the keys for our other car. Someone had to meet the inspectors at the house. Someone had to meet with the people at the bank to get a loan to bridge the gap until the insurance money came in. If Chris had a less-busy week, he was the one meeting all the contractors at the house, and I was the one doubling down at work. When he was busy at work, I took care of the insurance details. Ultimately, by taking one slow step at a time, we both got through it with our sanity and our marriage intact—and we ended up in a house we like even more than the one we lost.

Most of us like to think of life in terms of great adventures and amazing achievements but, many times, success is simply the product of doing the same thing—the same tactic, the same practice, the same exercise, the same tedious little task—over and over, day after day. It sounds boring, but it's also comforting when you're in the middle of a crisis or during those times when life seems overwhelming. Believing in the power of the slow trudge can get you over even the steepest challenges. I've learned that from experience. The slow trudge was the only way we got through that period after we had to rebuild a home.

The power of the trudge can do amazing things in *your* life, too. For example, if you want to have physical health, then you're not going to run a marathon one weekend and then sit on the couch the rest of the year. Instead, you'll need to move every day. If you want to have a company that has fantastic customer service, then you can't sit

down and answer all your customer e-mails in one day once a year; you have to answer them every single day. Great things happen when you do small steps that are compounded by the power of time.

This approach will get you through the crises in your life, but it's also great for when you want to improve your life in a variety of ways. Your job may seem so challenging and exhausting that when you come home all you want to do is slump down on the sofa and watch TV—but small steps don't require that much energy. By doing one or two small things every day, you can transform your life.

Last year, for example, when I went back to school for my nutritional therapy certification, the baby steps toward that goal consisted of studying at least twenty minutes a day. Twenty minutes a day was the litmus test for success or failure. Many days, I studied more than twenty minutes, but so long as I was consistent about at least those twenty minutes, I knew I would ultimately reach my goal.

Consistency is powerful. Pulling a last-minute all-nighter might have worked for us in college, when we tried to cram an entire semester of studying into a single night, but it doesn't work out in the grown-up world—not if we want to achieve something that's truly worthwhile. Best-Day-Ever success comes from all those tiny consistent steps, one after another, when you're tired, when you're bored, when you're sad, no matter what.

At first those big self-improvement goals—"I'm going to quit smoking," "I'm going to lose fifty pounds," "I'm going to start a new career"—can seem exciting. You feel energized by the sheer enormity of what you hope to accomplish. Pretty soon, though, the enormity will feel daunting. You'll get tired and slip up. Then you'll slip up again, and this time you'll find yourself resenting that big goal. The third time you slip up, you'll be saying, "That was a stupid goal anyway. I don't want to bother with it anymore."

Let's say you want to quit sugar. Rather than saying, "I'm quitting all sugar, including honey," you could say, "I'm not going to have regular sugar in my coffee. I'm going to downgrade to honey, and I will not eat refined sugar in the form of candy." That's your goal. That's it. Do that for a month. Do it for six months. Then do it for a year. By that time, it will have become a habit and you can set yourself a new, slightly more challenging goal if you want to. You'll be healthier than if you had done nothing—and you are far more likely to be consistent about small, manageable goals than if you had set yourself an impossibly high mountain to climb.

On his website, author James Clear shares a simple yet powerful strategy for utilizing the power of the trudge. In 1993, twenty-three-year-old Trent Dyrsmid was a rookie stockbroker who surprised everyone by making immediate progress toward success, thanks to two jars and some paper clips. Every day he would start with 120 paper clips in one jar, while the other jar was empty. At eight o'clock in the morning, he started making calls, and each time he made a phone call, he would move a paper clip from the full jar to the empty jar. For the rest of the day, he just kept making calls until all the paper clips had been moved from one jar to the other. After a year and a half of making 120 calls every day, his book of business grew to \$5 million in assets. Within a few years, other firms were recruiting him because of his success, and eventually he got a new job where he was making \$200,000 a year. Trent earned his success one paper clip at a time. The paper clips gave him a visual cue that helped him to commit to the same small act over and over and over, day after day.

Consider using the paper clip strategy to motivate you for the slow trudge. And remember—even though the trudge can get boring, it's also hopeful. Just do this one small thing, every day, and it will change your life.



## **MAKE IT PERSONAL**

- What are two ways you would like to improve your life? These are things that affect your day-to-day existence (not the same as your BIG goal from Strategy #4).
- Now make a list of one, two, or three small things that will get you closer to each of those improvements. Remember to keep them small enough and easy enough that you'll be able to do them every single day. Example: If your improvement goal is weight loss or more energy, the measurable daily trudge could be to start every morning with a lemon water or to be in bed by 10:30 p.m. daily.